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Introduction

'I cannot compliment them on common sense in choice of a *nom de guerre*', wrote John Ruskin in a letter to the editor of *The Times* published on 13 May 1851, the first time he commented on the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.[1] The reservation came in the context of a stirring defence of the controversial group, and in one way Ruskin was right: the word 'Pre-Raphaelite' has caused problems for the group's reputation ever since. Arguably the allusion to the art of a pre-modern age has prevented the artists and writers who adopted the label from being given their due as the first of the modernist avant-gardes. Moreover, the word can be criticized for over-complexity. It refers to the art of an age not precisely before Raphael himself, but rather before his followers and imitators, the 'Raphaelites'. To be 'Pre-Raphaelite', then, is not just to look back to an archaic past; it is also defiantly to reject the idea of following in the footsteps of a master or school. The word thus carries a modernist implication difficult to disentangle from its archaizing one, something that has caused critical problems throughout the century and a half from the formation of the PRB to the present day.

Yet in another sense Ruskin was spectacularly wrong. The word 'Pre-Raphaelite' is perhaps the most successful label ever devised for an English artistic movement, still more widely familiar than such labels as 'Vorticism', or even 'the YBAs'; it makes an effective brand name across the spectrum from scholarly journal articles through museum exhibitions to greetings cards. So familiar, indeed, is the label that we may forget to notice how strange it is. It is not easy to pronounce, and there is a flavour of jargon about it; it sounds like a term of scholarly art history rather than the slogan for a group of young rebels. In that respect, however, it was brilliantly calculated to capture the attention of an age that was just beginning to organize its discussions of art and literature historically. It is the obvious precursor of the many style labels that adopt a temporal prefix, from Roger Fry's coinage of 1910, 'Post-Impressionist', through to 'Pre-Columbian', 'Neo-Romantic' or 'Postmodern'. In a famously waspish review of 1850,

Charles Dickens ridiculed the ungainliness of the prefix along with its 'retrogressive' implications. He invents a 'Pre-Newtonian Brotherhood' for civil engineers who reject the laws of gravity, a 'Pre-Harvey-Brotherhood' of surgeons who refuse to acknowledge the circulation of the blood, a 'Pre-Gower and Pre-Chaucer-Brotherhood' (or 'P. G. A. P. C. B.') who wish to restore old English spellings.[2] Dickens's wit calls attention to another function of the name, a kind of subversive analogue for a professional association; the initials 'P. R. B.', appended to a painter's signature, mock the conventional sign of academic status, 'R. A.' (for Royal Academician, a full member of the Royal Academy of Arts).

Neither Ruskin in the Pre-Raphaelites' defence, nor Dickens on the attack, succeeded in mitigating the label's polemical edge, which indeed their vivid responses may have helped to publicize. Both texts also interpret the word unequivocally as an intervention into contemporary debates about painting. This is logical enough, in view both of the primary designation of the word and of its extended connotations, yet it raises a question scarcely less significant than that of the relation of archaism to modernism in the movement's endeavours. As the chapters in this *Cambridge Companion* demonstrate, Pre-Raphaelitism as we now understand it designates a movement in English literature as much as it does the corresponding movement in the visual arts. How then should we interpret the relationship between the visual and the literary arts, between drawing and painting on the one hand and reading and writing on the other, in a movement that takes its name so obviously from the history of painting?

One way of addressing the question is an appeal to history, something that the Pre-Raphaelites' own historical consciousness would seem to sanction. A preliminary analysis might award the primacy to painting, not just in the choice of name, but also in the composition of the original Brotherhood, six of whose seven members were aspiring artists: James Collinson, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Frederic George Stephens had met one another as painting students in the Royal Academy Schools, where Thomas Woolner trained as a sculptor. The first documents of the group are drawings made in the earliest days of their association, and they made their first public appearance as painters, in the London exhibitions of 1849, the first exhibiting season after the group was formed, apparently in the autumn of the previous year.

Yet these first paintings, like the group's early drawings, were literary – not just in the simple sense that they drew their subject matter from literary sources such as the English Romantic poets, Dante and Boccaccio, but also because they were steeped in the young artists' reading; even their knowledge of Italian painting before Raphael came as much through the growing

literature of art history as it did from the study of visual sources. While the first paintings were on display the seventh Brother, William Michael Rossetti (also the real brother of Dante Gabriel), began to keep a journal of the group's activities, the earliest sign of a determination to write the movement into the historical record. The very first entry, made on 15 May 1849, shows the group engaged in reading and writing alongside drawing and painting. Millais was writing a poem, while Stephens sat to him for the figure of Ferdinand in his subject from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (*Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*, The Makins Collection). On the same day D. G. Rossetti completed his drawing from Dante's *Vita Nuova*, intended for presentation to Millais (Figure 2), and recited a poem of his own as well as one by Coventry Patmore, which the assembled Brothers 'minutely analyzed'. William himself was contemplating a subject from Patmore, for a drawing or painting, on which Millais advised him.[3] The entry gives a vivid sense of the collaborative spirit within the group; it also shows all of the Brothers trying their hands at both literary and visual media. Christina Rossetti, regarded from the start as a 'sister' to the Brotherhood, also tried drawing and painting as well as poetry, and throughout the journal the artist-Brothers engage in intensive discussions of literature, past and present.

It was not long before they introduced their writing, both critical and creative, to the public, in a magazine that ran for just four issues early in 1850, under William's editorship. Some such title as 'Pre-Raphaelite Journal' or 'P. R. B. Journal' was contemplated and rejected – not, apparently, because the word 'Pre-Raphaelite' was thought inapplicable to writing, but rather because the contributors included a wider circle of friends and associates as well as the members of the PRB proper.[4] The eventual title, *The Germ*, emphasized the forward-looking over the retrogressive aspect of the movement, and the publication anticipated the 'little magazines' of later avant-garde movements not only in its manifesto character but also in its utter failure to cover its costs. As William later put it, the magazine was 'a most decided failure' in commercial terms.[5] As part of a rescue attempt, the third issue re-launched the project under a new title, *Art and Poetry: Being Thoughts towards Nature: Conducted principally by Artists*, and with a clearer statement of how writing was to function within the project: 'With a view to obtain the thoughts of Artists, upon Nature as evolved in Art, in another language besides their *own proper* one, this Periodical has been established.'[6]

This would seem to suggest that the Pre-Raphaelites thought of themselves first as visual artists, and only secondarily as writers. That was how the critic David Masson took the project in 1852, when he reviewed *The Germ* alongside the paintings exhibited that year: 'As might be expected,

Pre-Raphaelitism expresses itself far better on canvas than on paper.'[7] Masson traced the primary impulse back to the poetic innovation of Wordsworth, the desire to strip away the conventions of established literary practice by 'looking directly to Nature' (75). Yet it was the effort to 'apply the same theory to art' that led to the distinguishing feature of Pre-Raphaelitism, its adoption of models from painting before the age of Raphael as a way of stripping away the conventions of later art. Pre-Raphaelite writing, in Masson's account, simply borrows this procedure from painting: 'Now, if the Pre-Raphaelites were to write prose or verse, the very same feeling which makes them Pre-Raphaelites in painting, would lead them to outdo even the simplicity of Wordsworth, by a return to the more archaic simplicity of the writers of the time of Dante'; 'what strikes us most', in the writings of *The Germ*, 'is the archaic quaintness of their style, which is precisely such as would be formed now-a-days by a passionate study of the *Vita Nuova* of Dante, or of parts of the *Decameron* of Boccaccio' (80). Painting, in this account, is the primary Pre-Raphaelite art form, and Pre-Raphaelite writing may be said to deserve the name because it borrows its basic procedure from the sister art.

It may not be so easy, however, to distinguish among the primary sources for Pre-Raphaelite style in the two arts: by 1852 the *Vita Nuova* of Dante and the stories of Boccaccio's *Decameron* had already inspired drawings and paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites, and the mission statement in the third issue of *The Germ* provides a different rationale for the primacy of painting. The magazine's distinctive characteristic, or selling point, was that its contributors were practising artists rather than professional writers. This was not, however, a matter of being specially qualified, by virtue of their artistic training, to write about visual art. A generation later, James McNeill Whistler would argue that only practitioners were competent to comment on the art form they practised, but that is not the emphasis in *The Germ*. While there were notable contributions on the visual arts, such as F. G. Stephens's 'The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art' or Ford Madox Brown's 'On the Mechanism of a Historical Picture', poetry and literary criticism accounted for the large majority of the contents (see Appendix One). The artists' writings were to be valued precisely because they were 'in another language than their *own proper* one' – something like the opposite of Whistler's later argument.[8] The adoption of an unfamiliar 'language' can be seen as an alternative method of starting afresh from first principles. As unprofessional writers, the artists could claim to bypass the conventions of established literary practice, just as they attempted to renounce the conventions of the art schools by looking to 'Pre-Raphaelite' models for their

visual works. When Masson called several of the contributions to *The Germ* 'juvenile and immature' (84), he meant it as a criticism; yet the words indicate some kind of success in casting off the polish and sophistication of current literary convention.

The obvious corollary would be that someone untrained in painting might bring a special freshness to that medium, and indeed a notable feature of the PRB was that a relative beginner such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti was able to produce striking results in the very first oil paintings he made, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (Figure 6) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (Tate). The ideal Pre-Raphaelite might be someone untrained in either painting or poetry, who could work unfettered by existing conventions in either medium. Elizabeth Siddall, who entered the Pre-Raphaelite circle in late 1849 or early 1850, came close to fitting that description, and her poems and drawings were admired for an imaginative power that seemed to come across the more directly in that it was expressed in a simplified technique. Later in the 1850s, the ideal was still in place when Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris took up the visual arts without the benefit of an art school training (as undergraduates, they were also involved in a successor project to *The Germ*, another short-lived 'little magazine' called *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*).

Both the stylistic archaism to which Masson called attention and the unprofessional writing of *The Germ* are referred to a more basic aim, that of stripping away conventions in an effort to start afresh from first principles. Both Masson (with reference to Wordsworth) and *The Germ* describe this as a return in some sort to 'Nature', in formulations that seem typical of the nineteenth century, but the underlying idea remains powerful in later modernisms. Stéphane Mallarmé puts it well in his article of 1876 on a movement that is often seen as the originary avant-garde in painting, French Impressionism:

> In extremely civilized epochs the following necessity becomes a matter of course, the development of art and thought having nearly reached their far limits – art and thought are obliged to retrace their own footsteps, and to return to their ideal source, which never coincides with their real beginnings. English Praeraphaelitism, if I do not mistake, returned to the primitive simplicity of medieval ages.[9]

The Pre-Raphaelites might also remind us of a parallel to a much earlier modernism, that of the turn of the fourteenth century: in Canto XXIV of the *Purgatorio* (the central book of the *Divine Comedy*), Dante describes the 'sweet new style' (*dolce stil novo*) of his own poetic circle as an exact record of the dictation of Love.[10]

The idea of starting afresh from first principles is the most classic, then, of modernist moves. As R. H. Wilenski put it in his defence of the modernist sculptors in 1932, 'they began by assuming, for the moment, that no one had ever made sculpture before and that it was their own task to discover the nature of the activity in which they were about to be engaged.... They began, that is to say, at the beginning'.[11] Both of the Pre-Raphaelite procedures, stylistic archaism and writing or painting as a beginner, are means to a similar end, but unlike Wilenski's and many other formulations of the later modernist avant-gardes they are not medium specific. Despite the apparent priority of painting in the history of Pre-Raphaelitism, and even in its chosen name, the project belonged no more properly to painting than to literature, or rather its ways of starting afresh from first principles were equally applicable to both arts. Either the writer or the painter might take inspiration from models that dated from before the conventions had (putatively) set in, or the beginner in either medium might work untrammelled by academic convention.

The first procedure is vulnerable to the charge of archaism, the second to that of amateurism, and both have been levelled at the Pre-Raphaelites. Yet from the perspective of twentieth-century modernism there is a more damning charge. Pre-Raphaelitism would seem to be a classic example of what the great American critic of modernist painting, Clement Greenberg, called the 'confusion of the arts' – where painting is contaminated by narrative or literary allusion – and the Pre-Raphaelites duly appear in his list of artists who represent an 'all-time low'.[12] Although the Pre-Raphaelite procedures are perfectly cogent ways of starting afresh from first principles, they became unrecognizable as such for most of the twentieth century.

Perhaps, though, the Pre-Raphaelite project is better understood not as a 'confusion of the arts', but rather as an attempt to break down the boundaries between them, boundaries that had themselves come to seem conventional. The enthusiasm for trying one's hand at any medium, already apparent in the first entry of the *P. R. B. Journal*, doubtless reflects the reckless confidence of youthful inexperience, but it is also closely related to a distinctive feature of Pre-Raphaelitism, to which several of the contributors to this *Companion* call attention, its readiness to transgress the conventional boundaries between art forms, and moreover between the creative arts and those activities more usually considered scholarly, art-historical or critical. Thus we have not only 'literary' painting and 'pictorial' poetry, but also art criticism by poets, literary criticism by artists, and works in a variety of media that engage with the emerging scholarly discipline of art history, or that conduct criticism through creative means. Most of these boundary-crossing forms were already present in the writings of *The Germ* and in the

earliest drawings and paintings of the PRB, albeit sometimes in 'juvenile and immature' forms.

This brings us back to the question posed at the outset: How then should we interpret the relationship between the visual and the literary arts, between drawing and painting on the one hand and reading and writing on the other, in a movement that takes its name so obviously from the history of painting? The answer must be a capacious one. Neither the literary nor the visual arts can be said to have taken chronological precedence; still less did Pre-Raphaelitism set up any kind of hierarchy between them. Nor did it prescribe the forms their cross-currents and reciprocities might take. Pre-Raphaelitism was both a literary and an artistic movement; or perhaps it would be better to say that it was neither, in that it refused to recognize the difference as meaningful.

That makes the study of the Pre-Raphaelites important in the scholarly disciplines of both art history and English literature, not to mention a multitude of related fields and sub-disciplines – museum studies, comparative literature, the histories of taste and criticism, for example. Hence the remarkable proliferation in the scholarly literature on the Pre-Raphaelites in the past half-century, what William E. Fredeman, himself one of the most productive of Pre-Raphaelite scholars, has called a 'growth industry'.[13] Yet the disciplinary arrangements in our universities and art galleries also tend to segregate the studies of Pre-Raphaelite art and Pre-Raphaelite literature from one another. Pre-Raphaelite literature is the province of university English departments and scholarly journals; its focus is on criticism, with an emphasis on individual poets or poems rather than on the wider collaborations within the group as a whole. Pre-Raphaelite visual art, on the other hand, has been explored most extensively in exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues, as well as the catalogues of the museum collections that house Pre-Raphaelite works and catalogues raisonné on individual artists; these provide superb venues for exploring the inter-relationships among visual works, but divorce them misleadingly from the web of literary relationships without which they may make little sense. The prejudice against the Victorians, evident in both literary and art-historical scholarship throughout much of the twentieth century, has been more persistent in art history, and studies of Pre-Raphaelite art have been slow to percolate from the museum world (where the Pre-Raphaelites have been perennially popular with wider audiences) into the scholarly journals.

A particularly interesting case is that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a figure of commanding importance in both art and literature, but whose reputation is curiously different in the two fields. In literary studies his star has soared, and the intellectual sophistication of his poems as well as his translations

from Dante and the other Early Italian poets now seems securely established. Rossetti's high reputation owes much to the endeavours of Jerome McGann, whose essay of 1969, 'Rossetti's Significant Details', has itself attained a lasting fame, and who writes on Rossetti for the present volume; he has now been joined by a new generation of serious Rossetti scholars in what is now another 'growth industry' within Pre-Raphaelite studies.

In art history Rossetti's reputation has been much more equivocal, and perhaps even damaged by the popularity of his paintings in reproduction; a taint of lubriciousness or vulgarity lingers, and his remarkable experimental techniques in drawing and painting can still be misunderstood as indicating deficient skill. The exhibition on Rossetti, held in 2003 at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, and the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, received far more sympathetic, and intelligent, reviews from continental critics, who were often seeing his work for the first time, than from British critics too bored, or patronizing, to question their own received opinions. The exhibition catalogue, on which I collaborated with distinguished curatorial colleagues from the two exhibiting institutions, is inadequate in its coverage of Rossetti's literary work, despite the manifest importance of the latter to the visual works on display. Although it is, in compensation, much the most up-to-date treatment of Rossetti's work in visual media, it has been largely ignored in subsequent writing on Rossetti from a literary perspective. Now the magnificent web-based archive, *The Complete Writings and Paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, under McGann's editorship, provides superb coverage of Rossetti's work in all media, with facilities for cross-referencing (it is a good source, too, for Pre-Raphaelitism in general).[14] This, perhaps, is the ideal scholarly medium for Pre-Raphaelitism as a movement both visual and literary, although the digital image remains a poor substitute for the original works in their visual media (including books and manuscripts, whose physical and material presence is always crucial in Rossetti's work).

Rossetti is an extreme case. Nonetheless, there is still a regrettable segregation between the studies of Pre-Raphaelite literature and Pre-Raphaelite art, despite growing recent interest in interdisciplinary scholarship. If the ideal Pre-Raphaelite may be someone equally untrained in either poetry or painting, the ideal Pre-Raphaelite scholar would presumably be someone equally expert in both – a tall order indeed. The more practical alternative, and one more in the Pre-Raphaelites' own spirit of collaboration, is the one adopted in this *Companion*, which brings together leading scholars in the two fields. This seems an obvious course of action, and it is remarkable that it has not been tried before. Although several recent scholarly collections have included contributors from both fields, they are based in one or the other; for example, David Latham's *Haunted Texts* of 2003 and *Writing*

the Pre-Raphaelites of 2009, edited by Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer (both contributors to the present volume), are fine interdisciplinary collections, but the former clearly emanates from a literary perspective, the latter from an art-historical one.[15] Moreover, these and similar volumes are clearly designed to address specialized areas within Pre-Raphaelite studies, rather than serving as general introductions to Pre-Raphaelitism.

Yet a general introduction, covering art and literature together, is just what the student new to Pre-Raphaelitism most needs; it may also be just what the more advanced student or scholar in either art or literature needs, to acquaint herself or himself with the other field. The present volume does not attempt to analyze all of the myriad, and fascinating, interconnections among the Pre-Raphaelite media, or indeed to cover all of the diverse media practised by the Pre-Raphaelites; those are areas for more specialized studies. Its task is simpler and more basic: it aims to explore the whole movement, art and literature together, at an introductory level. Each of the contributors has something fascinating to say about media other than their '*own proper* one', and often they have been able to provide novel insights from the perspective of another discipline. In the main, though, each scholar writes in her or his specialist area. It is rather through the juxtaposition of the essays within the volume as a whole that the *Companion* achieves its aim of presenting Pre-Raphaelite art and literature as integral parts of a collaborative enterprise. The emphasis is on the earlier phase of the movement, from the formation of the PRB through to the 1860s; although all of the contributors suggest the directions in which the artists, writers or themes of their respective chapters would move after this initial period, there is no attempt to cover the more diverse and diffuse developments of the later decades of the nineteenth century, or the many artists and writers of later generations who allied their work in some way to that of the earlier Pre-Raphaelites.

Part One opens the volume with five general chapters on concerns shared widely among the Pre-Raphaelites. The first two form a pair, which deals with the sources and inspirations on which the Pre-Raphaelites drew, from the literature of the past (in Isobel Armstrong's chapter) and the art of the past (in Jenny Graham's). Michaela Giebelhausen's chapter concerns the intellectual background for the movement, with particular emphasis on religion, an area traditionally considered crucial to Pre-Raphaelitism but which has been relatively neglected in recent years. Colin Cruise's chapter on Pre-Raphaelite practices in drawing and Andrew Stauffer's on *The Germ* form a more informal pairing, since they deal with the group's very first experiments in visual and literary production respectively.

Part Two includes chapters on the main protagonists of Pre-Raphaelitism in both arts. The figures chosen for inclusion make a very conventional

canon of Pre-Raphaelites. In a volume twice or three times as long, it would no doubt be interesting to include a wider variety of the fascinating 'minor' figures associated with the group, and quite possibly some of them would emerge as not so minor after all. Here, though, the primary aim has been to provide chapters on the most famous figures, the ones that someone coming to the movement for the first time, or someone coming to either the literary or the artistic side of it from a principal expertise in the other side, most needs to know about. The chapters are arranged in a rough chronology, in the order in which each figure became involved with Pre-Raphaelitism. In two cases, Rossetti and Morris, chapters on both their literary and their artistic work have been deemed necessary. Part Two therefore opens with paired chapters on Rossetti, by Jerome McGann and myself. These are followed by chapters on two of the other PRBs, William Holman Hunt (by Carol Jacobi) and John Everett Millais (by Paul Barlow), and on another painter who was of great importance as colleague and mentor to the group from its inception although he never became a PRB, Ford Madox Brown (by Tim Barringer). Next come two figures who might be called Pre-Raphaelite Sisters, involved from the start in the case of Christina Rossetti (by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra) or within a couple of years in that of Elizabeth Siddall (by Deborah Cherry). Paired chapters on Morris, by Jeffrey Skoblow and Imogen Hart, move to what has sometimes been called the 'second phase' of Pre-Raphaelitism, the new group that formed around Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the later 1850s; Morris himself, Edward Burne-Jones (by Caroline Arscott), and Algernon Charles Swinburne (by Catherine Maxwell) had all been Oxford undergraduates, and their involvement shifted the social centre of the group. A final chapter deals with a figure who had in fact been a PRB and of the utmost importance since the earliest days, William Michael Rossetti (by Angela Thirlwell). He appears at the end in acknowledgement of his equally crucial role as chronicler and historian of Pre-Raphaelitism. Painters slightly outnumber poets in this sequence (with Rossetti, Morris and Siddall counted as both), and they predominate in the earlier chapters; starting with Christina Rossetti, there is a more equal balance between poetry and painting. The volume ends with a brief editorial Envoi, which reflects on the Pre-Raphaelites' legacy and proposes some directions for future study.

Many of the contributors have found it useful to make reference to a document from the earliest days, the 'list of Immortals' drawn up in a 'studio conclave' (Hunt's words) in 1848. This is one among many unplanned interconnections that have emerged in the course of writing, but perhaps it is significant that so many of the contributors have found this somewhat eccentric text relevant to the approach of the volume. Mentioned in a letter from Dante Gabriel to William Michael Rossetti of 30 August 1848, the list