

*English Pre-Raphaelitism and Its Reception in America in the Nineteenth Century* by Susan P. Casteras. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990. 209 pp., 114 b&w illustrations. ISBN 0-8386-3328-5, \$65.00

Recent studies of nineteenth-century aesthetic relations between America and Europe have concentrated on those Americans who went abroad, especially students seeking academic art training in Paris, participants in international expositions, and travellers to Italy. The art capitals of Europe represented alluring cultural meccas and attracted an international roster of artists, including large numbers of Americans. Artistic assimilations in the other direction present more complex problems for analysis. One of the most fascinating episodes of Anglo-American cultural interchange is explored by Susan P. Casteras in a fine volume detailing the reception of English Pre-Raphaelitism in nineteenth-century America. This movement represents a significant aspect of our art history from the mid-1850s until just after the end of the Civil War. Despite considerable activity in the field of Pre-Raphaelite studies in general, her topic has received comparatively little attention, except for *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites*, the fine exhibition and catalogue organized by the Brooklyn Museum in 1985. Casteras contributed an essay to that publication, and it serves as an excellent companion to her study. Her book, which presents significant new material, is divided into seven chapters covering a wide range of topics, including critics and criticism, exhibitions, specific paintings, and the contributions of British and American artists to the movement.

The first chapter, "Ruskin, His Champions, and His Challengers: William James Stillman, James Jackson Jarves, and Charles Eliot Norton," is devoted to the century's most widely read critic. Ruskin's ideas were widely disseminated in America and, as Casteras observes, "were readily transplanted in fertile soil" (148). Because of his popularity, his influence on American art "is better documented than any other aspect of English art in the nineteenth century" (19). Although opinion concerning his views was neither uniform nor consistently positive even among his supporters, Ruskin found articulate advocates among several prominent American intellectuals—Stillman, editor of the im-

portant art journal the *Crayon*; Jarves, a critic, connoisseur, and collector; and Harvard professor Norton.

In her second chapter, "The Stiff, the Eccentric, and the Ugly: General Responses to Pre-Raphaelitism," Casteras explores the diverse critical reactions to this art movement. From the mid-1850s on, American writers published many assessments of Pre-Raphaelitism. Few of these opinions, however, were positive, and the paintings they discussed were judged to be rigid, awkward, and harshly colored. Most Americans—including the critics—knew of the PRB through written accounts rather than from seeing actual work, and, not surprisingly, a clear definition of the movement's principles remained elusive.

Not until 1857-1858, when a monumental exhibition of English art (the subject of Chapter Three) was brought to three east coast cities was there an opportunity for many Americans to finally see original work by members of the PRB. The show, which comprised 356 paintings at its largest presentation in New York (installations in Philadelphia and Boston were smaller), displayed a wide historical range of nineteenth-century British art, most of it not controversial. Although several key artists were poorly represented in this exhibition, work by members of the PRB received the most comment in the press, and the show sparked considerable critical response. Most popular were the artists Ford Madox Brown and William Holman Hunt, especially a small version of the latter's *The Light of the World* (1853-6, Manchester City Art Gallery). The logistics involved in mounting a trans-Atlantic exhibition were daunting and complicated by many disagreements among the organizers. A poor economy contributed to its lack of financial success.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are each devoted to the three key members of the Brotherhood—Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti. In "John Everett Millais: Triumphs with the American Public," Casteras reveals that not only did Americans read British periodicals, but also that Britishers read those published in this country. Such writings served to popularize individual paintings. Most esteemed was Millais's *A Huguenot* (1851-2), a work which represented to American artists "the archetypal Pre-Raphaelite composition" (81). Prints of this painting are visible in interior scenes painted by Thomas C. Farrar and Aaron Draper Shattuck. Much of the influence Millais exerted on American artists came second-hand through the means of prints and illustrations as few canvasses by this artist were to be

seen in this country.

Hunt's works received less comment in the American press than did those of Millais and Rossetti, but what appeared was largely positive. Best received were *The Awakening Conscience* (1853-4, Tate Gallery) and *The Light of the World*. Rossetti's themes inspired by religion, Dante, and chivalry also found favor (Norton was a significant American patron and commissioned several works). The artist's images were the most sensual of the Brotherhood, such as his *Found* (begun 1854, Delaware Art Museum), "the subject of which—a fallen woman—was exceedingly rare in American art" (144). Following his death in 1882, American publications furthered his reputation in this country and his works were increasingly collected, although Casteras concludes that "tangible influence on American artists. . . is hard to gauge" (147).

Casteras's final chapter is a discussion of the American Pre-Raphaelites, the Society for the Advancement of Truth in Art (founded in 1863), and its publication the *New Path*. Major painter adherents included John William Hill, John Henry Hill, William Trost Richards, Henry Roderick Newman, and Farrar. These artists enjoyed a high visibility in the press, especially through the supportive criticism of Charles H. Moore and Clarence Cook, though they produced only a small number of works actually conforming to their theories. Thematically they differed with their British contem-

poraries; as Casteras observes, "The American form of this style was preeminently a landscape phenomenon" (183), rather than a figural one. Most painters concentrated on landscapes or "Ruskinian vignettes" (172)—detailed still life close-ups of nature.

There are no color illustrations, but those in black and white are generous in number and of good quality. Ample notes and an extensive bibliography will guide the interested reader to further sources. Throughout this impressive book Casteras's lively intelligence and broad interdisciplinary perspective are everywhere evident. Her writing is a model of clarity. Her arguments are supported by her admirably thorough research, and the author's readings have embraced literature, history, and religion, as well as art, giving her insightful analysis a rich contextual grounding. Especially fine is her assiduous research of contemporary periodicals and newspapers. Such sources are difficult to locate and, lacking reliable indices, time-consuming to investigate. They give an authoritative period voice to her interpretations. Casteras's volume is an important contribution to nineteenth-century studies and essential reading for scholars of both British and American cultural history.

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