ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENTS OF PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTERS SUBSEQUENT TO THE DISSOLUTION OF THE BROTHERHOOD

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Abstract: Art history has asserted the idea that Pre-Raphaelitism is a matter of artistic individualities, missing to regard it as a particularity of a series of works. Accordingly, the appellation came to encompass the whole range of works belonging to the Pre-Raphaelite artists, for reasons extrinsic to artistic analysis, such as the mere fact that, for instance, those artists belonged, at a certain moment in their lives, to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.
With these in view, it is worth mentioning that the early members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood either developed artistic practices that were no longer congruent with the notion of Pre-Raphaelitism, at least, in the case of Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, or repeated themes that had their origins in the period of the early period of the Brotherhood, in the case of William Holman Hunt. Meanwhile, Pre-Raphaelitism may also be considered an all-pervasive characteristic of the work of a large number of artists, who practiced the style, although did not embrace a permanent Pre-Raphaelite identity.

Keywords: Pre-Raphaelitism, painters, artistic development, artistic individualities, Pre-Raphaelite identity

Various art critics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries used to consider that Pre-Raphaelitism should be regarded as a characteristic of a series of artistic individualities and not as a particularity of a series of art works. In accordance with such assertions, the appellative broadly circumscribed a whole range of paintings belonging to artists patterned as Pre-Raphaelite; unfortunately, such encompassing did not consider artistic analysis and brought together a diversity of paintings that did not share common grounds. Meantime, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood artists approached different paths after the dissolution of their association.

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1. John Everett Millais, *Stella,* 1868, Manchester Art Gallery, United Kingdom

Millais's later work was perceived as a total switch from his previous practice: he approached broader brushwork, considered to have been determined by the slow Pre-Raphaelite brushing technique, which prevented him from working faster, and harmonious colours (*The Blind Girl* – 1856, *Autumn Leaves* – 1855-6), so that art historians concluded that his later paintings became fashionable and productive, distancing from the Pre-Raphaelite identity. Nonetheless, although his work appeared to have lost its Pre-Raphaelite characteristics, it is worth mentioning that, during the 1860s, Millais continued to take part in various projects and to initiate others and he is considered to have been the promoter of a new interest in the fine and decorative arts of the century. Millais's shift to an elegant and ease touch (*Stella* – 1868), which reminded of Reynolds and Gainsborough, was the equivalent of a revival style that is considered important for the late-Victorian category of grand-manner portraiture (John Singer Sargent). Twenty-first century critics appreciate that the new interest in the work of Reynolds and Gainsborough, in Georgian furniture and porcelain has its origins in the revivalism of the 1860s, whose central figure was Millais.

William Holman Hunt, on the other hand, appeared to repeat themes that had their origins in the period of the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (*The Shadow of Death* – 1870-73, considered as a reworking of Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents*). In his autobiography, Hunt asserted that he continued to observe the original goals of the Pre-Raphaelites; according to art historians, his later work preserved as a stylistic device the Pre-Raphaelite minute observation, while approaching religious subjects. Unlike Millais, Hunt continued to use the time-consuming practice of painting of the early Pre-Raphaelites; nonetheless, his later paintings, as Millais', were both popular and lucrative. For his biblical pictures, Hunt travelled to Palestine and Egypt, starting from 1854, and he brought Pre-Raphaelite close observation to its ultimate limit (*The Scapegoat* – 1854-6).

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2. William Holman Hunt, *The Scapegoat*, 1854-6, National Museum Liverpool, United Kingdom

It has been stressed that the notion of Pre-Raphaelite identity determined the emerging of a division between the early members of the Brotherhood and the tangential (Ford Madox Brown) or later members (Joanna Boyce, Simeon Solomon), who were seen as "less" Pre-Raphaelite. Yet, Pre-Raphaelitism may be considered, in fact, as an all-pervasive characteristic of the work of a large number of artists, who practiced the style, although did not embrace a permanent Pre-Raphaelite identity (for instance, Philip Hermogenes Calderon's *Broken Vows* – 1856). (Prettejohn, 2007: 117)

During the second stage of Pre-Raphaelitism, a lot of artists connected with the Pre-Raphaelite circles looked for exhibition alternatives outside the Royal Academy, protesting against the supremacy of the Academy. They started organizing their own exhibitions by 1857, when seventy-one works were displayed in Russell Place and included works by Ford Madox Brown (*An English Autumn Afternoon, The Last of England*), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*The Blue Closet* – 1856-7), and Elizabeth Siddall.

The following year, William Michael Rossetti organized, in collaboration with the art dealer Earnest Gambart, a travelling exhibition in America, which was not confined only to the Pre-Raphaelite art.



3. Philip Hermogenes Calderon, *Broken Vows*, 1856, Tate, London, United Kingdom

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Between 1859 and 1861, several private exhibitions were held at Hogarth Club, whose main promoters were associates of the Pre-Raphaelite group. The Club showed the first works of Burne-Jones (*The Knight's Farewell* – 1858, *Going to the Battle* – 1858 and *Sir Galahad* – 1858), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's works in the newly approached style (*Bocca Baciata* – 1859) as well as the new pictorial exploits in the representation of women figures made by various artists.



4. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Bocca Baciata*, 1859, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, United States of America

In 1865, a gallery in Piccadilly organized a Ford Madox Brown retrospective which, at the time, represented the beginnings of such a practice and gathered about one hundred works, mainly borrowed from the collectors who previously bought them. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue of the collection and the artist also displayed his painting called *Work* (1852-65), meant as a climax of the showing and considered the most thorough Pre-Raphaelite scene of modern life.



5. Ford Madox Brown, *Work*, 1852-63, Manchester Art Gallery, United Kingdom

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Such a busy entrepreneurial activity was unparalleled both in England and in continental Europe, where the first Impressionist exhibition was organized in 1874. After 1865, the Pre-Raphaelites seemed to have ceased setting up art shows; nonetheless, new organizers started exhibiting art works in London: Dudley Gallery, established in 1865, or Grosvenor Gallery, owned by Sir Coutts Lindsay, a friend of the early Pre-Raphaelites, who founded it in 1877. Many of the artists who showed their works at the new galleries were either pupils or followers of the artists that were connected with the Pre-Raphaelite group. For instance, Lucy Madox Brown, Catherine Madox Brown, and Oliver Madox Brown (Ford Madox Brown's children) and Marie Spartali formed a group that practiced in Brown's studio, while another group included Edward Clifford, Robert Bateman, and Walter Crane, who were the pupils of Burne-Jones.

The younger artists seemed to have emulated their mentors in their rejection of exhibiting at the Royal Academy and in learning and practicing outside the institutional structures of the Academy schools. It is worth mentioning that, after 1853, Ford Madox Brown stopped showing at the Royal Academy and Dante Gabriel Rossetti used to show only in private settings. During the 1860s, Burne-Jones showed at the Old Water-Colour Society and, after he left it, in 1870, he only sporadically exhibited at the Dudley. In 1877, he came again to public attention, on the occasion of the first exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery, where he showed eight large oils. That was the moment when Burne-Jones came out as the leader of the new art school that included Walter Crane (*Renaissance Venus* – 1877), John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (*Love and the Maiden* – 1877), Evelyn Pickering (*Ariadne in Naxos* – 1877), and John Melhuish Strudwick (*Isabella* – 1879). Critics considered that the members of the new school had a common interest in the early Italian art, so that they were seen as related to the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. One of those who supported such a connection was Henry James, who asserted the idea that the "square-jawed, large-mouthed female visage", associated with Burne-Jones's work, essentially belonged to the "English pre-Raphaelite school five-and-twenty years ago imported from early Florence to serve its peculiar purposes. It has undergone various modifications since then, and in Mr. Burne-Jones's productions we see its supreme presentment". Nonetheless, twenty-first century art theorists and critics showed that the new women figures were experienced between later 1850s and 1860s, namely after the climactic moment of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.



6. Edward Burne-Jones, *Sir Galahad,* 1858, Harvard Art Museum, United States of America

Other critics of the time (Frederic George Stephens, in *The Germ*, 1850) considered that, contrary to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which revived the principles of the early Italian art not from the Italian artists but, according to their example, from nature itself, the members of the group exhibiting at Grosvenor

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Gallery explicitly derived their works from the early Italian artists such as Botticelli, Piero della Francesca and Mantegna. It is important to mention that, in the 1870s, the Italian artists previously cited had scarcely been known by the art historian and connoisseurs, so that the Grosvenor group appeared to have brought back unconventional styles.

Certain Victorian critics understood the opposite manner according to which earlier art was approached by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Grosvenor group: while the artists of the first stage of Pre-Raphaelitism had as a common goal the revival of the earlier art through 'primitive' innocence, the later group envisaged to attain the same goal through studied methods. (*The Times*, 1877)

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, a certain yearning for Pre-Raphaelitism could already be perceived. The art of Kate Bunce (*The Keepsake* – 1901), Maxwell Armfield (*Self Portrait* – 1901), Frank Cadogan Cowper (*St Agnes in Prison* – 1905), John Byam Liston Shaw (*Boer War,* 1900 – 1901) appears as a Pre-Raphaelite revival. According to the opinions of modern critics, Pre-Raphaelitism continued to have an impact on the twentieth-century art, owing to the works of Stanley Spencer and to the 1940s – 1950s Neo-Romantics, who set forth the British character of their art, in opposition to the modern French styles.

7. Kate Elizabeth Bunce, *The Keepsake*, 1898-1901, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, United Kingdom



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8. Maxwell Ashby Armfield, *Self-Portrait,* 1901, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, United Kingdom

It has been asserted that in an art world where the French and the American modern trends strove to innovate, the English groups appeared to stand for the need to slow down innovating. Meanwhile, as modern art is generally considered to have started with Manet, in the mid-nineteenth century, this basic idea seems to have directed the whole criticism of the twentieth century regarding the Pre-Raphaelites. Accordingly, most art historians perceived the Pre-Raphaelites as opposing to the French trend, neglecting that a similar movement could have as protagonists the Pre-Raphaelites, during a period approximately matching that of the French currents, and transgressing British insularity. (Prettejohn, 2007: 129-30)

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