



Project
MUSE[®]

Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

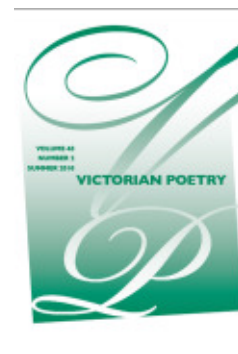
The Pre-Raphaelites

Boos, Florence Saunders, 1943-

Victorian Poetry, Volume 42, Number 3, Fall 2004, pp. 390-401 (Article)

Published by West Virginia University Press

DOI: 10.1353/vp.2004.0046



 For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/vp/summary/v042/42.3boos.html>

quintessential Hopkins masterwork “The Windhover.” Nathan Cervo’s approach, in “The Ploughman as Chevalier” (*HQ* 29, nos. 3-4 [Summer-Fall 2002]: 106-108), is fairly strict *explication de texte*—although, beyond considering one text, he is comparing, in two poems (“The Windhover” and “Harry Ploughman”), the poet’s vacillation between praise and disdain for the concepts of “pride” and “Amansstrength.” By contrast, Sarah Winters’ “Heavenly Bodies in ‘The Windhover’” (*HQ* 30, nos. 1-2 [Winter-Spring 2003]: 31-44) explores the historical circumstances of Hopkins’ interest in science, as she proposes that “the fire that breaks” from the sonnet’s described kestrel hawk may be a metaphorical comparison to the fire from falling meteors: illuminated objects from the sky, and objects about which Hopkins and many other amateur Victorian scientists often wrote. The fire, however, she adds, may reflect the religious conceptualization of a “[h]overing” Paraclete, in a lyric definitely centered upon the affirmation of Christic Incarnation.

A somewhat unusual literary critical context, but one from which we luckily can garner some fairly attractive and informative discoveries about Hopkins’ poetry, is Jerome McGann’s essay “Visible and Invisible Books: Hermetic Images in *n*-Dimensional Space” (*Literary and Linguistic Computing* 17, no. 1 [2002]: 61-74). McGann analyzes fairly deftly the semiotic structure of Hopkins’ sonnet “As kingfishers catch fire.” He does so as he makes the point that “poems . . . are inherently non-hierarchical structures that promote attention to varying and overlapping sets of textual designs” (p. 74). In an age when scholars are beginning more and more to conduct “critical and editorial reconstitution of our inherited cultural archive in digital forms” (p. 74), McGann wishes to clarify that “in imaginative work,” “the medium is always the message” (p. 73)—so that one must not treat poeisis as only “informational or expository” (as some computer aficionados, McGann avers, too much wish to do).

The Pre-Raphaelites

FLORENCE S. BOOS

The year has brought several books as well as two new editions and a number of articles. In order to do justice to all its contributors, I will retain the important collection *Outsiders Looking In: The Rossettis Then and Now*, edited by David Clifford and Lawrence Rousillon, for review next year, and begin this year’s overview with the new editions.

“The Chelsea Years . . . Prelude to Crisis, 1863-1867,” volume three, part one of William Fredeman’s edition of *The Correspondence of Dante*

Gabriel Rossetti, has now appeared under the imprint of D. S. Brewer. This 601-page book (the first of the “volume”’s two “parts”) is prefaced by a memoir of Fredeman by Allan Life, one of seven coeditors (listed below) who joined together to complete Fredeman’s edition after his death in 1999. Life also knew Fredeman as teacher, mentor, and friend, and accompanied him on several of his research trips to repositories and other sources of information in Great Britain.

Mindful perhaps of A. S. Byatt’s mordant but wryly equable parody in *Possession*, Life’s reminiscences of Fredeman provide a surprisingly direct and probing sketch of the latter’s complex life, which included survival of an automobile accident which killed his parents when he was two, childhood in an Arkansas orphanage, three marriages, a taste for pornography, and a marked and growing ambivalence toward the principal subject of his painstaking and exhaustive research. Life recalls with affection Fredeman’s gift for extended recitation of Victorian poetry, alludes to the pleasure he took in his contacts with an extended network of British and North American scholars and booksellers, and concludes with a eulogy of him as “a true successor of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and a worthy student of his life and art” (p. xxi).

The volume’s scope and presentation testify to the effective cooperation of its editorial heptarchy of Carolyn Hares-Stryker, Lorraine Janzen-Kooistra, Allan Life, Julian Moore, Andrew Stauffer, David W. Thomas, and Christopher Whittick. The illustrations and annotations are briefer than the ones Fredeman himself prepared, but they suffice for clarification of Rossetti’s complicated personal, artistic, and financial contacts in 1863-67, a period in which he focused more effort on his painting (and the income it brought him) than he did on his poetry.

In particular, the volume’s many “new” letters bring into clearer relief Rossetti’s frequent dependence for social companionship on his lawyer James Rose, his fellow painter George Boyce, and his sometime assistant Charles Howell. They also document his familial hospitality, lavish spending habits, eagerness to collect art, china, and unusual pets, recurrent failures to meet deadlines, and frequent appeals for more money from buyers who had already given him down payments. He was neither the first nor the last to blend these with declarations of determination to avoid distractions and achieve the best that was in him.

Rossetti became more reclusive in the period immediately following Elizabeth Siddal’s death. He did remain in near-weekly contact during much of this period with Ford Madox Brown, his closest friend, and wrote him apologetically on one occasion that “nothing on reflection could pain me more . . . than to inflict the slightest pain on you, whom I regard as so much the most intimate and dearest of my friends that I might call you by

comparison the only one I have" (February 9, 1866). William Allingham and the members of the Firm, by contrast, gradually seem to have faded from view, and even Allingham's suggestion at one point that he might bring Tennyson to visit evoked alarm, for "I have no finished work to show at present, and have moreover so fallen out of the habit of seeing any but intimates, that I feel like a fool with others" (July 6, 1864).

Despite moments of such diffidence, he had joined a couple of artists' clubs by 1866 (Arundel and Burlington Fine Arts), and his letters throughout the period bear witness to the steadiness of his attempts to help poetic and artistic friends and acquaintances. He tried to persuade Alexander Macmillan to publish Swinburne's poems, for example; actively campaigned to establish a fund for the impoverished George Cruikshank; helped Charles Murray, Charles Howell, and others find appropriate work; and brought the works of W. B. Scott, James Smetham, Frederick Shields, G. E. Boyce, W. S. Burton, J. M. Whistler, Alphonse Legros, Ford Madox Brown, and Walter Deverell to the attention of potential buyers by keeping samples of them in his own studio for the edification of visiting patrons.

A somewhat different sense of the importance Rossetti attached to this network of friendships and loyalties may be gleaned from his unsuccessful attempts throughout April 1867 to mediate a heated quarrel between J. M. Whistler—whom Rossetti himself considered needlessly combative—and Alphonse Legros, whom Whistler had struck in an argument. Another mark of his regard for Whistler appeared in a letter he sent to the secretary of the Burlington Club to oppose Whistler's expulsion from this body as the result of a scuffle with Seymour Hadden. In a stiffly formal note on behalf of himself and his brother, Rossetti objected to the Committee's introduction of "purely personal matters into the business of a Club" (June 14, 1867), as well as its decision to "entertain . . . up to so advanced a stage of proceedings the personal complaint made by one member against another without making that other at all acquainted with the course of affairs."

Rossetti's relations with patrons real and potential were similarly wary. At times, he wrote quite self-critically of the quality of his work in the volume's early letters, as in an 1863 remark to William Bell Scott that "I seem to have nothing worth showing you since last time, for I seem to get nothing done but paltry heads and trifles, and am beginning to get careless about it" (October 31). But he seems to have developed more confidence as his earnings and commissions grew, and later letters assume a less self-critical and introspective tone. Although he wrote angrily to Walter Dunlop, a former would-be buyer who had reneged on a commission, he was generally blessed with the patronage of patient and enthusiastic buyers such as

Ellen Heaton, Frederick Leyland, and George Rae, who suffered with good grace his lapsed promises of completion, incessant appeals for further advances, and requests for permission to substitute one work for another.

At a more abstract critical level, Rossetti expressed a number of table-pounding views of the contemporary French art he encountered during an 1864 trip to Paris, from which he reported (to William) that a Delacroix painting he had seen “is a great slovenly scrawl after all, like the rest of this incredible new French school—people painted with an eye in one socket through merely being too lazy to efface the first and what not” (November 8). To his mother he was more concise: “The new French school is simple putrescence and decomposition” (November 12). And in a letter to George Rae, he worked this charge of putrefaction into an expression of chauvinist ambition: “French art is mostly in a state of real decomposition, quite calculated to put English artists on their mettle to make a good run for the lead” (November 16). He did find something to admire in an early self-portrait of Courbet, as well as the work of “a man named Millet,” whom he described to Burne-Jones as “the best going by far,” and he also acknowledged to Burne-Jones that in the end “Delacroix [was] worth the journey with all his faults” (November 18).

During this period Rossetti painted a few early portraits of Jane Morris, his “very Queen of Beauty” (June 3, 1865), as well as several large canvasses of erotic female icons—for example, “Fazio’s Mistress,” “Helen of Troy,” “The Blue Bower,” “Venus Verticordia,” “Sibylla Palmifera,” “Monna Vanna,” “The Beloved,” and “Aspecta Medusa.” At the end of the volume, he also expressed to Allingham his first fears that his eyesight might be failing: “I have found the . . . strain on my eyes in working to be decidedly rather on the increase than otherwise, and am getting really anxious about it. I mention this quite in confidence, as it wd. be injurious to me if it got about” (September 30, 1867). The edition’s remaining volumes will record more serious personal failures and a few poetic triumphs.

Compendious physical editions are good things, despite the merits of instantly searchable hypertexts, and Jerome McGann’s *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose* (Yale) provides a paperback alternative to Jan Marsh’s *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Collected Writings* (1999). McGann has also rearranged (most of) Rossetti’s works under eight straightforward rubrics: “Poems” (1870, 1881), “The House of Life” (1870, 1881), “The Songs” (1870), “Ballads and Lyrics” (1881), “The Early Italian Poets” (1861, 1874), “Prose,” and “Other Translations and Posthumously Published and Uncollected Writings.” McGann’s choices slight some works both Rossetti brothers considered worthy of publication—most conspicuously “The King’s Tragedy”—but they also bring others, which William Michael Rossetti left unpublished in his 1911 edition, into the tent. The aforementioned

subdivisions accommodate readers' natural interests, and McGann has furnished the volume with extensive critical and scholarly notes. Those who may wish to consider Rossetti's original manuscripts will also find it easy to compare McGann's "reading texts" with the drafts and poems in his Rossetti Archive.

Four volumes of Christina Rossetti's books of meditations have appeared this year, under the title *The Prose Works of Christina Rossetti*, with an introduction by Maria Keaton (Thoemmes Press). These well-made reprints offer would-be readers ready access to *Called to be Saints: The Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied* (1881), *Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments* (1883), *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (1885), and *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892), as well as Keaton's comments in the introduction on Rossetti's anagogic use, along lines advocated by John Keble and others, of natural images, which supplemented Rossetti's appeals to history, literature, legend, anecdote, and the remarks of friends.

The diary form and short subsections of *Time Flies* make the third of the four volumes especially accessible. In her reflection on the uniqueness of musical "voice," for example, Rossetti remarked that "the voice is inseparable from the person to whom it belongs. The voice which charms one generation is inaccessible to the next. Words cannot describe it, notes cannot register it; it remains as a tradition, it lingers only as a regret: or, if by marvellous modern appliances stored up and re-uttered, we listen not to any imitative sound, but to a reproduction of the original voice" (February 9).

In her introduction to the fourth volume, *The Face of the Deep*, a 552-page series of chapter-by-chapter meditations on the Apocalypse, Keaton remarks on the author's concern to celebrate a "face" of Christian revelation mirrored in the visible surfaces of things, and finds that Rossetti's "way of relating a nested series of meanings to both their scriptural types and the experiences of each reader creates a continuous 'at present and at once.'" The work's intricate cross-references to poems, prayers, biblical passages, and personal interjections also conveyed Rossetti's particular preoccupations with the Apocalypse, which she compared at one point to a rock battered by the sea, and described with Wordsworthian awe as something which "seemed to float baseless in air, its summit vanished in cloud, it displayed upon its surface varied markings, it passed from view altogether in a mist, it fronted me distinct and solid far into the luminous northern summer night, still appearing many and various while all the time I knew it to be one and the same" (p. 174).

Mary Arseneau's *Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics* (Palgrave) argues that the biographical and critical

record may have “concealed aspects of Rossetti’s life history that have been unnoticed, undocumented, or omitted” (p. 5). She adduces extensive evidence for her assertion that the devotional life Rossetti shared with her mother, sister, and aunts informed her poetry as well as her essays. In her first chapter, Arseneau points out that the Tractarian doctrine of “reserve” may have restrained the Rossetti women from confiding many of their preoccupations to William Michael Rossetti, the family historian, and she devotes the following chapter to the first consideration I have seen of the commonplace book and manuscript poems of Frances Rossetti. She argues that Frances’ early interests in Italian literature and “fallen women” lived on in the motifs and preoccupations of Christina Rossetti’s poetry, and offers evidence that Maria Rossetti’s literary advice, moral example, and Dante scholarship may also have provided counterweights in Christina’s poetry and devotional writings to more secular Pre-Raphaelite ideals.

In her study of Rossetti’s early novella *Maud*, Arseneau argues that the heroine’s embrace of Tractarian “reserve” represents a form of spiritual triumph. In “Harmonizing *Goblin Market and Other Poems*,” Arseneau devises a typological reading of Rossetti’s most famous work, whose repetitions, she asserts, “reproduce . . . in miniature the volume’s overall movement of return and reinterpretation: within individual poems readers are brought back to words or phrases through repetition; speakers in various poems are brought back to critical interpretative moments with improved understanding; and as readers we are brought back to re-evaluate our own readings as we see patterns emerge in the repetitions and among various poems” (p. 135).

In “Interpreting ‘The Prince’s Progress,’” finally, Arseneau comments on ways in which Christina’s second volume of poetry distanced itself from the work of some of her artistic and literary forebears, most notably her father and brother. In “‘Had such a lady spoken for herself’: Confronting the Legacy,” she anchors Rossetti’s *A Pageant and Other Poems* and writings on Dante once again “in the community of female Rossettis and its values,” and comments on these works’ rejections of the allegorical and amatory interpretations of the *Divina Commedia* endorsed by Gabriele Rossetti and Dante Rossetti.

Arseneau also finds interesting adumbrations of Dantean landscapes in many of Rossetti’s later poems, and takes care to acknowledge the work of other critics who do not share her views. *Recovering Christina Rossetti’s* detailed analyses and biographical details will assure it of a wide readership among critics with sustained interests in Rossetti’s familial and Tractarian commitments.

In *The Beauty of Life: William Morris and the Art of Design* (Thames and Hudson), Diane Waggoner has gathered together a cluster of essays

prompted by an exhibition of Morris' books and designs at the Huntington Library in 2003. Pat Kirkham provides a fine introduction to relevant aspects of his subject's complex lifework in "William Morris: A Life in Design," and in subsequent chapters he and the volume's other authors consider "The Firm: Morris and Company" (Pat Kirkham), "Stained Glass and Church Decoration," "The Decoration of Houses," "The Art of the Book," and "John Henry Dearle" (all by Diane Waggoner), "The Things That Might Be: British Design After Morris" (Gillian Naylor), and "Two Sides of the River: Morris and American Arts and Crafts" (Edward R. Bosley). No other book, to my knowledge, has offered such a clear synoptic account of the Firm's internal operations, the nature and volume of its stained glass commissions, and the ways in which other contemporary designers integrated the Firm's designs into their work.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the volume's authors also give attention to the history of Morris and Company after Morris' death. Waggoner and Naylor, for example, differ in their assessments of the work of Morris' chief assistant John Henry Dearle, as well as the quality of the firm's work during the Edwardian period. (To vary Tennyson, one good custom can deform the world.) Few specialists in Morris' practices will have seen all the designs superbly illustrated in the book's plates and designs, especially those presented in the chapters on stained glass and the later Morris and Co., and each chapter provides an exemplary introduction to its topic.

Of the year's articles, I will review three on D. G. Rossetti, five on Christina Rossetti, and four on William Morris.

In "The Lost Pamphlet Version of D. G. Rossetti's '*The Stealthy School of Criticism*'" (VP 41, no. 2), Andrew Stauffer has carefully edited the sole known copy of Rossetti's trial proofs for his reply to Robert Buchanan's "Fleshly School of Poetry." Excerpts from this essay appeared in the *Athenaeum* for December 1871, and F. S. Ellis printed proofs of the longer version. But Rossetti's brother, lawyer, and assorted friends advised him to suppress them, and all copies were thought to have been destroyed before this one was discovered in the Huntington Library. To me at least, the contrast between the longer pamphlet's fulminations and the published text's more measured aesthetic arguments is sufficiently striking to suggest that Rossetti's friends had a point.

Consider, for example, the following comparison of Buchanan's pamphlet to a rotting dog's body:

It is necessary at times, I believe, for the guardians of public safety to search all kinds of unsavoury accumulations; and doubtless it must be no uncommon case for two dead dogs to lie there, one beneath the other. Were the hidden one conceivably wanted for

some purpose of judicial evidence, the task of digging it out would not be a pleasant one; and more time would inevitably be lost than if the upper carcass, perhaps purposely paraded, happened to be the one required.

W. E. Aytoun might have gotten away with such excursions, but tolerance for them seems to have been a privilege Victorian Britons reserved for their reactionaries.

In “Mary Philadelphia Merrifield’s Edition of Cennino Cennini’s *Il Libro dell’ Arte* and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘Hand and Soul,’” D. M. Bentley argues that Cennini’s book influenced Rossetti’s autobiographical prose tale as well as the wider aesthetics of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Merrifield’s translation of Cennini’s book appeared in 1844, and Rossetti’s Chiaro embraced many of Cennini’s painterly ideals of bright coloration and desires for “truth to nature.” Bentley interprets Chiaro as a “flawed” version of Cennini, motivated by rivalry and desire for fame, but his claim that *Il Libro dell’ Arte* influenced Pre-Raphaelite views of the character and ideals of the “Old Italian Masters” seems persuasive, whatever blend of sympathy and critique may have informed Rossetti’s portrait.

In “Love for Love: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Bocca Baciata* and “The Song of the Bower” (*JPRS* 12 [Fall]), D. M. Bentley traces parallels between Rossetti’s “The Song of the Bower” (a poem written in 1860 which originally bore the title “*Bocca Baciata*”), and the painting *Bocca Baciata*, for which Fanny Cornforth modelled in 1859. (The Italian phrase comes from a line of Boccaccio: “The mouth that has been kissed loses not its freshness.”) Separately, Bentley notes that Rossetti’s use of the quotation to attack prudery echoed Shelley’s “Peter Bell the Third,” examines “The Song of the Bower”’s stirrings of ambivalent celebrations of “free, sexual love as a desirable and shady refuge from life,” and characterizes its attempts to address “large issues of free will, consciousness, meaning, and destiny [as] a meditation on the issues raised by *Bocca Baciata*.”

In “Rossetti’s Goblin Marketing: Sweet to Tongue and Sound to Eye” (*Representations* 82), Herbert Tucker interprets Rossetti’s famous poem as an allegorical denunciation of contemporary advertising practices (“Come buy . . .”), reproduced in the goblin men’s relentless pitch for their wares, and comments on the “virtual orality” of “the terms on which goblins do business: the terms not of real-goods presence but of representation, framing, and display” (p. 121). He compares Rossetti’s evident distaste for the goblin men with Trollope’s critique of mendacious advertising in *The Struggles of Brown, Jones and Robinson*, which appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine* a month before the publication of Rossetti’s poem. Tucker sets aside feminist readings of the poem’s coda, and his euphuistic tropes squeeze their superposed images to the rind: “Lizzie’s express delivery of expressed fruit

now expresses sisterly love, not commercialized appetite, in a new context where the essence of fruit may appear in itself, shorn of the pulp fiction of all those insubstantial verbal goblin extras" (pp. 127-128). There is something persuasive, however, about his reading of the penultimate scene in which Laura awakes "as from a dream, / [and] Laughed in the innocent old way." Glossing "the innocent old way" as "the passage's advertisement for itself," he enjoins us (reflexively?) to follow Rossetti's example and "reclaim the simplicity of language from its goblin exploitation," returning to "the innocent old way of verse—the *innocent-told* way, virtually oral, the only way that poetry *as poetry* knew in the print-beglutted nineteenth century—Rossetti's fresh passage witnesses to the miracle that her narrative here culminates: the redemption of sound taste, the sweet redress of the tongue" (p. 130).

In "Christina Rossetti's Petrarca," in *Victorian Women Poets*, edited by Alison Chapman (Brewer), Michele Martinez examines Rossetti's essay against the background of Victorian debates about the medieval poet's lyric verse and "Laura"'s historical existence. For Rossetti, Petrarch was a devout man of republican sympathies and Laura a real woman whose piety and "reserve" helped inspire Petrarch and fashion his art, and Martinez observes that Rossetti's description of the poet carrying Laura's effigy in memory of her parallels one of the motifs of Rossetti's "Memory," whose speaker secretly preserves the image of a dead beloved.

In "Christina Rossetti's Last Poem: 'Sleeping at Last' or 'Heaven Overarches?'" (VN 103), Diane D'Amico compares the bleak melancholy of "Sleeping at Last" with the more hopeful resignation of "Heaven Overarches," another late poem to which critics have given little attention. William Rossetti—aggrieved by his sister's suffering as she died of breast cancer—nominated "Sleeping at Last" as a "last poem" in which Christina spoke bluntly of the "struggle and horror" of life's final passage. D'Amico points out that "Sleeping at Last" may have referred to the recent death of William's wife Lucy, and argues for the merits of "Heaven Overarches"'s more consolatory view that: "[a] little while, and we shall be / (Please God) where there is no more sea / Or barren wilderness."

In "Modelling God, Modelling Resistance" (JPRS 12 [Fall]), Debra L. Cumberland construes Rossetti's willingness to model for more than forty paintings and photographs as a performative enactment of her religious belief that "the Christian life was a type of modelling of God" (p. 39). Adducing critics who describe modelling as a means of reconstituting the self, Cumberland contrasts the speakers of Rossetti's poems with her brother's depictions of her in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, and sets Dante's demurely passive representations in opposition to the firmness, wisdom, and visionary insight she finds in Rossetti's personae:

“Rossetti’s modelling pose was, in fact, liberating: a way, through ritualistic incorporation and repetition of gestures, to create her own identity, mimicking the pose of saints and martyrs. . . . In poems such as ‘Reflection’ and ‘From House to Home,’ [Rossetti] celebrates performance, encouraging readers to enact the myriad of possible identities . . . that can lead to the self-transformation so celebrated in mystical literature” (pp. 51, 54).

In “Re-reading Sisterhood in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Noble Sisters’ and ‘Sister Maude’” (*SEL* 43, no. 4), Scott Rogers argues that *Goblin Market* reflected Rossetti’s idealized view of “sisterhood” before she began to work at Highgate Penitentiary, and the antagonistic sisters in “Noble Sisters” and “Sister Maude” expressed the dramatically changed views which emerged from her experiences there. Rogers’ article—which examines contemporary criticisms of such places of “penitence” and reviews internal tensions within Highgate’s staff—offers a partial corrective to eulogistic accounts of Rossetti’s relationships with her fellow women, but he provides no extended interpretations for these poems’ romantic focus and resentment-laden “medieval” wedding-plots.

In “William Morris on Prostitution: A Letter of August 17, 1885” (*VIJ* 31), Terry L. Myers examines a hitherto-unpublished letter by William Morris to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in which he expressed the Socialist League’s opposition to the Criminal Amendment Act of 1885, which criminalized sexual intercourse with women under sixteen years of age. In opposition to W. T. Stead’s determination “to generate sentiment for purity reforms, to spur individual actions, and to form ‘Vigilance Committees’ in every town,” Morris argued that “no legislative enactment will touch prostitution as long as the present condition of the people exists; as long, in short, as there are rich and poor classes,” and anticipated the “danger of a Puritan revival obscuring the real causes of this hideous unhappiness.”

It is good to have this explicit expression of Morris’ views, for they were thoroughly consistent with his moral temperament. It would be even better to know more precisely which provisions of the Act most irritated League socialists, and which of the convictions Morris expressed in this letter varied from those of his radical and reformist contemporaries.

In “The Ecology of Decoration: Design and Environment in the Writings of William Morris” (*JPRS* 12 [Fall]), Nicholas Frankel assesses Morris’ writings on art, practices of decoration, and work with the Kelmscott Press in the context of aesthetic thinkers from Kant to the ecocritic Laurence Buell, and argues that Morris’ views oblige us “to acknowledge a deep reciprocity at work between the world and a humanity in some ways more objective and passive than the things around it” (p. 64).

Frankel also comments on tensions between formalism and naturalism

in Morris' aesthetic theory and practice, and finds similarities between Morris' ideas and designs and the formalist prescriptions of Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament*. "The designs themselves," he observes, "while possessing an unearthly beauty, sometimes cling to principles seemingly at odds with ideas expressed in Morris's essays." In particular, he identifies a period (1875-76), in which he believes Morris' designs, though beautiful, were "often cool, formal, and self-consciously artificial where the lectures emphasize decoration's roots in happiness, hope, and grief" (p. 75).

As Frankel sees it, Morris also turned from a later period of "accommodation with mainstream Victorian practice" to independent designs for the Kelmscott Press, and created in the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* "a highly decorative object [which] suddenly makes the novel seem at once realized and realizable." Not only did the ornamental features of the text "invite the reader to enter an alternative world," but the text's floral forms were "living, actualized expressions of an ecological ideal, in which culture and nature, text and context, become merged in a space that eludes definition and defies the normative economy of the page" (pp. 78-79). On the basis of such evidence, he concludes that "no Pre-Raphaelite or Arts and Crafts designer . . . took so much inspiration for his work in the living environment as William Morris" (p. 80).

In "Morris and Swinburne" (*JWMS* 15, no. 3), Peter Faulkner examines the more than forty-year relationship between Morris and A. C. Swinburne, which began during their time together at Oxford, and can be traced in part through their correspondence about the Kelmscott Press volumes Morris sent to Swinburne as gifts. Swinburne was reclusive in later years, but consistently praised Morris and his writings throughout most of his life. Morris, for his part, wrote unguardedly to Georgiana Burne-Jones about Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse* that "to confess and be hanged, you know I could never really sympathise with Swinburne's work; it always seemed to me to be founded on literature, not on nature." Swinburne, unfortunately, was still alive when Mackail published these remarks in his *Life of Morris* in 1899, and he responded in an essay with the remark that "Morris could hardly swim a stroke without support from Chaucer," the only harsh evaluation of Morris' work he ever wrote. Faulkner concludes from this exchange and its antecedents that "there was a genuine friendship between Morris and Swinburne, but one more important to the latter than the former" (p. 22).

In "An 'Impossible' Socialist? William Morris and the Politics of Socialist Revolution versus Social Reform" (*JWMS* 15, no. 2), Colin Skelly offers a spirited rebuttal to the common view that Morris' rejection of parliamentary "pragmatism" and concentration on long-term goals curtailed the Socialist League's contribution (and relevance) to working-class

political progress. Skelly provides an accurate overview and assessment of the several factions which vied for influence within the British socialist movement from its inception, as well as a detailed account of the Hammersmith Socialist League's activities and ideological currents from its secession from the Socialist League in 1890 to Morris' death in 1896. Citing, for example, the League's high levels of month-to-month activity, steady support for a distinguished lecture series, and proven ability to attract relatively large street audiences, Skelly praises its efforts to uphold ideals of ultimate transformation as it struggled to negotiate careful compromises with parliamentary and "gas and water socialists," argues that Morris' little band of "impossibilists" found spiritual heirs in several vigorous strands of twentieth-century British socialist activism, and concludes—accurately, I believe—that the little group's "anti-state, though not anarchist, stance" represented a coherent alternative to the positions of other left-wing organizations of the time.

In brief, this year's contributions to the study of Pre-Raphaelitism and its various artistic, literary, religious, and political outliers suggest that renewed editorial attention to Dante Gabriel Rossetti has prepared the way for future interpretations; that Christina Rossetti's poetry and spiritual exercises still bring forth recuperative studies in every conceivable theoretical register; and that every aspect of Morris' lifework evokes respectful appreciation with the unwarranted exception of his lyric and narrative accomplishments, which await tillage of critical fields and pastures new.

Swinburne

MARGOT K. LOUIS

For many years impassioned Swinburneans have tried to make the scholarly world take Swinburne seriously, and have made some progress. Recently, however, at diverse cultural levels informed by, yet largely dissociated from Academe, something quite unexpected and astounding has happened: in rock, in jazz, in poetry, in fiction from magic realism to the crime novel, Swinburne is emerging as a living force in our own culture. In short (and as a scholar I shudder as I key in the words), *Swinburne is cool*. That it should come to this!

Let us begin soberly, with two splendidly uncool items illuminating the poet's social and intellectual context. Those interested in Swinburne's family history can now visit The Swinburn(e) Family History Site at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Atlantis/8805/index.html>, but will pay special