

The Pre-Raphaelites

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In addition to their artistic contributions, the writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and other Pre-Raphaelites continued to inspire interest during 2019. In what follows I will discuss several articles on literary Pre-Raphaelitism and Rossetti's poetry, then consider articles and books that interpret Morris's poetry, translations, and utopian romance *News from Nowhere*.

Pre-Raphaelitism

Critical approaches to artistic and literary Pre-Raphaelitism have long emphasized its attention to precise visual detail, but in “‘Art of the Future’: Julia Margaret Cameron’s Poetry, Photography and Pre-Raphaelism” (*Victorian Studies* 61, no. 2 [Winter 2019]: 204–215), Heather Bozant Witcher suggests an alternate approach. She reproduces Cameron’s poem, “On a Portrait,” which celebrates the fusion of “genius and love” in creating an ideal portrait, and argues that it is the blend of ambiguity and mystery with realism that make her photographs, and by implication, Pre-Raphaelite literary works, so distinctive. Witcher illustrates her point with Cameron’s portrait of Robert Browning, in which the strong features of his face are clearly delineated and the image itself is marked by small dots or stars created in the photographic process. She concludes that “the tension between exactness and uncertainty in these photographs invokes Pre-Raphaelite uncertainty or confessional self-revelation” (p. 214), a description that likewise applies to the poetry of Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites.

In “Naturally Artificial: The Pre-Raphaelite Garden Enclosed” (*VP* 57, no. 1 [Spring 2019]: 131–53), Dinah Roe explores the ramified psychological associations of the Victorian poetic motif of the walled garden. Eighteenth-century planners had preferred “natural gardens” that blended into the wider landscape; by contrast, nineteenth-century gardens were designed to “celebrate interiority, subjectivity, and generative consciousness, privileging the mind over nature” (p. 132). Roe notes that enclosure focuses attention inward, but it also defines what lies within its boundaries against an outer, often hostile, reality. The paradoxical polarities of the garden—natural/artificial, free/constrained, finite/infinite—encourage a “transgressive hybridity” (Isobel Armstrong) especially prominent in Pre-Raphaelite art. Roe finds examples of these encoded tensions in Charles Collins’s painting “Convent Thoughts,” which presents a pensive novice contemplating a flower within the limited space of her garden, and William Morris’s “The Defence of Guenevere” in which Guenevere reenacts a previous ecstatic moment within a walled garden. Here the walled garden is a site of unconventional sexuality and rhetorical experimentation, as the queen objectifies herself “in order to suggest her own subjectivity,” a risky strategy which is also “a plea for empathy, the ultimate act of imagination that would allow her jury to ‘see’ not only through the body whose destruction they are contemplating but also through her eyes, to perceive things the way she does” (p. 146). Roe concludes that “Pre-Raphaelite portrayals of these naturally artificial spaces both affirm the power of boundaries and create the conditions for their transgression” (p. 148).

In “George Meredith (and Margaret Oliphant) among the Pre-Raphaelites,” (*Yearbook of English Studies* 49 [2019]: 82–102), Rebecca N. Mitchell considers the ways in which Meredith consistently manifested Pre-Raphaelite literary and aesthetic ideals. She documents his early admiration for Pre-Raphaelite artists and the extent to which his early poetry shares a devotion to sensuous beauty, delight in nature, and indebtedness to Keats, Tennyson, and other poets included in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood “list of Immortals.” Meredith’s attitudes contrast with those of his contemporaries Margaret Oliphant and George Eliot, who, although both well-informed on contemporary Pre-Raphaelite art and ideals, took care to distance themselves from the movement. Oliphant resented Ruskin’s claims to authority, and in later years criticized Pre-Raphaelite artists for having failed to fulfill an original promise; Eliot disliked Meredith’s *Westminster Review* articles on “Belles Lettres” and disagreed with his favorable notice of such paintings as Holman Hunt’s “The Hireling Shepherd,” which she found lacking in “the raw material of moral sentiment” (p. 99). By contrast, Mitchell suggests that Meredith’s grasp of the interrelationship between naturalistic and imagistic representation central to Pre-Raphaelite art enabled him to render visual aesthetic understanding in literary terms. Finally, in his “Essay on Comedy,” Meredith argues that an unfiltered realism is insufficient to the aims of comedy and of literature in general, a view which links him both to the Pre-Raphaelites and later fin de siècle artists.

Although not a Pre-Raphaelite per se, Vernon Lushington (1832–1912) was a member of the group of young men that issued the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* as well as a well-connected friend and acquaintance of many artists and literary figures—Ruskin, Carlyle, Arnold, Ford Madox Brown, Holman Hunt, Arthur Hughes, Morris, D. G. and William Rossetti, the Brownings, and many others. David Taylor’s *The Remarkable Lushington Family: Reformers, Pre-Raphaelites, Positivists, and the Bloomsbury Group* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020) traces this intellectual and reformist family from its abolitionist patriarch Stephen through its later Bloomsbury descendants, who included Kitty Lushington Maxse, the original for Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. Its chief protagonist, however, is Vernon, who was a deputy judge advocate but also, as Taylor demonstrates, a patron of the arts, occasional poet, promoter of adult and worker’s education, and lifelong and devoted Positivist. A friend of Morris, whom he described as “1/2 a Positivist,” Lushington visited the latter as he lay dying, writing his daughter, “He was a genius with much yet to do & the will to do it. . . . Moreover, he was the friend of so many friends, and above all the friend of my youth. His vivid nature & ardent love of beauty made their impression on my soul just in its most impressionable time, so that I cd. honour

& love him even when I differed utterly from him" (p. 196). Taylor's account, based on the recently available Lushington papers, illuminates the interconnected social world of a nineteenth-century reformist, artistic, and intellectual elite.

D. G. Rossetti

J. D. Hall's "'Looking Downward Thence': D. G. Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' in *Astronomical Focus*" (*VP* 57, no. 3 [Fall 2019]: 321–343) places Rossetti's iconic poem within the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientific discoveries regarding time, space, and the boundaries of our current knowledge of the solar system. Hall first notes that the seven stars in the damozel's hair form a star cluster similar to the Pleiades. He then calculates the time and space probabilities in the poem's colloquy between earthly lover and a Pleiades-situated heavenly maiden according to hypotheses about the (non-)existence of ether, the speed of light, and the relative nature of time and space advanced by Victorian scientists such as Felix Eberty and Richard Proctor. Hall suggests that the fact "[t]hat Rossetti makes a version of lookback time a feature of his poem is an indication that he is attempting to get his mind around complexities that Eberty, Proctor, and later Einstein . . . would also struggle to imagine" (pp. 339–340). Like the poet and most readers, Hall concludes: "It is unlikely that the Damozel will find either the consolation or the prospect of eventual consummation that has prompted her looking back" (p. 340).

D. M. R. Bentley's "The 'Old Italian Book' That Made Dante Rossetti 'the particular kind of man and artist' That He Was" (*Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 28 [Spring 2019]: 36–65) identifies a hitherto largely unnoticed but important source for Rossetti's works in a book that he told William Bell Scott had provided "the most important part" of his artistic formation. This was the 1545 second edition of Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, "Poliphilo's Struggle for Erotic Love in a Dream," a story of sexual desire, frustration, and mutual fulfillment illustrated with 172 woodcuts. Bentley suggests that the continuous pairing of woodcuts and narratives in the *Hypnerotomachia* likely helped prompt the close association between image and text central to Rossetti's work. Further, the explicit nature of the descriptions of Poliphilo's desires and his amorous union with his beloved Polia is reflected in the sexual imagery of "The House of Life." Bentley observes that Colonna's emphasis on "classical machinery," including the *Hypnerotomachia*'s depiction of an allegorical Venus and her presence in the legends of Paris and Helen of Troy, parallels motifs in Rossetti's artwork and in poems such as "Troy Town," "Eden Bower," and the later versions of "The Blessed Damozel." Though Bentley does not

elaborate on this point, Venus and Troy motifs similarly appear in works of the same period by Edward Burne-Jones, Morris, and Swinburne, making Colonna's volume a central influence on Pre-Raphaelite preoccupations and aesthetics more broadly.

Rosalind White's "What of Her Glass Without Her? Prismatic Desire and Autoerotic Anxiety in the Art and Poetry of Dante Rossetti" (*Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 28 [Spring 2019]: 16–35) turns a skeptical eye on the many appearances of mirrors and reflecting surfaces within Rossetti's poetry and artwork. Noting that the sentiment in sonnet 53 of "The House of Life," "What of her glass without her?" typifies the way in which Victorian "feminine identity could be lost in a hermeneutic hall of mirrors," she scrutinizes the many metaphorical mirrors throughout Rossetti's poetry, noting that in such poems as "A Portrait," the image found behind or in the mirror is not that of a beloved but of the artist himself. Indeed, the female subjects of paintings such as *Bocca Baciata* are submerged or negated in "an endless series of [decorative] metonymies" (p. 21). More subtle, however, are the displacements of identity in "The Willowwood" sequence of *The House of Life*, in which the speaker's identity divides so that he becomes both himself and the beloved, experiencing the loss of "the other" in the self. In Rossetti's portrayals of Lilith, however, both in his painting *Lady Lilith* and sonnet 78 of *The House of Life*, White finds references to a threatening autoeroticism, as male anxiety at female sexual autonomy is projected onto a mirror. No longer can the male artist function as a mirror bridging the seer and the seen; instead, her image alters "from an external method of aesthetic validation into a hetero-narcissistic reverie that is both dream and nightmare" (p. 30).

In "[S]elling old lamps for new ones: D. G. Rossetti's Restructuring of Oriental Schema" (*The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2019]), Eleonora Sasso documents Rossetti's fascination with Near-Eastern mysteries and exotic sexuality as a recurring feature of his art and poetry from childhood, when at age seven he composed a dramatic fragment, "The Story of Aladdin, or, the Wonderful Lamp." She notes that his response to the *Arabian Nights* was a "profoundly conservative manifestation of the Orient," in which the latter is identified with crime, despotism, revenge, erotic intrigue, and an often sinister magic. Two of Rossetti's poems centering on ancient relics, "The Burden of Nineveh" and "Tiber, Nile, and Thames," identify past cultural ruins with the more decadent and doomed features of his own society, and his poems and artworks centering on the tale of Troy emphasize the destructive role of female beauty in leading its civilization to its doom. By contrast, his poems and artworks

on biblical subjects such as “Ave,” “Mary’s Girlhood,” and “The Girlhood of Mary Virgin” blend Christian themes with portrayals of purity, and *Astarte Syriaca* surrounds a Syrian goddess with Greek symbolism, thus “combining different visions of the Orient” (p. 35).

The increasing importance of digital communication to Victorian studies is seen in the growth of COVE (Central Online Victorian Educator), edited by Dino Felluga, which provides annotated Victorian texts for classroom interactive use, accompanied by contextual material including maps and images. Rossetti’s “The Sonnet,” edited by Felluga and others, offers elegant detailed notes on the 1880 sonnet that opens *The House of Life*, as well as critical essays by Jerome McGann on the nature of a Pre-Raphaelite double work, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra on the occasion of the poem’s composition (the 80th birthday of Rossetti’s mother), and Elizabeth Helsinger on the sonnet’s place in the larger sequence of *The House of Life*. This digital edition provides an excellent introduction to Rossetti’s poetry for both graduate and undergraduate students.

William Morris

TEACHING WILLIAM MORRIS

Teaching William Morris, edited by Jason D. Martinek and Elizabeth C. Miller (Vancouver: Farleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2019) provides an exciting entrance into current approaches to Morris’s work. The authors’ introduction observes that the multiplicity of Morris’s endeavors has made it difficult to capture his achievements in any single course, since each of his contributions—literary, artistic, or political—requires a knowledge of the others for context. Martinek and Miller therefore suggest that only an interdisciplinary approach can be successful, and that “the best way to find models for how to approach Morris more holistically is to look at how he is taught today” (p. 4). They note that presenting Morris’s works to contemporary students presents special challenges, since his “conscious rejection of accepted forms . . . only gets more confounding and more in need of explanation as the years go on” (p. 7). Nonetheless, the endeavor is necessary, since “Morris was uniquely gifted with the capacity to hold together seemingly incompatible visions of condemnation and imagination, and it is this capacity for critical hope that we go to him for again and again” (p. 7). The volume’s nineteen essays are grouped into sections: “Pasts and Presents,” “Political Contexts,” “Literature,” “Art and Design,” and “Digital Humanities,” and in what follows I will comment on the eleven chapters most directly concerned with Morris’s literary works.

In “Time Travelling with William Morris,” John Plotz ruminates on the aftereffects on his teaching of his authorship of a children’s book on Morris,

Time and the Tapestry. Facing some resistance in the classroom, he sensed his students' "fear that the future's best days are behind it" (p. 43). In response, Plotz argues that Morris does not offer up one more fantasy realm but rather, just as the *Earthly Paradise* had striven to "build a shadowy isle of bliss / Midmost the beating of the steely sea," the appeal of Morris's alternative worlds is that he himself "is well aware of just how shadowy this isle of bliss is" (p. 44). Morris's gift was to remind his audiences of the ability of art to express their connection and solidarity with those before them. This leads Plotz to what can seem a charming tangent, his account of his several weeks of reading all the books that selected users of a local library in Muncie, Indiana, had checked out between 1891 and 1902, directly after the appearance of *News from Nowhere*. The fragmented nature of the results increased his appreciation for *News from Nowhere*'s "attenuated, far-off vision of a deliberately implausible future. . . . Our only addressees lie, as they always have, in the future" (p. 46). Plotz concludes that what we must convey to students are the gaps and spaces in Morris's literary designs, especially in his late romances, which convey a "life without and beyond us, a world protected from human meddling" (p. 47).

In "The Medievalism of William Morris: Teaching through Tolkien," Kelly Ann Fitzpatrick observes that students are often more familiar with the works of J. R. R. Tolkien than those of Morris or later fantasy authors, and she finds that they become interested in Morris on learning of his important influence on Tolkien. Fitzpatrick encourages her students to trace Tolkien's indebtedness to Morris through his plots, his interest in Icelandic sagas, and his essays on translation and the concept of "secondary worlds," which for both writers are steeped in medieval culture and language. A knowledge of Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* enables students to find parallels in Morris's historical fictions *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*, and to identify Morris's anticipation of later fantasy motifs throughout his late romances. Such comparisons lead students to an appreciation of "how fantasy writers like Morris and Tolkien used representations of the medieval to reflect, represent, translate, critique and idealize not only the Middle Ages, but also their own contemporary societies" (p. 72).

In "A Dream of William Cobbett?: Teaching Morris's *John Ball* in an Interdisciplinary Course on Victorian Radicalism," Linda K. Hughes and William M. Meier describe their course on nineteenth-century progressive political movements taught to a class of mostly graduate students in history and rhetoric. As their attached syllabus indicates, this was an exciting and resource-packed class, with Morris's *A Dream of John Ball* and *Commonweal* writings placed alongside readings on Chartism, Marx and Engels, terrorism, feminism,

and the British Empire. The course's juxtapositions evoked new insights, especially into the hitherto little-explored relationship between Morris's writings and those of early nineteenth-century rural populist William Cobbett; Hughes and Meier observe that Morris read several of the latter's writings carefully in the years before he composed *John Ball*, and that Cobbett's name appears repeatedly in his political writings of the period. They also identify another source for *John Ball*, a Lord Mayor's Show of 1884 which had staged a pageant celebrating the defeat of Watt Tyler by an ascendant Lord Mayor. Morris's *Justice* article in response defends Tyler and "his worthier associate John Ball" and cites Cobbett, whom Hughes and Meier note forms both "intertext and paratext" (p. 82). The course's careful organization helped students to relate the readings to one another; for example, in her final essay one student noted the relationship of Morris's beautiful landscape descriptions to Engels's dismay at the degradation of the urban environment in his *Condition of the Working Class*.

In "Living in Heaven: Hope and Change in *News from Nowhere*," David Latham narrates his attempts to overcome his students' initial cynicism when faced with Morris's utopian vision: "He can't be serious; it's Nowhere because it will never work" (p. 115). Observing that many improvements have occurred in the 130 years since the publication of Morris's utopia, Latham asks his students why other, readily achievable changes have been delayed. He then identifies five points of difference between conditions in *Nowhere* and those of Morris's own nineteenth-century society: the replacement of self-interest with fellowship; a healthy and handsome population; cleaner rivers and more wildlife; less pollution and more sunshine; and citizens who enjoy work without pressure for financial rewards. Latham demonstrates several ways Morris's text is designed to stimulate identification, stir resistance, and place the literary and cultural endeavors of his own time in an ironic light. In conclusion, he argues that credible transformations in the areas of weather, health, ecology, and labor may be imagined, but that for the final intractable element, the ideal of fellowship, we must look to a non-escapist art and a new form of dream. Thus, in *News from Nowhere*, Morris "endeavors to show us how the force of a shared desire can transform the realm of the stories we imagine into the reality of the lives we live" (p. 127).

In "Morris Matters: Teaching *News from Nowhere* in a Seminar on Victorian Materialities," Susan David Bernstein describes a course that applied "thing theory" to Victorian literature with some arresting and original results, as her students found sophisticated ways of relating material objects from *News from Nowhere* to the utopia's wider patterns. One, for example, studied the wooden locks on the Thames encountered by Guest and his friends as they row

upriver, finding parallels between their mechanism and the concept of “assemblages,” between the pauses generated by the locks and the romance’s serial form, and between the enclosed pools formed as the locks are traversed and utopian space. A second student, noting that red bricks appear four times in the narrative, documented favorable mentions of red bricks in social theorists of the period and described their metaphorical implications in several of Morris’s poetic works. A third essay offered the nature-based designs of Morris’s tapestries as correlatives for the weave and warp of his utopia, noting how the features of tapestry embody Morris’s respect for beauty in raw materials and parallel the myriad natural ecotopian descriptions throughout the text.

In “Teaching *News from Nowhere* in a Course on ‘The Simple Life,’” Michael Robertson explains how he helped a group of initially uninterested beginning students to grasp the issues raised in Morris’s text. “The simple life,” as he explained to his students, was not merely a matter of “plain living and high thinking” but a counter-hegemonic practice of “theoretically informed action toward social change” (p. 151). In particular, literary utopias attempt defamiliarization, disrupting their audience’s acceptance of the status quo. Robertson’s students read *News from Nowhere* against the background of three other texts, Jonathan Woolman’s *Journal*, Louisa May Alcott’s satiric “Transcendental Wild Oats,” and Henry Thoreau’s *Walden Pond*. The course’s great success came when Robertson organized an unmoderated debate, as his formerly lethargic students came alive as they argued over such matters as whether “human nature” could be altered by social organization and whether the informal, self-directed education advocated in *Nowhere* was desirable or possible. Robertson concludes that “[i]ntroducing *News from Nowhere* into the course convinced me of Morris’s central place in the simple life tradition; it also taught me the importance of simplicity in pedagogy” (p. 157).

In “Teaching Morris the Utopian,” Deanna K. Kreisel describes her theoretical and historical approaches to teaching *News from Nowhere* in a course in utopian fiction that included such useful background texts as Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon*, Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, and Richard Jefferies’s *After London*. Her students considered several alternative varieties of utopia including intentional communities, utopian political thought, and Marxist and socialist theories, and also explored psychoanalytical approaches to the problems of repression and desire such as Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*. She asked her students to examine the careful distancing strategies of Morris’s narrative, the paradoxical tension between the “presentism” of utopia and its attitude toward past literature and history, and the persistence of gendered labor divisions and sexual jealousies even within this

new society. What would it be like, Kreisel asks her students, to live in a world without utopian desire? She concludes with a reminder that in a time of increasing economic inequality and scarcity of resources, “we need more than ever Morris’s hopeful ‘vision rather than a dream’” (p. 172).

In “Teaching Guenevere through Word and Image,” Pamela Bracken elaborates on her efforts to merge the study of text and visual images in her teaching of “The Defence of Guenevere.” Bracken observes that it is common to look at a book’s illustrations before reading it, and that her visual-verbal method “make[s] an intentional activity out of a natural behavior” (p. 183). Her students accordingly engage with the details of the Kelmscott Press version of the poem, pondering the meanings evoked by the floriated initials, the importation of manuscript conventions into the printed text, and the potentially ambiguous effects of the absence of quotation marks. They then examine early twentieth-century illustrations of the poem by Jessie King and Florence Harrison as commentaries on Morris’s text; in one striking instance, Harrison represents the figure cowering on the bed beneath the “great God’s angel” as male—not Guenevere herself but one of her accusers. Bracken notes that throughout years of striving to make the poem vivid for her visually sensitive students, the placement of “The Defence of Guenevere” in the context of its artistic printing and illustration has frequently made Morris’s poem her students’ favorite Victorian work.

In “Morris and the Literary Canon,” Michelle Weinroth outlines the background conditions that have placed Morris’s literary works “in a liminal space of English Studies, at the edge of the Victorian greats” (p. 188). She finds the reputation of his creative works the victim of an ideological prejudice against his disruptive politics, his interpenetration of word and image, and, most importantly, his creation of a translation style that captured in rhythm and sonority “the quintessential character of an ancient culture—its artisanal creativity and oral rituals” (p. 195). Weinroth contrasts Matthew Arnold’s advocacy of a domesticating style suited to a hegemonic national rhetoric with Oscar Wilde’s prescient recognition of the “anti-literary” and antiestablishment features of Morris’s translation style as a measure of creative authenticity (p. 198). Weinroth suggests that as students learn to be skeptical of the pronouncements of the gatekeepers of received culture, they may be more likely to cultivate “their aesthetic sensibilities in a quintessentially Morrisian vein” (p. 198) and turn freshly to the issues of what constitutes “good” literature and even literature itself.

In “Morris for Many Audiences: Teaching with the William Morris Archive,” I reflect that my more successful efforts to teach Morris’s writings share

certain features: they are highly visual; present puzzles or questions to answer; emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of Morris's work; focus on the details of a specific text; and often take the form of a project or group effort. I describe attempts to place Morris's early poems in the context of their later Kelmscott Press renderings (cf. Pamela Braken's essay above), a visit to special collections to examine Morris's works in association with other examples of Victorian print culture, and the joint construction of an online illustrated version of *News from Nowhere*. The latter has inspired the ongoing creation of a digital annotated text and map of Guest's journey through London and up the Thames (http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/NewsNowhere_Illustrated/production/NewsfromNowhere/chapter21.html). Ph.D. student Kyle Barton and I have also prepared an edition of "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire" for Dino Felluga's COVE project, and I suggest that an appropriate assignment for a graduate class might be the cooperative completion of another such short edition.

In "Digital Design with William Morris," Amanda Golden describes her course "Victorian Technology and Art" offered at an institute of technology. Golden asked her students to design an e-book of a chapter of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* illustrated by their choice of Morris designs and typography and supplemented by a written rationale addressing how their project interprets the text. These juxtapositions produced some ingenious readings, and Golden notes that "the students' digital scavenging and piecework speaks to new research methods and modes of engaging materials" (pp. 278–279). She concludes that "Morris's accessibility, in terms of available materials and the fact that his work speaks to a multimodal approach, enables students to interpret the language and technology of his time (including fine printing) by adapting that of our own" (p. 280).

ARTICLES ON MORRIS

In "Morris, Jameson, Utopia" (*The Journal of William Morris Studies* 23, no. 3 [2019]), Tony Pinkney interprets *News from Nowhere* in the context of Fredric Jameson's claim that utopias inevitably end in failure since they arise from the societies in which they are created. Pinkney divides *Nowhere* into two sections; in the first, more conventional one, a time traveler joins the more enlightened society of twenty-first-century London and learns of the altered principles under which it is now conducted. He styles this portion of the text a Marcusian utopia devoted to the return to a happier state and agrees with Jameson that the result of this "epoch of rest" is a relative stasis or lack of dynamism. By contrast, the second part of the utopia recounts Guest's journey up the Thames with Ellen, and Pinkney styles this open-ended and dynamic experience a form

of (Ernst) Blochian utopia of horizons, a movement toward the “not yet.” Ellen herself is a redemptive and energizing figure around whom stories have gathered, and Pinkney imagines an alternative future story in which Ellen becomes a political leader within a future utopian society. He concludes that although utopia fails in *News from Nowhere*, “in so doing it generates the figure of Ellen, who is a kind of Jamesonian utopian theory in her own right” (p. 15).

In “The Cognitive Process of Parable: John Ruskin, William Morris and the Oriental Lure of the Forbidden” (*The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East*), Eleonora Sasso provides a structuralist and thematic reading of Ruskin’s and Morris’s indebtedness to the *Arabian Nights* in framing their own tales. Ruskin is more prone to stereotype—for him, non-European art is “pre-eminently the gift of cruel and savage nations” (p. 65)—whereas the study of Near-Eastern designs led Morris to declare that for him “Persia is become a holy land” (p. 66). Sasso notes Ruskin’s admiration for “The Story of Aladdin, ‘The Fisherman and the Jinni’ and ‘Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,’” as well as the metaphorical importance of the *Arabian Nights* in *Praeterita*. Morris enjoyed reading the *Arabian Nights* aloud to his family, and Sasso finds its eastern imagery and preoccupation with prohibitions and warnings prominent in many *Earthly Paradise* tales, including “The Writing on the Image,” “The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” and the overtly Arabian tale “The Man Who Never Laughed Again,” whose romantic intensities, successive dream states, and mysterious but receding beloveds mirror its Middle Eastern source.

In “This is a Pipe: The Aesthetic Object in Morris’s *Nowhere*” (*Journal of William Morris Studies* 23, no. 3 [Winter 2020]: 17–35), Andrew J. Wood interprets the nuances of chapter 6 of *News from Nowhere*, “A Little Shopping,” in which Guest is astounded when given a highly decorated pipe by an adolescent shopkeeper. Wood contrasts Morris’s views with those of twentieth-century philosopher Georges Bataille, who likewise celebrated art as the most fundamental human production but also valorized pleasure, luxury, and excess as forms of “sovereignty” in which one consumes without labor. By contrast, *Nowhere*’s pipe does not signify sovereignty but the end of alienated and subservient labor. The presence of the decorated pipe, by definition both useful and beautiful, indicates that society has passed beyond anxiety over necessities, and the shopgirl’s assurance that if Guest should lose the pipe, another will find and use it embodies a new ethic of sharing and reuse. Her pleasure in Guest’s acceptance of the gift indicates that the pipe is not only pleasurable to its maker and user but also its distributor. As opposed to the tasteless luxury of class-ridden

nineteenth-century society, such objects are not luxuries but a sign of the importance of pleasure in labor and consumption; nor is the pipe atypically fine, for throughout *Nowhere* the characters enjoy excellent food, clothing, and habitations. Such items are no longer valorized as uniquely “authentic” in a society in which everyone is free to pursue whatever tasks they desire and in which profit no longer limits enjoyment. Wood suggests that if we can start “with democratizing singularly beautiful objects, then we can form the basis for more broad-scale . . . change in the aesthetics and functionality of our communities, forms of labour and even social interactions” (p. 33).

In “Cheers and Jeers: Lecturer-Audience Interaction in the Socialist Movement” (*Journal of William Morris Studies* 23, no. 3 [Winter 2020]: 36–52), Anna Vaninskaya shifts focus from the content of Morris’s (and others’) socialist writings to the social context of delivery. She notes the ubiquitousness of lecture presentations throughout the nineteenth century, the wide array of sponsors and venues, and the physical hardships experienced by lecturers such as Edward Carpenter, who had to endure the demanding behaviors of their hosts and travel with the physical props needed to illustrate their talks. Socialists, however, faced the added problem of actively hostile audiences; Robert Tressell’s 1914 *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* presents a scene in which workers mock and attack a socialist speaker. Although in his diaries and letters the relatively restrained Morris registered disappointment that his working-class audiences were often unable to grasp his message, other pioneering socialists such as Henry Hyndman, James Leatham, and Bruce Glasier were more openly contemptuous of their auditors. Still, the various bodies of socialists and related laborites did manage to shift public opinion in the early twentieth century, and Vaninskaya’s article is a useful reminder of the obstacles surmounted along the way by Morris and other dedicated socialist campaigners.

In “Missing Links: *Beowulf*, *Grettis saga* and the Late Romances of William Morris” (*Journal of William Morris Studies* 23, no. 2 [2019]: 33–53), Thomas Spray observes that for both Eiríkr Magnússon and Morris, medieval British and Scandinavian cultures were closely allied. This view was based in part on the resemblances between the first part of *Beowulf* and sections of the *Grettis saga*, and Spray notes that Morris claimed in his lectures that the Icelandic sagas, especially the *Grettir* and *Njáls* sagas, were the record of a people “cognate to our own dominant race.” Spray identifies several echoes of the *Grettis saga* and other Icelandic works in *The Wood Beyond the World* and “Goldilocks and Goldilocks,” especially in their treatment of shape-changing and menacing

dwarfs and other supernatural creatures. He observes that for Morris the Norman invasion had caused a detour from a potential continued unity of Gothic peoples, and concludes that “In *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Roots of the Mountains* and most notably in *The Wood Beyond the World*, Morris could envision alternate histories for the northern nations where no . . . interruptions of the ancestral line could occur” (p. 47).

In “That Robin Hood should bring us John Ball: William Morris’s References to the Outlaw in *A Dream of John Ball* (1888)” (*Journal of William Morris Studies* 23, no. 2 [2019]: 54–65), Stephen Basdeo provides context for the scene in Morris’s historical romance in which the villagers, soon to join John Ball in fighting the oppressions of their feudal lords, listen appreciatively to a ballad of Robin Hood. The figure of Robin Hood had been variously interpreted by earlier commentators, some of whom had even characterized him as a nonpolitical defender of the monarchy. By contrast, Morris was indebted to Joseph Ritson’s 1795 ballad anthology, *Robin Hood*, which infused Ritson’s own pro-French revolutionary sentiments into the medieval outlaw. A further antecedent for Morris’s interpretation had appeared in Keats’s poem “Robin Hood,” which contrasted the natural forest life of Robin and Maid Marian with the greed of contemporary capitalism. Basdeo notes that in Morris’s tale the singing of the Robin Hood ballad directly before the entrance of John Ball is historically symbolic, mirroring the view of nineteenth-century socialists who saw themselves as heirs to an earlier radical pre-socialist lineage, and enabling Morris to “situate his John Ball’s medieval socialism within a romantic revolutionary tradition” (p. 63).

In “Building a Bridge to Nowhere: Morris, the Education of Desire, and the Party of Utopia” (*Utopian Studies* 29, no. 1 [2018]: 44–66), Mark Allison addresses one of the basic questions of recent utopian criticism: should utopias present a blueprint for building a superior society, or alternately, an Althusserian “education of desire” that stimulates the reader’s imagination? For Allison these goals are contradictory, since at least a partial unity of goals is required for action, as evinced by the opening scene of *News from Nowhere*, in which each Socialist League member holds a different view of the end to be attained. Throughout *Nowhere*, Morris confronts these problems both symbolically and practically through the metaphor of the bridge, “a multivalent symbol for utopian desire” (p. 51), which evokes a vision that by definition must be shared with others across time and space. Allison suggests that Morris seeks to build a “Party of Utopia” through Ellen, and that, through their shared attraction to Ellen, readers’ desires are “educated” into political desire for the utopian society of *Nowhere*. A further feature of *Nowhere* is the presence of multiple

alternative incarnations of its author (Guest, Old Hammond, etc.) that paradoxically create consensus, as expounded in Morris's lecture of the same year, "How Shall We Live Then?" in which he argues that his own "self" is a composite of desires that overlap those of his audience. "Building a Bridge to Nowhere" is also a finely written article which would be suitable to assign to students as an example of lucid and graceful prose.

Joe P. L. Davidson's "Between Utopia and Tradition: William Morris's *A Dream of John Ball*" (*The European Legacy* 25, no. 4 [2020]: 389–403) approaches the aporia of utopian studies from the vantage point of Morris's socialist time travel narrative of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. He follows Allison in noting the need to merge the personalizing effects of utopian thinking with practical unity, and suggests that Morris dramatizes a possible solution in the doctrine of fellowship through historical understanding, so that the "unfulfilled utopian dreams left over from past moments of popular revolt are taken up in the struggles of today" (p. 391). As John Ball engages in dialogue with his nineteenth-century visitor, he realizes that his own conception of the effects of the Peasants' Revolt has been simplistic, for after the supplanting of feudalism by capitalism the latter will continue the structures of oppression into the future. Yet the time traveler shares Ball's sense of postponed desire and thus affirms the continuing relevance of his forerunner's vision. Davidson concludes that "Such utopian memory is distinguished by the fact that it does not look back to the past to understand what actually happened but to uncover what failed to happen" (p. 399); the task of the present is to gather up past utopian moments to demonstrate their contemporary relevance.

Finally, two recent books on Morris's social thought in the context of art and ecology deserve mention. *William Morris's Position between Art and Politics* by Professor Grzegorz Zinkiewicz of the University of Lodz, Poland (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Press, 2017) addresses Morris's shifting conception of the relationship between aesthetics and socialism from his early writings onward; and *The Return of Nature: Socialism and Ecology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020) by sociologist John Bellamy Foster devotes three chapters of its monumental Marxist history of environmental thought—"The Art of Labor," "The Movement toward Socialism," and "An Earthly Paradise"—to an exposition of Morris's socialist environmentalism.

In all, the past year's many critical approaches to the writings and art of Dante Rossetti, his fellow Pre-Raphaelites, and William Morris indicate a sustained engagement with visual-verbal interactions and the theoretical and ethical complexities of literary and other utopias. Moreover, even more than in past years, *News from Nowhere* remains the most cited and interpreted

Pre-Raphaelite-influenced text, perhaps indicating its perceived special relevance for our vexed times.