Pre-Raphaelite painting is regarded as one of the visual sources of the ubiquitous Art Nouveau motif, the sinuous line. Pre-Raphaelite painters indulged in ostentatious depiction of flamboyant hairdresses in their female portraits. It would not be too difficult to notice their affinity with fin-de-siècle European painting, Polish painting included, as for instance in one of the most popular paintings by Władysław Śleńński, a friend of Gauguin who took up painting when he arrived in Paris having no plans to embark on artistic career. The sinuous line, which on the first glance may seem an almost abstract form, was in fact loaded with meanings, as was often the case with works of art created around 1900.

Connections between the art of the Pre-Raphaelites and the artists of the Młoda Polska (Young Poland) generation go deeper. One of the less obvious similarities is their treatment of historical subjects. It would be perhaps an exaggeration to maintain that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood developed a distinctive genre of historical painting. Some of its members were still closely attached to tenets of academic painting.

Already in the early years of its existence, paintings that depart from academic ideals as codified in Britain by Joshua Reynolds were created. This attitude was certainly not accidental.

The first symptoms of change can already be found in Rienzi (1849) by William Holman Hunt. The very choice of subject, the moment of intense emotion caused by the death of...
Rienzi's brother, is strikingly unusual although still acceptable from the point of view of academic tradition, and the rendering of the subject generally abides by academic rules.

An important event in the history of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was their teamwork on the commission of murals for the Oxford Union's Debating Hall. The idea of choosing Thomas Mallory's *Morte d'Arthur* was conceived by Rossetti in 1857.

Rossetti decided to depict *Sir Lancelot prevented by his Sin from entering the Chapel of the San Graal*. Hughes painted *The Death of Arthur*, Burne-Jones did *Nimue luring Merlin to his Death*, and William Morris painted *Sir Palomydes's Jealousy of Sir Tristram*. Other compositions were also planned. Morris also did the exquisite floral decoration of the ceiling. Mallory's account was probably a revelation to Morris due to its realism and liveliness, which left its mark in Morris's poetry from that period. His poem *King Arthur's Tomb* represents the confused thought processes of both Lancelot and the narrator, thus bridging the gap between the historical events and modern times.

Marked emphasis on feelings and inner life can already be noticed in the depiction of scenes from more recent history such as in the paintings by Millais *A Huguenot on St. Bartholomew's Day refusing to shield himself from danger by wearing the Roman Catholic badge* (1851-2), *The Proscribed Royalist* (1851), or *The Escape of a Heretic 1559* (1857). Historical subjects with religious messages were obviously very important to Millais. However, here again the tangled emotions and fears of depicted characters take precedence. Another example of representation of human emotions in liminal situations may be found in the painting by William Holman Hunt *A converted British Family sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids*.

At the risk of underestimating other important facets of Pre-Raphaelite art, one may say that one of their greatest achievements lies exactly in the convincing expression of human emotions and emotional relationships of the people displayed in their pictures. In 2009, an exhibition *Symbolism in Poland and Britain* was organized at the Tate Britain. It gave a unique opportunity to see the paintings by the most important Young Poland artists Jacek Malczewski and Józef Mehoffer in the same room with Pre-Raphaelite paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, and thus to better understand their affinity.
A similarity to Pre-Raphaelite works can be noticed already in the earlier works of Leon Wyczółkowski. In 1877, he executed a first version of Maryna Mniszchówna Fleeing the Chase. The painting was so successful that he painted a different version of it in 1882.

Wyczółkowski was famous for experimenting with different artistic ideas and changing them often. He was also one of the earliest and most successful Polish artists to use Impressionist technique. The paintings of Maryna Mniszchówna herald the imminent symbolist movement, however. Wyczółkowski focuses on the depiction of emotions of the Polish wife of Tsar False Dmitri I, fleeing Russian troops with her baby. In the first version there is also an interesting parallel to the art of Burne-Jones in the use of tangled bushes. Alina, another painting by Wyczółkowski depicting a protagonist of the play Balladyna by Juliusz Słowacki, is reminiscent of Ophelia by Millais - though Wyczółkowski's use of the motif of tangled bushes again might be a trace of inspiration by Burne-Jones.

Use of a subject from Juliusz Słowacki's drama is a clear symptom of neo-romanticism prevailing in Polish culture around 1900, as is the reference to The Works of Ossian in his painting Petrified Druid (1892-94). This painting is already characteristic of the treatment of historical subject matter by Young Poland artists. Poetic vision took precedence in their works over the clarity of the message. The influence of French symbolism, with its predilection for nuance and indirect suggestion, was the reason for the disappearance of traditional historic scenes. Their place was taken by symbolic compositions that dealt with Polish history even more successfully.
Leon Wyczółkowski, *Sarcophagus of Queen Jadwiga*, 1898

It is necessary to remind the reader that the comparison of Pre-Raphaelite and Young Poland painting is not a novel idea. Indeed, already in 1902 Ignacy Matuszewski proposed a vast parallel connecting poetry of Juliusz Słowacki, Renaissance art, Pre-Raphaelite painting, and works by Young Poland and modern French artists. According to Matuszewski, the element connecting all these rather disparate artistic efforts was the “mood”. It is this quality that prompted him to consider paintings by Leon Wyczółkowski from the series showing sarcophagi of Polish kings in the Wawel cathedral together with works by Burne-Jones and Rossetti. Although Matuszewski does not dwell long on Wyczółkowski’s paintings, in the second passage, where he quotes his works, he gives a hint that there may be more in them than just “mood”. He asks rhetorically, “Whoever, looking at Sarcophagi or *Stańczyk with Dolls*, does not notice anything more than exquisite sculpture-like bodies and perfect play of light, probably does not have a soul”. Pre-eminence of emotion as the most important quality of art, and emotional response as the most important objective of art, are thus proclaimed.

This was perhaps the most important reason why formulas of academic historical painting had become largely obsolete by the end of the 19th century. It would not be too difficult to extend this list with other works by Young Poland artists who exemplify this novel approach to history in their art. Let us conclude it for now with the most important one - the series of designs for stained glass windows for the Wawel Cathedral by Stanisław Wyspiański. His visions of resurrected bodies of Polish kings were never realised, but played an enormous role for his generation. Wyspiański intended to fill Wawel cathedral with stained glass windows
showing dead Polish kings alive in their regal attire.

History for Wyspiański is no longer an object of cold scientific study, which can be represented in an impassive fashion, but the most important source of inspiration for his own life and the life of his generation - just as it was with the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. According to Helena d’Abancourt, Polish translator of Robert de la Sizeranne's book *Peinture anglaise contemporaine*, the most important feature of the Pre-Raphaelite school was the „truth” of their compositions and not “Botticellian” features of female figures in their paintings superficially regarded as their most important characteristic. It was the same “truth” that Young Poland painters were trying to express in their works.

**Notes:**

5. Jerzy Malinowski, *Malarstwo polskie XIX wieku*. Warszawa:DG, 2003, p. 282. The importance of this painting in Wyczółkowski’s oeuvre is emphasized by depicting it in a view of his studio, which was given an ironic title A picture like many other.
6. Jerzy Malinowski links this painting with the popularity of the motif of the “lirnik” (wandering hurdy-gurdy player) who has become a symbolic figure responsible for transmitting the patriotic mission to new generations in works by Jacek Malczewski, Malinowski 2003, p. 284.