

tain analogies between the two. In the case of *Eurhythmy*, it is meant to be compared with *Princess Sabra Drawing the Lot* (1865-6), lent by Hanover College, Indiana, but it seems to me that the analogy of the rigid lines of figures is stretched at best. There is something missing in putting this picture within the context of Burne-Jones despite some common concerns between the two painters. While Hodler's painting is as symbolically enigmatic as Burne-Jones's, it appears that the two works are in wholly different spheres. Burne-Jones' painting is tied to its poetical prototype while Hodler's composition is visionary in a different way, a sort of coming to terms in a cosmic zone where vivacious curves and his signature parallelism impart an endless march of melancholy souls toward the abyss. The juxtaposition of the two artists, both influential in their own ways – Burne-Jones more in France; Hodler more in Vienna – underscores as many differences as similarities.

The catalogue,* which is available in a German and English edition, is a glorious affair, beautifully made with reproductions that are accurate and valuable. There are twelve important essays, mostly by German scholars, although the fine essay on the St. George cycle is by Matthias Fehner, the director of the Kunstmuseum, Bern, which try to place the complexities of Burne-Jones into a Continental (Germanic) focus. All of the essays are worth reading for their clarity of what is a complex issue. The essay by William Waters and Peter Nahum on Burne-Jones's medieval sources is particularly interesting for its research into some of his sources, but not always convincing on what these were. A negative side to the exhibition is the entrance fee: SFr18, more than £11, which I suspect will inhibit many from adventure.

*[The catalogue of this exhibition is fully reviewed by Simon Poë in the Book Reviews section]

'I Preraffaelliti. Il sogno del '400 italiano da Beato Angelico a Perugino da Rossetti a Burne-Jones'

Museo dell'arte della città di Ravenna 28 February-6 June
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford 15 September-5 December

Arnika Schmidt

For centuries, Italy has fascinated the English with its groundbreaking artistic accomplishments, gentle climate and natural beauty. The Victorians in particular enjoyed a passionate and multi-fold relationship with the peninsula's cultural heritage revealed by the literary and artistic production of British artists in this period. The fervour for all things Italian, or rather for an idea of 'Italian-ness', is the driving force behind the works of the artists represented in this exhibition. This show is the first to focus exclusively on the ways in which the artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were inspired by Italy and as such is of great public and scholarly interest. The accompanying catalogue deftly conveys the complexity of Anglo-Italian artistic relations in the 19th century and encourages a broader understanding of Pre-Raphaelitism.¹ Five essays take up the crucial aspects further engaging with the political and historical background, analysing the Pre-Raphaelites' interaction with literature and discussing the reciprocal dynamics between English and Italian artists. The exhibition exemplifies the addressed issues by the approximately 150 works of art presented in nine sections which are in turn grouped together under three main categories illustrating the intellectual engagement with visual and literary sources, the emotional response to the evocative southern landscape and a sensual assimilation of Italian Renaissance art.

Unfortunately the title chosen for the Italian venue, which alludes to a narrower investigation of the Pre-Raphaelites' response to Italian quattrocento art, may mislead visitors' expectations as both the display and the catalogue entries clearly show a broader approach. Had the exhibition's concept been restricted to the theme described in

the title, however, visitors might have been equally dissatisfied as the Pre-Raphaelites neither pretended nor wished to imitate the Early Italian Masters as John Ruskin specified in his famous letter published by the *Times* in 1851, a point very well argued in Colin Harrison's highly informative essay on the Pre-Raphaelites and Italian art before and after Raphael.² These artists were above all inspired by the idea of medieval Italy and the genuine creativity attributed to pre-Raphael artists as transmitted to them by literary sources and by Ruskin's accounts in particular.

A selection of early renaissance panels in the first section introduces the visitor to the kind of artworks the Pre-Raphaelites would have been inspired by. Still it is important to keep in mind that very few paintings by Italian trecento and quattrocento artists were on public display in Victorian England. As a consequence, secondary visual sources such as Carlo Lasinio's etchings of the Camposanto in Pisa, displayed in the adjacent room, became primary vehicles for the dissemination of an idea of pre-Raphael art for those who, like the majority of the members of the Brotherhood, had never actually visited the peninsula. Italian medieval history and literature also had a modern catalyst as the romantic poets Keats, Shelley and Browning had all elaborated themes drawn from Dante, Boccaccio and other contemporary sources. Translations of these poets' crucial works and their romantic interpretations constituted the major literary sources of interest for the Pre-Raphaelites. The episode of Paolo and Francesca narrated in Dante's *Divina Commedia* was one of the favourite motives of the Brotherhood, an aspect perfectly accounted for by the curators' choice of the unfortunate couple's pictorial and sculptural immortalizations by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones and Alexander Munro in the show's third section. The following three rooms were dedicated to Ruskin and his followers who represent the realistic counterpart to Rossetti's imaginative approach within the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The author of *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice* understood his own watercolours (Pl 2) and drawings of Italian art and architecture as a means of documenting his observations in a manner which mirrored his archaeological interest in the country's cultural heritage, a heritage which was at that time rapidly falling into decay due to neglect. Ruskin's scientific approach also directed his disciples' mode of painting landscapes as the exhibition *Pre-Raphaelite vision – truth to nature*³ in 2004 so beautifully demonstrated. Their accurately detailed works of both English and Middle-Eastern landscapes show a geological and archaeological interest absent in the few depictions of the Italian countryside, which rather aim to evoke the atmosphere of the chosen sites, as the exhibits present in the sixth section clearly demonstrate. Curiously, most of the landscape paintings on display in the two sections dedicated to this genre were executed by artists that never belonged to the Brotherhood, another aspect at odds with the exhibition's title but a crucial element for the understanding of the variety of artistic responses evoked by the peninsula. In his pioneering book on the Pre-Raphaelite landscape first published in 1973 and re-edited in 2001, Allen Staley stated that 'in the 1860s and 1870s the most talented younger landscape painters turned away from the naturalism of Pre-Raphaelitism to return to a more pictorially disciplined and subjective art'.⁴ On these lines the so-called Etruscan School, a group of primarily English artists including William Blake Richmond, George Heming Mason and George Howard headed by the Roman painter Giovanni (Nino) Costa, was considered by some as a promising alternative.⁵ Ideological parallels of the two anti-academic tendencies and Costa's strong connections to England led some Italian critics of the time to the mistaken assumption that the Roman himself belonged to the Pre-Raphaelites regardless the fact that the atmospheric renderings of enchanting sites by Costa and the Etruscans (Pl 3) give an interpretation of 'truth to nature' very different from the scrupulously objective landscapes of painters following the Ruskinian tradition, an argument well set out in Christopher Newall's catalogue essay. The show's selection of paintings, oil studies and watercolours by artists

such as Lord Frederic Leighton, Richmond and Costa give a visual account of the Etruscans' poetic response to the sentiment evoked by the Italian landscape.

The last two sections of the exhibition present the visitor with a different kind of emotional engagement with Italian culture which drove the second generation of Pre-Raphaelites towards the creation of a more sensual art inspired by the sumptuous style of High Renaissance painting and the writings of Algernon Charles Swinburne and Walter Pater. The muscular nude bodies of Michelangelo and the Venetian Masters' free handling of rich colours were major sources of inspiration for Rossetti (Pl 4), Burne-Jones and their followers. These artists appropriated the aesthetic and decorative qualities of the Renaissance Masters, which appealed to their *fin de siècle* sensibility. A choice of sensual female portraits, allegorical works by painters including Rossetti, Frederick Sandys and William Holman Hunt and Burne-Jones' rarely accessible studies and cartoons for the mosaics of San Paolo dentro le Mura in Rome, a project he had started to work on in 1881, exemplify in Ravenna the turn to aestheticism the Pre-Raphaelite movement had taken towards the end of the 19th century.

The display follows an overall chronological structure even though the sections are organized thematically. The curators' concept works very well as it allows the visitor to keep track of the artists' development as well as providing an idea of the variety of English artists' sources of inspiration deriving from the Italian culture and countryside throughout the 19th century. The exhibition addresses recurring themes and techniques treated by the Brotherhood, which have a particular resonance for Ravenna, such as the cult of Dante, the legend of Paolo and Francesca and mosaic, making the city an ideal backdrop for this revealing show.

1 *I Preraffaelliti. Il sogno del '400 italiano da Beato Angelico a Perugino da Rossetti a Burne-Jones*, exh cat., by Colin Harrison, Christopher Newall and Claudio Spadoni, with essays by Maurizio Isabella and Martin McLaughlin, 251 pp incl 150 col + 10 b&w ills (Silvana, Cinisello Balsamo/Milano, 2010), €39. ISBN 978-88-3661-578-0.

2 Harrison, op cit (n1), p42.

3 *Pre-Raphaelite vision: truth to nature*, exh cat, London (Tate Britain), Berlin (Alte Nationalgalerie) and Madrid (Fundación La Caixa) 2004/2005.

4 Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite landscape*, New Haven 2001, p244.

5 *Art Journal*, 1871, p173-80.

'Symbolism in Belgium'

Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 26 March-27 June

Nic Peeters

According to Elizabeth Prettejohn, Symbolism is the link between the Pre-Raphaelites and Surrealism. The art generally known as 'Symbolism' flourished in quite a few European countries, but especially in France and Belgium around the turn of the previous century. It is generally agreed that Symbolism started with the publication of manifestos in Paris and Brussels during the year 1886. In Brussels the public came to know Symbolist art mainly through the annual exhibitions organised by the artistic associations of 'Les XX' and 'La Libre Esthétique'. These associations were truly international: they invited foreign artists to exhibit with them and their members showed their work in Paris, Venice, Weimar and Amsterdam among other European cities. They also kept a keen eye on the British art scene.

The Belgian Symbolists particularly admired both the first and second generation Pre-Raphaelites in Britain. In fact, the second generation, with Edward Burne-Jones at its centre, has for some years now been known as the 'British Symbolists'. There were many personal and artistic ties between the Belgian and British groups. Fernand Khnopff, the most famous Belgian Symbolist, was a friend of Burne-Jones and exhibited frequently at London's New Gallery, which was the

most important platform for late Pre-Raphaelite art from 1888 till 1909. Other Belgian Symbolists such as Willy Schlobach and Jean Delville either visited London and other parts of Britain or even lived and worked there for a number of years. The works of British artists such as Ford Madox Brown, William Holman Hunt, William Morris, Walter Crane and George Frampton were exhibited at shows of 'Les XX' and 'La Libre Esthétique' in Brussels where paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Burne-Jones and again Madox Brown became known through Frederick Hollyer's photos. A large number of pictures by the Pre-Raphaelite photographer Julia Margaret Cameron met with great success in the same city. Besides all this, both groups shared the use of English and Belgian literature (eg, the writings of Christina Rossetti and Maurice Maeterlinck) as well as the act of looking within oneself as an important source of inspiration. Consequently, the same recurring themes appear in both the works of the Pre-Raphaelites and those of the Belgian Symbolists: the femme fatale, the feminine ideal, androgyny, the mirror as a symbol of introspection and the interrelated concepts of sleep and death. This firm bond between the two schools of art is possibly best represented by Schlobach's *La Morte ou Ophélie* (*The Dead Woman or Ophelia*, 1899), which – reminiscent of John Millais's 1851-2 *Ophelia* – shows the corpse of a beautiful Lizzie Siddal look-alike floating down the Thames.

Not only in content but also in style, a large number of works at this exhibition betray the Belgian admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites. Khnopff's style is, of course, strongly related to the 'Aesthetic' approach of his great idol Burne-Jones. So is Xavier Mellery's, but in his work one also detects clear traces of Crane's and Evelyn De Morgan's more academic execution. Léon Frédéric's fusion of photographic realism, achingly bright colours and spirituality, displayed by, for instance, *La nature ou La fécondité* (*Nature or Abundance*, 1897), uncannily resembles later works by Holman Hunt such as *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1876-87). In his stunningly evocative paintings such as *L'amour des âmes* (*The Love of Souls*, 1900) and *L'ange des splendeurs* (*The Angel of Splendours*, 1894) Jean Delville, the most esoteric Belgian Symbolist, placed his figures in almost abstract, cosmic compositions reminiscent of the 'British Symbolist' George Frederic Watts – who was close to the Pre-Raphaelites.

Regrettably, curator Michel Draguet does not draw attention to this Anglo-Belgian alliance in his exhibition. This is quite odd because he dedicates half a chapter to it in the book-length essay that he has published for the show and that serves as a catalogue. This update of a 2004 publication makes excellent, informative reading and is profusely illustrated, including a colour print of Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs* (1872-80) that was on sale in Brussels during the 1880s. However, it is not a true catalogue: in several ways the book does not concur with the exhibition. One of these is that there is not a single British picture on display to afford the visitor a comparison between the Pre-Raphaelites and their Belgian followers.

Apart from exposing the connection between the two schools, such a comparison could have revealed how Belgian Symbolism took the art of the Pre-Raphaelites a step further... into the dark side. Much of second generation Pre-Raphaelite art, starting with Rossetti's 'Aesthetic' water-colours of the late 1850s, was the result of introspection but it did not deliberately explore the most lugubrious caverns of human nature. Belgian Symbolism did. The poet Emile Verhaeren, whose verses often inspired the artistic circle around him, called this exploration 'ingenious self-torment' in his *Confession de poète* (1890). In this way, the Belgian Symbolists revived the Romantic tradition: they made use of the 'tortured artist' effect to counter with emotions what they thought was an excess of rationality all around them. While science, technology and secularisation became ever more powerful in their society (Belgium had become the second industrialised country in the world, after Britain), they went in search of ever more shocking themes to inspire their paintings in a grand effort to preserve what magic there was left in daily life. Typical of this is that in Schlobach's aforementioned painting, Ophelia's body does not float past flower-