

than brief interpretations within the limited length of the Twayne format. Inside every thin book there may not be a fat one screaming to get out—but there is here. This is a helpful book, but we hope for even better in Taylor's future work on Thompson. *cbp*

The Pre-Raphaelites

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Among the works considered this year are three books: a general study of Pre-Raphaelitism and the decadents, an examination of landscape in Victorian poetry, and a comparative study of Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson. Brief comments will also be offered on eight articles, four on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry, and four more on that of Morris. Christina Rossetti seems to have drawn somewhat less attention in the form of articles this year than her male contemporaries.

Perhaps the work of widest scope is Gisela Hönnighausen's fine translation of Lothar Hönnighausen's *The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature: A Study of Pre-Raphaelitism and Fin de Siècle*. Hönnighausen's excellent work first appeared in German in 1971, but it has survived eighteen years of Victorian criticism remarkably well. The very topic of the book is familiar—evolving conceptions of the symbol, and their effects on mid- and late-nineteenth-century British poetry—but Hönnighausen approaches his subject from several novel perspectives, and cites cogently from a wide range of lesser- as well as better-known British, French, and American nineteenth-century works. The first two chapters (on "Changing Conceptions of the Symbol in the Nineteenth Century" and "Typology and Allegory in Late Romantic Literature") trace critical attitudes toward poetic practice from Keble and Baudelaire through Symons and Wilde, and the remainder of the book explores thematic and linguistic nuances of "late Romantic" literature under a variety of thematic and ideological rubrics. The third chapter, in particular, interprets "The Impact of Symbolist Tendencies on Late Romantic Poetry" on "poet and poetry," "the problem of genre," "late romantic diction," "aspects of late romantic imagery," and "the inter-relationship of the arts." The fourth and fifth chapters attempt detailed, unredutive examinations of their respective motifs, "The Imaginary Landscape" and "The Ideal Beloved." The last, summary chapter, on "Late

Romantic Spirituality” attempts to measure the distance traveled from the verdantly allegorical psychic landscapes in much of Pre-Raphaelite poetry to the more hermetically mystical and non-referential evocations in work of the fin-de-siècle. By way of a postscript, the English version then closes with “A Survey of Critical Works Since 1971”; in it, Hönninghausen lists works which have appeared since his own, and offers further observations about the interrelations between critical methodologies, and their importance for his topic.

One very attractive aspect of Hönninghausen’s work is its evenhanded and uncondescending attention to the poetry and criticism of such little-read, non-canonical authors as Thomas Woolner, James Collinson, Arthur O’Shaughnessy, Thomas Hake, John Barlas, John Payne, Aubrey Beardsley, Michael Field, and Olive Custance. Among other things, this practice seems to reflect his genuine programmatic interest in a collective poetic sensibility, which extends beyond the distinguished idiosyncracies of a few “major” practitioners. Extensive collateral considerations of Baudelaire, Gautier, Valéry, and Verlaine also provide contrastive ground for his judgments of the merits and limitations of their British counterparts, and help him find interesting readings of such familiar works as Rossetti’s sonnets and picture poems, and Morris’ “Golden Wings.” He is keenly sensitive to the modes of consciousness he wishes to discern, of course, but also aware of individual shortcomings. Of Arthur Symons’ failed attempt to find a “musical language” in “In the Key of Blue,” for example, he remarks sympathetically that the faults of the poem

should not lead us to underrate the importance of these musical poems for the development of modern poetry with its lyric masterpieces like *The Cantos* and *Four Quartets*; the techniques which essentially remain eclectic experiments for O’Shaughnessy and Symonds become integral structural components of modern poetry for the generation of Pound and Eliot, of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. (p. 134)

Passages such as this also exemplify an underlying premise of Hönninghausen’s book, one which is its most persistent weakness as well as its greatest strength: he accepts without question a guiding assumption that the phenomena he examines actually evolved in a kind of collective, implicitly “progressive, poetic consciousness, toward the ‘modern’ practices which followed them.” This hypothesis is often attractive, and sometimes historically convincing, but skeptical reconsiderations of such “movements” suggest that it may be more a matter of hermeneutic faith than verifiable fact.

There are also a few minor gaps, which is perhaps inevitable in a book of this scope. The most noticeable may be the apparent subsistence of Hönninghausen’s Pre-Raphaelites, “late Romantics,” European symbolists, and fin-de-siècle artists in a kind of world apart, apparently isolated from other poetry of their time. Ideal poetic landscapes, imaginary beloveds, and

diffusely spiritual images were certainly features of High Victorian poetry, after all, and one might well question how well such attributes enable Hönninghausen to demarcate this particular group of "late Romantics" from some of their contemporaries. How would he distinguish "symbolic" uses of landscape and imagery, for example, from apparent parallels which one could readily find in Tennyson or Hardy? Hönninghausen's extensive citations of the works of Rossetti, Pater, Symonds, and Wilde are quite representative of the author's *corpora*, but he discusses Morris and Swinburne solely on the basis of their youthful works, for reasons that are not clarified. Finally, Hönninghausen's assumptions seem to bridge a few puzzling lacunae; Richard Le Gallienne is anachronistically juxtaposed with Christina Rossetti, for example; Poe appears on occasion as a kind of honorary Pre-Raphaelite; and the discussions of Christina Rossetti's, Michael Field's, and Olive Custance's grieving lyrics take no note of the fact that their authors are the only women the book considers. These are minor reservations, however; Hönninghausen's book is a very substantial and well-written contribution to the literature of Pre-Raphaelitism in English and will be consulted by all who value the texts he treats.

Narrower in scope, but very fresh and lively in its readings of individual authors and comments on Victorian culture, is Pauline Fletcher's *Gardens and Grim Ravines: The Language of Landscape in Victorian Poetry* (1983). In separate chapters on Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Rossetti, Morris, Swinburne, and Hardy, Fletcher contrasts individual "symbolic landscapes," and interprets them as icons of a "tension between social responsibility and private necessity, between engagement and withdrawal" (p. 16). Dante Rossetti, for example, "discovered the perils of solipsism in his antisocial landscapes of withdrawal . . . [and] added the perilous attractions of the *femme fatale*; but . . . did not move out of his enclosed bowers toward a social landscape." Morris, by contrast, created a "Field Full of Folk," an "ideal landscape [which] is basically rural and pastoral, but . . . includes elements from town, garden, and wilderness. In order to blend these diverse elements he cleanses the town of its direct and violent hurry, rids the forest of its terror, and robs the garden of its social exclusiveness. Such a vision may be utopian, but it is too inclusive to be called escapist" (p. 189). Unfortunately, Fletcher devotes only a page or two to the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and little attention to other writings by women; the poetic landscapes of Emily Brontë, Christina Rossetti, Mary Coleridge, and Alice Meynell would harmonize well with some of the patterns she discerns. Apart from this limitation, her commentary on the relation of Victorian poetic imagery to its cultural environment is generous and comprehensive, and the evidence presented broadly supports her conclusion that "running through Victorian poetry is another type of sublime landscape

that . . . might be termed the landscape of endurance. . . . It is . . . sobered by the same realization that had finally come to Ruskin, turning him from 'mountains to men': that these barren scenes are not merely a delight for the tourist, but must be seen in terms of the human lives to which they form a background" (p. 252).

Sharon Leder and Andrea Abbott's book-length study of *The Language of Exclusion: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti* (1987) considers these two women poets as exemplars of a "radical feminist critique of male heroism and the high human price of the Crimean War and the American Civil War, . . . [whose poems] question the stability of the market relation, . . . [and present] poetic visions for an alternative social order based on the model of sisterhood" (p. 17). Leder and Abbott attempt to apply the insights of culturally sensitive feminism to their comparative study, but the application of these insights to Rossetti sometimes seems undercut by projective readings of individual poems. They occasionally appear to assume, for example, that Rossetti intended her ardently religious portrayals of injustice, grief, and exclusion to advocate forms of secular redress sought by contemporary feminists. Some of Rossetti's poems more readily bear such an interpretation ("The Royal Princess," for example), but the authors' glosses of others sometimes seem strained. Several of Rossetti's women speakers yearn forlornly for men who have deserted them for war or other pursuits; when the narrators of the poem then turn to Christ, or repent the futility of their desires, the authors interpret this as a principled expression of opposition to war, and a subtle, sexual-political critique of women's "powerlessness and of the society that uses and limits them" (p. 106). The restrictive range of women's options clearly formed an implicit frame of reference for Rossetti's poetry, but the extent of her awareness of the political nature of these restrictions remains at issue. Nevertheless, the authors' provision of useful information about Rossetti's social views and responses to contemporary political events will be helpful to others who wish to reconstruct Rossetti's situation in sympathetic feminist terms.

Four articles on Dante Gabriel Rossetti also merit mention. Two of them are previously unpublished general essays, one sixty years old, and the other more than a century. The latter is an untitled draft written by Emily Pfeiffer in 1883, and printed as "Documents: The Posthumous Critics of a Dead Poet, and Deathless Poetry," in *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Studies* for the fall of 1988. Osbert Sitwell drafted the other essay in 1928-29, under the title "Dante Gabriel Rossetti"; it has now appeared in *Victorians Institute Journal* (16), with an introduction by Melynda Huskey, as "'Postured Kings Standing in Enamelled Fields': Osbert Sitwell on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Art."

Pfeiffer wrote her essay in response to a Buchananesque attack by John Shairp, at the time Professor of Poetry at Oxford; her principled defense of Rossetti's semi-explicit sexual references and erotic idealization is admirable, but her vindication now seems a bit apologetic and circumspect. Sitwell effusively praises Rossetti's capacity to "draw as naturally as a bird sings," but adds that "wherever he went there was soon wafted a faint but unmistakable and exotic air of Camorra and Mafia"; in other excursions, he indulges himself in captious allusions to Ruskin's "absurd if inspiring doctrines" and "the slimy trail of Arts and Crafts."

Two contemporary articles in *Victorian Poetry* examine some persistent tensions in Rossetti's work. Catherine Golden's "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Two-Sided Art" (26:395-402) explores parallels between conscious verbal meditations on the margins of Rossetti's paintings and the visual metaphors of his sonnets. Jerome McGann's "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Betrayal of Truth" (26:339-361) sees the dislocated mental states of Rossetti's poetry as reflections of "the significance of imaginative work in an age of mechanical reproduction," and "a critical definition of the symbolistic imagination when its work has been forced by circumstance to be carried out within a marketing and commercial frame of reference." Rossetti's paintings, in McGann's view, reveal this commercialism most directly when they "seduce and then abandon the corrupted eye of the conventional viewer," while the painful pursuit of receding transcendence in *The House of Life* mocks

the Victorian theory of cultural touchstones which Arnold was developing elsewhere in his ideological prose: to prove that Ideal Beauty was transcendent. [Rossetti's] achievement was to have shown that the theory was a confidence trick which Victorian society played on itself. . . . For the sake of truth Rossetti chose an unusual and lonely path: to will a suspension of disbelief in those inherited lies of art. (pp. 358-359)

Rossetti indeed had the courage to design a poetic form for his acedia and depression, but as McGann elsewhere acknowledges, he also helped to construct the sexualized icon of "Ideal Beauty" he is here praised for "resisting," and his weary commodification of "mechanical [artistic] production" also seemed to him a sign of his own "corruption," not that of a cunningly mocked "conventional viewer."

Several articles were devoted to Morris' poetry and art during the past year. My "Love Is Enough as Secular Theodicy" (*PLL* 24:53-80) defends the suspensive resolution in the poem of Morris' internal questioning in the years 1871-73, and draws a loose analogy between Morris' straightforward stoicism and Kant's more elusive and regulative ideal of a "purely good will." Jan Marsh's "Knight and Angels: the Treatment of 'Sir Galahad' in the Work of Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal and William Morris" carefully collates appearances of the Galahad motif in the early (1850s)

works of these three artists, argues for Elizabeth Siddal's independence of conception and influence on her more famous contemporaries, and comments on the implications of Morris' early poetry for Rossetti's art. Her conclusion is that the group's common preoccupations suggest that "the quest to disentangle priorities and identify 'who was first' is not so much vain as misguided. The achievement was clearly collective."

Ruth Ellison's "Icelandic Obituaries of William Morris" (*WMSJ* 8, no. 1: 35-41) examines six newspaper and one magazine notice of Morris' death published in Iceland (significant numbers, in a country of less than 80,000 inhabitants), and provides interesting information about their authors, as well as their views of Morris. Thorsteinn Erlingsson, for example, who may have been mentioned as a "remarkable looking boy" in Morris' Icelandic diary, later became the editor of *Bjarki* and Iceland's first declared socialist. Another, Matthías Jochumsson, a poet, editor, translator, and somewhat free-thinking Lutheran clergyman, recalled a visit to Morris' London home in 1885, when he noted that "the raven-black [to Icelandic eyes] flowing locks of the artist had turned white and his whole appearance was much more elderly; yet he was only just over 50. . . . Whoever saw Morris once, never forgot him afterwards." Another visitor to Hammer-smith, the Icelandic scholar Jón Stefánsson, remembered an angry vindication of Icelandic independence which Morris delivered when a speaker referred to Jon as Danish: "Then Morris rose up in wrath and said that Denmark was not worthy to unloose the latchet of an Icelander's shoe, let alone to oppress him. . . . All the northern countries, and England too, were the spiritual colonies of Iceland." Patricia Crown's article, "'A Language That All Can Understand': William Morris, William Hogarth and the Decorative Arts" (*WMSJ* 8, no. 1: 5-13) draws some surprisingly close similarities in William Morris' and William Hogarth's attitudes towards art, most conspicuously their shared conviction that "art was part of the texture of life, daily and familiar, a common property, an understandable language, an easily accessible pleasure. It was meant to be produced by and for those who would not be ruled either politically or artistically."

All in all, 1988 was a relatively good year for Pre-Raphaelite studies: new and comprehensive interpretations of three major figures appeared, and were supplemented by a number of briefer or more limited critical and historical accounts, more than can be justly given credit in this brief review. Last year was slightly more productive of writings about Morris, and this year of studies of the Rossettis. If justice is served, Christina Rossetti will eventually reap more of her earthly meed of critical attention in articles as well as books. *cbp*