

## The Pre-Raphaelites

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This past year was unusual in witnessing no book-length studies on Pre-Raphaelite literary topics *per se*, though several collections include essays on these subjects. As compensation, however, a plethora of excellent articles have burgeoned, and in a further noticeable change, criticism on the Rossetti family has centered more on the work of Dante Gabriel than that of his sister. In what follows, I will first discuss essays which consider some aspect of "Pre-Raphaelitism" as a whole, then review items on the Rossettis and Elizabeth Siddal, and finally, turn to new material on Morris and his circle.

### Pre-Raphaelitism

*Pre-Raphaelite Masculinities: Constructions of Masculinity in Art and Literature*, edited by Amelia Yates and Serena Trowbridge (Ashgate) includes several valuable reexaminations of Pre-Raphaelite artistry from the perspective of gender and feminist-influenced "masculinity studies." In "How grew such presence from man's shameful swarm': Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Victorian Masculinity" (pp. 11-34), Jay D. Sloan argues that prior feminist and post-feminist assessments of Rossetti's work have incorrectly assumed that these manifest a unitary point of view, whereas Rossetti instead explores several alternate modes of masculinity

in his poetry. He defines the most important of these personae as those of “Confessional Man” and the “Pilgrim of Love,” as exemplified by “Jenny” and a sonnet, “On the Vita Nuova of Dante.” Sloan’s reading of “Jenny” concludes that the poem “captures the ultimate damning reality of Victorian masculinity, its infinite capacity for denial”—a view which he believes Rossetti presents ironically and at critical distance. Since much of the chapter centers on his interpretation of “Jenny,” however, it might also seem useful to consider whether the persona of “Confessional Man” appears in Rossetti’s other narratives and sonnets.

In “‘Me, Who Ride Alone’: Male Chastity in Pre-Raphaelite Poetry and Art” (pp. 151–168), Dinah Roe identifies the motivations which underlie the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of the unmated warrior and artist, characterized by his “suppression of desire.” She traces the permutations of this ideal in the work of Frederic Stephens, Dante Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris and others, noting the often-hostile Victorian critical reactions to several variants of artistically embodied non-normative forms of masculinity. She traces such embodiments from an early Tractarian-influenced ideal of monastic-like brotherhood, through celebration of the quests of lone knightly warriors such as Galahad, to a final stage of identification with previous artist and singer figures such as Dante and the storytellers of *The Earthly Paradise*. Discerning in Christina Rossetti’s “Repining,” Dante Rossetti’s “The Staff and Scrip,” and Morris’s “Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery” characteristic expressions of “the conflation of chaste male and modern artist,” she finds this configuration central to Walter Pater’s developing aestheticism, as well as a prelude to later *fin de siècle* challenges to norms of masculine self-restraint.

Sally-Anne Huxtable’s “In Praise of Venus: Victorian Masculinity and Tännhauser as Aesthetic Hero” (pp. 169–188), explores the meanings ascribed to the legend of Venus’s cave by artists and poets of the period. She finds Venus’s hill “a queer space” which protected the enactment of inexpressible anti-normative desires and traces its permutations from its Germanic origins through the poems of Swinburne and Morris, the paintings of Edward Burne-Jones, and Oscar Wilde’s dialogue, “The Critic as Artist.” Especially interesting is Huxtable’s commentary on Burne-Jones’ “Laus Veneris,” which she interprets as representing an anguished and abandoned Venus languishing in a female-centered, “highly fashionable Aesthetic interior.”

In “A ‘World of Its Own Creation’: Pre-Raphaelite Poetry and the New Paradigm for Art” (*Twenty-First Century Perspectives on Victorian Literature*, ed. Laurence W. Mazzeno, Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 127–150), David Latham returns to the vexed issue of how to identify specific features of Pre-Raphaelite writing. Noting that the claim that the Pre-Raphaelites reproduced “nature” has been

misleading, Latham instead identifies a “jarring conflict of tensions” produced by its characteristic early features, “a literary subject within a naturalistic setting with a decorative style.” After examining instances of grotesquerie, contradiction, and disharmony within such mid-Victorian poems as D. G. Rossetti’s “Downstream,” Morris’s “Golden Wings,” and Elizabeth Siddal’s “Love and Hate,” Latham contrasts the features of Yeats’s image-laden, highly symbolic play *The Shadowy Waters* with Morris’s later prose romances, which he finds “balance the literary, the naturalistic, and the decorative.” This essay’s clarity, breadth of coverage, and provision of an extensive critical context would make it a suitable introduction to literary Pre-Raphaelitism for a graduate class.

In “‘A Holy Warfare against the Age’: Essays and Tales of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*” (*Victorian Periodicals Review* 47.3: 344–368), I attempt to define some features of this pioneering collaborative effort: its self-consciously progressive, anti-establishmentarian stance, its appeal for tolerant and non-dogmatic forms of religion, its advocacy of wider educational opportunities for women and workers, and its aesthetic preference for Gothic-tinged and romantic literary works. As case studies I examine some little-noticed efforts, among them a quite remarkable tale of an atheist fishwife by William Fulford, an elegantly image-laden, melodramatic romance by Edward Burne-Jones, and a finely argued critique of the then-present state of Oxford education by Godfrey Lushington. In a small pendant, “Attributions of Authorship in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*” (*Notes and Queries* 61.4: 561–563), I consider earlier attempts to identify the authors of the *Magazine*’s unsigned articles and suggest some further possible attributions for the prose contributions.

## D. G. Rossetti

In “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *The Blue Closet* and *The Tune of Seven Towers*: Reception and Significance” (*JPRS* 23 [Fall]: 29–43), D. H. Bentley explores what can be surmised about the symbolism of Rossetti’s two dream-like watercolors. After adducing evidence that these are set in the fifteenth century, Bentley suggests that Rossetti depicts “the rituals and activities . . . that revolved around a transcendental center now lost and elegiacally celebrated.” He then identifies an equal number of unanswerable questions latent in Morris’s similarly titled poems and discusses the symbolism inherent in evocations of color and music in all of these works, which he concludes provide the reader/viewer “with a cognitive escape from the ugliness and banality of urban and industrial England.”

In “‘Till I Am a Ghost’: Dante Rossetti and the Poetic Survival of the Fittest” (*JPRS* 23 [Fall]: 56–73), Charles L. Sligh probes Rossetti’s poetic preoccupation

with the uncertain or mysterious aspects of death. Neither a believer nor a contented agnostic, drawn to séances and haunted by images of the grotesque effects of death, Rossetti returns to this theme in such works as “The Blessed Damozel,” “The House of Life,” “The Question” (revised on his deathbed), and several notebook jottings. Noting that for Rossetti “the signals coming back from The Other Side are abundantly spectral and dubious,” Sligh suggests that Rossetti’s anxieties about survival motivated his attempts to revive neglected artists of the past, his cultivation of an “aesthetic of radical unavailability” designed to intensify interest in his works, and his extreme care with revisions as well as arrangements for the presentation and reception of his writings.

In “Rossetti’s ‘Portrait(s)’: Three New Drafts of a Rossetti Poem” (*JPRS* 23 [Fall]: 5–28), Mark Samuels Lasner and I attempt to identify three hitherto unknown manuscripts of “The Portrait,” Rossetti’s meditative poem about mourning and memory. This task proved a fascinating puzzle because the first manuscript had been literally cut up and several of its pieces inserted into the third one. Based on our identifications and the versions included in the Rossetti Archive, it is now possible to trace Rossetti’s revisions of this poem through 10 extant versions. And in a related essay, “‘Rubbish?’ Three Newly Extant Drafts of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘The Portrait’” (*American Notes and Queries*, 27.1–4: 1–5), Laura Kilbride considers the possible roles played by Thomas Wise and other collectors in preserving these manuscripts and further reflects on the implications of the poem’s religious imagery.

In “Problematic Genealogies: Algernon Swinburne, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Discovery of Francois Villon” (*VP* 52.4: 661–678), Claire Pascolini-Campbell attempts to correct the mistaken notion that Swinburne’s translations of Villon postdated those of his early mentor D. G. Rossetti. She documents Swinburne’s youthful interest in Villon and notes that Rossetti began his own translations at Swinburne’s suggestion. Rossetti’s approach influenced later interpretations of the poet, however, for whereas Swinburne’s early efforts reproduced bawdy and grotesque features of Villon’s work, Rossetti’s more idealizing “emotive and nostalgic” representations in turn influenced Swinburne’s own later translations as well as the interpretations of successive translators.

In “Fashioning Elite Identities: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and Musical Instruments as Symbolic Goods” (*Music in Art* 39.1–2: 145–158), Karen Yuen examines the motives behind the collection of exotic or rare musical instruments by each artist. She points out that although Rossetti himself lacked a knowledge of musical instruments and failed to use those he purchased, their acquisition and artistic display in his paintings helped him socialize in the collecting circles frequented by potential patrons such as Frederick Leyland. By contrast,

the more musically-inclined Edward Burne-Jones used rare musical instruments solely as artistic props, but in designing an alternate shape and ornamentation for the pianos of his preferred patrons, he “control[ed] the visual dimensions of, and distribution of, these musical instruments.”

## Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal

The sole Christina Rossetti article of the year which I've been able to locate is Todd O. Williams's “On Christina Rossetti's Correction to the April 25 Entry of *Time Flies*” (*JPRS* 23 [Spring]: 9–18). Williams traces the implications of Rossetti's careful correction of a misattributed biblical reference in her penultimate prose work, *Time Flies*, and observes that here as elsewhere she alters her account of an event in Christian history—in this case, to the spiritual history of St. Mark—to reframe a “narrative from one of doubt and backsliding to one of redemption and accomplishment.”

In “‘Strong Traivelling’: Re-revisions of Women's Subjectivity and Female Labor in the Ballad-work of Elizabeth Siddal” (*VP* 52.2: 251–276), Jill Ehnenn provides a unifying analysis of the themes of Siddal's art and poetry as expressions of the suffering entailed by female “labor,” that is, the assigned feminine roles of romantic attachment, waiting, and self-suppression. After discussing some implications of the ballad form for contemporary Victorians, Ehnenn examines the unexpectedly unromantic reactions of the speakers of such poems as “A Fragment of a Ballad” and “At Last.” She then identifies the comparable ways in which Siddal's drawings reinterpret D. G. Rossetti's “Sister Helen” and the traditional ballads “Sir Patrick Spens” and “Clerk Saunders” to emphasize the suffering and terror of their heroines.

## William Morris and His Circle

Yoshiko Seki's *The Rhetoric of Retelling Old Romances: Medievalist Poetry by Alfred Tennyson and William Morris* (Tokyo: Eihosa) considers the ways in which Morris's poetic practice responded to Victorian and later critical debates about the nature of dramatic poetry and the purposes of romance. Seki argues that Morris intentionally chose “dramatic” writing “in order to break with the [Victorian] poetic convention of sympathy and prosecute a new kind of versification,” and that the “disunity and untidiness” of his Arthurian poems confirm his desire to seek his own, alternate rhetoric. She counters the charges of modernist critics that *The Earthly Paradise* is escapist, noting that Morris's choice of carefully framed and ornamented older stories constituted a sophisticated response to Victorian

debates about the use of earlier literary materials, and that the poem's blend of classical and medieval sentiment was designed to provide a new form of modern epic for an unpoetic age.

The most significant essay collection on Morris's work to appear in some years is *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris's Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams*, edited by Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne (McGill-Queens Univ. Press). Weinroth's introduction explains that the volume is dedicated to exploring the dialectical oppositions between Morris's aesthetic achievements and his radical politics as "an unstable and transformative tension" which recreates the past in "representations of an alternate commonweal." In accord with these aims, most of the volume's essays explore creative manifestations of these apparent antinomies and tensions. In what follows I will review eight of the volume's most relevant chapters.

In "Illuminating Divergences: Morris, Burne-Jones, and the Two *Aeneids*" (pp. 56–84), Miles Tittle examines the collaborative edition of this imperial epic, translated and partly illuminated by Morris with illustrations by Edward Burne-Jones. Tittle notes that the artistic preferences of the two men had diverged by the time of this enterprise; whereas Morris strove to emphasize the tale's ambivalent tone and the pain unleashed by disruption and war, the classical harmonies of Burne-Jones's drawings embody a more celebratory view of Aeneas's mission. He postulates that Morris turned from illumination to translation in order to resume greater control of the text, and that his translation seeks to return the epic to its multiply-sourced folk origins and imbue it with "his own misgivings about the hegemonic roots of the warrior hero." The chapter's strikingly handsome images, many available for the first time, confirm Tittle's claims for the divergent approaches of the two collaborators as well as manifest Burne-Jones's subtlety in evoking tonalities of form and color.

Yuri Cowan's "Translation, Collaboration, and Reception: Editing Caxton for the Kelmscott Press" (pp. 149–172) redresses the scant attention previously paid to the content of the books published at the Kelmscott Press, as opposed to considerations of design, clarity, technique, and so forth. Cowan views Morris's reprinting of works translated and published by Caxton, the first English printer, in the context of Morris's conviction that all forms of decorative art are collaborative ventures, and moreover, that attempts to re-mediate past works must preserve some of their essential features of "strangeness" or "otherness." He finds Morris's criterion for the selection of texts is the desire to provide lively and significant works of the past in accessible form to his late-Victorian readers. A merit of Cowan's approach is that it reconciles Morris's more general views on society and popular literature with his intentions in issuing Kelmscott Press books.

In "Morris's Road to *Nowhere*: New Pathways in Political Persuasion" (pp. 172–194), Michelle Weinroth explores Morris's utopia as the culmination of his many years of experimentation in the arts of persuasion. Tracing its antecedents in classical pastoral, Weinroth considers *News from Nowhere* as an expression of the "politics of disengagement," a place "for thinking through the fundamental principles of a humane social world." Avoiding melodrama and triumphalism, *News* instead offers representations of asymmetry and deferral, and differs from static and prescriptive utopias in confronting "the problem of how we might deliver news about that which we do not know."

In "*News from Nowhere Two: Principles of a Sequel*" (pp. 218–240), Tony Pinkney offers a blend of creative and critical response to Morris's famous work. He suggests that, 125 years after its publication, Morris's utopia should be updated for our own time, and such a sequel should "contain built-in principles of change and development" in accord with twentieth-century utopian theory. To this end, he maintains, it should consider some of the alternate narrative possibilities alluded to in the text—among these the suggestion that Morris's utopia itself may be threatened either by outside forces or the complacency of its citizens. Pinkney then constructs an alternative plot in which Ellen and Old Hammond return from idyllic seclusion to lead an army of resistance against a counterrevolution, "a fight for justice at every twist and turn of the river." Fantasy turns serious, however, as the reader recognizes the uncanny resemblance of some of Pinkney's constructions to political events of recent decades.

In "The Politics of Antiquarian Poetics" (pp. 124–148), David Latham explores the significance of Morris's belief that social relations were intertwined with language itself, and his resultant attempts to change what he saw as degraded linguistic forms into an alternative language appropriate for encouraging community and fellowship. Latham explores Morris's early poetry as a celebration of artistic vision, set poignantly in a medieval world "so newly fallen from the communal ideal of society"; the poetry of his middle period as an attempt to broaden contemporary views of mythology; and his socialist writings as models for inquiry which encouraged reader involvement. He usefully identifies several poetic features of Morris's late prose romances which enabled him to develop "the prose poem as a new genre of art," and concludes that more than any of the other Pre-Raphaelites, Morris articulated fundamental reasons for their pre-Renaissance, pro-medievalist position in "a radical commitment to revolutionizing a hierarchical social order . . . based on the authoritarian ideology of classical and biblical mythologies."

In "Radical Tales: Rethinking the Politics of William Morris's Last Romances" (pp. 85–105), Phillippa Bennett presents a holistic view of the

relationship of Morris's late prose romances to his political endeavors. She asserts that rather than directly presenting socialist societies or principles, Morris sought in his romances to explore the challenges of political activism and to define "the values that underpinned his personal engagement with, and commitment to, the socialist movement." Bennett suggests that he chose the romance genre because of its openness to the "contemplation of possibilities" and its embeddedness in a rich and potentially liberatory tradition of storytelling. Her readings of several late romances identify recurrent patterns: the need for commitment under hardship, the wisdom to desire "better, more, and otherwise," and the necessity of hope.

In "Telling Time: Song's Rhythms in Morris's Late Work" (pp. 106-123), Elizabeth Helzinger provides the first sustained account of the prosody of Morris's brief socialist lyrics, especially the "Chants for Socialists." Explaining the effects of rhythm, designed to move singers "to desire a common weal," she posits that these songs encourage excitement and activism while simultaneously promoting "reflection on the excitements of the rhythmic power they arouse." Helzinger then considers the effect of song in Morris's prose works, exploring the effects of a historical rhyming password in *A Dream of John Ball* and observing that the interspersed lyrics or "song-speech" of the late prose romances "occupy the place of subjective interiority." Finally, she considers the use of charms and riddles, which reflect Morris's hope that "when the mastery of men is renounced, the mastery of nature that such lyric forms compel might be harnessed for the commonweal."

In "William Morris's 'Lesser Arts' and 'The Commercial War'" (pp. 35-55), I consider the creative tensions within Morris's writings of his representations of struggle, violence, and the solace of creative memorialization. Noting that even his earliest poems and prose romances convey revulsion and sorrow at the consequences of violence, I examine his increasingly overt opposition to what he saw as the social violence of "commercial war," his many attacks on British imperialism in later life, and his stated abhorrence of even socialist-instigated violence. Although his later romance protagonists still engage in quasi-allegorical struggles, they also attempt to disengage when possible, and to transmute the conflicts around them into stories, songs, and other artistic expressions of reconciliation and peace.

In separate articles: Roger Simpson's "William Morris's Unpublished Arthurian Translations" (*JWMS* 20.4: 7-18) provides the first survey of the content and physical qualities of Morris's unpublished translations from medieval French. Simpson explains the ways in which Morris's French translations supplied Tristram and Lancelot-cycle material unavailable to English readers in Malory's prior translations, and argues that even the errors and corrections apparent in



Morris's calligraphic version offer "fresh and exciting insights into his working practice."

Three final articles offer biographical information on Morris's family and associates. In "'Almost as good as Iceland on a small scale': William Morris's 'Icelandic Imaginary' at Home" (*JWMS* 21.1: 9-21), Wendy Parkins continues her ongoing exploration of the political and aesthetic meanings implicit in the Morrises' domestic arrangements. She finds that the many objects brought back from Iceland—clothes, slippers, silverware, a pony—were valued for their aesthetic qualities and understood in the context of their original uses, reflecting an appreciation of the culture which had produced them. She does, however, fault Morris for bringing to Kelmscott Manor an Icelandic pony for his children, which unintentionally condemned "Mouse" to a life of isolated boredom separated from his former equine companions. Parkins might have added that these Icelandic associations may have had a signal effect on the young May Morris, who in later life travelled several times to Iceland and established close and personal ties with its people.

In "Jane Morris and her Male Correspondents" (*JWMS* 20.4: 60-78), Peter Faulkner draws together what is known about the four men (excluding her husband) with whom Jane corresponded most frequently—Dante Rossetti, Cormell Price, Wilfred S. Blunt and Philip Webb—and assesses her correspondence with each. Since Jane's relationship with Rossetti has been analyzed in depth by Jan Marsh, Wendy Parkins, and others, and that with Blunt chronicled in Faulkner's edition of their letters, the article's most interesting findings may lie in its untangling of subtle aspects of her other friendships, especially that with Phillip Webb, with whom she shared a sustaining affection based on common cultural tastes and mutual kindnesses.

And lastly, in "'A Clear Flame-Like Spirit': Georgiana Burne-Jones and Rottingdean, 1904-1920" (*JWMS* 20.4: 79-90), Stephen Williams provides the first detailed history of the political endeavors of the woman who had earlier shared and chronicled the lives of her husband and William Morris. As a leading activist and member of the Rottingdean Parish Council, Georgiana opposed local landed interests and advocated for the provision of public services, including medical and nursing care for local residents. A founder, chief donor, and joint secretary (chairperson) of the Rottingdean District Nursing Association, she helped establish the regional medical services later integrated into the National Health Service. The accompanying photograph of Georgiana with her great-grandson taken in 1914 at the age of seventy-four shows a lithe, erect woman with a firm but pleasant countenance and attractively curling hair. Perhaps fate had in the end

compensated this least-physically-admired of the original Pre-Raphaelite women with a subtler beauty reflective of a well-spent life.

So much material leaves this reviewer exhausted! Some features of this year's offerings do stand out, however; comparative interpretations of Pre-Raphaelite poetry with paintings on similar themes have uncovered new resonances, and as often, a consideration of less-familiar aspects of Morris's work such as his short lyrics and translations have added depth to the interpretation of his more well-known writings.