

## The Pre-Raphaelites

FLORENCE S. BOOS

The year brought worthwhile articles and scholarly editions to compensate for its scarcity of single-author monographs. Two recent articles on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry offer contrasting psychological and historical approaches. Joseph Bristow's "He and I: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Other Man" (*VP* 39, no. 3) sidesteps more familiar aspects of Rossetti's images of heterosexual frustration to focus on the male personae in poems such as "He and I" (sonnet XCVIII in "The House of Life") who preempt speakers' authority and identity and "solicit, only to betray, the poet-speaker's trust"—figures such as "Willowwood"'s allegorical image of "Love," for example, who weighs down the speaker's "neck with moan of pity and grace" and encircles both lovers' heads in his aureole. Bristow finds other analogous patterns in the looming imagery of "The Burden of Nineveh," "Love"'s denial of fulfilled love in "Love's Nocturne," and the dying speaker's confessions to his priest in "A Last Confession." Readers may find his analysis of Rossetti's figural displacements and processional narcissism convincing enough to warrant searches for unmediated female figures in Rossetti's work (Beatrice sans Virgil? Venus sans Cupid?).

In "Punch on Nineveh, Catholics and the P. R. B." (*JPRS*, fall), Andrew Stauffer finds unexpectedly complex contemporary responses to Henry Layard's Assyrian bull and Pre-Raphaelite art in Rossetti's two versions of "The Burden of Nineveh"—art-student debates about "whether Punch / Is right about the P. R. B." in the first version, for example, to associations of Assyrian bull statues with aestheticism, Pre-Raphaelitism, and papal "bulls" (!) in *Punch* and other periodicals. The Pre-Raphaelites outlived those assaults, and *Punch* later portrayed the Ninevan excavator Layard as an M. P. in agonistic struggle against "John Bull," but Stauffer argues that Rossetti's poem reflected these glints of cultural history in its "moves between mockery and wonder, ironically exposing imperial pride-fulness while negotiating [Rossetti's] own conflicted attitudes towards Catholicism in the 1850s." Quaint illustrations (among them a *Punch* cartoon of a British lion atop a frowning Assyrian bull adorned with papal crown) support Stauffer's points, and his close historical study clarifies an unexpectedly whimsical aspect of Rossetti's icon of brute imperial force.

Betty S. Flowers has newly introduced and annotated an inexpensive paperback edition of R. W. Crump's *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*, originally published in three hardcover volumes from 1978 to 1990, and argues in its introduction that Rossetti's "iconic rather than psychological" art requires "readings that pay attention to the interplay between

allusions and emotion.” Her edition of this compact (1221 page) paperback reproduces William Michael Rossetti’s earlier notes for critical comparison, and supplements them with hundreds of helpful biblical, literary, and biographical notes of her own. It would be a great pleasure to see comparably inexpensive reprints or republications of other Pre-Raphaelite works—Jan Marsh’s edition of the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, for example, and some of William Morris’ longer poems.

In “Lisa Wilson: ‘A Friend of Christina Rossetti’” (*JPRS*, fall), Diane D’Amico sets out what she has discovered about Mary Louisa Wilson (1850-1934), who appears in two photographs as a handsome and austere middle-aged woman. Wilson was an independently prosperous single woman who devoted herself to her older friend in her final illness, cherished Rossetti as poetic model as well as religious exemplar, and dedicated to her her own *Verses* (1896). D’Amico comments on Wilson’s intricate emulations of Rossetti’s poetry and the symbolism of Rossetti’s poetic tribute “To My Fior-di-Lisa,” as well as Wilson’s personal recollections in the margins of Mary Sandar’s 1930 biography of Rossetti, and the influence on both women of religious writers such as Rossetti’s spiritual advisor, the Rev. Frederick Littledale, who wrote that “to get to know God’s friends is a very good way of ‘having’ Him.” In keeping with this ideal, D’Amico interprets Wilson’s destruction of Rossetti’s letters as a further sign that she “never traded on [her] friendship for worldly benefit,” and that her “actions always seem to have followed what . . . spiritual friendship would demand.”

In “Questioning Milton, Questioning God: Christina Rossetti’s Challenges to Authority in ‘Goblin Market’ and ‘The Prince’s Progress,’” Sarah Fiona Winters (*JPRS*, fall) interprets *Goblin Market* as a bold revision of *Paradise Lost*, “which presents humanity saving itself, without need of God.” She also assimilates Lizzie and Laura’s response to goblin fruit to Milton’s portrayals of Adam and Eve, considers Rossetti’s retelling “problematic . . . because Adam-Lizzie’s redemption of Eve-Laura leaves no room for Divine intercession,” and offers a separate absence-of-God interpretation of *The Prince’s Progress*, as a cry from the depths against a “God who . . . failed to love [Rossetti] with the desire a Bridegroom owes to his Bride,” and whose “Prince does not . . . function as a foil to Christ; he is Christ.” The essay’s discussion of Miltonic parallels seems to me more persuasive than its reinterpretation of Rossetti as a disillusioned agnostic.

In “Reappraisals of the Flesh: Christina Rossetti and the Revision of Pre-Raphaelite Aesthetics” (*JPRS*, spring), Alan Salerno interprets a formal photograph by Charles Dodgson in which Christina stands slightly apart from her family as an allegorical trope of “radical ‘distortions’ [to] Pre-Raphaelitic notions,” which are “startlingly and stunningly carried

over into her literary productions.” After a discussion of female agency in *Goblin Market* and *Speaking Likenesses*, he argues that her heroines who return in the end to “comfortable (and hardly radical) domestic environment[s], [nevertheless] have . . . new knowledge with which to transform it.”

Christine Wiesenthal examines psychological implications of indeterminately gendered pronouns in “Regarding Christina Rossetti’s Reflection” (VP 39, no. 3), and assimilates the speaker’s view of her “soul’s dear soul” (presumably female) in “Reflection” to the reflexive object of a Lacanian “gaze.” Alluding to trompe-l’oeil images such as Holbein’s obliquely distorted death’s head in *The Ambassadors*, she concludes that in “The Reflection” the “dual roles through which the speaker presents herself can be read as a tacit poetic refusal ‘of the injunction to be a given gender,’” and that the poem’s male lover “looks to the woman for his gratification” in its “serial displacements of lack onto an other/Other for imaginary satisfaction,” while she in turn looks “to God as the ‘missing’ object in the field of her vision.”

Authors devoted at least fourteen articles and one book to William Morris’ literary output this year. I introduced and glossed each of the twenty-five tales and interconnecting lyrics of his great epic cycle *The Earthly Paradise* in a new edition (2 volumes, Routledge), and sought to clarify in its general introduction the work’s publication history, sources in ancient and medieval “earthly paradise” traditions, and seasonal progression of interrelated “classical” and “medieval” tales. In head- and footnotes, I also commented on Morris’ complex revisions of classical, medieval, Germanic, Scandinavian, Arabic, and Persian sources, and document aspects of Morris’ practical knowledge and passion for travel, as well as his nascent radical-democratic (later anarchosocialist) convictions.

Aided by assiduous researchers and guided at several points by the remarkable erudition of Peter Wright, I sought for example to gloss Morris’ wide-ranging allusions to bird and animal lore, practices of ancient and medieval agriculture, and concrete descriptions of Viking ships and medieval navigation. Headnote commentaries examine his idiosyncratic narrative innovations and reconfigurations of such characters as Rhodope, Bharam, Bellerophon, Guðrun/Gudrun, Bolli/Bodli, Holger Dansker/Ogier the Dane, and the multivalent hero of “The Hill of Venus.” Morris’ visible struggle in later tales to reinterpret religious myths in allegorical terms and find meaning in sustained commitments to worthy but unrewarded or unrecognized ideals led me to reappraise other authorial decisions—to portray women more favorably than his predecessors, for example, to insert from time to time pointed critiques of “heroic” *faits de prouesse* by wary peasant bystanders, and to research in detail the everyday

crafts and labor that sustained his aristocratic characters' lives. In the anomalous role of reviewer of my own work, finally, I would like to echo an earlier remark and apologize for the volume's high cost, for I believe that potential readers would welcome a paperback edition of Morris' poignant tales.

In "A Conversation with Northrop Frye About William Morris," (*JPRS*, spring) an informal interview Christopher Lowry conducted in Frye's office at the University of Toronto in 1988, three years before his death, Frye rejected notions that Morris' temperament was religious, and characterized Morris as a worthy member of a broadly oppositional literary tradition. He also expressed especially pointed respect for Morris' passionate and prophetic defense of "the Earth": "People are beginning to wake up to the fact that the unlimited exploitation of nature will not work and is very dangerous, and after we've used up everything there won't be very much to go on with, and Morris certainly told them that one hundred years ago."

In "A Rediscovered and Partly Unpublished Morris Notebook" (*JWMS* 14 no. 3), Chris Fletcher presents a newly "discovered" album of fragmentary verses and sketches Morris gave to Charles Fairfax Murray in 1858 (now in the hands of the British Library). Fletcher offers conjectures about some of the volume's lacunae and missing pages, prints the album's rough "new" verses, which do not of course appear in my *Juvenilia of William Morris* (Morris Society, 1982), and observes that they foreshadow patterns familiar from other early fragments and Morris' Froissartian *Defence* poems such as "The Haystack by the Floods" or "Concerning Geoffray Teste Noire" (attraction to dignified but elusive women; long-forgotten catastrophic disruptions of medieval wars; and recurrent desires to memorialize forms of love and heroism "history" has effaced). Fletcher remarks in his conclusion that many aspects of these poems' "compositional history and early provenance, together with details of binding, mutilation and partial reconstruction" will inevitably remain unclear, despite his exemplary efforts.

In "The Influence of De La Motte Fouqué's *Sintram and His Companions* on William Morris's *The Wood Beyond the World*" (*JWMS* 14, no. 2), Hilary Newman considers the effect on Morris' writings of Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's portrayal in *Sintram and His Companions* of a selfless traveller in the snowy Norwegian wastes, and finds parallels with *The Wood Beyond the World* in *Sintram's* allegorical dwarf-figure and three-stage quest plot. Dwarfs, quests, and northern landscapes obviously figure elsewhere in Morris' and others' works, but Newman's article is a helpful reminder of these works' common recourse to northern medieval sources and motifs.

In “‘The North Begins Inside’: Morris and Trollope in Iceland,” Peter Preston reconsiders the personal significance of Morris’ two Icelandic journeys for his efforts to engage in critical reflection and self-assessment, “think bigly and kindly,” and find unexpected sources of his uncompromising political activism. He also finds recurring patterns in Morris’ journals of “melancholy, self-reproof for indulging his unhappiness, [and] a summoning up of positive feelings,” and comments on the animating effects of his “re-imagining[s]” of Icelandic sources and the “empathetic intensity and energy” they conferred.

Preston’s most novel contribution is the contrast he develops with the boat tour Anthony Trollope took around Iceland with a friend in 1876. Trollope and his party were models of Britannocentric tourism, who remained largely offshore, bought souvenirs indiscriminately, made relatively few attempts to converse, and praised Icelanders in proportion to their acquaintance with more familiar European attitudes and ways of life. Morris, by contrast, journeyed on the backs of sturdy and patient little Icelandic horses, acquired a working knowledge of the language, and viewed material objects as artifacts which might help him understand something of the island’s rich cultural past. Preston illustrates his article with diverting sketches by a member of Trollope’s party and Burne-Jones’s caricatures, but makes no mention of prior commentators such as Gary Aho, Ruth Ellison, Karen Herbert, Frederick Kirchhoff, Emily Meredith, and John Purkis. He does, however, provide ample evidence for the conclusion that Morris’ “record of his visit and the shape taken by his subsequent career speak of his crucial indwelling sense of northernness.”

William Whitla’s endeavor in his eighty-one page study of “‘Sympathetic Translation’ and the ‘Scribe’s Capacity’: Morris’s Calligraphy and the Icelandic Sagas,” (*JPRS*, fall) was “to combine bibliographical descriptions of Morris’s calligraphic manuscripts with theoretical explanations for his new calligraphic scripts and . . . the place of the sagas in his political analysis.” In Whitla’s view, Morris’ experiments with manuscript illumination and studies of medieval and humanist calligraphy made him “the inaugurator of the revival of handwriting in the modern period,” and he describes Morris’ several handwritings in *The Earthly Paradise* drafts and calligraphic saga editions, defends his translations’ archaisms as examples of conscious “defamiliarization,” and interprets Morris’ publishing of manuscripts as rejections of conventional Victorian publishing’s more exploitive practices. Whitla too makes little or no mention of cognate studies by other scholars (Karl Anderson, Ruth Ellison, and Karl Litzenberg, for example), but his erudite checklists and overviews of “The Old Norse Translations of William Morris and Related Materials” and “William Morris’s Calligraphic Manuscripts” create a thoroughly docu-

mented base for further interpretive study.

In "Ten Journeys to the Venusberg: Morris's Drafts for 'The Hill of Venus'" (VP 39 no. 4), I sought to unravel the vexed intentions and composition history of Morris' ambivalent German knight, who journeys from Venus' cave to the Vatican and back, but remains unaware for all eternity that the pope's crozier has bloomed in benign recognition of his cause. I propose that one of Morris' proximal sources for this "unheroic" final tale in the *Earthly Paradise's* grand cycle was Sabine Baring-Gould's proto-anthropological account of the legend in *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (1866), and argue that Morris held back a facile and moralistic early version of the tale in order to deepen its hero's skepticism and principled desperation, and affirm his own conviction that searching honesty and struggle are moral ends in themselves. The homage to generous eros and idealized praxis created a miniature emblem of Morris' larger work, and an aesthetic frame for its imbricated cyclical patterns of desire, renunciation, anonymity, and remembrance.

Nicholas Salmon, a stringent interpreter of Morris's historical writings, published four studies of Morris' socialist literary writings in the *Journal of the William Morris Society* shortly before he died young, at thirty-nine in 2002. In "'The Battered Looking and Middle-aged Barn-cock'; Or 'An Old Fable Retold'" (JWMS 14, no. 3), he interprets Morris' early socialist fable "An Old Fable Retold," about barnyard animals who quarrel over the topic, "with what sauce . . . we [shall] be eaten?" as a parodic allegory of Morris's "symbolic and final rejection of parliamentary politics" in the aftermath of his involvement in the Eastern Question Association.

In "The Communist Poet-Laureate: William Morris's *Chants for Socialists*" (JWMS 14, no. 4), Salmon argues that Morris himself found too didactic his successful song, "Wake, London Lads," composed for an 1878 protest against English war preparations against Turkey. He also criticizes *Chants'* allusions to deep working-class poverty, but acknowledges that they "respond[ed] to contemporary society in a way that disproves the absurd allegations that he was some sort of romantic dreamer out of touch with his age."

In "A Study in Victorian Historiography: William Morris's Germanic Romances" (JWMS 14, no. 2), Salmon reviews historical and anthropological antecedents of the Romans and Germanic tribes in *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains* in histories by Theodor Mommsen, Charles Elton, Edward Freeman, and others, and interweaves this account with Morris' own remarks about "barbarism," slavery, and the persistence of European "cultural remnants" of ancient tribal institutions that have long since become "mere . . . travesties of the originals."

Salmon also interprets Morris' fragment *The Story of Desiderius* as a late-Roman companion piece to the better-known medieval and political romances.

In "A Reassessment of *A Dream of John Ball*" (*JWMS* 14 no. 2), Salmon identifies Morris' revisions to the *Commonweal* version of Morris' tale. Morris had long viewed Ball as a proponent of proto-socialist views, in Salmon's view, and thought that the Peasant's Revolt failed because "the men who created the rebellion [were] not seeking equality or community but personal freedom and liberty." Salmon himself interprets *John Ball* as a fictional counterpart of "Socialism from the Root Up," but he also finds it "as much . . . a celebration of national identity [as] of revolutionary aspirations." Salmon's conclusion—that Ball's "bland assertion [in the final scene]—unsubstantiated by either historical fact or contemporary events—that despite everything the 'Fellowship of Man shall endure' simply lacks credibility"—unfortunately seems to me to undervalue the poignance as well as deliberate counterfactuality of Ball's evocation of a socialist as well as secular kingdom of ends.

In "The Changing Politics of Fantasy: From Morris and Schreiner to the Present" (*JPRS*, spring), Margaret D. Stetz argues that utopian fantasies typically do not evoke "some 'shadowy land,' but the land outside the text," and decries contrasts between this "land" and "the unnatural conditions that [have] . . . deformed the social landscape." *News from Nowhere* clearly embodies this pattern, but so in Stetz's view did Olive Schreiner's fable "The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed," which appeared in the same year (1891). Both authors recoiled from contemporary social conditions and celebrated an ideal of community and "aestheticized labour in the world to come," but the idealized artists in Schreiner's feminist text were androgynous, even sexless, and Stetz finds analogies with Schreiner's account in Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* (1981). She concludes that more recent authors of utopian fantasy have shared with their Victorian predecessors an aesthetic which "boldly view[ed] the creative impulse and the activist impulse as one and the same."

David and Sheila Latham's *William Morris: An Annotated Bibliography: 1998-1999* devotes thirty-four of its 121 entries to literature, among them a few works in Italian and German. One of the literary entries is a dissertation, "From Utopia to Paralogy" (SUNY Buffalo), in which Martin Spinella makes a rather intriguing assertion that *News from Nowhere* and Bellamy's *Looking Backward* offer vocabularies for critical appreciation of "the effects of . . . emergent communication technologies on literary community and experiment."

The year finally offered two somewhat unusual tributes to Pre-Raphaelite ideals. In "The Other Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure: Creativity, Innovation, Critique, and the Humanities" (*JPRS*, spring) D.

M. R. Bentley praises the other “Bill” (William Morris) and “Ted” (Ned Jones) for their socially committed ideals and practices, and argues that “The Defence of Guenevere” vindicates “humanity in . . . its intellectual, physical, and spiritual richness and uncertainty.” He inserts facing columns with relevant quotations from Kant, Collingwood, and others, and pleads for application to the humanities as a whole of Morris’ general definition of a “building worthy of protection” as “any work . . . over which educated, artistic people would think it worthwhile to argue.”

Jan Marsh, finally, the “discoverer” of “A Friend (Re)Visits South Kensington: From a scribbled manuscript (in William Morris’s hand?)” (*JWMS* 14, no. 3), reviews “Inventing New Britain: The Victorian Vision” (the title of a Victoria and Albert Exhibition in 2001) in the persona of a skeptical and sometimes aggrieved William Morris: “The first crafted object my gaze lighted upon [for example] was a huge silver-gilt epergne designed by the Consort, depicting a variety of dogs and their dead victims,—hares, rats and so forth. A more horrible item can scarcely be imagined; or rather, a more horrible waste of high workmanship.” The revenant “Morris” wryly encounters his own assertion that “the chief duty of a civilised world today is to set about making labour happy for all” emblazoned on a gallery wall, but bitterly finds “[not] the least sign of that, anywhere about.”

Such creative improvisations grace the ideals they advocate, and merit non-institutional reconsideration in our time, and those that will follow.

## Swinburne

MARGOT K. LOUIS

Eager to provide readers of the year’s reviews with as much information as soon as possible, I lavished on my 2000 review most of the riches of 2001; last year I discussed Catherine Maxwell’s invaluable Swinburne chapter in *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester Univ. Press, 2001), along with Stephanie Kuduk’s fine “A Sword of a Song’: Swinburne’s Republican Aesthetics in *Songs before Sunrise*” (*VS* 43 [2001]: 253-78), Jette Kjeldsen’s “What Can the Aesthetic Movement Tell us about Aesthetic Education?” (*Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 1 [Spring 2001]: 85-97), Nathan Cervo’s “A Note on ‘Swallow’ in Swinburne’s ‘Itylus’” (*VN* 99 [Spring 2001]: 15-16), and Catherine