

The Critical Reception of Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy, 1878-1910

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## THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF PRE-RAPHAELITISM IN ITALY, 1878–1910

Much has been written on the foreign influences on British art and especially on the fascination of British and Pre-Raphaelite artists with Italy. However, less is known about the reception of British art abroad and its impact on the art and aesthetics of other countries. The links between Pre-Raphaelite and continental art, and the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on the wider European context, have not been widely recognized. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the later movement which stemmed from it, which we label as Pre-Raphaelitism, have been viewed as an isolated English phenomenon, instead of as part of the tradition of nineteenth-century European art. In their reassessment of the movement, Susan Casteras and Alicia Craig Faxon have attempted to correct the balance by placing Pre-Raphaelitism in its historical European context.<sup>1</sup> However, the aim of their book followed a pattern already established by twentieth-century scholars, namely to focus on the link between English and French art, which in this case is extended to include Belgian art.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the 1997 exhibition at the London Tate Gallery on Pre-Raphaelite art in the age of Symbolism, though widening the picture of the influence of the English movement abroad to include the work of Swiss Symbolist artists, was still biased towards the French art world.<sup>3</sup> It displayed only one painting by the Italian Divisionist Gaetano Previati and made only a passing reference to the impact of Pre-Raphaelite art in Italy. This is unsatisfactory since, as will become apparent below, in the 1880s and 1890s there was a pronounced interest in Pre-Raphaelitism among Italian artists and writers on art and literature which left a marked impact on their own work.

If we turn from Anglo-Saxon to Italian twentieth-century studies, we find a similar gap in the literature. Analyses of the impact of Pre-Raphaelite and English art on Italy are also very limited and the question of the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism has been only partially addressed in various articles on Gabriele D'Annunzio and his interest in the Pre-Raphaelites, although they lacked the broader scope of a study of the influence of the movement on Italian writers and artists.<sup>4</sup> Italian art historians since the early 1960s have worked on

I am grateful to the Isaiah Berlin Foundation for the research grants which helped me in the preparation of this work.

<sup>1</sup> *Pre-Raphaelite Art in its European Context* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> For the link between the Pre-Raphaelites and French Symbolism see *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art: Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer*, ed. by John Christian, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1989). For an informative essay on the critical reception of the Pre-Raphaelites in France see Jacques Lethève, 'La connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais en France (1855–1900)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 53 (1959), 315–28. See also Claude Allemand-Cosneau, 'La fortune critique de Burne-Jones en France', in *Burne-Jones 1833–1898: dessins du Fitzwilliam Museum de Cambridge*, exhibition catalogue (Nantes: Musée des Beaux Arts, 1992), pp. 69–81, and more recently Annie Dubernard-Laurent, 'Le rôle de la Gazette des Beaux-Arts dans la réception de la peinture préraphaélite britannique en France', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1549 (1998), 41–51.

<sup>3</sup> *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860–1910*, ed. by Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> See Robert Weiss's short study 'D'Annunzio e l'Inghilterra', in *L'arte di Gabriele D'Annunzio*,

the late nineteenth century and have carried out extensive research on the Macchiaioli painters and the Divisionists. Rossana Bossaglia, in her fundamental study of Italian Art Nouveau, has highlighted the interest of Italian artists in Pre-Raphaelite art and the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>5</sup> Gianna Piantoni focused her attention on the Roman art world and pointed to the influence of English Pre-Raphaelitism here.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Anna Maria Damigella, in her study of Italian Symbolism, discussed the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism in Rome and northern Italy and its relevance in the theoretical framework of the Italian Symbolists.<sup>7</sup> So far, however, there has been no attempt to analyse the relationship of English Pre-Raphaelitism with Italian art in any systematic way.

This paper is the first comprehensive study of the essays and reviews published in Italy on English Pre-Raphaelite artists of the first and second generation and their successors. It focuses on the period 1878–1910, 1878 being the year when the first article on contemporary English painting appeared in Italy, and 1910 the year of Marinetti's Futurist speech in London against Ruskin, after which the interest of Italian artists and critics was captured by the avant-garde. This analysis will provide the exact dates and phases of the Italian discovery of Pre-Raphaelite art; it will indicate the channels of diffusion and emphasize the importance of a number of personalities who were pivotal in the diffusion of British Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy.

Information on Pre-Raphaelitism arrived in Italy, by and large, in two phases: firstly, in the 1880s, when discussion was largely literary and focused on Dante Gabriel Rossetti; secondly, in the early 1890s, when it extended to the Fine Arts, culminating in the first Venetian Biennale in 1895. Subsequently, interest shifted towards the later phase of the movement, and Edward Burne-Jones became the cult English artist, influencing a whole generation of Italian artists and stimulating a debate on the existence of 'Italian Pre-Raphaelitism'.

Atti del convegno internazionale di studio (Milan: Mondadori, 1968), pp. 463–70. See also John Woodhouse, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti, D'Annunzio e il preraffaellismo', *Rassegna dannunziana*, 2 (1982), 1–11; and by the same author, 'Preraffaellite truccate: le donne dipinte dal D'Annunzio', in *Letteratura italiana e arti figurative*, Atti del XII Convegno dell'Associazione Internazionale di Studi di Lingua e Letteratura Italiana, 3 vols (Florence: Olschki, 1988), II, 929–39. An excellent study of the Roman milieu is in Riccardo D'Anna, *Roma preraffaellita* (Rome: Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1996). For a study of the literature on D'Annunzio and the arts see Giuliana Pieri, 'The Effect of the Pre-Raphaelites on the Cultural Consciousness of D'Annunzio', *Notebooks of the Italian Cultural Institute, Edinburgh*, 11 (2001), 39–54.

<sup>5</sup> Bossaglia also wrote the only article which deals explicitly with the problem of the critical reception of English Pre-Raphaelite artists in Italy: 'Note sulla fortuna italiana di Burne-Jones', in *Burne-Jones dal preraffaellismo al simbolismo*, exhibition catalogue (Milan: Mazzotta, 1986), pp. 82–85.

<sup>6</sup> Gianna Piantoni, 'La Cronaca Bizantina, Il Convito e la fortuna dei preraffaelliti a Roma', in *Aspetti dell'arte a Roma*, ed. by Dario Durbè, exhibition catalogue (Rome: De Luca, 1972), pp. xxxv–xli. A recent exhibition in Rome has also pointed at European artistic relations between Italy, Britain, France, and central Europe: *Dei ed eroi, classicità e mito fra '800 e '900*, ed. by M. T. Benedetti, G. Piantoni, M. G. Tolomeo, and M. Volpi, exhibition catalogue (Rome: De Luca, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Anna Maria Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia 1885–1900* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981); see in particular chapter I, 'Roma 1883–89: il paesaggio stato d'animo', pp. 21–84.

*The Late 1870s and 1880s*

Unlike France, where Pre-Raphaelite paintings began to be exhibited as early as 1855, the exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite works in Italy was a late phenomenon. The first recorded exhibition was in 1890, at the *In Arte Libertas*, an artists' society founded by the Roman patriot and landscape painter Nino Costa in Rome in 1887, which became the main channel for the artistic diffusion of Pre-Raphaelite art in Italy.<sup>8</sup> The first Venice Biennale in 1895 was also the first exhibition to show Pre-Raphaelite works on a larger scale and to a wider audience; until then, knowledge of Pre-Raphaelitism had been restricted to Anglo-Italian circles in Rome and Florence. However, the first signs of a knowledge of Pre-Raphaelitism can be found in essays and reviews from 1878 and throughout the 1880s, with an increase in 1882, on the occasion of the death of D. G. Rossetti, who, thanks to his obvious connection with Italy, was pivotal in the spreading of interest in the movement.

The year 1878 was an important one for the diffusion of Pre-Raphaelite art on the Continent as several English artists exhibited at the International Exhibition in Paris. Some belonged to the original Pre-Raphaelites and still employed the painstaking technique which characterized their earliest works. Others were to become the new face of Pre-Raphaelite art, the later generation of artists working under the influence of D. G. Rossetti. The only Italian writer on art who responded to the show of English painting in Paris was the Florentine patron and theorist of the Macchiaioli, Diego Martelli. Although Martelli's main interest was contemporary French art—he introduced Impressionism into Italy—he published a series of reviews of English art in the Piedmontese periodical *Il Risorgimento*.<sup>9</sup> The importance of these reviews lies in the fact that they were, to my knowledge, the first articles to present contemporary English art to an Italian audience. The reviews were meant to show the English school of painting in all its various trends, and, unlike later essays, did not expand on the history of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, nor did Martelli feel the need to explain the term 'Pre-Raphaelitism' to his audience, although at the time in Italy the English movement had not received any coverage in the press.

The interest in D. G. Rossetti, first as a poet and later also as a painter, provided the impetus for the first diffusion of a knowledge of Pre-Raphaelite art in Italy. In 1878 Luigi Gamberale published the Italian version of Rossetti's 'Last Confession'.<sup>10</sup> In the introduction, Gamberale, aware of the total lack of knowledge of Rossetti in Italy at the time, briefly presented the Rossetti family. He focused particularly on Christina, and mentioned an early Italian translation of her poem 'Goblin Market', a further instance of the early interest in the Rossettis in Italy.<sup>11</sup> Although Gamberale's interests were mainly literary, he

<sup>8</sup> On the history of *In Arte Libertas* see Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia 1885–1900*.

<sup>9</sup> 'Esposizione Universale', *Il Risorgimento*, 10 October, 31 October, and 25 November 1878.

<sup>10</sup> *Un'ultima confessione: novella di Dante Gabriele Rossetti tradotta dall'inglese da Luigi Gamberale* (Campobasso: Colitti, 1878).

<sup>11</sup> An even earlier instance is the translation in 1866 by Teodorico Pietrocolo-Rossetti of the same poem, as 'Mercato dei Folletti'. I have not been able to trace this volume. Pietrocolo-Rossetti's interest in the Rossetti family can also be seen in his biography of D. G. Rossetti's father, *Gabriele Rossetti* (Turin: UTET, 1861).

commented on D. G. Rossetti's paintings, pointing out their Dantesque theme, thus establishing the medieval framework through which Rossetti's paintings were initially known in Italy.<sup>12</sup> He based his knowledge of Rossetti's works on two articles, one by Francis Hueffer of 1870, and an article in the *Athenaeum*<sup>13</sup>—an interesting instance of the circulation of English books and journals in the Abruzzi.

In April 1882 Navarro Della Miraglia published an article on D. G. Rossetti in the form of an obituary preceded by a brief overview of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, the first essay of the kind to be published in Italy.<sup>14</sup> In his account, Della Miraglia placed Rossetti at the forefront of the movement, together with Millais, Madox Brown, Burne-Jones, and William Holman Hunt, viewing the development of the movement as a passage from the initial Ruskinian influence, which placed Nature at the forefront of art, to mysticism, which drew on the early Italian Renaissance. He also focused on the peculiar qualities of Rossetti's figures, comparing them to Italian Old Masters, and Botticelli above all. However, the descriptions of the characteristic figures of Rossetti bear little resemblance to the Old Masters; rather they evoke the creations of Burne-Jones and his followers. As Della Miraglia admitted, the difficulty in the appraisal of Rossetti's works was due to the lack of accessibility of his paintings—Rossetti from the late 1850s refused to show his works in public. Italian critics were thus faced with a great obstacle and relied heavily on secondary sources and reproductions.

Della Miraglia's review was followed closely by the first extended essay on Pre-Raphaelitism, Carlo Placci's article on D. G. Rossetti in May 1882.<sup>15</sup> Placci played an important role as an intermediary in the cultural life of his time, acting as a link between the intellectual and social elites of different countries, and especially between Italian Anglophiles and the Anglo-American communities in Florence and Rome.<sup>16</sup> His article was an immediate response to the death of Rossetti, part of a broader celebratory appraisal of the English artist. It is a review of Rossetti's poetry as well as an analysis of his paintings. Placci rightly engaged with the difficulties encountered by critics when confronted with Pre-Raphaelitism in view of the individual and divergent styles adopted by its principal exponents. He was well informed about the development of Pre-Raphaelitism, sharing the praise of his contemporaries for Burne-Jones. He considered Rossetti's evolution from his initial realism to his later style as a change for the worse, and was particularly harsh in his criticism of Rossetti's colour and drawing, echoing similar judgements by English critics. When commenting on Rossetti's characteristic female type, Placci's criticism became

<sup>12</sup> 'Dei quadri di Dante Gabriele, salvo pochi di argomento religioso, gli altri tutti, e son quelli su cui riposa la sua fama di pittore, sono tratti dal ciclo dantesco' (Gamberale, *Un'ultima confessione*, pp. vii–viii).

<sup>13</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Poems* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1870), with a memoir by Francis Hueffer; 'Mr Rossetti's New Picture', *Athenaeum*, 25 November 1871, p. 694.

<sup>14</sup> Navarro Della Miraglia, 'Dante Gabriele Rossetti', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 23 April 1882 (unpaginated).

<sup>15</sup> 'Dante Gabriele Rossetti', *La rassegna nazionale*, 9 (May 1882), 427–46.

<sup>16</sup> See Maria-Jose Cambieri Tosi, *Carlo Placci: maestro di cosmopoli nella Firenze fra Ottocento e Novecento* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1984). See also Marie-Pierre Strowel, 'Carlo Placci between Italy and Britain in the 1880s: His Friends, his Essays and the Role of Enrico Nencioni', *MLR*, 89 (1994), 71–87.

overtly disapproving: ‘su corpi disegnati giottesicamente si pone quasi sempre una testa convenzionale di tipo inglese malsano, con un collo a trapezio geometrico, con narici leggermente arricciate e labbra innalzate a punta’.<sup>17</sup> Placci’s description interestingly paralleled the aversion to Rossetti’s paintings of one of the most prominent members of the English Florentine community, the writer and critic Vernon Lee. She described some of Rossetti’s paintings, which she saw in London in 1883, in a letter to her mother:

They are half lengths of women: one a vile caricature, with goitry throat, red hair and German housemaid sentiment, of Mrs Stillman, called ‘Veronica Veronese’—the others mainly of Mrs Morris, making her look as if her face were covered with ill-shaven stubble, and altogether repulsive. The best is one of Lilith, [. . .] the pictures seem to me not merely ill painted and worse modelled, but coarse and repulsive.<sup>18</sup>

The similarity of Placci’s and Vernon Lee’s rejection of Rossetti’s works suggests their mutual influence, and possibly Placci’s dependence on Vernon Lee’s knowledge of Rossetti’s paintings. In fact there is no record of Placci seeing private collections of Pre-Raphaelite works in London, which were the only source for Rossetti’s paintings at the time. Placci’s first-hand knowledge of Rossetti’s works was limited to one painting which he saw at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool a few months before Rossetti’s death, *Dante’s Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice* (1871), the replica in oil of his earlier watercolour.<sup>19</sup> His peremptory judgement on Rossetti’s painting provoked a response from W. M. Rossetti and Marie Spartali Stillman, who both wrote to him, pointing out the error of judging Rossetti’s art on the basis of a single painting.<sup>20</sup> Mrs Stillman’s letter casts light on her early acquaintance with Placci, suggesting her role in Placci’s knowledge of Pre-Raphaelitism.<sup>21</sup> A friend to both Vernon Lee and Carlo Placci, Marie Spartali Stillman (1843–1927) was the authority on Pre-Raphaelite art in Italy at that time. She is chiefly known as a model for the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron and for D. G. Rossetti. However, she was a good Pre-Raphaelite artist of the second phase of the movement and became a prominent exponent of the style in the 1870s and 1880s, when her family was based in Italy. Her husband, the American journalist William James Stillman, had been in his youth a painter in the Pre-Raphaelite vein and a great admirer of Ruskin, and had greatly contributed to the spreading

<sup>17</sup> Placci, ‘Dante Gabriele Rossetti’, p. 445.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee. Violet Paget, 1856–1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 88. Violet Paget, alias Vernon Lee, saw these paintings at Leyland’s house, which housed an important collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings and above all of works by Rossetti. It is interesting to note that the only painting Vernon Lee admired was that of *Lady Lilith*, which Nencioni described in great detail in his article on Rossetti in 1884.

<sup>19</sup> See *Paintings and Drawings of D. G. Rossetti (1828–1882): A Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. by Virginia Surtees (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), no. 81. The replica of the original watercolour of 1856 was commissioned by William Graham. It was acquired by the Liverpool Corporation in 1881. Mrs William Morris sat for the figure of Beatrice and Mrs Stillman posed for one of the two attendants.

<sup>20</sup> The letters are housed in the Biblioteca Marucelliana, Florence, in the Carteggio Placci, and published in Strowel, ‘Carlo Placci between Italy and Britain in the 1880s’, pp. 71–87.

<sup>21</sup> At this time the Stillmans used to spend their winters in Florence and Placci probably met them in 1881 or 1882 through the Pagets.

of a knowledge of Ruskinian and Pre-Raphaelite doctrine in North America in the 1850s.<sup>22</sup>

Placci's second critical study of Pre-Raphaelitism was his article on Morris of July 1884.<sup>23</sup> The article focused mainly on Morris's poetry. However, to introduce his subject, Placci briefly explained the characteristics of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, from which principles Morris's and Burne-Jones's art stemmed. These features, according to Placci, were eclecticism, medievalism, absence of pathos, and the link between art and poetry.

Placci's article on Morris was preceded by Nencioni's essay on D. G. Rossetti of February 1884, an important step in the diffusion of Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy, being the first study of Rossetti based on a more extensive knowledge of his paintings.<sup>24</sup> Nencioni firstly addressed the difficulties of interpretation of the word 'preraffaellismo' and the confusion which stemmed from it—a crucial problem for a correct interpretation of the phenomenon of Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy, but also in France and England, where the proliferation of studies on the Pre-Raphaelites had often resulted in incorrect views of the movement. As he stated, 'Preraffaellismo è parola spesso abusata e sbagliata.' He pointed out all the mistaken interpretations of Pre-Raphaelitism, providing thus an interesting insight into the different meanings which the word 'Pre-Raphaelite' had acquired. Pre-Raphaelitism should not be mistaken, Nencioni states, for the 'rinascimento medievale germanico', i.e. the Nazarenes; nor for a mere imitation of the Old Masters, which was the commonest mistake, resulting in the stereotyped image of their paintings as copies of Florentine Madonnas holding lilies in their hands.<sup>25</sup> He opposed to these views the individuality of inspiration of the Pre-Raphaelites, which explained the diversity of their style, and association of very distinct painters (he mentioned Holman Hunt, Burne-Jones, Madox Brown, Millais, T. Woolner, and D. G. Rossetti) and poets (D. G. Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne) in the Pre-Raphaelite school. Furthermore, his study brought to the forefront of critical attention Rossetti's peculiar female imagery, a fact that had consequences in the shaping of Decadent imagery in Italy. He exemplified Rossetti's female beauty in the description of two paintings, *Beata Beatrix* (1864, Tate Britain, London) which represents the 'bellezza eterea, estenuata, e morente', and *Lady Lilith* (1868, Delaware Museum of Art), an embodiment of the 'bellezza superba e trionfante'. These two descriptions drew on nineteenth-century notions of femininity, showing its dual conception, exemplified by the antithesis of angel and demon. Swinburne's poems,

<sup>22</sup> See Susan P. Casteras, *English Pre-Raphaelitism and its Reception in America in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), in particular chapter 1.

<sup>23</sup> 'William Morris', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 13 July 1884 (unpaginated).

<sup>24</sup> Enrico Nencioni, 'Le poesie e le pitture di Dante Gabriele Rossetti', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 17 February 1884 (unpaginated). Nencioni relied on English sources in his article. He made reference to the studies on Rossetti by Watts, Hueffer, Colvin, and Carr. He probably refers to the following articles, which appeared in English papers in 1883: 'The Rossetti Exhibitions', *Art and Letters: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 2 (1883), 151; J. Comyns Carr, 'Rossetti's Influence on Art', *English Illustrated Magazine*, 1 (1883), 28–40; Sidney Colvin, 'Rossetti as a Painter', *Magazine of Art*, 6 (1883), 177–83.

<sup>25</sup> In Nencioni's words: 'nè bisogna figurarsi i preraffaellisti inglesi come tanti copiatori di madonne di Giotto e dell'Angelico, come ostinati riproduttori di Vergini magre e bionde con un giglio in mano e una stella tra i capelli.'

and the paintings of Rossetti and Burne-Jones, were particularly important in the figuring of this Decadent notion. As Mario Praz has shown in his *Romantic Agony*, Italy was especially receptive to this imagery, as can be detected from D'Annunzio's poetry and novels.<sup>26</sup> Nencioni's descriptions can be viewed as literary recreations of Rossetti's idea of female beauty, and were particularly influential in the shaping of an Italian view of Pre-Raphaelite imagery, and of Rossetti's paintings in particular.

Some of Nencioni's reviews on purely literary subjects also contained references to Pre-Raphaelitism, involving a constant process of redefinition of the movement, and indicating, also, the extent to which he could assume a growing interest in Pre-Raphaelite art in Italy. In a review of English contemporary poets and the new poems of Mary Robinson, in 1886, Nencioni highlighted the influence of Pre-Raphaelite art in English contemporary poetry.<sup>27</sup> Later, in his 1887 review of *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, edited by W. M. Rossetti, Nencioni still focused on the link between Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry.<sup>28</sup> He also set forth the comparison between Pre-Raphaelite poetry and the early Italian Masters Angelico, Botticelli, Leonardo, Filippo, and Filippino Lippi, who became, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the recurrent points of comparison for the explanation of the peculiar qualities of Pre-Raphaelite art. England played a major role in the nineteenth-century rediscovery of these early Italian Masters, and the writings of Swinburne and Pater were particularly influential in the creation of the myth of the Italian Renaissance. Several instances of knowledge of and interest in the writings on art of Pater and Swinburne in Italy point to the ascendancy of English culture in Italy in the last decades of the century.

The Italian cultural scene from the mid-1880s was dominated by the poet and writer Gabriele D'Annunzio, who according to Praz was the 'monumental' figure of European Decadentism.<sup>29</sup> His 'Cronache mondane' in the Roman periodical *La tribuna*, an interesting combination of art criticism and gossip column, both reflected and established a taste for the Pre-Raphaelites. Ladies of Roman high society were explicitly compared to D. G. Rossetti's or Lawrence Alma-Tadema's paintings, and references to other members of the Brotherhood were present in D'Annunzio's writings throughout the Roman years, which coincided with the 1880s.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, D'Annunzio's first novel *Il piacere* was one of the most important vehicles for the spread of the neo-Renaissance style and English Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy; it made the Pre-Raphaelites fashionable and gave a great impulse to the cult of D. G. Rossetti. Under the initial stimulus of

<sup>26</sup> Mario Praz, *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (Milan and Rome: La Cultura, 1930; repr. Florence: Sansoni, 1992); translated into English as *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

<sup>27</sup> 'I poeti inglesi moderni e i nuovi canti di Mary Robinson', *Nuova antologia*, 87 (16 June 1886), 605–20. On the influence of Pre-Raphaelite art on poetry Nencioni wrote: 'i preraffaellisti influirono dal canto loro sulla nuova scuola poetica inglese. L'Arnold, il Morris, Dante Rossetti, Cristina Rossetti, il Swinburne in alcune delle sue prime poesie, e oggi la Robinson, tutti hanno qualche relazione, tutti devono qualche cosa ai pittori preraffaellisti' (p. 140).

<sup>28</sup> 'Opere di Dante Gabriele Rossetti', *Nuova antologia*, 93 (1 June 1887), 317–22.

<sup>29</sup> 'la figura più monumentale del Decadentismo' (Praz, *La carne, la morte e il diavolo*, p. 356).

<sup>30</sup> See Giuliana Pieri, 'D'Annunzio and Alma-Tadema: Between Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism', *MLR*, 96 (2001), 361–69.



Nencioni's article on Rossetti, which D'Annunzio greatly admired, he created his own feminine icons clad in Pre-Raphaelite garments, as in this description of one of the protagonists of *Il piacere*, Maria Ferres: 'Portava un abito d'uno strano color di ruggine, d'un color di croco, disfatto indefinibile; uno di quei colori estetici che si trovano ne' quadri [. . .] dei Primitivi, e in quelli di Dante Gabriele Rossetti'.<sup>31</sup> D'Annunzio's influence on poetry, fashion, and artistic taste in *fin-de-siècle* Italy cannot be overstated. The Pre-Raphaelite/Dannunzian craze reached such heights that, in 1903, Guido Gozzano published a sonnet entitled 'La preraffaellita'.<sup>32</sup> It was a reference to the imagery of Pre-Raphaelite feminine beauty, and to the 'gelida virgo prerafaellita' celebrated by D'Annunzio in *Due Beatrici* (*Chimera*), II:

Tien fra le dita de la manca un giglio  
d'antico stile, la sua destra posa  
sopra il velluto d'un cuscin vermiglio.  
Niuna dolcezza è ne l'aspetto fiero;  
emana da la bocca lussuriosa  
l'essenza del Silenzio e del Mistero.

These tercets presented the dual imagery of the Pre-Raphaelite woman, which would prevail in the last decade of the century: the virginal beauty portrayed in Quattrocento style, and the sensual woman of Decadentism.

### *The 1890s and the Start of the New Century*

In a letter dated 1899 to Alberto Grubicy, the art dealer and brother of the painter and theorist of Italian Symbolism Vittore Grubicy, the Italian Divisionist painter Giovanni Segantini gives an indirect proof of the extent of the diffusion of a taste for Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy at the turn of the century. Complaining about his exclusion from an exhibition, he stated: 'oggi non vene [sic] sono di esposizioni che non sano [sic] trovar posto per Burne-Jones'.<sup>33</sup> Interest in the Pre-Raphaelites, and principally the later Pre-Raphaelite style of Burne-Jones, D. G. Rossetti, and Walter Crane, and in the English neo-Classical school of painting—George Frederic Watts, Frederic Leighton, and Lawrence Alma-Tadema—was at this time at its height. The year 1895 saw the triumph of Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy with the first Biennale in Venice, which was the earliest exhibition there to show works of the Pre-Raphaelites to a national audience. D'Annunzio, who had played such a pivotal role in the previous decade in the spreading of a knowledge and fashion for Pre-Raphaelitism and who would continue to do so in the 1890s, gave his first public speech on this occasion.<sup>34</sup> In the following decade a distinctive Pre-Raphaelite mood captured Italian Symbolist painters and influenced Italian Art Nouveau.

<sup>31</sup> G. D'Annunzio, *Il piacere* (Milan: Treves, 1889; repr. Milan: Mondadori, 1989), p. 227.

<sup>32</sup> G. Gozzano, *Poesie*, ed. by Edoardo Sanguineti (Turin: Einaudi, 1973), pp. 272–73. The poem was first published in 1903 in *Il venerdì della contessa*.

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Alberto Grubicy, 19 April 1899; no. 747 in Annie-Paule Quinsac, *Segantini: trent'anni di vita artistica europea nei carteggi inediti dell'artista e dei suoi mecenati* (Milan: Cattaneo, 1985), p. 587.

<sup>34</sup> G. D'Annunzio, 'Glosa', in *Prose di ricerca*, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1950), III, 291–307. The speech did not reflect the exhibition; it was a praise of Venice, its peculiar beauty and art.

The account of the critical response to Pre-Raphaelitism in the 1890s starts with a dispute over the notion of Pre-Raphaelitism between Ugo Ojetti, one of Italy's most influential art critics, and Diego Angeli. Ojetti's article in the *Fanfulla della domenica* in 1893 criticized the Italian painters Alfredo Ricci (1864–99), Alessandro Morani (1859–1941), and Giulio Aristide Sartorio (1860–1932) because of their Pre-Raphaelitism, and presented the English movement as having its origins in the German movement of Peter Cornelius and Friedrich Overbeck, the Nazarenes.<sup>35</sup> The misunderstanding of the German origin of the movement and of its aesthetic premisses was attacked by Angeli in the *Nuova rassegna*.<sup>36</sup> Angeli, who in 1902 married D. G. Rossetti's niece Helen Rossetti, had at the time just started a career as a writer on art. In his 1893 article he centred his argument on the Cinquecento style of the Nazarenes, as opposed to the Pre-Raphaelites' reverence for the Quattrocento, and also pointed out their moral statement against Academism. The underlying issue of the Ojetti–Angeli *querelle* was not simply the correct notion of English Pre-Raphaelitism, but rather the criticism launched against the Italian 'Pre-Raphaelites'. Their style, directly influenced by the English example, came to the fore of Italian art in the second half of the 1880s and was becoming increasingly influential in the 1890s, showing the full impact of English Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy.

In the summer of 1893 the Italian painter and Italian Pre-Raphaelite *par excellence* Giulio Aristide Sartorio travelled to England at the height of his interest in the Pre-Raphaelites. While in London, he sent several articles to the *Nuova rassegna* on various aspects of English painting. His first contribution was a review of the summer exhibitions of the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours.<sup>37</sup> Sartorio harshly criticized Academic art while proclaiming his admiration for Holman Hunt, Madox Brown, D. G. Rossetti, and Burne-Jones. Sartorio's enthusiasm for Pre-Raphaelitism also had an ideological reason, connected to contemporary debates on the creation of Italian national art.<sup>38</sup> Sartorio argued that the aesthetics of the English Pre-Raphaelites, which he identified with the return to the example of the early Italian Masters, would be a solution to the contemporary degeneration of Italian art. He also believed that Italian artists would benefit from the English example, in so far as they had opened the path to the origins of the great Italian tradition, the Quattrocento.<sup>39</sup>

Sartorio's subsequent articles were devoted to two great English masters: Turner, whom he had admired at the Kensington Museum and National Gallery, and John Constable, who allowed him to state his own ideas on land-

<sup>35</sup> Ugo Ojetti, 'I preraphaeliti', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 19 March 1893 (unpaginated).

<sup>36</sup> 'Puristi e preraphaelisti', *Nuova rassegna*, 10 (1893), 314–15.

<sup>37</sup> Giulio Aristide Sartorio, 'A proposito dell'esposizione nella Royal Academy', *Nuova rassegna*, 25 (1893), 43–45.

<sup>38</sup> For a bibliography on Italian national art in the post-Risorgimento period see Stephanie Pratt, 'National Identity on Display: The 1888 Italian Exhibition in London and its Critical Reception', *The Italianist*, 20 (2000), 292–312. See also *Modern Italy: Images and History of National Identity*, ed. by Omar Calabrese, 5 vols (Milan: Electa, 1982), vol. 1, section on 'The Art Market'.

<sup>39</sup> On the importance and spread of neo-Renaissance style and its nationalistic significance see *Reviving the Renaissance: The Use and Abuse of the Past in Nineteenth-Century Italian Art and Decoration*, ed. by Rosanna Pavoni, trans. by Adrian Bolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

scape art and launch an attack against Impressionist painters.<sup>40</sup> His final article for the *Nuova rassegna* was the first essay on Burne-Jones published in Italy,<sup>41</sup> and was the result of Sartorio's visits to Burne-Jones's studio. It is a detailed and sensitive essay, which tried to recapture and explain the charm of Burne-Jones's art: the 'tranquilla armonia accordante colori e linee', the 'essenza di nobile armonia plastica', and the peculiar beauty of his figures and heads 'meravigliose per lo strano senso di sovrannaturale bellezza che l'artista vi soffonde';<sup>42</sup> and Burne-Jones's colour scheme, which he compared to the tonal unity of Leonardo. He also focused on the intellectual *milieu* to which Burne-Jones belonged, which counted among its exponents the poets Tennyson and Swinburne, as well as Morris and D. G. Rossetti.

Burne-Jones's reputation at the end of the century was at its height. He was the most celebrated English artist in Europe, and Italy shared the continental admiration for his work. Burne-Jones's symbolism and mysticism also underwent scrutiny in Italian periodicals, and some essays and reviews on Burne-Jones became statements against contemporary Realism. This was patent in the extended essay on the artist published in *Emporium* in 1895.<sup>43</sup>

The mid-1890s saw an increasing interest in monographic studies of the most eminent contemporary English painters. It was, however, only with Sartorio's essay on D. G. Rossetti of 1895 that Italy had a detailed analysis of the Pre-Raphaelite movement itself. Sartorio's articles in *Il convito* included an extended essay on D. G. Rossetti and a review of the first Biennale, which had a detailed account of the origins and development of the whole Pre-Raphaelite movement.<sup>44</sup> Sartorio focused his attention on the two phases of Pre-Raphaelitism, the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the later movement, born under the direct influence of D. G. Rossetti. It was unsurprisingly this latter phase that interested him most, and his favourite artists were Burne-Jones, Rossetti, and Watts, the latter being practically unknown in Italy at the time despite having spent many years of his youth in Tuscany.<sup>45</sup> Sartorio's 'Nota su D. G. Rossetti pittore' of 1895 is one of the most perceptive and best-documented articles published in *fin-de-siècle* Italy. It is based on Sartorio's first-hand knowledge of works by Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelite artists, which he acquired mainly during his previous trip to England, in 1893. Alongside the works which he saw in England and those at the *In Arte Libertas* exhibitions, Sartorio, in writing his essay on Rossetti, relied on his knowledge of the collection of Charles Fairfax Murray. He mentioned drawings and also

<sup>40</sup> 'Joseph Turner', *Nuova rassegna*, 27 (1893), 112–14; 'John Constable 1776–1837', *Nuova rassegna*, 28 (1893), 143–46. In the latter, Sartorio brought forward his ideas on landscape art, which rely on Nino Costa's aesthetic principles, as formulated in the Etruscan School.

<sup>41</sup> 'Edward Burne-Jones', *Nuova rassegna*, 33 (1893), 304–09.

<sup>42</sup> Sartorio, 'Edward Burne-Jones', p. 304.

<sup>43</sup> G. B., 'Artisti contemporanei: Sir Edward Burne-Jones', *Emporium*, 13 (1896), 43–44.

<sup>44</sup> G. A. Sartorio, 'Nota su D. G. Rossetti pittore', *Il convito*, 2 (1895), 121–50; 'Nota su D. G. Rossetti pittore', *Il convito*, 4 (1895), 261–86; 'Esposizione di Venezia: nota sulla pittura in Inghilterra', *Il convito*, 7 (1895–96), lviii–lxiii; 'Nota sulla pittura inglese (continuazione e fine)', *Il convito*, 8 (1896), lxxiii–lxxvii. *Il convito* was published by Adolfo De Bosis between 1895 and 1898, except for the last volume (12), which came out in 1908.

<sup>45</sup> Katerine Gaja, *G. F. Watts in Italy: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Florence: Olschki: 1995).

copies of Pre-Raphaelite paintings which he saw in Fairfax Murray's house in Florence, admitting: 'io devo al sig. Fairfax Murray amico e scolaro di Dante Gabriele molte delucidazioni intorno all'opera del maestro'.<sup>46</sup> Charles Fairfax Murray (1849–1919) played an influential role in the later Pre-Raphaelite movement.<sup>47</sup> He not only provided copies and reproductions of works by early Italian and Renaissance Masters for English artists, but as Sartorio suggests in his articles, he also had an important role in the diffusion of English contemporary art in late nineteenth-century Italy. In his threefold role as copyist, dealer, and patron, which made him so important for English artists and critics, he also influenced Italian artists.

The First International Exhibition in Venice in 1895 was the single most important event in the diffusion of Pre-Raphaelitism to a wider audience, showing for the first time in Italy several major works. A limited number of original works of the Pre-Raphaelites had been exhibited beforehand in Rome at the *In Arte Libertas* exhibition of 1890 and 1891. However, as the critical response in the late 1870s and 1880s had shown, it was the triumph of a phenomenon which had influenced Italian art and culture for nearly two decades. It should thus be viewed as the occasion for a critical rethinking and systematization of the phenomenon of Pre-Raphaelitism.

The exhibitions at the time were limited to living artists. Since Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown were by then both dead, two rather minor painters were left to champion the Pre-Raphaelite cause: Arthur Hughes (1832–1915) and his nephew Edward Robert Hughes (1851–1914).<sup>48</sup> However, among the original members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to exhibit at the First Biennale were also Holman Hunt and of course Millais, who had early abandoned the style and subject matter of the Pre-Raphaelites, opting for a more fluid style and subjects taken from traditional genre painting. Alma-Tadema and Leighton represented the Academy. Burne-Jones exhibited his watercolour *Sponsa de Libano* (1891, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). Watts, who together with Burne-Jones was given a more extended catalogue entry, showed *Psyche, Endymion, and Fuggito*. It was, however, Whistler's *Symphony in White, no. 2: The Little White Girl* that was awarded the 2,500 Lire of the Premio Internazionale del Comune di Murano.

Several articles on Pre-Raphaelitism appeared in response to the Biennale.<sup>49</sup> Enrico Panzacchi, one of the promoters of the Biennale, published a review in

<sup>46</sup> *Il convito*, 2 (1895), 147.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Barrington, 'Copyist, Connoisseur, Collector: Charles Fairfax Murray (1849–1919)', *Apollo*, 393 (1994), 15–21. See also David B. Elliott, *Charles Fairfax Murray: The Unknown Pre-Raphaelite* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> On the Venetian Exhibition and the list of English artist exhibitors see Sandra Berresford, 'The Pre-Raphaelites and their Followers at the International Exhibitions of Art in Venice 1895–1905', in *Britain at the Venice Biennale 1895–1995*, ed. by Sophie Bowness and Clive Phillpot (London: The British Council, 1995), pp. 37–49.

<sup>49</sup> See Enrico Thovez, 'Il nuovo rachimismo' (1895), in *Il vangelo della pittura ed altre prose d'arte* (Turin: Lattes, 1921), pp. 119–27; Vittorio Pica, *L'arte europea a Venezia* (Naples: Pierra, 1895), pp. 19–38. Both articles were very critical and warned of the dangers of implanting this British movement in Italian art.

the *Nuova antologia*.<sup>50</sup> He pointed out once again the general confusion around the notion of Pre-Raphaelitism, which commonly resulted in labelling all English art 'Pre-Raphaelite'. The most interesting aspect of Panzacchi's review is, however, his perceptive interpretation of European contemporary art, as being at large dominated by Symbolist currents. Among those who criticized the Biennale was Mario Morasso, a fervent admirer of contemporary French art and of Manet and Degas in particular, who wrote a harsh critique of contemporary English painting.<sup>51</sup> He limited the definition of Pre-Raphaelitism to the original Brotherhood and highlighted the present degeneration, particularly in the works of its original members, Millais and Holman Hunt, whose art he found artificial and old-fashioned.

The Second Biennale shifted away from Pre-Raphaelitism towards the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements. This tendency became prominent in the subsequent exhibitions. The presence of Walter Crane, Frank Brangwyn, the sculptor George Frampton, and the Glasgow school of C. R. Mackintosh in 1897 and 1899 clearly indicates that the Italian organizers had abandoned the anthological approach of the first Biennale, which was meant to give a picture of the different trends of contemporary British art, and focused instead on new artistic movements. The modernist bias also showed the influence in Italy at the time of the English magazine *The Studio*, which had a clear Arts and Crafts bias.

*The Studio* was taken as a model by the Italian art magazine *Emporium*, first issued in 1895. *Emporium* published a series of articles on contemporary English art with the intention 'offrire ai lettori dell'Emporium un completo studio sui fondatori della scuola preraffellita in Inghilterra'.<sup>52</sup> They presented the different trends of contemporary English art, giving extensive coverage to the late Pre-Raphaelite style of Burne-Jones and Crane and the Arts and Crafts Movement. The first article was on Leighton and was followed in 1895 by essays which analysed the work of Watts, Burne-Jones, and the English decorative arts.<sup>53</sup> These studies were followed in 1896 by two essays on D. G. Rossetti and Millais.<sup>54</sup> In 1897 Helen Zimmern contributed two articles on Alma-Tadema and Ford Madox Brown; she also published on contemporary Italian art in the *Art Journal*.<sup>55</sup> In 1898 Vittorio Pica, then a leading writer

<sup>50</sup> 'L'esposizione artistica a Venezia', *Nuova antologia*, 15 (1895), 393-402; 16 (1895), 636-48; 18 (1895), 261-73.

<sup>51</sup> 'Note critiche sull'esposizione di Venezia', *Natura ed arte*, 10 (1896-97), 841-49. The review referred to the first Biennale, although it was published later. Morasso's aesthetic and political ideas had a strong influence on the founder of the Futurist movement, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. His dislike for the Pre-Raphaelites is thus not surprising.

<sup>52</sup> 'Artisti contemporanei: Sir John Everett Millais', *Emporium*, 21 (1896), 162-83 (p. 163).

<sup>53</sup> M., 'Artisti contemporanei: Sir Fr. Leighton, P.R.A.', *Emporium*, 1 (1895), 166-82; G. B., 'Artisti contemporanei: Giorgio Federico Watts, R.A.', *Emporium*, 6 (1895), 410-27; G. B., 'Artisti contemporanei: Sir Edward Burne-Jones', *Emporium*, 12 (1895), 444-65; and *Emporium*, 13 (1896), 36-56. In December 1896 a special Christmas edition (vol. 24) was issued with a colour reproduction of Burne-Jones's *Four Seasons*, a very Italianate work; see also G. Carotti, 'Della decorazione moderna in Inghilterra', *Emporium*, 8 (1895), 120-29.

<sup>54</sup> Ulisse Ortensi, 'Artisti contemporanei: Dante Gabriele Rossetti', *Emporium*, 19 (1896), 2-14, and 20 (1896), 82-95; 'Artisti contemporanei: Sir John Everett Millais', *Emporium*, 21 (1896), 162-83.

<sup>55</sup> 'Artisti contemporanei: Alma Tadema', *Emporium*, 34 (1897), 242-65. By the same author see

on art, started a series on book illustration, which featured English artists prominently.<sup>56</sup> Pica's series showed that Art Nouveau was, however, gaining importance and would soon replace Pre-Raphaelitism as the avant-garde artistic trend in Italy. The articles in *Emporium* were informative and well documented, usually in the format of extended monographs of the artists; they were often directly based on essays published in English periodicals or books, though they were not merely derivative. Most importantly, they were beautifully illustrated, providing Italian artists with numerous fine reproductions of works by their English counterparts. The Arts and Crafts bias of the contributors to *Emporium* explains the pre-eminence of late Pre-Raphaelitism; they all shared the idea that the style of the Pre-Raphaelites, and specifically of Burne-Jones and Morris, was the single most significant influence on contemporary Decorative Arts.

The great amount of coverage that the Pre-Raphaelites received in the Italian Press after 1895 fell into two categories. On the one hand, there were articles and books which provided detailed accounts of the origins of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; some used the traditional format of a monograph on the artist, for which *Emporium* had set the standard. The importance of studies of this type lay in the fact that they provided Italian readers with detailed biographical notes on the major contemporary English artists; they usually had accurate bibliographical references to studies published in England and Italy; and, finally, they had numerous illustrations. They were also often based on or a response to the stream of English publications on Pre-Raphaelitism in the first decade of the new century, which comprised memorials, letters, and biographies. Several books and essays focused on D. G. Rossetti, whose influence on the later generation of English artists was recognized as the single most important factor in the development of contemporary English art.<sup>57</sup> These included a series of essays specifically related to the Rossetti family and Dante Gabriel's and Christina Rossetti's poetry, with Italian versions of Dante Gabriel's poems.<sup>58</sup> In 1902 an

also 'Artisti contemporanei: Ford Madox Brown', *Emporium*, 35 (1897), 322–39. Zimmern contributed two further articles on English painters: 'Artisti contemporanei: Hubert Herkomer R.A.', *Emporium*, 38 (1898), 82–108; and 'Artisti contemporanei: Sir Edward John Poynter, P.R.A.', *Emporium*, 53 (1899), 323–41.

<sup>56</sup> 'Attraverso gli Albi e le Cartelle (sensazioni d'arte), VIII: gli Albi inglesi per bambini (Cadelcott-Crane-Greeneway)', *Emporium*, 37 (1898), 46–66. *Emporium* was also the first magazine to present Aubrey Beardsley to an Italian audience; see G. B., 'Artisti contemporanei: Aubrey Beardsley', *Emporium*, 9 (1895), 192–204.

<sup>57</sup> Renato Barbiera, 'La strana vita di Dante Gabriele Rossetti', in *Immortali e dimenticati* (Milan: Cogliati, 1901), pp. 351–86. See also Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1906).

<sup>58</sup> There are several essays by Alfredo Galletti: 'Dante Gabriele Rossetti e la poesia preraffaellita', in *Studi di letteratura straniera* (Verona: Drucker, 1903), pp. 1–68; 'Un poeta-pittore dell'amore e della morte: Dante Gabriele Rossetti', *La lettura*, 6 (1906), 332–29; 'Dante Gabriele Rossetti e il romanticismo preraffaellita', in *Studi di letteratura inglese* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1928), 145–237 (first publ. in *Saggi e studi* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1915)). Galletti's essays were followed later in the century by those of Federico Oliviero: 'Il ritornello nella poesia di Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Archiv für das Studium der neuen Sprachen und Literaturen*, 125 (1910), 93–101 (repr. in *Saggi di letteratura inglese* (Bari: Laterza, 1913)); 'Sul simbolismo di D. G. Rossetti', in *Nuovi saggi di letteratura inglese* (Turin: Libreria Editrice Internazionale, 1918). There were also various late editions of Rossetti's poems: *La Beata Donzella di Dante Gabriele Rossetti* (Padua: Gallina, 1907); *Poesie liriche*, with notes by Cino Chiarini (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1919); *Ballate. Rosa Maria, Il vascello bianco, La tragedia del re*, trans. by Romualdo Pantini (Florence: Le Monnier, 1922). On

illustrated edition of Dante's *Vita nuova* was issued; the text was significantly illustrated with plates of works by Rossetti.<sup>59</sup> Rossetti's Dantesque works had always been regarded very favourably by Italian artists and writers on art, and this illustrated edition represented the height of Rossetti's fame in Italy. Two articles by Zaira Vitale in 1904 and 1905 opened a new path of enquiry into D. G. Rossetti's influence on contemporary artists.<sup>60</sup> The first presented the work of Elisabeth Siddal as a poet and painter. Vitale's article was inspired by W. M. Rossetti's essay on Siddal, published in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1903.<sup>61</sup> Her second article analysed the stylistic changes in Rossetti's paintings according to the different models who worked for him, namely Christina Rossetti, Elisabeth Siddal, and Jane Morris, who was presented as the icon of the later artistic brotherhood, developed by Morris and Burne-Jones in Oxford, under the influence of Rossetti.

There were then a number of articles that focused on the late Pre-Raphaelite style of Burne-Jones and his followers and investigated the Symbolist undercurrent of their art. These papers engaged in a critique of contemporary realism and positivism and took Pre-Raphaelitism as the example of the new Idealistic trend in the arts. Arturo Graf's article on the Pre-Raphaelites, in the *Nuova antologia* of 1897, was fundamental, in so far as it readdressed the question of the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on contemporary European art and explicitly linked the English movement to Symbolism and Aestheticism.<sup>62</sup>

At the end of the first decade of the new century, two major publications on the Pre-Raphaelites were published, the last to be issued in Italy before the 1960s. They dealt with the phenomenon of Pre-Raphaelitism, presenting the various artists who influenced the birth of the original movement, those who were influenced by it, the followers of Burne-Jones, and the late imitators of the movement. Jarno Jessen's approach to Pre-Raphaelitism was historical.<sup>63</sup> She wanted to go back to the actual sources, drawing attention to *The Germ* and the aesthetic principles expounded in its articles. She considered Burne-Jones the initiator of a new phase of Pre-Raphaelitism, which fell under the spell of

Christina Rossetti see Olivia Agresti-Rossetti, 'Cristina Giorgina Rossetti', *Nuova antologia*, 123 (1906), 37–52; Federico Oliviero, 'Poeti mistici, Cristina Rossetti', in *Saggi di letteratura inglese* (Bari: Laterza, 1913). Finally, in 1928 a study of the Rossetti family: M. L. Giartosio de Courten, *I Rossetti: storia di una famiglia* (Milan: Alpes, 1928).

<sup>59</sup> Dante Alighieri, *La vita nuova di Dante*, ed. by Antonio Agresti, with illustrations by D. G. Rossetti (Rome and Turin: Roux e Viarengo, 1902). The volume had an introductory essay by Agresti, 'La vita nuova di Dante e i quadri di D. G. Rossetti', pp. 9–30. The decorative motifs which framed the text copied Morris's examples. It was reprinted several times, the latest being the 1921 edition. The illustrations comprised: *The Salutation of Beatrice*; *Beatrice, Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast*; *Denies Him her Salutation*; *Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice*; *Beata Beatrix*; *Dante Drawing an Angel*; *La donna della finestra*; *Dantis amor*; *The Salutation of Beatrice in Eden*.

<sup>60</sup> Zaira Vitale, 'Eleonora Siddal Rossetti', *Emporium*, 114 (1904), 430–47; 'Le modelle di D. G. Rossetti', *Rivista d'Italia*, 9 (1905), 448–59.

<sup>61</sup> William Michel Rossetti, 'Dante Rossetti and Elisabeth Siddal', with facsimiles of five unpublished drawings by Dante Rossetti in the collection of Mr Harold Hartley, *Burlington Magazine*, 1 (1903), 273–95.

<sup>62</sup> Arturo Graf, 'Preraphaeliti, simbolisti ed esteti', in *Foscolo, Manzoni e Leopardi* (Milan: Loescher, 1898), pp. 445–510; first publ. in *Nuova antologia*, 67 (1 and 16 January 1897).

<sup>63</sup> Jarno Jessen (pseudonym of Anna Michaelson), *Preraphaelismo* (Turin: Clausen, 1907), with a note by Enrico Thovez on Italian Pre-Raphaelitism.

Quattrocento painting. Burne-Jones, she claimed, was the only Pre-Raphaelite painter who strictly followed the principles of the masters before Raphael—this of course disregards the influence of Michelangelo on Burne-Jones's later works. He was celebrated as the single most influential contemporary painter in Europe and the one who brought to completion the process of transformation of English art. Morris and Burne-Jones were responsible for the popularization of the movement, and this was mainly due to their role in the renewal of the applied arts. The later part of her essay is fundamental for an understanding of the broad notion of Pre-Raphaelitism, which was applied to several English artists who worked mainly under the influence of Burne-Jones. She divided English artists into two groups: those who were directly influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites (William Dyce, Noel Paton, Frederick Sandys, Arthur Hughes, Simeon Solomon, Frederick Shields, and John Brett); and the artists of the younger generation (Byam Shaw, Marie Stillman, Eleanor Brickdale Fortescue, Thomas Cooper Gotch, Spencer Stanhope, and John William Waterhouse, who, she thought, epitomized contemporary Pre-Raphaelitism),<sup>64</sup> comprising those who worked under the direct influence of Burne-Jones (James Melhuish Strudwick, W. Crane, and Evelyn De Morgan). She noted that the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism was not limited to the younger generations of English artists, but was exercised also on continental art, especially in France and Italy. Pre-Raphaelitism was thus viewed as a multifaceted movement, difficult to define because it entailed many different elements; she used the metaphor of the chameleon: 'il significato del prerafaalismo appare come un camaleonte' (p. 73). However, the unifying element, which could reconcile the different tendencies and styles, was the Idealist interpretation of art: 'Prerafaalismo significa idealismo' (p. 1).

Agresti's book *I prerafaellisti* of 1908 was the culmination of the interest in Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy.<sup>65</sup> It is a comprehensive study of Pre-Raphaelitism, with an initial attempt to sketch a history of English painting from Hogarth to contemporary English artists. The guiding principle in his analysis was evolutionary. In the analysis of the origins of the movement, he stressed the importance of Ruskin's theories. Agresti had already dedicated a study to Ruskin in an essay on D. G. Rossetti of 1899, his first response to Pre-Raphaelitism.<sup>66</sup> Despite Ruskin's role in England in the promotion of the Pre-Raphaelite movement and his obvious links with Italy, Italian art critics and reviewers, unlike their French counterparts, overall showed limited interest in his works.<sup>67</sup> Agresti

<sup>64</sup> Jessen wrote: 'egli è il vero prerafaellista nella tendenza alla marcata espressione e a gesti stranamente eloquenti' (p. 46).

<sup>65</sup> Antonio Agresti, *I prerafaellisti* (Turin: Società Tipografico-Editrice Nazionale, 1908). Agresti also published an abridged version of his book in *Rassegna contemporanea*, 19 (1913), 253–72.

<sup>66</sup> *Poesie di Dante Gabriele Rossetti, con uno studio su la pittura inglese e su l'opera pittorica e la vita dell'autore*, trans. by A. Agresti (Florence: Barbera, 1899).

<sup>67</sup> Knowledge of Ruskin's writings in the late 1870s and 1880s was restricted to a single personality, the Venetian Giacomo Boni, the architect and archaeologist who excavated the Forum Romanum. He had met Ruskin in the winter of 1876–77 and was one of the first to introduce his aesthetics and criticism in Italy. Boni's interest, however, focused particularly on Ruskin's theories on conservation and restoration. The only study of Boni is by Eva Tea, *Giacomo Boni nella vita del suo tempo* (Milan: Ceschina, 1932). See also Giuliana Pieri, 'The Influence of English Pre-



pointed out that the initial movement underwent a radical transformation with Burne-Jones, whose artistic evolution showed the first signs of the decadence of the movement; in a peremptory statement he affirmed: 'della decadenza del preraffaellismo il primo e più diretto responsabile è Burne-Jones'.<sup>68</sup> Agresti's picture of the development of the English decorative arts starts with the new Pre-Raphaelitism of Burne-Jones, whom he actually charged with excessive decorativeness, and goes on, through the Arts and Crafts Movement, to Art Nouveau. Agresti was biased against Modern Style, which in his view represented the decadence of the Pre-Raphaelite sense of decoration. His prejudice influenced the way in which he presented the work of contemporary English artists, whose career was briefly sketched in two chapters, tellingly entitled 'Gli imitatori' and 'La decadenza'. Agresti's nostalgic vision of the Pre-Raphaelites and his focus on Ruskin's principles came under attack, in 1910, in Marinetti's Futurist speech delivered at the Lyceum Club in London.<sup>69</sup> In 1909 the Futurist movement had been launched on the international cultural scene from the front page of *Le Figaro*, proclaiming the beauty of youth, speed, and the new mechanized means of transport, and putting Italy back on the artistic map of Europe. Marinetti's London speech reinforced the rejection of the cult of the past and incited the English to abandon 'l'idéologie lymphatique de ce déplorable Ruskin [. . .] avec son rêve maladif de vie agreste et primitive. [. . .] Ce maniaque de simplicité antique' (p. 93). Futurist rhetoric is coupled here with a strong critique of the development of Italian art in the previous few decades under the influence of Ruskin, who clearly represents for Marinetti the complex cluster of Pre-Raphaelitism. It is Ruskin's influence, Marinetti claimed, that sustained the view of Italy as the obsolete repository of her own glorious past: 'l'influence de Ruskin a singulièrement développé chez vous le culte obsédant de notre passé, et faussé entièrement votre jugement sur l'Italie contemporaine' (p. 94). Italy in the following decades would be forced to forget the anti-Academic stance of the English Pre-Raphaelite movement and adopt the singular combination of modernism and new-Academy at the service of Mussolini's Fascist rhetoric.

### Conclusion

Twentieth-century accounts of Italian *fin-de-siècle* art and culture have overlooked the extent to which Pre-Raphaelite art was known in Italy. As this study has demonstrated, the late 1870s and 1880s saw the actual discovery of Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy. The notion of Pre-Raphaelite art held at the time by a number of Italian writers accurately reflected the nature of the original move-

Raphaelitism on Nineteenth-Century Italian Art and Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1998), pp. 2–24.

<sup>68</sup> Agresti, *I preraffaellisti*, p. 313.

<sup>69</sup> Filippo Tomaso Marinetti, 'Ce déplorable Ruskin', in 'Discours futuriste aux Anglais, prononcé au Lyceum Club de Londres', in F. T. Marinetti, *Le Futurisme* (Lausanne: Éditions l'Âge d'Homme, 1980), pp. 93–100. A shorter version of the same speech is also in F. T. Marinetti, 'Contro Roma Passatista', in *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. by L. De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968), pp. 240–47.

ment: these writers described it as a genuinely English movement, having no connection with the pre-Raphaelite school of the Nazarenes, and the main focus of their attention was the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Italian reviewers tried to explain precisely the meaning of Pre-Raphaelitism, pointing out the return to nature, under the influence of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and the centrality of Rossetti. They also established the canon of the Pre-Raphaelites, namely D. G. Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Millais, and Burne-Jones, which would be followed almost invariably thereafter. However, in the early 1880s, among Italian artists and critics at large there existed a measure of confusion about the nature of the movement. This confusion, which characterized the Italian fascination for English art and partly explained the need for critical assessment, was innate in a movement which grouped together highly individual artists, most of whom made radical stylistic changes in their careers. 'Preraffaelita' or 'preraffaelista' was applied indiscriminately to original members of the Brotherhood, to the later development of the movement of Burne-Jones and Morris, and to contemporary English artists from the traditional quarters of the Academy. The confusion, however, must be viewed as an Italian interpretation of Pre-Raphaelitism, which was variously used as synonym for Rossettian feminine beauty, Symbolist and Idealist responses to Realism, and a reaction against the degeneration and mannerisms of the Academy and the official attempts to fabricate and impose a new national art.

The interest in English literature and poetry was instrumental in spreading a knowledge of Pre-Raphaelite art in Italy. The literary emphasis of the initial interest in Pre-Raphaelitism can be partly explained by the difficulties experienced by Italians in acquiring first-hand knowledge of Pre-Raphaelite paintings at the time; as a consequence, Italian artists and critics relied mainly on secondary sources. It was only in the 1890s that Italian artists visited England with a view to acquiring a better knowledge of Pre-Raphaelite art.

In addition, the critical attention given to Pre-Raphaelite poetry, and the works of D. G. Rossetti and Swinburne in particular, meant that the type of Pre-Raphaelitism which was first introduced in Italy was the later phase, coinciding with Rossetti's later style and the Aesthetic Movement. The association of Pre-Raphaelitism with Aestheticism also acted as a stimulus to the discussion of the actual aims and origins of the Pre-Raphaelites. Although Italian writers have been accused of having a limited and superficial view of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, awareness of this limitation at the time, paradoxically, provoked an intense interest in the movement as a whole.

It remains, nevertheless, true that the Italian discovery of Pre-Raphaelitism was centred around the poetry and painting of D. G. Rossetti. The centrality of Rossetti also carried further implications. Firstly, Rossetti's connection with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood stimulated an interest in the original Pre-Raphaelite movement, with its link to Ruskin's aesthetics and its particular approach to nature and its pictorial representation. Furthermore, Rossetti's link with the next generation of English painters was the starting point for the interest in the later phase of Pre-Raphaelitism and the work of Burne-Jones in particular. Finally, the peculiar traits of Rossetti's later production, his obsession with the depiction of haunting feminine beauties, shaped Italian decadent

imagery; Rossetti's female beauties became the Pre-Raphaelite beauties *par excellence* in the writings of Nencioni and D'Annunzio, and subsequently appeared on the canvases of the Italian 'Preraffaelliti'.

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