

become blurred, at times deliberately, at other times perhaps uncontrollably, in the lives and works of three who moved centrally among the many currents and eddies of those times. Wilde, Symonds, and Beardsley—and many others might be called to bear similar witness—convey simultaneously great strengths in control over their artistic materials and an awareness that they attempt to order the essentially fluid and unstable. What they attempted, and what they achieved, are admirably presented to us by Ellmann, Beckson, and Fletcher, whose books merit high acclaim. *edp*

## The Pre-Raphaelites

*Florence Boos*

In 1987 the second volume of the Princeton edition of William Morris' letters, along with two books and several articles on Morris' poetry and romance, was published. In addition to these works, I will discuss several articles on Dante and Christina Rossetti, and two books devoted to Pre-Raphaelite art. A book-length study of Christina Rossetti, which has also appeared, will be discussed next year.

The second volume of Morris' *Letters* (921 pages, in two physical volumes) has been beautifully edited by Norman Kelvin with the assistance of Gale Sigal. Its 903 letters from 1881–88 follow the 659 letters from 1848–80, and provide the first full epistolary record of Morris' maturation and engagement in an exhaustive range of activities. Many of the letters had previously been published in abbreviated form, in newspapers, in relatively obscure collections, or not at all. Morris was forty-six years old at the beginning of 1881, and in March 1888 he turned fifty-four. The letters record his erratic health and personal adjustments to middle-age, personal reflections, literary and artistic judgments, activities on behalf of the Firm, carefully argued defenses of socialism and work for the Socialist League, and a running series of comments on architectural preservation and respect for the natural environment. Even the more familiar letters from Philip Henderson's 1950 collection (*The Letters of William Morris to his Family and Friends*), assume new resonance in this fuller personal and intellectual setting.

Kelvin and Sigal's detailed notes on Morris' friends and correspondents and explanations of the debates or incidents which evoked each letter

are especially valuable for this period of constant activity and responses to public events and divisions within the Socialist League. Their introduction also provides an interpretative survey of Morris' many concerns during the period, and the book's illustrations include many little-known photographs of his associates and family circle. One of the authors of the 1986 "Year's Guide" praised another work as "the best edition of the letters of any Victorian figure"; it would be foolish to escalate claims, but it should be pointed that this edition also does honor to its preparers and to its subject.

Morris might have felt sympathetic appreciation for the first of the critical books of the year, J[oyce] M. Tompkins' posthumous *William Morris: An Approach to the Poetry*, for it is an appreciative work "born out of its due time." Dr. Tompkins died in England in 1986, at the age of eighty-nine; she remarks that the book "took shape" from 1967-69, and its implicit interlocutors and adversaries were her fellow students of Morris in the 1950s and 1960s. In her conclusion, she candidly remarks:

To comprehend Morris's poetry requires some knowledge of and pleasure in medieval romantic writing . . . [.] the familiarity which young people from educated circles had up till about 1920. I belonged to one of the later of these generations, and my easy acceptance of content and tone in Morris's tales has helped me to approach them more closely. So have the reading habits I acquired then, the dislike of excitement in fiction, the pleasure in leisurely, smooth unfolding.

The virtues of the book are to be found in such a "leisurely unfolding" of individual insights into Morris' poetic work. Its concomitant faults are a tendency toward digression, and uncritically biographical readings mixed with reproofs of such readings by others. The best chapters are the ones devoted to Morris' early writings, *Jason*, *The Earthly Paradise*, and *Love is Enough*, and offer many well observed quasi-biographical glints. Of "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon," she notes: "The superimposition of his sense of himself on a character in his tale sometimes results in a blurring of outline." Of *Love is Enough*: "It may be . . . that below every declaration of belief there is an undertow. . . . At times the sentences seem to swing round involuntarily as they feel the hidden current." Some readings are a bit eccentric: she considers the three teeth "like spears" of Bellerophon's defeated monster a sarcastic allusion to the trinity, and insists that *Love is Enough* ends with the lovers' happy union. The book is clearly a labor of love which might have benefited from some editing; as it is, students of Morris' early and middle poetry will often find Tompkins' readings worthwhile, whether or not they agree with them.

Amanda Hodgson's *The Romances of William Morris* is a briefer work, guided by the rather restrictive view that "romances" must "move in a linear pattern towards a fixed and gratifying end." She believes that Morris progressed from early skepticism about attempts to recreate the past, to a greater faith in the value of heroism, and sees the latter as the source of his

“gratifying” later works. Morris’ beliefs did evolve in ways which affected the structure of his narratives, but I believe Hodgson’s preference for “happy” endings oversimplifies the interactions between politics and form throughout his major literary works. Hodgson largely disregards early works which end happily (e.g., “Rapunzel”); downplays the heroic and affirmative poems of Morris’ middle period (she fails to discuss, for example, *Jason* and the Bellerophon tales); and glosses over the bittersweet qualities of such later romances as *The Pilgrims of Hope*, *A Dream of John Ball*, *The House of the Wolfings*, or even *The Roots of the Mountains*. Martyrdom in service to great causes is one mark of a genre of heroic or utopian tragedy.

Also problematic in the light of her definition is her dismissal of the obvious “romance” *Love is Enough*, as “the nearest Morris ever came to an endorsement of escapism” (what about *its* affirmative ending?), and silence about *The Pilgrims of Hope*; she also deprecates a thoroughly “romantic” tale, “The Fostering of Aslaug,” which would seem to anticipate the affirmation she admires in the later romances. The view that the late prose romances are the culmination of Morris’ literary work would also seem to be undercut by her deprecation of “the unsophisticated, even banal, basic pattern of the sentences [in the romances]. Morris writes a very shapeless prose.” Finally, Hodgson makes little or no references to the many British and North American critical discussions of the points she raises (for example, in Carole Silver’s 1981 *The Romance of William Morris*).

In fairness, the chief merits of the book lie in its individual readings, which are more flexible than its theory. For example, she unexpectedly but accurately praises “the realistic” emotions of “The Lovers of Gudrun,” characterizes *Sigurd the Volsung* as “Morris’s first really optimistic [?] poem,” and makes useful observations about contemporary mythology, history, and definitions of romance. It is, in fact, also “gratifying” to see a sustained and spirited attempt to relate Morris’ political views to his late prose romances.

At least two scholarly articles of the last year on Morris merit mention: Eugene Le Mire’s “The ‘First’ William Morris and the 39 Articles,” (*JWMS* 7, no. 2: 9–14); and David Latham’s “Paradise Lost: Morris’s Re-writing of *The Earthly Paradise*,” (*JPRS* 1, no. 1 [Part 1]: 67–75). Le Mire points out that the Oxford University Reform Act of 1854 narrowly enabled Morris to obtain a pass degree without either subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles or renouncing his adherence to Anglicanism. Latham gathers much of what is known of the British Library and Fitzwilliam Museum Library’s collections of Morris’ early drafts for *The Earthly Paradise*, dates them with the aid of watermarks and other evidence, and provides a convincing rationale for several sample changes. Three of the Huntington Library manuscripts—an early draft of the entire manuscript;

fragments of an early version of *Jason*; and a version of the discarded "Story of Aristomenes" with changes marked—would benefit from similar careful scrutiny. Also valuable is David and Sheila Latham's "William Morris: An annotated bibliography 1984-85," (*JWMS* 7, no. 3: i-xxiv), whose succinct summaries accurately convey something of the tone and content of the works cited. This bibliography is the more useful now, since the coverage of Gary Aho's *William Morris: A Reference Guide* extends only through 1982.

Among the critical articles on Morris, Roger Lewis' "News From Nowhere: Arcadia or Utopia?" (*JWMS* 7, no. 2: 15-25), argues that *News From Nowhere* is not an aristocratic pastoral "arcadia" or a satiric "utopia," but a Schillerian "idyll." It is not clear why pastoral romances in the nineteenth century had to be "aristocratic," (as opposed, say, to "bourgeois"), or "utopias" satiric, and several Victorian literary "idylls" do not fit Lewis' definition, but his discussions of analogues and antecedents are informed by an accurate sense of *Nowhere's* subtle intentions. Frederick Kirchhoff's "Terrors of the Third Dimension: William Morris and the Limits of Representation," (*JPRS* 1, no. 1 [Part 1]: 77-82) asks why Morris preferred two-dimensional pattern-designs to three-dimensional representations, and answers that he associated the latter with artistic "subjectivity" and "high art." He then interprets Morris' use of statuary and a "swan-maiden" in several *Earthly Paradise* tales as evidence of this ambivalence toward three-dimensional, "high" art. Kirchhoff's arguments are ingenious and resourceful, but statues also embody other obvious allegorical qualities, of course: lust (Laurence in "The Ring Given to Venus"); love (Melanion in "Atalanta's Race"); and cold antagonism (Sthenoboea in "Bellerophon in Argos"). Only "Pygmalion and the Image" really fits the critic's scheme, as it did in the classical antecedents of the tale.

One of the year's articles on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Alicia Faxon's "Thoughts on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Humor," (*JPRS* 7, no. 2: 80-89), glosses an entertaining selection of Rossetti's quips and comic verses. Brennan O'Donnell's "D. G. Rossetti's 'The Stream's Secret' and the Epithalamion," (*VP* 25: 187-192), finds in the poem a deliberate evocation of the traditions of Spenser's "Prothalamion," which "becomes more interesting and more deeply ironic . . . against the background of poems in which streams and rivers . . . help the poet to celebrate publicly a type of love which is sanctioned by society." O'Donnell's interpretation is conceivable, and he provides a sensitive and carefully detailed account of the poem.

One of William E. Fredeman's tributes to the Brotherhood's recording secretary appears in "William Michael Rossetti and the Wise-Forman Conspiracy," (*BC* 36:55-71), in which Fredeman meticulously and with some humor documents William's social and business dealings with the forgers H. Buxton Forman and Thomas J. Wise. The correspondence which


resulted included at least one vain attempt by Wise to persuade WMR to attest to a lie, and Fredeman correctly describes one of Wise's letters as "a shrewd and subtle blend of hypocrisy, mendacity, arrogance, and false humility." His conclusion is that WMR was "in every way 'unWise.'"

Three articles on Christina Rossetti provide new readings of her poems. In the first half of "The Role of Embroidery in Victorian Culture and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle," (*JPRS* 7, no. 2: 55-67), J. Anne George and Susie Campbell interpret Christina Rossetti's literary references to embroidery in the light of her known distaste for such activities; by way of contrast, they devote the rest of the article to two equally well known but notably enthusiastic needleworkers, Jane and May Morris. Linda E. Marshall's "What the Dead Are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti," (*VN* 72 [Fall 1987]: 55-60) canvases all the relevant Anglican doctrines on the state of the soul between death and the Last Judgment, and finds Christina Rossetti's many poetic allusions to death consistent with the Anglican hypothesis of the existence of an interim state of "Hades." Marshall then construes Rossetti's view of Paradise and Heaven as an expression of women's fate: "Rest in Hades, glorification in Heaven: Rossetti's eschatological programme of deferral wearily recognizes the 'doubly blank' lot of woman in the world and compacts from imposed passivity indomitable, watchful strength." It should perhaps be observed that Christina Rossetti was also an heir of the Romantic movement, which sought its own sources of "indomitable, watchful strength"; some of her references to consciousness after death, moreover, may be metaphorical. Nevertheless, Marshall's account of Rossetti's eschatology is thoroughly researched, and offers genuine insights into Rossetti's theological temperament.

Another aspect of Christina Rossetti's devotional life is explored in Diane D'Amico's "Christina Rossetti's *Christian Year*: Comfort for 'the weary heart,'" (*VN* 72 [Fall 1987]: 36-42), which examines Rossetti's private copy of John Keble's *The Christian Year*. D'Amico reproduces and interprets several of Rossetti's marginal illustrations to the volume, and notes common features of the lines and passages she marked. Poets' illustrations of poetry are always of interest, and D'Amico's commentary identifies several pointed ways in which Rossetti's drawings depart from Keble's text. She invariably portrays the speakers of the poems as women, for example, even where Keble indicates they are male; imposes recurrent anxieties about isolation and sinfulness upon Keble's more cheerful passages; and persistently sees God not in nature (as Keble tends to do), but only in heaven.

Two handsomely illustrated art-books complete this year's selection. Max Beerbohm's 1922 *Rossetti and His Circle* has been reprinted by Yale

University Press with the addition of a notably helpful forty-four page introduction by N. John Hall, and an appendix of additional plates and drawings. Jan Marsh's *Pre-Raphaelite Women* is a visually beautiful guide to one of the major interests of Pre-Raphaelite art. Clear schematic types ("Holy Virgins," "Sorceresses," "Pale Ladies of Death") provide the rubrics for Marsh's chapters, and she gathers into her book a wide array of familiar and unfamiliar pictures, glossed with useful observations about artists and subjects, symbols and elements of composition, and the contemporary reception of the works. Of special value is her attention to such little-known women artists as Rebecca Solomon and Evelyn de Morgan. Beyond its ostensible subject matter, this book offers an attractive pathway into a significant part of Victorian art.

In brief, then, Dante Gabriel Rossetti seems to have received relatively little in the way of critical attention this year, and William Morris and Christina Rossetti rather more. Historical scholarship provided the basis for most of the more original interpretations in the journal literature, and the major publishing event of the year was not a work of criticism, but the appearance of the second volume of Morris' *Letters*. 

## Tennyson

*Joseph Sendry*

1987 was a milestone year in Tennyson studies. It saw publication of the revised three-volume edition of Ricks's *The Poems of Tennyson*, the inaugural volume of the Tennyson Archive, and the second volume of the Lang-Shannon edition of the poet's letters. Susan Shatto's *Tennyson's Maud: A Definitive Edition*, published in 1986, remains as unfinished business from last year's review. In 1987 the poet also continued to attract the quantity and quality of critical attention we have come to expect. But because of the unusual importance of the primary materials that appeared in 1987 and the unusual space limitations in this issue of *Victorian Poetry* I have chosen to confine commentary here to the editorial productions. Since 1988 promises to be a fruitful year for Tennyson criticism, some of the more noteworthy contributions from 1987 may yet receive comment in this space next year.

In the present state of Tennyson studies it would be difficult to imagine a publication in this or any year that would outrank in importance a comprehensive edition from the desk of Christopher Ricks. Indeed, on the strength