Pre-Raphaelitism, D. G. Rossetti, and the Morris Circle

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The year 2020 brought a special issue on Rossetti's poetry, essay collections on Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics and the works of William Morris, and a new selection of Morris's socialist essays, as well as several critical and biographical articles on F. G. Stephens, D. G. Rossetti, and Morris, among others. I consider these contributions under three headings: "Pre-Raphaelitism," "D. G. Rossetti," and "William Morris and His Circle." As is now the practice, articles entirely devoted to the Pre-Raphaelite poets Elizabeth Siddall and Christina Rossetti have been moved to the year's review of women poets.

Pre-Raphaelitism

Heather Bozant Witcher and Amy Kahrmann Huseby's *Defining Pre-Raphaelite Poetics* (London: Palgrave, 2020) brings a powerful, organizing framework to the vexed issue of defining the features of literary Pre-Raphaelitism, with emphasis on its experimental, intermedial, and politically unconventional features. In their "Introduction: Defining Pre-Raphaelite Poetics," the editors link the familiar Pre-Raphaelite study of nature and appearances to an embrace of plurality, noting the absence of prior critical discussion of the political impli-

cations of the Pre-Raphaelite focus on everyday life and desire for destabilization of prior categories. Asserting the importance of linking form to experimentation and social networking, they seek to define Pre-Raphaelite poetics "away from components and toward an awareness of method, process, and action" (p. 5). The identity of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was upheld through the shared practices of regular meetings, oral recitation, a joint periodical, and mutual critique of one another's works. This emphasis on community, sociability, and political engagement undergirds the movement's bent for disruptive intertextuality, defined as the making of new forms from old through creative multiplication.

These explorations are continued in other essays in the volume. Witcher and Huseby's "Gender Work: The Political Stakes of Pre-Raphaelitism" posits a relationship between the movement's gender politics and its other experimental qualities. The writers first interpret Ford Madox Brown's painting *Work*, with its foregrounded navvies excavating beneath a street while women assume more caregiving roles, as an instance of a more traditional sexist depiction of true labor as masculine. (On the other hand, could the girl depicted as wearing a woman's red dress be a child sex worker rather than a "caregiver"?) They then contrast Brown's painting with Elizabeth Siddall's poem "Lord, May I Come," allegedly written just before her death, and conclude that Siddall reverses convention and gender expectations through attention to her inner self as she resolves "to endure grief though close attention [to] the surrounding landscape as evocative of the world to come" (p. 36). The authors also find female introspection in Christina Rossetti's "The Triad," in which Rossetti expresses distaste for three possible female roles—as highly sexualized, properly married, and discontentedly single; they generously view the poem as a "meditation on the impossibility of social counting. . . . Rossetti suggests that women are an aggregation of such characteristics, one which does not flatten or mass women into a general type or category" (pp. 42–43).

Similarly, Witcher and Huseby suggest that "the sister arts" have been traditionally gendered, with poetry accorded a primary position to be served by the more feminine graces of art and music. By contrast, they note the centrality of music and sound to Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, its kinship to recitation and community, and the importance of its characteristic "hybridity over bifurcating forms." Moreover as poetic painters, Pre-Raphaelite artists broadened the definition of art to include criticism and interpretation, so that their narrativized paintings cross generic boundaries. They conclude that by rereading Pre-Raphaelitism "with an eye toward its political engagements," they "draw attention to the ways that these poet-artists not only transgressed

boundaries—socially, artistically, and formally—but furthered Brown's argument of socioeconomic inequities in *Work*" (p. 52).

John Holmes's "Investigating Intersexuality: Pre-Raphaelite Poetics and the Hermaphrodite Self" similarly explores the expanded views of gender identity characteristic of much Pre-Raphaelite work. Noting that nineteenth-century terms such as "hermaphroditism" and "bisexuality" have now-dated connotations, Holmes employs the broader term "intersexuality" to reflect the more recent emancipatory movement to affirm nonbinary identities. After documenting the extent to which the original Pre-Raphaelites viewed their poems as serious works of inquiry, usually framed as reinterpretations or reshapings of a prior text, artifact, or artwork, he then examines three instances of such "inquiries." In D. G. Rossetti's "Hand and Soul," the artist-protagonist paints his soul in the form of a woman, and Holmes suggests that "Rossetti depicts what would in current terms, appear to be a case of gender dysphoria. . . . Rossetti's story asks us to accept a painting by a man of his own female soul as beautiful" (p. 66). He finds another instance of Pre-Raphaelite inquiry in Walter Deverell's drawing of "Viola and Olivia," which portrays (in contradiction to Shakespeare's text) an imagined love between the disguised Viola and a responsive Olivia. Here Holmes notes that the separation of soul from body is used to portray homosexual love, as in John Tupper's accompanying poem in *The Germ*, which affirms the women's love as "married souls—unmarried here," for love "is of the spirit, clear / Of earth and dress and sex." A third instance occurs in Swinburne's "Hermaphroditus," a series of four sonnets that Holmes describes as "gentle, sympathetic, solicitous" in portraying an intersex being formed from the union of a male youth and a nymph, and Holmes posits that blocked desire is "transcended by the feeling that the hermaphrodite is 'dear'" (p. 77). Holmes concludes, "Even staying alert to the risk of anachronism, there is something surprisingly contemporary and still refreshing about the perspectives on sexuality realized by the Pre-Raphaelites through their poetics of inquiry" (p. 79).

As part of the burgeoning movement to study Victorian poetic musical culture, Mary Arseneau's "Musico-Literary Pre-Raphaelite Poetry" deftly synthesizes a vast and hitherto underexplored subject. Her essay considers the collaborative nature of Victorian musical settings; the degree to which the Pre-Raphaelites interacted through their music with aesthetic, political, and religious movements; and the ways in which new musical settings enabled their poetry to reach additional audiences. She notes that music was an inherent part of Pre-Raphaelite sociability, as several members of the Ford Madox Brown circle gave musical performances; Georgiana Burne-Jones was a talented

pianist; and Morris cultivated early English music, composed a Christmas carol, "Masters in this Hall" (set to an old French dance tune), and, in later life, composed the influential collection *Chants for Socialists*.

Arseneau also makes the case that features of Pre-Raphaelite sensibility influenced turn-of-the-century high-art musical themes and preoccupations, including medievalism, sensual love, the idealization of women, and the use of legends. As the project editor of *Christina Rossetti in Music* (https://biblio.uottawa.ca/omeka2/christinarossettiinmusic/), Arseneau is well positioned to trace later musical settings of Pre-Raphaelite writers, as she notes that Rossetti's "A Birthday" has received at least 113 such settings and that her poems were sought out for accompaniment by many distinguished Victorian and Edwardian composers, including several women. Even "Goblin Market" received a nineteenth-century arrangement and performance by Emmanuel Aguilar in 1880, for which Rossetti worked with the composer to prepare an adapted version. Arseneau cites Maura Ives's interesting observation that this abridged *Goblin Market: A Cantata* removed many of the features that have interested modern critics, including the explicitly sexual nature of the temptation, the close identification of the two sisters, and the final reintegration into society of a redeemed Laura; the cantata thus—"with Christina Rossetti's explicit approval—revises, remediates, and interprets Christina's masterpiece poem" (p. 171). Arseneau concludes that "Pre-Raphaelite poetry's relevance and appeal today cannot be doubted in light of both the impressive Pre-Raphaelite presence in the music repertory and the number of musical compositions based on Pre-Raphaelite poems that have been created continuously since the nineteenth century" (p. 173).

Robert Wilkes's "'Of Chivalry and Deeds of Might': Reviving F. G. Stephens's 'Lost' Arthurian Poem" introduces a hitherto unknown early Pre-Raphaelite poem, an uncompleted dream narrative from 1849 in which the protagonist is transported to a medieval world where he joins Arthur and Gawaine on a journey. Wilkes argues that Stephens, perhaps the most erudite of the Brotherhood, was also the first member of the Brotherhood to respond creatively both to the Arthurian legends and to Tennyson's poetry. He finds in Stephens's Arthurian poem anticipations of later Pre-Raphaelite pictorialism and attention to natural detail, as well as its focus on virtuous knighthood, homosocial bonding, and the contrasts between a premodern age and the industrial present. Wilkes compares Stephens's poem with its companion artwork of the same year, "Morte d'Arthur," and notes that Stephens's early appropriation of Arthurian themes in both genres probably influenced the tone and subject matter of later works by Edward Burne-Jones, D. G. Rossetti, and William

Morris: “The poem looks backward to the medieval past, but also forward by writing about an archaic subject with immediacy and realism” (p. 139).

D. G. Rossetti

Victorian spiritualism has inspired considerable recent attention, as shown in the interest in William Michael Rossetti’s séance diary at the University of British Columbia Library, first explored in a 2015 article by Andrew Stauffer, “Speaking with the Dead: The Séance Diary of William Michael Rossetti” (*JPRS* 24 [2015]: 36–43). J. B. Bullen and Rosalind White are now preparing a full edition of this text with annotations and commentary, as anticipated in their “Communication with the Dead: The Séance Diary of W. M. Rossetti” (*JPRS* 29 [Fall 2020]: 9–11). Bullen and White detail D. G. Rossetti’s early interest in the return of spirits (palingenesis) as evinced in his paintings and drafts of “The Blessed Damozel,” as well as his friendships with several spiritualists and practitioners of the period, such as Mary, William, and Anna Mary Howitt; his friend J. M. Whistler; and his later patrons, Georgina and William Cowper-Temple. William’s diary records twenty such séances held in various settings from 1865 to 1868 with a variety of attendees, including Fanny Cornforth and Jane Morris. At these, the “spirits” were grilled at length on practical details, although Dante also invoked the “spirit” of Lizzie Siddall to learn if she was now content in an afterlife and whether, as in “The Blessed Damozel,” he could join her in this post-death realm (yes, but he would not see her for some time). Bullen and White note a similar occultism in Rossetti’s *Beata Beatrix*, begun around 1864 and originally titled “Beatrice in a Death Trance,” linking Beatrice’s death beside the Arno with Siddall’s beside the Thames.

A contrasting discussion of Rossetti’s literary response to his wife’s death appears in Brian Donnelly’s “Dante G. Rossetti, the Little Green Book and the Dispute with Death” (*Victoriographies* 10, no. 1 [March 2020]: 12–32). Here Donnelly examines the three central poems in the notebook Rossetti ordered exhumed from Elizabeth Siddal’s grave in 1869 and finds that all are united by “the language of exile and return, of burial and retrieval” (p. 12). These poems are “Dante at Verona,” a narrative informed by the exile of Rosetti’s father, Gabriele, and Rossetti’s own sense of severance from a beloved; “A Last Confession,” a tale of the speaker’s near madness and violence at his imagined rejection by a desired object; and “Jenny,” which in contrast to several recent readings, Donnelly interprets as a poem in which an alienated speaker *identifies with* (rather than distinguishes himself from) an abject female figure. Donnelly also traces themes of alienation and death as consistently present in other Rossetti poems, especially in “The Stream’s Secret,” composed during

the period of the exhumation, in which the speaker entreats a wandering stream to convey a message from the absent beloved but is ultimately faced with the futility of such an effort. Donnelly concludes, "While throughout his career . . . Rossetti's work is dominated by the themes of love and loss, these seem to crystallise around the little green book and the three great poems, the seeds of which it contained" (p. 30).

In "Something I Do Not Know Again": Unearthing Abjection in Dante Rossetti's 'Jenny,'" Nicholas Dunn-McAfee (*JPRS* 29 [Fall 2020]: 12–26) approaches the complicated issue of the narrator's attitude toward the sleeping prostitute through the lens of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, that is, the subjective horror that the individual experiences when confronted with rejected, cast-off aspects of identity. Identifying the scholar/speaker's many evasions, blurrings, and failures to confront his own ambivalent emotions, Dunn-McAfee traces the ways in which he experiences a "breakdown in the distinction between the self and other as the speaker fluctuates between casting-off and embracing Jenny." He identifies ways in which Rossetti's revisions deleted the earlier version's more eroticized language, explores the narrator's consistent lack of affect and control throughout, and identifies how the latter's analyses of the causes of prostitution veil a threat to himself as well as to Jenny. Dunn-McAfree's remarks on the inconclusiveness of the poem's final scene seem convincing: "'Jenny' confronts us with a particular breakdown of meaning that—with thorough interrogation—can be recognized but cannot be resolved."

In "Glasstexts: Seeing through Rossetti's Material World" (*Victoriographies* 10, no. 1 [2020]: 33–51), Dinah Roe traces Rossetti's attitude toward the difficulties of representation by contrasting three poems in which a character, or speaker, attempts to discern written images inscribed on glass. Noting that these embody "the complex interplay between transitivity and reflection that defines the experience of reading itself" (p. 33), she dissects the meanings embedded in three poems in which a woman writes, is associated with, or fails to discern messages inscribed on glass: the early sonnet "Words on the Window-Pane"; a poem from Rossetti's 1870 volume, "Jenny"; and his late ballad "Rose Mary." In the first of these, glass writing forms an image of fragile but precious literary transmission, whereas in "Jenny," the writing on the prostitute's mirror disfigures her image and prevents both her and the speaker from gazing clearly through or within her glass, perhaps suggesting Rossetti's sense of "the limitations of the male perspective" (p. 42). In "Rose Mary," the heroine's "sinful eyes" misread the images on the magic beryl stone, thus causing the deaths of her lover and herself, as the flawed medium of the crystal prompts flawed

interpretations. Roe thus finds a clear progression in these "glasstexts" toward pessimism about the transparency of words, as the later the date of the poem, the "more skeptical it becomes about the word's ability to adequately reflect or see through the problems of representation" (p. 34).

In "Brainwork and Community in 'Eden Bower'" (*Victoriographies* 10, no. 1 [2020]: 90–107), Heather Bozant Witcher argues for the collaborative nature of Rossetti's writing practices as shown in his correspondence with his brother, sister Christina, and friends (W. B. Scott, Ford Madox Brown, William Morris, and A. C. Swinburne) during the 1869 composition of "Eden Bower." Several of these correspondents offered advice, especially William and Christina, and Witcher traces the drastic improvements to the poem over successive drafts, noting the gradual smoothing out of metrical patterns, the increased appeal for audience involvement, and the heightening of the poem's dramatic contrasts through the use of the "inner standing point" (later famously referenced in the poet's remarks regarding "Jenny"). She finds that the ballad form—"with its emphasis on community and rhythmic sound—foregrounds Rossetti's fraternal brainwork, with its reliance upon community and sociability" (p. 101). Further, the emphatic, syncopated trochaic refrains (1881: "Sing Eden Bower! / Alas the hour!") call attention to "the tension between the boldness of Rossetti's erotic choice and the lamentation of Adam's fall" (p. 103). Witcher observes that the sensory and interior nature of this and other poems in the volume presents a modern interiorized subject, while also providing precursors for Morris's "chants" of the 1880s and 1890s, which use rhythmically inspiring lyrics as a means of creating social fellowship.

In "Unity and/or Disunity in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poetry: Proto-Aestheticism, Cultural Politics, and Italian Nationalism at the Victorian Mid-Century" (*Victoriographies* 10, no. 1 [2020]: 52–70), Vicky Greenaway explores Rossetti's Italian writings as departures from the dominant Victorian concern with affirming Italian political nationalism and the prospect of a unified Italy. As background, Greenaway notes the importance of contemporary literature as a vehicle for Italian nationalism, as in the face of bans on political speech, "culture becomes not only the argument for unity within nationalist rhetoric, it becomes the vehicle for that rhetoric" (p. 56). Nonetheless, when asked by Hall Caine, then preparing a lecture on the latter's work, to confirm the political motivation of his *Early Italian Poets*, Rossetti categorically refused. Greenaway shows that instead—in contrast to his father Gabriele's lifelong dedication to the unity of his homeland—Rossetti's Italian poems and translations present instances of separateness and failed resolution. Greenaway then explores several writings on Italian themes: "Dantis Tenebrae," Rossetti's sonnet in

memory of his father; his translation of the *Vita Nuova*; "Dante at Verona"; "The Blessed Damozel"; and the troubled and violent "A Last Confession." "Dantis Tenebrae" reads his father's legacy in aesthetic and mystical rather than political terms; in the *Vita Nuova*, "Art and the Ideal" are firmly opposed to what the earth and material world can provide; the protagonist of "Dante at Verona" is socially and politically isolated as he completes his greatest work; and "The Blessed Damozel" represents "an attempt at dialogue in which the words of the two participants never meet" (p. 59). "A Last Confession" supports Greenaway's paradigm most directly, as the Italian revolutionary soldier murders his child-protégé when she becomes old enough to assert her own preferences and (in his perception) choose an Austrian lover. Eliding the horrific implications of the poem's apparent sympathy for its soldier/murderer protagonist, Greenaway summarizes, "That Rossetti produces such a negative account of an Italian nationalist exile at this date (1848) is remarkable and shows how far out of line he was with the typical cultural rhetoric of Italy and Italian unification" (p. 69). She argues that this valorization of the disunity of "art from politics, of ideal from reality, of signifier from signified" (p. 67), combined with Rossetti's early Aestheticism, thus helped create the preconditions for a later Decadent cosmopolitanism.

In "'The very sky and sea-line of her soul': Nature, Destruction, and Desire in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Poems*" (*Victoriographies* 10, no. 1 [2020]: 71–89), Serena Trowbridge argues that, in contrast to the enhancing floral imagery of Rossetti's paintings, poems such as "Jenny" and "The House of Life" present a more complex, abstractly symbolic view of nature. In "Jenny," Trowbridge finds that "Rossetti draws, if obliquely, on environmental concerns" as the prostitute despoiled by man is paralleled with the contamination of her London environment. Trowbridge then examines the imagery of "The House of Life" in detail, noting that the shifting and uncertain features of the natural environment obtrude into the sequence in ways that extend beyond mere "pathetic fallacy" (p. 77), as the sequence moves from an aesthetic delight in beauty shadowed by an awareness of death to resignation in the face of a natural cycle lacking comfort or ultimate meaning. An intrinsic, disturbing aspect of this negative intertwining of nature and humanity is embodied in human sexual emotions, since for Rossetti, "[t]he female body has an uncomfortable relation to nature, being both part of it and corrupted by it, as well as contaminating it and, by extension, humanity" (p. 86). The poem's conclusion is especially bleak, for while in "Newborn Death" (sonnet 99), "Love, Song, and Art" may mingle transiently within nature, the outcome must be always, unrelentingly, Death. Appropriately, Trowbridge notes that even in the final sonnet, "The

One Hope," Rossetti posits that "only a pantheistic faith in oblivious nature can offer [an uncertain] solace" (p. 87).

William Morris and His Circle

The Routledge Companion to William Morris appeared this year under my editorship with an introduction and twenty-two chapter essays. This 534-page volume, with its fifty-two color plates and sixty additional illustrations (many hitherto unreproduced or photographed by the contributors), is divided into five major sections: "Morris's Life, Family and Environs," "Art Preservation, Interior Design and Adaptation," "Literature: Poetry, Art, Translation, and Fantasy," "Literature and Socialism," and "Book Collecting and Design." It is a tribute to the versatility and originality of Morris's endeavors in many directions, as well as to the expertise of the volume's authors, that so much genuinely new material continues to surface a 125 years after his death. Since I cannot review all twenty-two chapters here, I concentrate on those that most directly concern Morris's literary works.

In the first section, "Morris's Life, Family, and Environs," Michael Robertson's "Morris's Biographies" (chapter 1) simultaneously explores three topics: Morris's life, his biographers and critics, and the art of biography itself. He assesses each of the three great biographies—those by J. W. Mackail, E. P. Thompson, and Fiona MacCarthy—but also usefully notes the many other contributions provided along the way by Morris's family, political associates, editors, critics, and less-remembered biographers. Robertson points out Mackail's striking silence regarding Morris's private life and cites the counterbalancing contributions made to understanding Morris's personal qualities by May Morris, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Bernard Shaw, and J. Bruce Glasier. He explicates prior debates over the degree to which Morris's socialism was Marxist and revolutionary and traces the rise of feminist criticism in the context of revelations about the Morrises' private life, discussing more recent contributions by Jan Marsh, Wendy Parkins, and (especially) Marsh and Frank C. Sharp's 2012 *Collected Letters of Jane Morris*. In conclusion, Robertson applauds the originality and agenda of Fiona MacCarthy's 1995 *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* "to present Morris in all his complexity," noting that hers is a characteristically contemporary biography in its plenitude and "novelistic concern with character," upholding John Updike's observation that such recent biographies, in their rich detail and attention to setting, approach "novels with indexes" (p. 35).

In "Morris, Gender, and the Woman Question" (chapter 3), I suggest that Morris's views on gender, sexuality, and women's roles developed largely in parallel with his life experiences, family relationships, and formulation of

socialist ideas. If he was never fully a feminist in the modern sense, a comparison of his earlier and later literary works and public statements reveal that he adapted significantly in response to his experiences as husband, father, and political activist. Moreover, May Morris's career, which extended into the third decade of the twentieth century, can be viewed as the embodiment of several of his ideals for women of the future. Morris's literary works pay special heed to the psychological oppressions experienced by women within a patriarchal society, and his reflections on gender relations in *News from Nowhere* offer a nuanced response to the avant-garde socialist-feminist ideals of his day. His last completed prose romance, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, notably presents a genuinely socialist feminist view of an egalitarian communal society, in which equals of both sexes combine their efforts for the common good.

Martin Stott's "'What came we forth for to see that our hearts are so hot with desire': Morris and Iceland" (chapter 5) discusses Morris's 1871 and 1873 *Journals of Travel in Iceland* in many contexts: biographically, as a transformative experience; as a source for his narrative poems and romances; as an expression of his Icelandic readings and translations of medieval Icelandic literature; and as a partial influence on his developing political views. In addition to tracing Morris's itineraries and emotions during his journeys, Stott examines some of the poetry these inspired and considers the *Journals*' belated publication history and the reactions of modern critics. He also documents the favorable response of Icelanders to Morris's visits, his fund-raising campaign on behalf of Iceland during the famine of 1882, and the moving tributes paid to Morris by Icelanders at his death. He records May Morris's three later visits to the island (in 1924, 1926, and 1931) and explores the continuing resonance of Morris's eco-socialism with the platform and ideals of contemporary Icelandic Greens, including a former prime minister. Stott also moves beyond Morris's Victorian period to consider earlier and later accounts of Iceland, especially those of W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice (*Letters from Iceland*, 1937) and most recently of Lavinia Greenlaw (*Questions of Travel*, 2011), and the phenomenon of popular literature set in Iceland as represented by J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and the television series by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, *Game of Thrones* (2016–2019).

In the section "Literature, Poetry, Art, Translation, and Fantasy," Elizabeth Helsinger's "A Question of Ornament: Poetry and the (Lesser) Arts" (chapter 10) probes the question of what constitutes "ornament" (as conceived by Morris and other aestheticians of his century) and explores how Morris altered his use of ornamentation in successive poetic works. Helsinger argues that forms of "peculiar intensities, repetitions, and compulsive patterning" (p. 265)

are central to Morris's early work but are modulated in *The Earthly Paradise* to cultivate a sense of unfulfilled desire that, in his later works, will be used to advocate for political change. She then observes that Morris's longest unbroken narrative, *Sigurd the Volsung*, represents an altered view of ornamentation as a form of popular art that moves its audience to action; thus, *Sigurd*'s total design is conveyed through a propulsive meter that enforces a relentless cycle of fate even as its verbal surfaces signal the saga's "social, aesthetic, and ethical otherness" (p. 269). The poem's verbal figures resemble Morris's designs of the period in giving a sense of movement through patterned repetitions, prolongations, scene patterning, and repeated invocations of the narrative as tale, suggestive of a cycle whose readers must enact "a tale still to be told" (p. 271). She concludes that Morris's new form of ornament is devoted to prolonging his readers' expectations "even beyond the needs of the poem" (p. 272) and into a revolutionary future, in accord with his aims in the final decades of his life.

David Latham's "Making Pictures: Pre-Raphaelite Poetry and Its Reception" (chapter 11) tackles a major topic: What precisely is Pre-Raphaelitism in poetry, and how do Morris's works participate in this movement? Using John Ruskin's concept of "grotesque idealism," imagery that reaches toward mysterious truths not rationally accessible, and Walter Pater's identification of "convulsed intensity" and "opposite excellences" in Morris's early poetry, Latham provides fresh readings of major poems of the *Defence of Guenevere* and contrasts the intense imagery and tone of Morris's early writings with that of the narrative poems of his middle period, *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*. In these, Morris moves from the lyric poetry of unresolved tensions to "a narrative surface of clear plotline," which Latham characterizes as "a return to the origins of art in terms of archetype and mythology." In their measured rhythms, these anticipate the pace and ornamentation of his later prose romances and help "develop the prose poems as a new genre of art" (p. 288). Moreover, through the *Earthly Paradise*'s frame of Nordic and Greek tales, integration is regained through the songs and stories of our communal roots, a perception later translated into Morris's lectures on art and socialism.

Latham finds Morris's last epic, *Sigurd the Volsung*, to be an innovative combination of hexameter rhythms and rugged Anglo-Saxon alliterative lines that expresses an ethos of self-sacrifice for the good of the community. *Poems by the Way* draws together verses composed over thirty years that anticipate the concerns of his lectures, romances, and designs; in shifting emphasis from love to art, moreover, these provide a means of finding hope through the sharing of tales. Finally, Latham provides a close reading of the ornamental syntax of the opening lines of the prose romance *Child Christopher*, organized to evoke

an experience through imagery rather than grammar. He argues that in minimizing dramatic conflict to represent, instead, a shared community of language, Morris's late romances resemble *Poems by the Way* and, in conclusion, suggests that these should be viewed as Morris's final major poetic works.

Phillippa Bennett's "Rewilding Morris: Wilderness and the Wild in the Last Romances" (chapter 14) argues that Morris's last romances, from *The Glittering Plain* (1891) through *The Sundering Flood* (1897), feature ecologically and socially revolutionary content, offering not closure but inspiration (even disruption) to the conventional expectations of realist fiction and the society that has produced it. Characters in the late romances engage with nature in its less settled "wilderness" aspects, as well as with the "wildnesses" within society and their own selves. They must engage with overwhelming spaces without being intimidated by them and must learn to read the wilderness signs that indicate danger or safety. Most important, humans must understand that they are a part of the wilderness, not something alien to it; the protagonists of *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* and *The Sundering Flood*, among others, experience an uninhibited physical joy within nature and commune with wood and nature spirits who reinforce their strength and sense of identity. Other values in this alternative world include nudity (as a symbol and form of physical renewal), mutual sexual feeling (as a positive expression of our animal nature), and, conversely, the "courage to travel alone" in pursuit of one's quest, even at the cost of renunciation and sacrifice. Morris's protagonists also return from their journeys to fulfill active roles in their communities, and Bennett suggests that if we desire a wilder, more authentic world, Morris's last romances grant "a vision of what that world could be" (p. 361).

In "Windy, Tangible, Resonant Worlds: The Non-Human Fantasy of William Morris" (chapter 15), John Plotz attempts to account for the strangeness, as well as the appeal, of Morris's late romances. For Plotz, late-Victorian fantasy is, in part, a reaction against Darwinism and realist fiction and is allied with fin-de-siècle decadence; accordingly, Morris's imagined worlds offer hope, not for our world as it now is but rather (in Kafka's words) "plenty of hope, only not for us." (p. 369). Morris's characters share an intuitive knowledge of these worlds, with a sense of full immersion, whereas his readers can only feel disconnection from a "world without us," framed as the antithesis to our capitalist, liberal-bourgeois existence. After considering the origins of prose fantasy from the late eighteenth century onward, Plotz argues that the "tangibility, resonance, and nonhuman" (p. 369) aspects of Morris's imagined worlds have been more influential than is generally credited, since modern prose fantasy began only in the aftermath of Morris's romances, with their neomedieval

settings, multiple subplots, and focus on northern-European mythologies. Whereas authors such as Tolkien and C. S. Lewis import a recognizable this-world moral scheme into their imagined secondary worlds, Plotz finds that Morris pioneered a vision of true alterity in which the "people-for-the-world" inhabit a truly dehumanized, and thus "planetary," space.

Paul Acker's "A Very Animated Conversation on Icelandic Matters: The Saga Translations of William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon" (chapter 13) follows the impressive trajectory of Morris's more than thirty saga translations. Acker first discusses Morris's early readings in English translations of Old Norse literature and the influence of such sources on his early romance "Lindenborg Pool" and two tales in *The Earthly Paradise*. He describes the content and manner of Morris's studies in Icelandic, beginning in 1869 under Magnússon's tutelage, and details their early joint publications, *The Story of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue*, *The Story of the Dwellers at Eyr*, *The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs*, and *Three Northern Love Stories*, with its Pre-Raphaelite emphasis on romantic conflicts and ill-fated love. Acker provides details of Morris's concurrent work with calligraphic manuscripts, some left incomplete and others finished in collaboration with Charles Fairfax Murray, George Wardle, and others; these show his care with historical details, as when in a leaf of the *Ynglinga saga*, he has penciled in seven panels with the names of the Norse gods. Acker next considers Morris's archaized word choices, suggesting that Morris's method is more successful in translating poems, such as those from the Elder Edda, than in his longer prose narratives. In the 1890s, he and Magnússon returned to the task of publishing much of their joint work in the six-volume *Saga Library* (1891–1901), and Acker concludes that, even in old age, Morris retained his identification with the bluntness and broad humor of the sagas (as well as with its oft-beleaguered, but courageous, heroes).

Several articles in the section "Literature and Socialism" focus on interpretations of Morris's utopia *News from Nowhere*. In "*News from Nowhere* in the Museum of Literary Interpretations" (chapter 17), Tony Pinkney takes the reader on a tour of possible alternative readings of Morris's most famous work. His Althusserian-Machereyan and, more broadly, postmodern method of analysis involves a dialectic of probing for possible contradictions, gaps, or oppositional responses to the text's surface. As Pinkney demonstrates, the possibilities for such alternate interpretations are legion. True to his desire to link methodology and text, Pinkney turns to the narrative for features of the new society that can be also used to interpret *News from Nowhere* itself: the lack of haste, decentralization, and the inhabitants' "intense earnestness in getting to the bottom of some matter which in time past would have been thought quite

trivial" (p. 406). Similarly open-ended is the issue of the genre of *Nowhere*, which as a "utopian romance" and dream vision suggests the reconciliation of opposites; however, the new society struggles to contain its disagreements, and its triadic generic structure is mirrored in the text's several unhappy, even murderous, erotic triangles. Remarking that *Nowhere* contains a greater profusion of characters than other utopias, Pinkney notes that these exemplify the text's message of equality and decentralization but can unexpectedly reveal hidden discontents, as when Guest, on returning to his own nineteenth-century world, hurries past the prematurely aged worker who salutes him in shock and discomfort—possibly even, Pinkney hints, an image of himself.

A final section, on the "Gothic," explores Guest's presence as a "ghost" within Nowhere, evoking a sense of the claustrophobia characteristic of gothic fiction, as well as Guest's unstable identity and presence, which inspire imagery of evil spells (and even a final exorcism). Pinkney concludes his quasi-psychoanalytic readings with the postulate that an essentially anarchist, or freely associative, quality of Morris's text demands the decentered interpretations that have dominated critical approaches to Morris's work since the 1970s and will inevitably take new forms in the future.

Elizabeth Miller's "William Morris and the Literature and Socialism of the *Commonweal*" (chapter 18) explores the ways in which Morris promoted an expansive, internationalist, and ecologically minded version of nineteenth-century socialism through the artistry of his *Commonweal* writings. She examines the newspaper's origins, its cosmopolitan content, and its appeals to affect and sensuous experience in the three important literary works serialized in its pages. Miller observes that "Pilgrims of Hope" marks a transition between Romantic views of nature and late-Victorian social protest poetry and, as "an eco-poetic, collectivist epic" (p. 427), the poem's merging of Anglo-Saxon alliteration with epic hexameters helps construct an internationalist literary tradition. In its appeal to "Earth" as the repository of memory beyond our own lives, "Pilgrims" also envisions a posthuman world: "Till shrunk are the floods of thine ocean and thy sun is waxen pale." Likewise, *A Dream of John Ball* (1886–1887) employs a dream vision of time travel to explore another revolutionary moment, that of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, and since Morris's medieval period is not idealized but presented as a time of political persecution and oppression, it thus forms a fitting historical analogue to Morris's own day. Although the Peasants' Revolt is local, John Ball's words reach out to a wider and, thus, international world, offering solace and hope to the nineteenth-century visitor who has experienced the ravages of global capitalism.

Finally, in Morris's 1890 *News from Nowhere*, he presents an ecotopia that posits humanity as a part of the natural world. Like "The Pilgrims of Hope" and "A Dream of John Ball," its goal is to persuade his contemporary *Commonweal* readers to focus on their ultimate goals and interconnectedness rather than on temporary divisions. In this, it succeeds, for Morris's vision of a new society was widely inspirational in the 1890s and thereafter, even for those whose immediate politics differed significantly from his own. Miller notes that its serial publication encouraged a view of history as open-ended and ongoing, thus encouraging a transhistorical and internationalist vision of socialism. In addition, its imagery of gardens, orchards, and hay harvests; its critique of extractive capitalism and coal-smoke pollution; and its ecological vision of the interpenetration of nature and humanity as enunciated by its central characters all suggest the centrality of natural renewal to his vision of socialism. Miller concludes that in all three literary works written for *Commonweal*, Morris creates a model of humanity that "extends backward into the past, forward into the future, sideways to other nations, and upward and downward into the very atmosphere and soil that constitute the earth" (p. 435).

Patrick O'Sullivan's "Desire and Necessity: William Morris and Nature" (chapter 19) presents Morris's views on nature and the environment against a background of recent environmental thought. After explaining the divergences between several factions of environmentalists, all of which focus on economic scarcity (that is, demand), he defines eco-socialists as those who identify the problem in the tendency of economic systems to overproduce. The remedy to alleged scarcity, then, is the overthrow of capitalism, and, against this background, O'Sullivan finds Morris to be the most "green" of the nineteenth-century utopian theorists. Morris's environmental ideas address most of the issues later publicized by radical environmentalists, including the advocacy of simplicity in lifestyle, production for need alone, use of alternative technologies, local production for local consumption, and respect for the natural environment. In *Nowhere*, the fullest embodiment of these views, Morris projects a society without cash exchange, in which goods and services are provided on the basis of need, decisions are made directly, not through representatives, and the rights of dissidents are preserved. Food is grown locally and intensively throughout the city, the landscape has been altered through woodland management, rivers have been purified from pollution, and wastes and wildernesses are carefully preserved. O'Sullivan concludes that Morris's assertion of our ethical obligation to protect nature from exploitation may ultimately be his greatest contribution to the future.

In "Morris and Marxist Theory" (chapter 20), Owen Holland identifies the many correlations between Morris's socialist views and those of Karl Marx and "Marxism," placing them within the context of competing late-nineteenth- century socialist parties and the views of later commentators. In the first of the chapter's five subsections, "Marx, Morris and the Socialist Movement in Fin-de-Siècle Britain," Holland notes that despite the marginality of socialist views of the time, Morris consistently gave Marx credit for the latter's insights on labor, class struggle, and the historical development of capitalism, as well as for the establishment of socialism "on a scientific basis." Holland also points out that the Socialist League formed its closest contacts with the Marxist (as opposed to the anarchist) groupings on the Continent and that Morris served as a Socialist League delegate to the 1889 Paris conference held by the Marxist Workers' Party of Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue, later recognized as the founding conference of the Second International. In section 2, "Socialism from the Root Up," Holland explains the centrality of Marx and "scientific socialism" to Belfort Bax and Morris's *Commonweal* series of the same title. The authors devoted an entire chapter to expounding Marx's theories of use, exchange, and surplus value, and the *Communist Manifesto*, scientific socialism, and the Marxist German Workers' Party are featured in their historical account of the development of socialism. In section 3, "Romanticism and Marxism: Morris's and Marx's Elective Affinities," Holland traces some commonalities between the ideas of the two socialists, both indebted to a strain of revolutionary-utopian romanticism, who nonetheless assumed contrasting roles: Marx as a theorist of alienation, production, and revolution; and Morris as a propagandist for revolutionary communism with a deep grasp of the social reality of alienation.

Section 4, "Alienation, Production and Sensuous Emancipation," compares Morris's and Marx's reflections on the sensory deprivation of workers. Holland notes the emphasis on sensuous experience central to *News from Nowhere*, including its repeated references to sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste, an immersion through which "the aestheticism of Morris's pre-socialist years takes on definite political value as a rhetorical means of persuasion" (p. 424). Similarly, both Morris and Marx assert the human need for beauty; Marx uses aesthetic production as a model of nonalienated labor, and Morris endorses the Ruskinian maxim that "Art is man's expression of his joy in labour" ("The Nature of Gothic"). Finally, both assume that nonalienated labor will be desirable and sought for its own sake; under communism, the worker becomes, in Marx's words, "a different subject" (p. 477), and, for Morris, labor and leisure will blend into one. In section 5, "Revolution, Dual Power and the Transition

Beyond Capitalism," Holland asserts the importance of Morris's commitment to revolution, conceived as "a change in the basis of society" (p. 478) instituted by workers themselves, a view that led him to reject alleged solutions that failed to attack the structural unity of the capitalist order. The "drama and intensity" of the account of revolution in *News from Nowhere* also exemplifies Marx's description of periods of "dual power" (p. 479)—revolutionary eras during which new representative bodies compete for authority with an existing state. Finally, Marx and Morris both share an ultimate goal: the withering of the state as an instrument of oppression. Holland concludes that although Morris does not reproduce Marx's formulations exactly, the striking affinities in their thought help illuminate the grounds of Morris's political imagination.

In the final of the *Morris Companion*, Yuri Cowan's "William Morris's Book Collecting" (chapter 21) explores ways in which Morris's collecting practices illuminate his artistic and literary activities. Morris's medieval texts show his interest in all aspects of the past, including hunting, gardening, painting, dyeing, medicine, and cookery. Although Morris's chief period of collecting was directly before and during his work on the Kelmscott Press (1889–1896), he had begun to collect rare items much earlier, since an early catalogue of 1876 includes several incunables and Icelandic works. Cowan notes that, for Morris, a library was always a social environment where he discussed books with his coworkers and friends, so that his collaborators in design, such as Emery Walker and Edward Burne-Jones, also benefited from access to his collections. Moreover, he clearly enjoyed giving books as presents, as testified by the many inscribed copies to his family, friends, and fellow authors. He also kept copies of Kelmscott Press books for himself, especially vellum editions, not all of which have been located, and, in a few cases, made up bound collections of proof illustrations and other texts in preparation for potential catalogues of incunabula and rare woodcuts. Many of his books remained "uncut," that is, with the edges untrimmed, an instance of Morris's preservationist instincts and care with binding. Cowan concludes that although scholars have explored Morris's indebtedness to more famous literary sources, Morris "also built up his own canon, a more wide-reaching and inclusive one, exemplified in the great diversity of his reading interests" (p. 498), and that, in his writings and personal life, he created a community within which rare books could be shared and experienced.

Finally, in "William Morris and the Kelmscott Press" (chapter 22), Nicholas Frankel explores Morris's ambitions in founding the Kelmscott Press, which included not only his stated aim, the desire to produce books that "would be a pleasure to look upon as pieces of printing and arrangement of type" (p. 501),

but also the creation of art works that would provide an alternative to the printing practices of his day, since the cooperative labor practices of the Kelmscott Press radically departed from the isolating, near-industrial conditions under which Victorian books were generally produced. Kelmscott books also deemphasized single authorship; a few even lack title pages, ceding importance to the elaborated colophon that emphasized the facts of printing and bookmaking, so that even a literary work became a communal enterprise. Previous critics have remarked on the significant materiality of Morris's Kelmscott Press books, and to these insights, Frankel adds recognition of the importance of Morris's plant designs and floriated forms created for the Press. These patterns evoke our alliance with nature and remind us of "the outward face of the earth" ("Some Hints on Pattern Designing") and its patterns of growth and change.

Frankel notes that it took some time for Morris to figure out how to replicate the dynamic effects of his wallpapers and fabrics within the confines of a book, as he experimented with chintz covers and other discarded bindings and initially eschewed all use of color. Instead, Kelmscott Press volumes, through their use of foliated printed borders, create a natural and protective habitat for the text, and the intertwining boundaries between border and text simultaneously immerse the reader in both its immediate language and the outer world. In addition to heightening the meanings within Morris's own works through their designs, his Kelmscott Press versions also reinterpret the works of others, for example, lending new political urgency to the opening lines of Keats's "Endymion" and exemplifying through its designs the poem's claim that imagination may "wreath a flowery band to bind us to the earth." Frankel concludes that Kelmscott Press books not only strive to reclaim the printed word from the constraints of capitalist production but also create a symbiosis between the natural environment, text, and reader, so that a printed book may, in Morris's words in "The Lesser Arts," be made to "look as natural, nay as lovely, as the green field, the river bank, or the mountain flint."

In addition, several 2020 journal articles merit mention. In "Morris and Masculinity: Re-Reading 'Riding Together" (*JPRS* n.s. 29 [Spring 2020]: 27–47), Veronica Alfano interprets Morris's early *Defence of Guenevere* poem against a background of Victorian assumptions about the gendered nature of poetry. She finds in the poem's restrained tensions and repetitive refrains an ornamental, formal quality increasingly associated with the "female realm of self-reflexive beauty" (p. 31), as opposed to a masculine realm of enterprise and social engagement; however, Alfano argues that form can also assume narrative power, as what seems a distanced account of a beloved comrade's death affords insight

into its devasted protagonist and, thus, "ultimately adumbrates a hybridized form of masculinity which would prove crucial to Morris's poetics and politics" (p. 36). Alfano then considers his later "Chants for Socialists," in which Morris models a "cooperative and balanced masculinity" (p. 39) embodied in lyrical forms "that often signal feminized disengagement" (p. 41), mingling boldness and tenderness and employing feminine images of mothers and homes. Even so, she finds, "the influence of Morris's first volume is still felt at the fin de siècle, as writers employ repetitive balladic forms and shimmering patterns of imagery to resist the Victorian penchant for both the masculinized realm of ambitious narrative and the feminized realm of open-hearted sentiment" (p. 43).

In "'A Love for Old Modes of Pronunciation': Historical Rhyme in Tennyson and Morris" (*Tennyson Research Bulletin* 11, no. 4 [2020]: 305–324), Sarah Weaver examines the rhyming practices of both poets, each of whom sought to preserve older vowel and rhyming pairs in his works, though for somewhat different reasons: Tennyson wished his words to contain echoes of the good aspects of the historical past, and Morris, more radically, desired to revive some portion of the language of England's linguistic ancestors. Both poets studied rhymes carefully; Tennyson, for example, wrote out long lists of possible rhyming words, and both poets used pairings that, according to contemporary critics, were affectedly archaic or simply inaccurate. Using pronunciation guides of the period, Weaver carefully documents the word strings used by both poets, as they often lengthen vowels in accord with prior practice, use diphthongs in alternate ways, stretch the pronunciation of *-y*, and otherwise create strings of related off-rhymes. Since Victorian critics strongly preferred aural to visual rhymes, Weaver suggests that both poets "must have been especially motivated to draw on medieval and early modern language in defiance of critical opinion" (p. 315). She concludes that such rhymes "exert pressure on readers to reshape their speech," forcing the reader either to adopt an alternate usage or to reject it, and thus draw attention "to other ways of talking and, therefore, being" (p. 321).

In "Second Generation Pre-Raphaelitism: The Poetry of *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*" (*Defining Pre-Raphaelite Poetics* [London: Palgrave, 2000]: 83–116), I argue for the importance of this youthful periodical, which despite its disparate contributors projected a mildly progressive and activist stance, as it advocated university reforms, broadly nondoctrinal views of religion, and the extension of further education to women and workers, in addition to championing recent literary works by Tennyson, the Brontës, and Elizabeth Gaskell. More avant-garde, however, and unique for a university magazine were its contributions to original poetry. Morris's poetic sophistication improved radically between his first selection, "Winter Weather" (January), an evocation of knightly

conflict; his more developed exploration of manly combat, "Riding Together" (May); and his dramatic poem with multiple voices based on Malory, "The Chapel in Lyoness" (August). Similarly, the encouragement of D. G. Rossetti's enthusiastic young friends prompted the latter to produce drastically revised and improved versions of three major poems, "The Blessed Damozel," "The Staff and Scrip," and "The Burden of Nineveh." Awareness of the ongoing Crimean War encouraged an ethos of chivalric metaphors and heroic masculinity, so that at least seven poems feature alleged "manly" violence, and the collaborative nature of the venture not only improved its literary originality but brought contacts with important patrons such as Rossetti, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Tennyson. During the brief floruit of *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, it thus not only helped prepare several of its contributors for future educational, literary, and artistic careers but aided in shaping the Pre-Raphaelite poetry of the 1850s and thereafter in accord with its antiestablishmentarian social and aesthetic ideals.

In "Art against Alienation: William Blake, William Morris, and the British New Left" (*Journal of William Morris Studies* 23, no. 4 [2020]: 10–29), John P. Murphy examines the critical reception of Morris during the 1950s and 1960s that enabled his recognition as a major British socialist whose views resembled, but also differed in emphasis from, those of Karl Marx. This recognition was largely effected by writers for the non-Communist *New Reasoner*, such as Kenneth Muir and E. P. Thompson, the Australian leftist editor and Morris biographer Jack Lindsay, and the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye, all of whom paired Morris with William Blake as prophets of humanist, emancipatory socialism as opposed to the more structuralist, determinist Marxism advocated by Louis Althusser and his Continental followers. An influence on this development was the discovery of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, which stressed alienation as an inevitable feature of capitalism that deprived workers of their own natures, labor, and fellowship with their own kind. Accordingly, Morris and Blake were celebrated for fusing their lived experience as craftsmen-artists with a critique of industrial capitalism, creating utopian visions of the productive possibilities of a more fulfilling, post-capitalist existence. Murphy also notes the recent increased appreciation of both Blake and Morris as protoenvironmentalists, as seen in the claims of John Bellamy Foster and others that *News from Nowhere* reflects a new orientation toward nature and the earth.

It has been twenty-two years since the appearance of a one-volume edition of Morris's essays, Norman Kelvin's now-scarce *William Morris on Art and Socialism*. A major gap is thus filled by *William Morris: How I Became a Socialist* (London: Verso, 2020), with introductions by the radical journalist Owen

Hatherley and notes and an editor's introduction by Owen Holland, author of *William Morris's Utopianism* (2017). The collaboration works well, as Hatherley provides an overview of Morris's relevance for contemporary socialist efforts and Holland offers a succinct political biography of Morris and clear account of the distinctiveness of his democratic, anti-imperialist vision within the context of his time. Many of the volume's selections are of lesser-known yet significant essays, such as the 1884 "The Housing of the Poor," the 1885 "Ireland and Italy: A Warning," and the eloquent 1887 "Why We Celebrate the Commune of Paris." Holland's annotations are admirably detailed, so that even those who are familiar with Morris's essays from other editions, such as the *Collected Works*, will want to own this compact and valuable volume.

In conclusion, 2020 brought many skillful and original contributions to an understanding of Pre-Raphaelite literary art in general, as well as of specific works by D. G. Rossetti and William Morris, who were viewed as anticipating the anxieties, aspirations, and critical sensibilities of the present day.