Dante Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism, and the Morris Circle

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Dante G. Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelitism

The year 2022 was a banner year for articles placing Dante Rossetti's poetry in relation to the sister arts of music and painting. Several of these have been conveniently gathered in a special issue of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* (27, no. 2 [2022]), with an introduction by Michael Allis. In his "Roundtable: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Music: Introduction," Allis lists more than a dozen settings of Rossetti's poems by composers from 1893 to 1928, including Claude Debussy's *La damoiselle élue*, Wilberfoss Owst's "The White Ship," and Vaughan Williams's song sequence *The House of Life*. He argues that musical imagery is pervasive throughout Rossetti's art and poetry, as critics have identified its lack of temporality and heightened sensuality with late-century aestheticism, noted the presence of exotic instruments throughout his paintings, and identified the sonorous repetitions of his lines and phrases as inherently musical. Observing that Rossetti's oeuvre, and music itself, is inherently interdisciplinary, Allis concludes with the hope that an understanding of the musical aspects of Rossetti's practice will further the exploration of music's contribution to "the rich interdisciplinary potential of Victorian studies in general" (p. 186).

The succeeding articles confirm this promise. In "Blessed Damozel(s): Ekphrastic Perspectives on Rossetti's Poem and Painting," George Kennasay suggests that although many artistic works of the past depict music, "the traffic is not equal" (p. 187), and fewer poems are represented in graphic art or, until the twentieth century, have inspired paintings also interpreted in music. After reviewing the title poem's revision history (there were four versions) and contemporary reception, he notes artistic renderings by Edward Burne-Jones and Byam Shaw (Kennasay describes the latter's 1906 illustrations as "both gaudy and banal," p. 190), then explores Rossetti's two paintings of the subject in 1877 and 1881 (the latter still in process shortly before his death). Both paintings thus belong to a later phase of Pre-Raphaelite art, "placing more emphasis on imagined ideas than on naturalism—an aesthetic that shades into symbolism" (p. 191); moreover, the poem's use of concrete detail in a context of unstructured space and temporal ambiguity is a poetic equivalent of "the clear

physical detail of the painting . . . combined with its relative lack of perspective" (p. 192).

At this point Kennasay turns to the many musical settings of the poem, ranging from the now-lost 1886 score of Orton Bradley and Claude Debussy's still-performed 1888 *La damoiselle èlue* to Julia Harrison's 1928 *Damozel*, written for performance by women's choirs; a useful accompanying chart documents sixteen such compositions (including two merely orchestral pieces), excluding Debussy's. These vary widely in their ethos and tonalities: Debussy, for example, minimizes the poem's narrative structure and elides its speaker; Arnold Bax includes the entire poem in a highly dramatic, Wagnerian setting; Charlotte Fanning, Lady Ramsay, creates an operatic drama, in which the use of different stanzas sung simultaneously recreates the viewer's experience of the painting in grasping its various elements simultaneously (p. 204). Omitting or selecting aspects of the poem can create entirely opposite effects, from an achieved sense of heavenly union (Reginald Clarke) to a recognition of eternal separation (Fritz Hart). In his conclusion, Kennasay suggests that "there are degrees of 'ekphrasticness' where music is concerned," and that (in line with modern reception theory), "when two works together stand in an ekphrastic relationship, there is the potential for each to redefine the other" (p. 214).

In "Musical Experience in the Bower: D. G. Rossetti, Listening, and Space," Marte Stinis identifies a continuing feature of Rossetti's painting (and, to a lesser extent, his poetry) in the representations of a bower, a visual space enabling Rossetti to explore the commonalities between music and painting through its suggestions of "ideas of immersion, artistic correspondences, and the abstracting of colour and form" (p. 236). Observing that music provided advantages absent from painting, including "the ability to unfold over time, and the unique relationship of performativity between listener and musical piece" (p. 237), she traces Rossetti's development of visual representations of musical elements through three paintings, *The Blue Bower*, *Veronica Veronese*, and *La Ghirlandata*. Noting musical elements in such early works as *The Blue Closet* and *Bocca Baciata*, Stinis explores the 1865 *The Blue Bower*'s use of vivid color, an exotic musical instrument (a koto), and kaleidoscopically tiled background, effects designed to evoke analogies between color and sound current in Rossetti's contemporary circles, as well as to "re-enact on Rossetti's audience a similar effect to that of musical performance" (p. 243).

In partial contrast, Rossetti's 1872 *Veronica Veronese* reflects Pre-Raphaelite interest in Venetian painting during the 1860s and 1870s, leading to deeper "colour relations and effects" in this "study of varied greens," so that the painting

was "no longer just an image of performance, but one which traced . . . the performative moment back to its revered moment of conception" (p. 243). With its enclosing interior, allusion to Venetian painter Paolo Veronese, and image of a woman allegedly in the act of composition (Rossetti's inscription describes its subject as "*le mariage des voix de la nature et de l'âme*"), the portrait becomes "an image of composition, as well as of the 'genius' as composer, as painter (Veronese), and as text" (p. 244). Stinis finds the third painting in the sequence, Rossetti's 1873 *La Ghirlandata*, significant for its evocation of listening and reception, as embodied in the two angels who enter the subject's bower. She notes that the "depiction of a listening figure hints at themes of introspection, reverie, emotionalism, and spiritual subjectivity," and that "without the transference of musical information from performer to listener, the performance is not complete" (p. 247), so that Rossetti's portrayal binds the painting's ability to capture a single moment with music's unfolding of experience over time. Finally, Stinis finds parallels between the inward creative/receptive gaze of these paintings and what critics have elsewhere defined as the "inner standing point" in Rossetti's poetry, as well as anticipations of Henri Bergson's conception of multiple temporalities emanating outward from an inner consciousness. The evocation of the idea of music thus enables Rossetti's "bower" paintings to approach the Paterian ideal by which all art aspires to the condition of music, and through this analogical fusion of painting, poetry, and harmony, to contribute to the musical qualities of the Aesthetic Movement.

In "Picturing Music: Doubling Ekphrasis in Six Rossetti Sonnets," Elizabeth Helsinger explicates the subtleties of Dante Rossetti's portrayals of the relationship of music and song to pictorial art, poetry, and the temporal qualities of consciousness. She is the first to explore so fully this doubling ekphrastic practice—summoning "an elusive music from what is offered to the eye alone" (p. 216)—through his poems on artworks portraying musicianship. Observing that Rossetti's poems are "less interested in evoking the sound of music than in exploring in poetic form what music means," she finds that in his sonnets, picturing the performance of music expresses "its paradoxical relations to a present that can only be apprehended at the moment of its passing" (p. 218).

Helsinger begins with two little-noticed early Rossetti sonnets, both from 1849 (when Rossetti would have been twenty-one years old). "For an Allegorical Dance of Women by Andrea Mantegna" evokes a Renaissance painting of a classical scene in which Apollo, god of poetry and song, pipes to a circle of singing and dancing muses. Helsinger notes that Rossetti's sonnet not only evokes Apollo's (and Mantegna's) experience of the scene but also celebrates "a certain kind of thinking in time, a thinking that takes place with

and through the senses. In the process poetry might be said to be contemplating, in an imaginative act, its earlier condition as music" (p. 221). Though the sestet evokes the painting's "meaning," that meaning is unnamable, since words, music, and their pictorial representations cannot be one; yet in conjuring up the scene through all the senses, readers/viewers can experience "music's fullness in the moment and disappearance in its passing" (p. 222). A second early sonnet, "On a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione," meditates on the famous *Le Concert Champètre*, now ascribed to Titian (and since derided by feminists for its portrayal of two fully clothed men and two naked women in a holiday setting). Helsinger elucidates the painting's genesis in a Theocritean pastoral tradition equating nature and song, as Titian's courtier and herdsman sing while the attendant female muses respectively suggest music and lyric poetry. Romantic poets such as John Keats had postulated a similarly eternal harmony now belated and unavailable to the senses, but Rossetti's sonnet seeks a different effect as he evokes the silence after music's cessation, its "temporal elusiveness, the always already passing sounds of any music inescapably linked to the passing of time" (p. 236). Helsinger then explores analogues in Rossetti's watercolors of the period, such as *The Tune of Seven Towers*, as well as effects in contemporary paintings by Edward Burne-Jones (*Green Summer*, 1864) and J. M. Whistler (*Little White Girl*, exh. 1865), observing that in the 1850s and 1860s music becomes in poetry and art "an object of desire always already lost" (p. 231).

She then considers the four poems of "Willowwood," Rossetti's most overtly musical sonnet sequence, in which the performance of song retrieves the "confused, watery memories of a lost beloved" (p. 231), though also replicating her loss. Evoking the Dantean figure of "Love" as singer-poet, the first two sonnets present "an ekphrasis of a visionary scene" (p. 233) in which the lover views his beloved's face within a well, shadowed by the looming presences of lost hours, "The shades of those our days that had no tongue" (p. 233). Helsinger identifies the third sonnet as itself a song that utilizes all possible forms of verbal music within its strict confines, "so that semantic meaning comes second in our experience of the sonnet's insistent, connected patterns of moving sounds and silences" (p. 234). In the final sonnet, the song ends, the beloved returns to death, and Love himself mourns in sympathetic witness to the speaker's loss, "an image at once tactile, visual, and auditory" (p. 234). In conclusion, Helsinger summarizes Rossetti's melopoetics, or musical-literary criticism, as less a demonstration of verbal music than an ekphrastic mode of thinking through "the experience of music, its strange constructive powers and its bitter-glad elusiveness more than sounded notes or the temporal

structures they realize" (p. 235). For anyone teaching "The House of Life" or its "Willowwood" sequence, Helsinger's article would be an ideal accompanying selection.

Michael Allis's "Reshaping the Ballad: William Wallace's Musical Refiguring of Rossetti's 'Sister Helen'" provides a set-piece illustration of how literary and musical analyses can be mutually illuminating. He notes that Rossetti's revisions to his poem tended to soften the original harshness of his sorceress-subject to emphasize "Sister Helen's" pain at her former lover's perfidy, and that contemporary reviews also expressed qualified sympathy for Rossetti's tortured murderess. Allis then demonstrates a similar effect in Scottish composer William Wallace's symphonic rendition, which balances a musical interpretation of narrative (program music) with more subjective and introspective interludes. Although Wallace provides direct allusions to the poem's sensory data, such as its references to "melting wax" and speeding horses' hooves, he more subtly complements its narrative through a rotational structure that moves insistently toward its climax of revenge and sorrow.

Contemporary music critics had condemned the symphony's subject matter as overly programmatic and unelevated, however; the *Musical Times*, for example, wished the composer had been inspired "by a damsel of more civilized sentiments" (p. 266). Allis argues that such critics were oblivious to Wallace's addition of two subjective and more abstract interludes, which constitute a "clear attempt to inject a certain 'nobility of expression' in his rebalanced re-figuring of Rossetti's poem" (p. 261). Wallace's later lecture of 1899 on "The Scope of Programme Music" asserts his preference for more emotive and abstract renderings, and perhaps to elude further imperceptive critical attacks, Wallace's next symphony, performed in 1901, was titled simply "Symphonic Poem no. 4."

An important related article is Mary Arseneau's "The Victorian Salon and Pre-Raphaelite Melopoetics" (*VP* 60, no. 2 [2022]), which documents the importance of an interdisciplinary salon culture in the transmission of Pre-Raphaelite poetry through musical settings, the inspiring of a late-century English Musical Renaissance, and the establishment of the Royal College of Music. She traces the influence of the bohemian and progressive-leaning Fitzroy Square gatherings hosted by the Ford Madox Brown family from 1866 to 1872 and attended by a wide group of familiars such as the Rossetti siblings, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Holman Hunt, William Morris, and other artists and critics. This more arts-oriented cultural group overlapped the more politically connected Mary Gladstone salon, as many individuals moved in both circles; as an instance, she notes that in 1887, William Michael Rossetti and Lucy

Rossetti hosted a concert featuring the choral cantata, *Scenes from Prometheus Unbound* by Hubert Parry, a regular presence at the Gladstone salon and later head of the Royal College of Music who had set Christina Rossetti's poetry to music. Another frequenter of both circles who with his wife Catherine hosted similar groups in their home was Brown's son-in-law, Francis Hueffer, an important music critic and promoter of Wagnerism as well as what he termed "poetic music," as embodied in the English Musical Renaissance; social reformer Charles Rowley recalled the Hueffer-Brown home as the "focus for all that was excellent and profound in literature and the Arts. . . . All was life and humanity at its best" (p. 219). The cultural symbiosis of late-nineteenth-century musical organizations elevated Pre-Raphaelite poetry to prominence, as the writings of Morris, Christina Rossetti, and Dante Rossetti inspired repeated settings in conjunction with a growing taste for art songs and English folk themes. Arseneau expresses regret at William Michael Rossetti's limitations as a participant and chronicler of the movement's musical reach; for example, he records only forty-three settings of his sister's poetry, whereas later scholars have found 172 (p. 224); nonetheless, this reader is impressed that a busy civil service administrator with heavy familial and literary obligations managed to attend as many musical performances as he did.

Arseneau further suggests that both the Gladstone and Pre-Raphaelite salon circles aided in increasing gender, class, and racial inclusivity. In this context, she adduces their encouragement of female musicians—40 percent of the 172 musical settings of Christina Rossetti's poems were by female composers—and the presence of Britain's most distinguished Black composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, at the Royal College of Music, where in 1898 his teacher Charles Stanford conducted the premiere of his *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*. She observes that "while in his later career, Dante Gabriel Rossetti moved toward aestheticism and a focus on the intense experience of art rather than its usefulness, William Morris and Christina Rossetti embraced the elevating potential of music in political and spiritual terms, respectively" (p. 230), and she concludes that "the Victorian salon has had a global and lasting impact on the music scene generally and specially on the reception and interpretation of Pre-Raphaelite poetry" (p. 232). Twenty-first-century academics take for granted the existence of a wide interlocking network of public institutions and universities that foster cultural events, but Arseneau and her fellow musical scholars, such as Phyllis Weliver, Maura Ives, and Karen Yuen, have begun to uncover more of the informal social networks that enabled the flourishing of nineteenth-century music and its sister arts.

Several other articles consider the relationship between Rossetti's poetry, translations, and other art forms. In "Dante, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Their Verbal/Visual Personae" (*Comparative Studies in Modernism*, no. 20 [Spring 2022]), Paola Spinozzi examines ways in which Rossetti's translations of Dante's poetry, especially the *Vita Nuova*, both conveyed and reinterpreted the original. Spinozzi reviews the *Dolce Stil Novo* ideals of the virtuous (distant) woman as intermediary between man and God, an ideal both critiqued and appropriated by Dante and his Victorian namesake, and its postulate of a necessary tension between desire and sublimation. She suggests that Rossetti was further prompted by the rivalry of medieval poets and painters such as Dante, Cavalcanti, Cimabue, and Giotto to construct his own dual poetic and artistic identity, a view borne out by his early paintings and drawings of Dante amid his contemporaries.

Spinozzi notes Rossetti's precocity in completing his draft of the first English translation of the entire *Vita Nuova* at the age of twenty, as well as the first translation to use rhymed verse and the original meters (the revised version was published twelve years later). She finds his stated ideals of philological correctness balanced with fidelity (not literal adherence) to an original meaning to be innovative contributions to the Victorian reception of early Italian poetry: in Rossetti's words, "The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation . . . with one more possession of beauty" (p. 56). Spinozzi observes that Rossetti's translations enhance the dramatic effects of the original, as well as pay tribute to a shared ideal of an aristocracy of noble minds. Finally, Spinozzi examines in detail four of Rossetti's early drawings of Dante (1848–1859). She notes the nuances of his representations of Dante and his fellow artists and poets such as Giotto and Calvacanti, with their hints that the young Dante hoped eventually to surpass them in fame, and she suggests that Rossetti similarly celebrates his role in honoring his Italian cultural forebears while hoping to establish a poetic and artistic presence in his own land. Like other Rossetti critics, she finds his reinterpretations of medieval sources suggestive of new meanings, a "cross-cultural *mise en abyme* in which each magnifies and is magnified by the other" (p. 63).

In "Intermedial Configurations in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Reception of the *Vita Nuova*" (*The Afterlife of Dante's Vita Nuova in the Anglophone World: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Translation and Reception History* [Routledge, 2022]), Julia Straub addresses a similar topic from the perspective of recent theories of "intermediality," which postulate that all media and art forms are interconnected and pervasive throughout cultural phenomena. Following

distinctions enunciated by Irina Rajewsky, Staub identifies three categories of intermediality—combinations of media, such as painting and poetry; media adaptations of a work originally present in another form; and intermedial references, such as ekphrases. Rossetti clearly employs all these forms of intermediality, through Straub notes special features of his creative work that "interfere with and also amplify the intermedial strategies depicted here" (p. 110), including his efforts as a linguistic and cultural translator and personal identification with the historical Dante. She remarks that Rossetti and his contemporaries were influenced by the distinctions laid out in Gotthold Lessing's "Laocoön," by which literary texts depict temporal sequences and the visual arts convey the affective potential of a subject frozen in time. For Rossetti, the confluence of the two was essential to art: "[T]he point of meeting where the two [picture and poem] are most identical is the supreme perfection" (p. 112).

Straub then examines the several forms of Dantean representation exhibited in Rossetti's work over time, arguing that his semi-biographical *Beata Beatrix*, with its links to Elizabeth Siddal's death, the Dantean story, and other art works and photographs of the period, exemplifies the "energies" (that is, the "ideas, themes, moods, and sensitivities") circulating at a particular moment, configurations that "Rossetti would have found in Dante but that relate to much broader artistic traditions" (p. 113). She then examines two intermedial case studies of artworks influenced by the *Vita Nuova* from different periods of Rossetti's life; the first is his early medievalized (and somewhat austere) 1848–1849 drawing, *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice: Dante Drawing the Angel* (also discussed by Spinozzi), and the second is his later 1866 painting *Monna Vanna*, a reference to the woman who heralds Beatrice's arrival and is symbolically associated with spring. Rossetti had at one point titled the painting *Belcolore*, also the alternate title for his 1859 poem on love's transience, "A New-Year's Burden." Her name can also be translated as "vain," and the portrait's lush sensuality and costly accoutrements are designed to appeal to "viewers and patrons who would consume art just like any other luxury good" (p. 116). Straub concludes that his changing artistic preferences "from his earlier medievalism to a visually more opulent Aestheticist style" show the varying intensity of the intermedial encounters that shaped Rossetti's imagination of Dante's world. Of equal importance, these encounters reflect several Victorian contexts for the reception of the *Vita Nuova* "as a cultural endeavour, sprawling far beyond the realm of the merely aesthetic" (p. 118).

Olivia Moy's "Gothic Shock and Swap: Suspended Bodies and Fluctuating Frames in D. G. Rossetti's Double Works," chapter 3 of her *Gothic Forms in*

Victorian Poetry (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2022), brings new critical contexts to a discussion of Rossetti's paintings-cum-poems, and, by extension, to his later work. Comparing the effects of his portraits of women to uncanny and mysterious "realist supernatural" episodes in gothic fiction, Moy finds that the contrasting "realist symbolism" of Rossetti's paintings and their accompanying poems create "confrontational, jarring, and demanding" effects (p. 146). She notes that the verses of "The Blessed Damozel" alternately harmonize and conflict with one another and with the later paintings, creating an oscillation she terms "a Gothic mode of uncertain readership" (p. 149), intensified by its projection onto women's bodies. Unable to decide whether the canvasses' large and detailed representations should be seen as corporeal women or mythic figures, art or flesh, the viewer experiences—in Moy's dramatic formulation—"a kind of formal violence . . . with its sudden shocks and pulls" (p. 167).

Moy attributes the mixed reception of Rossetti's works, both by the Victorians and more recent critics, to this double evocation of aesthetic realism and symbolism: "Is [the portrait to be viewed as] goddess or woman, virgin or experienced model"? Moreover, in feminist or psychoanalytic terms, the obsessive doubling and reworking of such images exhibits "possessive narcissism" (p. 168), as Rossetti repeatedly reworked paintings with different recognizable faces or combined body parts from different sources, a practice Moy identifies as manifesting "his commitment to symbolic realism" (p. 171). At this point she considers four paintings from the 1860s and 1870s, each of a single female figure and accompanied by a sonnet, and argues that these framed images of women gazing into a mirror, window, or outside the painting's frame "recast the viewer as viewed object," causing uncertainty and fear through sudden changes in framing (p. 172).

Moy's first example of this phenomenon is *Proserpine* (seventh version, 1874), the famous image of a darkly desultory Jane holding the fateful pomegranate, "evasive" in her indeterminate gaze (p. 176). The accompanying sonnet, a dramatic monologue variously inscribed in successive versions on the painting's frame and the canvas itself, positions its speaker as doubly entrapped within image and poem: "Afar from mine own self I seem," while simultaneously "the bodily reality of Jane Morris always threatens to subvert the mythic effect of the legend" (p. 177). In the 1877 *Astarte Syriaca*, a representation of Jane as the Mesopotamian goddess of fertility, Moy finds "the female figure's gaze upon us is locked in a fixed, commanding stare. . . . To reconcile the sublimity and picturesque elements of [the] image is a disorienting affective experience" (p. 182). The relationship of the painting to its accompanying sonnet also changes with the sequence in which these are encountered, with the

sonnet insisting on a mythic reading, and its final lines (the sole portion Rossetti attached to the frame) celebrating the more abstract goddess in contrast to the "picturesque" object within the frame (p. 183).

Two further paintings, *Lady Lilith* (1866–1868, later altered) and *Sibylla Palmifera* (1870), were similarly accompanied by sonnets, and Moy views the subjects of these paintings as exercising increased agency. The mirror-gazing Lilith becomes "a legitimate spectator herself, without acquiescing to the demands of our expectations," using her mirror to "subvert the delimiting power of the canvas's very canvas and frame" (p. 187); similarly, the accompanying sonnet celebrates Lilith's power to enchant her victim. In its suggestion of the extent to which Rossetti "was in fact at the mercy of his models," Moy finds that such claims for Lilith's power may complicate "long-standing readings of his megalomanical artistic practice" (p. 189). And finally, in *Sibylla Palmifera*, an uncanny conflation of realistic and otherworldly effects, a woman/artist/prophet is given a commanding role as she holds her palm as a pen, poised for authorial action, while the accompanying sonnet describes the male artist as passively absorbing her gaze, "I drew it in as simply as my breath" (p. 193). Though Moy finds that Rossetti's framed women "thus exert power despite their confined bodies," looking back at their would-be viewers, she also admits that none seem truly at rest, mirroring in formal terms a Victorian preoccupation with the shifting boundaries between life and art. Moy's conclusion focuses on reception, as she notes the unusual distaste evoked in Rossetti's critics such as William Buchanan by his practice of "corporeal realism." Thus, what she defines as Romantic aesthetic elements—sublimity, picturesqueness, suspension, and shock—combine in Rossetti's double works to "switch and swap the terms of our viewing authority," as the portraits "emasculate the ecstatic sublime" and "force their viewers into uncomfortable states of fluctuation and uncertainty" (p. 199).

In this context, the sole biographical article on Rossetti stands out. In "Rossetti and Siddal: Reconsidering the Rift 1858–1860" (*Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 31 [Fall 2022]: 5–17), G. E. Battersby revisits in detail the relationship between Rossetti and his future wife during a period in which it had been thought they were estranged. New information reveals that in fact the couple spent considerable time together in the period before their marriage, and, as Battersby notes, reconciliation had been sought by both parties (p. 16).

Morris and His Circle

Articles of the year consider Morris's poetry and Scandinavian legacy, his influence as a fantasy writer, the continuing relevance of his anti-imperialist

writings, and the importance of viewing his immediate London and Oxford landscapes as inspirations for his work.

Two articles consider Morris's 1885–1886 communist epic, with its commemoration of revolutionary commitment, romantic loss, and grief at the savage repression of the Paris Commune of 1871. In "On the Way to Nowhere: The Revolutionary Politics of Time in *The Pilgrims of Hope*" (*Journal of Wiliam Morris Studies* 24, no. 4 [2022]), Pavla Veselá counters earlier critics who have found the poem clumsily written or unsuited to its political purpose, instead interpreting "its perceived weaknesses as strengths" (p. 50). Her reading of the poem's changing emotions, as mirrored in its use of poetic features such as shifting word lengths, breaks, and musical rhythms, identifies its recurrent movement from hope to despair and the reverse, noting how *Pilgrim*'s achronological sequence allows for a release into the future: "in almost every section, there is a moment when attention to the miserable present dislocates it from the time continuum and hope oriented towards a different future breaks through" (p. 52). Within this pattern there are subthemes: Veselá's section "Love Has Slain Time, and Knows No To-day and No To-morrow" follows the poem's early installments as they portray a pastoral environment and the mutual love of Richard and his wife as a motivation for their commitment to a less degraded human future; "The Blended Sound of Battle and Deliv'rance Drawing Near" witnesses the hero's conversion to the socialist cause and his later memories of his wife's defection and death and the Communard's defeat; and in "Come Then, Since All Things Call Us, the Living and the Dead" portrays the survivor as he returns home to raise his son and repurpose the utopian ideals of the Commune for continued struggle. As Veselá concludes, *Pilgrim*'s aspirational ending is bittersweet, since the losses of the past are irretrievable, yet its "uncertainties and defeats . . . were openings to the fullness of Nowhere" (p. 65).

Owen Holland's "'These Christs that Die Upon the Barricades': Victorian Responses to the Paris Commune" (*BRANCH*) places Morris's communist epic within its contemporary literary and political context. A summary of the responses of his fellow Victorian intellectuals manifests the near-uniqueness of Morris's identification with proletarian aspirations. Of his fellow fiction writers, only Eliza Lynn Linton's *The True History of Joshua Davidson: Christian and Communist* (1872) celebrates a carpenter and former Communard trampled to death for his beliefs by his fellow Britons as a modern embodiment of the Christian ethic. In *The Civil War in France* (1871), Karl Marx had asserted that the Commune represented "a new point of departure, of importance in world history," whereas hostile commentators were more likely to view it as a

repetition of a recurrent foreign threat. Among many others, Alfred Tennyson repeatedly expressed suspicion of continental upheavals: for example, in "In Memoriam" truth and justice are contrasted with the "red fool-fury of the Seine" and an 1873 poem warns against an art suffused "with poisonous honey stol'n from France." Even more extreme were views expressed by the titularly Republican Swinburne, who responded to the entirely "fake news" of the burning of the Louvre by calling for an international law authorizing the murder on sight of any escaped Communard. In this context, it is worth noting that in 1871 William Michael Rossetti wrote to Walt Whitman that his own sympathy "(far unlike that of most Englishmen) was very strongly with the Commune—i. e. with extreme, democratic, and progressive republicanism" (Rossetti, *Selected Letters* [Penn State Univ. Press, 1990]). Holland observes that the "limited duration of the Commune lent it an intensity that attracted commentary from many different quarters, since the possibility of a return and reanimation inspired the need to understand its origins and significance"; was it a threat to the "fabric of civilization" (Salisbury, *Quarterly Review*, 1871, p. 550) or "an emblem of a coming proletarian democracy?"

In a sign of changing tastes, two essays view Morris's literary works from the vantage point of the writings of J. R. R. Tolkien. Rachel Falconer's "Earlier Fantasy Fiction" (Stuart D. Lee, ed., *A Companion to J. R. R. Tolkien* [Blackwell, 2022]) usefully places Morris's romances in the context of later categorizations of fantasy fiction; she suggests that the main contribution of fantasy should be its inventiveness, its departure from type, as opposed to conformity to generic norms such as the use of medieval settings or the creation of an independent, secondary world. Observing that fantasy becomes recognizable in a Victorian period also noted for its realist fiction, Falconer suggests that the resultant works exhibit a hybridization of both modes, and she offers contrasting examples in Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924), David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), and, most relevant here, William Morris's *The House of the Wolfings* (1889). Although portraying Germanic tribes in a quasi-historical medieval narrative, Morris's community is one that might have existed (but did not), projecting "an ideal of community for the future" (p. 307). Falconer notes that the opening words of *Wolfings*, "The tale tells that in times long past," claims both historicity and vagueness, "for it is not known where or when we are precisely, and whether the main characters are based on historical or legendary figures or are purely fictional" (p. 307). Important, however, is the tribe's identification with the woodland as "a distinctive and densely meaningful time-space in which his characters discover what it is they most value" (p. 308). Falconer observes the paradox that *Wolfing*'s hero Thiodolf

is of "alien" origin rather than a Wolfing by birth, and that he identifies fully with the tribe only at the moment when he casts off the protective armor provided by the Hall-Sun in "allegiance to the life of the tribe even at the expense of his own life" (p. 308). She then asks whether through his sacrifice Thiodolf represents the selfless and generous virtues Morris attributes to the Gothic tribes, or alternately, whether he becomes through his choice "a modern, individual subject" (p. 308); for although Thiodolf escapes paralysis and atomism, she notes, "he does reveal the constructedness of Morris's ideal of community and fellowship" (p. 309).

Falconer also inserts a feminist and multivalent reading, for in contrast to previous critics, who have assumed the heroism of Thiodolf's acceptance of death with and on behalf of his fellows, she emphasizes that Hall-Sun herself remains unconsoled. Instead, the narrator fails to "take sides with Thiodolf at this juncture, as we might expect . . . this image of lovers parting in asymmetric grief provides a strongly dissonant note in the text's otherwise optimist[ic] celebration of undying human community." Falconer's summation is eloquent: "It is Morris's Germanic fantasy that we can experience and think through the idea of fellowship: as the dream of a quasi-historical past, as the vison of a socialist future, and as a nightmare for those whom fellowship excludes" (p. 309).

An effort to view Morris's poetry through the lens of ecocriticism appears in an essay linking Morris's poetry to two alliterative poems by Tolkien based on the same Scandinavian legends. Susan Poursanati and Aria Farmani's "William Morris's *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, and Lawrence Buell's *Eco-critical Perspective*" (*Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 29 [Fall 2022]), though at times unclear in syntax, illustrates the possibilities for interpreting Morris's plots in the context of attachment to a specific place and environment. The authors cite Buell's list of potential ways in which texts may evoke engagement with the physical world: through connecting readers with the pain or suffering of others, both human and nonhuman; with locations they would otherwise never see; or with alternative futures. Postulating connectedness to a specific environs as central to identity, Poursanati and Farmani trace the downward trajectory of *Sigurd*'s tragic protagonists as reflected in their lessening affiliation with a central home; for the Volsung hero this locus of attachment is embodied in the "Wood-world" and its great tree Branstock, and for the Niblungs, in their hereditary mountain retreat. Sigurd's life exhibits a pattern of successive uprootings, which in turn propel his need for conquest; the tragic fate of Sigurd's mother Signy and the tale's other

women follows from their forced exile to alien lands through marriage; and the tale's destructive battles and conflagrations occur as the Volsung kin are forced from their protective habitats. Conversely, a recurrent sense of inhabiting different locations simultaneously (p. 433) provides a source of both confusion and comfort for the protagonists. By contrast, "the moral and therapeutic power of place-connectedness" (p. 438) is manifested in the natural settings of the tale's peaceful societies, and by the fact that Morris's protagonists invariably flee to natural settings for consolation in times of crisis.

Sarah Mead Leonard's "Printed Ecologies: William Morris and the Rural Thames" (*British Art Studies*, 22 [March 2022]) excavates Morris's design practices through a detailed evocation of features of his late-nineteenth-century Thames-side environments, several of which have been altered since his time. As she records, his Hammersmith home was at the time surrounded by boatyards, brewery malthouses, and a leadworks, and was sited in close proximity to other industries, a waterworks, and slum housing. In contrast, Morris found a personal pastoral along the upper Thames and its tributaries, as Leonard remarks: "[This] is a setting in his poetry and romances; it is the utopia described in *News from Nowhere* and his socialist speeches; and it is also the visual world of his designs." Yet Morris's countryside was also becoming modernized; by the late nineteenth century, Kelmscott village and its environs had become a site of industrial farming, animal husbandry, gasworks, a factory for ethanol and beet processing, and a private railway. Leonard identifies the more traditional aspects of the landscape that he admired, including the unplowed, wet meadows that supported a wide a variety of wildflower and wildlife species, as well as cows and sheep. She observes that although Morris praised the landscapes of the Lake District and Iceland, "his own perfect place was very different: gentle, verdant, and marked everywhere by a long human history of land management."

In his "Hints on Pattern-Designing," Morris remarked that patterns should reflect "ornament that reminds us of the outward face of the earth," and, accordingly, he observed local plants and locales carefully as the basis for his designs. These are, however, not "direct visual inscriptions of single site or plant," but instead blend repeats and patterns based on his observations of natural processes with the features of specific places, as *Trellis* (wallpaper, 1862) and *Strawberry Thief* (printed textile, 1883) are based on the gardens at Red House and Kelmscott Manor. Leonard identifies specific aspects of the surroundings of Kelmscott Manor—its meandering waterways and dense combination of plant species, hedgerows, water-meadows, hawthorn bushes, and wildflowers, such as scarlet pimpernel, double roses, and snakehead fritillaries—as evoked in the numerous wallpapers and textiles he created while in residence at the

manor. The introduction of herbicides and decline of earlier forms of land management has since removed some of the features Morris so loved, as "havens of biodiversity in their traditional form." Leonard concludes that he imported these features into urban settings through his designs, so that "the presence of those products in middle- and upper-class London homes must also imply the presence of Morris's pastoral in those spaces, meaningful to Morris if not his buyers." All who are familiar with his designs will find their grasp of Morris's aesthetic choices enhanced by Leonard's account of the specific details of his environments.

In "Hypocrisy and Cant and Vicarious Ferocity: William Morris and Resistance to British Imperialism" (*Journal of William Morris Studies* 25, no. 1 [2023]), Jan Marsh addresses a topic of both historical and contemporary relevance: Morris's anti-imperialist views and the ethical debates surrounding the preservation and destruction of colonial artifacts and monuments. Accompanied by photographs of statues of General Gordon and Cecil Rhodes (including one in Cape Town, South Africa, amusingly decapitated in 2020), she details Morris's opposition to all forms of British imperialism. Even as a student at Oxford, his Newdigate Prize submission had unexpectedly attacked the European crusaders, not its Arab residents, as the source of Holy Land desolation; he remained distantly unsupportive of his brother Arthur's military career in South Africa; and by 1876 he had joined the Eastern Question Association to protest Britain's potential involvement in the Crimea. When in 1889 George Gordon was killed in defense of the British presence in the Sudan, Morris was near-unique in denying him heroic status, describing him in *Commonweal* as "an instrument of oppression whom fate at last thrust aside" (p. 24).

Marsh next adduces recent debates about the repatriation of looted imperial artifacts and the movement to remove memorials to those now credited with perpetuating atrocities. She observes that, in *News from Nowhere*, the new society has cleared Westminster Abbey of "the beastly monuments to fools and knaves, that once blocked it up" (p. 19). Nonetheless, Morris was a preservationist, and even architecture he had criticized (St. Paul's Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament) is retained in Nowhere as a testament to history. Marsh suggests that, although we cannot know what Morris would do (I suspect he would not have preserved the Gordon statues, at least not in honorific settings), the essential task for the present is to "begin the work of choosing new heroes to replace those that cluster around Trafalgar and Parliament Squares, to take two sites" (p. 22). Ironically, she suggests, there could be no statue of Morris himself, "given the Socialist League's rejection of parliamentary strategies" (p. 23).

During the past year, the William Morris Archive has continued to add images of Morris manuscripts held in the William Morris Gallery, the Bodleian Library, and the Fitzwilliam Museum Library, and medieval scholar Peter Wright has contributed an introduction and notes for the archive's edition of Morris's translation of the *Odyssey*. And, in a different register, it is amusing to read that Morris was caricatured at least five times in *Punch* for his restorationist and socialist endeavors. In "Prehistoric Morris: A Caricature by E. T. Reed" (*Journal of William Morris Studies* 25, no. 1), Greg Michaelson reproduces a May 1894 caricature of "The Opening of the Primeval Royal Academy," in which recognizable artistic figures are shown in caveman garb. Whether the drawing is a satire on a stultified institution, of the contemporary fashion for medievalism, or a friendly sendup of Reed's contemporary artists is unclear. It is interesting, however, to identify Morris (who would never have joined the Royal Academy) in a symbolically marginalized position in the lower far right. In 1894, Morris would have remained a public presence through his continued promotion of the decorative arts and egalitarian socialism, and here Reed's Morris appears clearly recognizable with his bushy hair, beard, and firm expression, as he totes an incongruously large basket, perhaps representing his craftwork, and grasps the red banner of socialism tightly over his shoulder.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

JUSTIN A. SIDER

In these pages, a little over a decade ago, Alan Young-Bryant joked aptly that Algernon Charles Swinburne was "the most neglected recovered poet of the period" ("Swinburne: 'The Sweetest Name,'" *VP* 49, no. 3 [2011]: 301). He meant that our narrow vision of the poet stinted the sheer scope and variety of his writing. If steady work has somewhat remedied this situation, today the remark also seems apt in a different sense, as Swinburne occupies rather less of the field's attention than he did a decade or so ago. Scholarship on Swinburne is slight this year, though the four publications range nicely over the poet's verse forms, intellectual affiliations, critical reception, and relation to cultural history.

In *Conversing in Verse: Conversation in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2022), Elizabeth K. Helsinger explores the sociable forms of conversational poetry—poems committed to the political and ethical work of responding to others, to "that which is not the self" (p. 3). A chapter on Robert Browning and Swinburne proposes that these poet are