WRITING
ON THE IMAGE:
READING
WILLIAM MORRIS

David Latham

interdisciplinary nature of Morris's work that prohibits anyone from ever reaching the boundaries of Morris's literature, decorative arts, book design, politics, etc., 'etcetera' being a word on which I would never end an introduction for any other figure but Morris.

NOTE

1 'How Morris seems to know things,' admired Charles Faulkner. Richard Watson Dixon agreed: 'I observed how decisive he was: how accurate, without any effort or formality: what an extraordinary power of observation lay at the base of many of his casual or incidental remarks, and how many things he knew that were quite out of our way' (Mackail 1:44).

ILLUSTRATIONS

2
(Dis)continuities:
Arthur's Tomb, Modern Painters, and Morris's Early Wallpaper Designs

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Arthur's Tomb (fig. 2.1; 1855) is Dante Gabriel Rossetti's first painting of an Arthurian subject and, as such, has been generally recognized as occupying a transitional position between the work of the first and second groups of Pre-Raphaelites. Although dated 1854 the painting was actually executed in the late summer and autumn of 1855, some two years after Rossetti had declared the 'Round Table' of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 'dissolved' (*Correspondence* 1:163), and some two months before he made the acquaintance of Burne-Jones and, through him, Morris (Burne-Jones, *Memorials* 1:128–30). Nevertheless, as David Rogers observes, the 'angularity of [its two] figures, particularly the Queen who was surely posed for by Lizzie Siddal, harks back to the early PRB style of 1849-50,' and its subject – Launcelot attempting to kiss Guenevere over Arthur's tomb – 'inspired the poem of [nearly] the same title ... in *The Defence of Guenevere*, [Morris's] first volume of poetry, published in 1858' (44). Perhaps because it occupies a liminal position between two stages of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, *Arthur's Tomb* has not occasioned the commentary that David Latham suggests it deserves[1] either as a work by Rossetti or as an inspiration to Morris, a deficiency that this essay will attempt to remedy as it places the painting, the poem that it occasioned ('King Arthur's Tomb'), and Morris's wallpaper designs of the early 1860s in the context of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* 3, 4, and 5 (1856, 1856, 1860).

Despite the visual echoes of such works as John Everett Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-50), James Collinson's *The Renunciation of*

Queen Elizabeth of Hungary (1848-50), and Rossetti's own drawing of *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1849) that are generated by the angular postures of Launcelot and Guenevere in *Arthur's Tomb*, several aspects of the painting detach it from the early Pre-Raphaelite style. First, the use of watercolours casts it in a relatively informal mode that is reinforced by the sketchy quality of the brushwork with which its background and foreground foliage are rendered so as to focus attention not only on Launcelot and Guenevere, but also on the effigy of Arthur that surmounts his tomb and the scenes from the history of the Round Table – the knighting of Launcelot and Galahad's vision of the Holy Grail – that decorate its length. Second, the decoration of the tomb, its horizontal placement in the picture space, and the horizontal dimensions of the picture space itself (23.5 x 36.8 cm) are less evocative of the Early Christian art admired and emulated by the original Pre-Raphaelites than of the woodcut of the tomb of Adonis in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) and Titian's allegory *Sacred and Profane Love* (1514) (see Colonna 371–3, Bentley, 'Hypnerotomachia' 280–3, and Grieve 277), two products of the Venetian Renaissance, the characteristics and productions of which Ruskin had celebrated in *The Stones of Venice* (1851, 1853) and would celebrate again in *Modern Painters* 5. 'It is in many ways a painful picture,' observes Evelyn Waugh in his sensitively astute reading of the painting in *Rossetti: His Life and Works*; 'three horizontals' – the effigy and tomb of Arthur, and the branches of the apple tree that impinge on Launcelot's shield, and Guenevere's headdress – 'constrict the composition until it aches with suppressed resilience ... A lesser artist, certainly any other Pre-Raphaelite, would have twisted [the trunk of] that apple-tree or gnarled it and made a beautiful decoration of it; all Rossetti wanted was a clamp' (95). In characterizing Launcelot as 'aflame with masculinity' and Guenevere as an image of 'threatened chastity,' Waugh brilliantly captures the sexual drama of *Arthur's Tomb*, but in failing to discuss its apple tree as a biblical allusion as well as 'a clamp' and in interpreting Arthur's effigy and tomb merely as manifestations of 'obtrusive mortality' (94–5), he scants the Christian and moral dimensions of a painting whose formalistic and ethical resonances are very much a reflection of Rossetti's preoccupation in (and after) 1853 with the eschatological consequences of sexual transgression and the tense relationship between sacred and profane love. The year 1853, it may be recalled, was when *Hesterna Rosa* was drawn; 'The Honeysuckle' composed, and *Found* begun; 1855, the year of *Paolo and Francesca da*

Rimini, La Belle Dame Sans Merci, and 'Valentine – to Lizzie Siddal.' Like all these and other works of the mid-1850s, *Arthur's Tomb* occupies the transitional zone in Rossetti's oeuvre between *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) and *Bocca Baciata* (1859).

A third aspect of *Arthur's Tomb* that detaches it from Rossetti's earlier work, aligns it with his thematic and stylistic concerns of the mid-1850s, and, as important, signals it as a possible precursor of Morrisian design is its use of an undulating or serpentine line of force to lead the viewer's eye through the picture space and across the rectangular mass of Arthur's tomb. Beginning near the top left of the picture, where Launcelot's grazing horse provides both a spatial and a narrative prelude to the episode depicted, this line of force takes the viewer's eye along the knight's shield, across the thematically significant gap between his face and Guenevere's, down the curvature of the queen's headdress, and out of the picture near the bottom right of the picture space. Continuous despite interruption or, conversely, a form of interrupted continuity, the serpentine line of *Arthur's Tomb* thus links Launcelot and Guenevere, reflects their separation, and invites meditation on the (dis)continuity between sacred and profane love. It is also a compositional allusion by way of the presence and shape of the serpent in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture space to the temptation and fall of Eve, a narrative to which the fallen apple beside the serpent and the apple tree behind the figures also alludes. As obviously as in *Found*, a moment of tension between sexual innocence and experience is insistently referred to a Christian context of judgment and consequences, though here, of course, it is the female who is (newly) innocent and the male who desires to continue a life of sin. That Guenevere wears a fastened girdle and Launcelot a passionate red tunic is fully in accordance with the iconography of clothes in relation to sacred and profane love that Rossetti began to develop with 'The Blessèd Damozel' and used consistently in his poems and paintings of the 1840s and 1850s, as witness, for example, the fastened girdle of the innocent girl in *Hesterna Rosa* and the red flowers on the prostitute's dress in *Found*.[2] (That the red and white of Launcelot's tunic and shield are also liturgical colours adds a degree of complexity to the painting that accords with its – and, later, Morris's – suggestion of a continuity as well as a distinction between sacred and profane love.)[3]

Since *Arthur's Tomb* so strongly evokes the biblical temptation and fall, there is something to be learned from comparing it with a

medieval depiction of the Tree of Knowledge that was probably known to Rossetti at the time of the painting's execution: the 'somewhat late thirteenth-century Hebrew manuscript' in the British Museum that Ruskin entitles 'Appletree' in Plate 7 of *Modern Painters* (3:208). Although *Modern Painters* 3 and 4 were not published until early 1856 (their prefaces are dated 'Jan[uary]' of that year), they were almost certainly a topic of conversation between Ruskin and Rossetti during their composition in 1855 when the two men were teaching together at the London Working Men's College (from January to March they even taught on the same night);[4] indeed, Jan Marsh goes so far as to suggest that 'the inspiration [for *Arthur's Tomb*] surely [came] from the Gothic carvings, illuminated missals and early German woodcuts Ruskin was currently studying, praising, lending' (*Dante Gabriel* 148–9). (Ironically, it may have been Ruskin's tutelage of Rossetti in medieval art that caused him to be dissatisfied with *Arthur's Tomb*: 'The Guenevere and Launcelot is not my pet drawing, though Mr. Browning could not say too much of it,' he told Eleanor Heaton on 11 November 1855; 'it is one of my imperfect ones ... Launcelot is so funnily bent under his shield, and Arthur points his toes so over the tomb, that I dare not show it to Anti-Pre-Raphaelites, but I value it intensely myself' [qtd in Surtees 1:35].) Ruskin's primary reason for reproducing the thirteenth-century 'Appletree' in *Modern Painters* 3 is to illustrate the symbolic treatment of external nature in Christian art 'from the earliest periods down to the close of the fourteenth century' (after which imitation became the norm). His secondary reason is to refute Macaulay's 'very curiously foolish' interpretation of the figure wound around the 'tree of knowledge' in a fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript as a 'snake' (3:206–7). In correcting the 'exquisite naiveté of the historian,' Ruskin provides a valuable gloss on the disposition of the figures in *Arthur's Tomb*:

> Mr. Macaulay is evidently quite unaware that the serpent with the human head, and body twisted round the tree, was the universally-accepted symbol of the evil angel,[5] from the dawn of [Christian] art up to Michael Angelo; that the greatest sacred artists invariably place the man on the one side of the tree, the woman on the other, in order to denote the enthroned and balanced dominion about to fall by temptation. (3:207)

In a realm that has already fallen by temptation, Launcelot and

Guenevere are placed asymmetrically on the left (sinister) side of the tree of knowledge, as also are Launcelot's horse and the serpent, which appears to be crawling away after accomplishing its task. Viewed as a dramatic tableau, *Arthur's Tomb* is centred on the faces of Launcelot and Guenevere and the queen's upheld hand; viewed in the context of the Christian narrative and symbolic formality evoked by its apple tree and serpent, its central concern is with the 'fall by temptation' that destroyed the 'enthroned and balanced dominion' of the Round Table and thus warrants typological referral to the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve. Not without reason does the shadow of the apple tree that falls across the depiction of the vision of the Holy Grail on Arthur's tomb divide all the knights but one (presumably Galahad) from the vision and, indeed, overshadows the eyes of the knight whose red cloak associates him with Launcelot.[6]

II

In Morris's 'King Arthur's Tomb,' the serpentine line of force that parallels Launcelot and Guenevere with the serpent (and, it may be added, with the undulating branches of the apple tree) in the painting finds powerful expression in two passages that are remarkable both as expressions of the tension and continuity between sacred and profane love and as verbal variations on the painting's major thematic and formal elements. In the first of these, which is spoken after Guenevere has articulated her inability or reluctance to choose between sacred and profane love ('If even I go to hell, I cannot choose / But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot Keep / From loving Launcelot'), Launcelot echoes Christ's words on the cross[7] as he attempts to kiss her and, in response, she characterizes both his appearance and his actions as serpentine:

> 'Lord, forgive her now,
> That she not knowing what she does, being mad,
> Kills me in this way – Guenevere, bend low
>   And kiss me once! for God's love kiss me! sad
>
> 'Though your face is, you look much kinder now;
>   Yea once, once for the last time kiss me, lest I die.'
> 'Christ! my hot lips are very near his brow,
>   Help me to save his soul! – yea, verily,

'Across my husband's head, fair Launcelot!
    Fair serpent mark'd with V upon the head!
This thing we did while yet he was alive,
    Why not, O twisting knight, now he is dead?' (201–12)

In the second, which is spoken by Guenevere, her comparison of Launcelot with a viper[8] is reinforced by several references to serpentine shapes and supplemented by rhythmical repetitions – 'Banner and sword and shield ... Body and face and limbs' – whose undulations simultaneously echo those shapes and reflect the erotic physicality that she is striving to transcend:

'Banner of Arthur – with black-bended shield

'Sinister-wise across the fair gold ground!
    Here let me tell you what a knight you are,
O sword and shield of Arthur! you are found
    A *crooked sword*, I think, that leaves a scar

'On the bearer's arm, so be he thinks it straight,
    Twisted Malay's crease beautiful blue-grey,
Poison'd with sweet fruit; as he found too late
    My husband Arthur, on some bitter day!

'O *sickle* cutting hemlock the day long!
    That the husbandman across his shoulder hangs,
And, going homeward about evensong,
    Dies the next morning, struck through by the *fangs*!

'Banner and sword and shield, you dare not pray to die,
    Lest you meet Arthur in the other world,
And knowing who you are, he pass you by,
    Taking short turns that he may watch you *curl'd*,

'Body and face and limbs in agony
    Lest he weep presently and go away,
Saying, 'I loved him once,' with a sad sigh –
    Now I have slain him, Lord, let me go too, I pray.
                    [Launcelot *falls*]

'Alas! alas! I know not what to do,
    If I run fast it is perchance that I
May fall and stun myself, much better so,
    Never, never again! not even when I die.'
                (368–88; italics added except on *'falls'*)

The heraldic reference near the beginning of this passage ('Banner of Arthur – with black-bended shield / Sinister-wise across the fair gold ground!') echoes the asymmetry of *Arthur's Tomb* as a formal representation of manifest evil and the allusion near its conclusion to *Romeo and Juliet* ('Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast,' 2.3.94) refers the relationship of Launcelot and Guenevere to another pair of rash and unfortunate lovers. The most remarkable aspect of the passage, however, remains the unifying presence of the same serpentine line that undulates through Rossetti's painting with an equivalent erotic energy and typological resonance. The 'governing lines' that 'rule the swell and fall and change' of a 'mass' may not be discernible to a 'careless observer' or to 'an ordinary artist,' writes Ruskin in *Modern Painters* but they will be apparent to an artist who possesses the 'acuteness of perception' that recognizes in a thing's 'outward' form the manifestation of its inner 'growth and make' (4:192). Clearly, Morris was no 'careless observer' or 'ordinary artist.'

III

Possibly 'inspired by the rose trellises at the Red House,' *Trellis* (fig. 2.2; circa 1862) was apparently 'Morris's first wallpaper design' (Burdick 75) and certainly among the earliest produced by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company.[9] Excluding the birds in various animated postures that were contributed to the design by Philip Webb, its most notable feature is not the trellis that gives it its title but the climbing rose that ascends vertically and diagonally through its space with its leaves and most of its flowers facing the viewer. Particularly when the stems, leaves, and background of *Trellis* are rendered in very muted shades of brown and green as is usually the case, the fact that the flowers and thorns of its climbing rose are the same vibrant colour (orange, yellow) associates the beautiful and attractive with the painful and dangerous, a theme found in many of the poems in *The Defence of Guenevere* volume and reinforced in the design by the presence of (delicate, vulnerable) mayflies and (robust, static) beetles as well as

(energetic, aggressive) birds. The associative use of colour in *Trellis* thus provides the viewer with an interpretative entry point that is enlarged by other aspects of the design, including its reliance on a tension between the natural world of the birds, beetles, mayflies, and climbing rose and the artificial realm of the trellis itself and the supporting wall to which it is nailed: the overall effect is of a convergence of nature and culture in which the darker aspects of the former are by no means eradicated by the discipline and cultivation of the latter. The climbing rose that mediates between nature and culture in this scheme is a domesticated plant that is still very much a part of the natural world of display and defence, desire and threat, sexuality and violence that animates 'King Arthur's Tomb' and other early Morris poems and prose romances. Here, as in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, the imbrication of display and defence, desire and threat, sexuality and violence implies that no easy distinctions can be made among wild, domesticated, and human nature, house, garden, and beyond. That the serpentine and quadrangular shapes of *Trellis* are homologous with those of *Arthur's Tomb* is not so much an indication of the wallpaper's lineage (though it may be this) as a testament to Morris's extraordinary and growing capacity in the 1850s and 1860s to recognize and redeploy patterns that could be said to reflect foundational structures and tensions in the human psyche (or at least imagination).

If Morris's other wallpaper design of circa 1862, *Daisy* (fig. 2.3), was partly inspired by the daisy wallhanging for Red House that Jane Morris may have helped to design as well as embroider in 1860 or, like the hanging, by an illumination in a medieval manuscript, then this might explain the absence in it of the serpentine line and thematic resonances of *Trellis*. Consisting of four different floral clusters arranged in horizontal lines so that they articulate but do not overlap, *Daisy's* overall effect is one of stasis, tranquility, and harmonious coexistence. Like the daisy wallhanging, its major design elements are traceable to *Modern Painters* 3, though not so much to the reproduction of a 'Cyclamen' that shares Plate 7 ('Botany of 13th Century') with the 'Appletree,' as is the case with the wallhanging,[10] as to Ruskin's discussion of the medieval interest in flowers elsewhere in his chapter 'Of Medieval Landscape: First, the Fields.' Especially germane is his emphasis on two aspects of the mind and art of the Middle Ages: an exclusive attention to 'what was graceful, symmetrical, and bright in colour' in 'Lower nature' and a heraldic reduction of the complexity of

floral and other natural forms to 'disciplined and orderly pattern[s]' (3:203–4). Indeed, *Daisy* fully exemplifies the 'two everlasting laws of beauty' whose discovery and application in 'floral ornament' by 'mediaeval workman' established for Ruskin 'the principles of decorative art ... [and] mass arrangement in general' 'to the end of time' – namely, the 'law of growth,' typified by the profiles of buds and leaves, and the 'law of proportion,' typified by the 'series of three' ribs in a leaf (that is, a central rib with 'two ... *and no more*, on each side') (3:211–3). By the early 1860s, the Morrises would also have known that in discussing 'the orders of leaves' in *Modern Painters* Ruskin draws an almost explicitly moral contrast between, on the one hand, 'the sweep of the chestnut and gadding of the vine,' and, on the other, 'the close shrinking trefoil, and contented daisy, pressed on earth' (5:102). Both the daisy hanging and the *Daisy* wallpaper are pictures of rural and domestic contentment. Little wonder that *Daisy* became one of ' the most popular [wallpapers] ever produced by the Firm' (Burdick 46).

Morris's third wallpaper design of the early 1860s, *Fruit (or Pomegranate)* (fig. 2.4; circa 1864), consists of four branches of fruit (oranges, lemons, peaches, and pomegranates) arranged diagonally across the design with most of their leaves and flowers flattened to face the viewer, and the pomegranates in various stages of ripeness and in various orientations. It is these that are the most striking (if not startling) feature of the design, for especially when ripening or opened to reveal their seeds they bear unmistakable resemblance to female genitalia, a visual metaphor also exploited by Rossetti in *Proserpine* (1873–7). To conclude that the pomegranates in either Morris's wallpaper or Rossetti's painting are merely metaphorical of female body parts would be erroneous, however; thoroughly conversant as they both were with Christian iconography, Morris and Rossetti would have understood 'the pomegranate, bursting open, and the seeds visible ... [as] an emblem of the future – of hope in immortality' (Jameson 1:35), a significance that it carries, not only in *Proserpine*, but also in Rossetti's watercolour drawing of *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante* (1852) and in the erotically charged girdle of his *Astarte Syriaca* (1875–7). More than any other fruit in Pre-Raphaelite poetry and painting, the pomegranate radiates both sacred and profane significances: an 'image of temptation' and 'passion' it certainly is in Morris's wallpaper (MacCarthy 183),[11] and also an image of present and future fulfilment.

Although *Fruit* recalls *Trellis* in its evocation of the tensions and

continuities present in 'King Arthur's Tomb' and *Arthur's Tomb*, it differs from the earlier wallpaper in the insistently diagonal patterning of the branches of which it is composed, all of which point upwards at almost precisely a forty-five degree angle from left to right. In this, *Fruit* recalls several of Rossetti's paintings of the late 1850s and early 1860s that are either diagonal in structure, reliant on a diagonal movement, or graced by a diagonal ornament of some sort – for example, *Mary Magdalene Leaving the House of Feasting* (1857) (diagonal banisters), *The Tune of the Seven Towers* (1857) (diagonal pennant staff), and *The Wedding of Saint George and the Princess Sabra* (1857) (diagonal shoulder decoration and, as Waugh observes, 'the design [as a whole] is built about the diagonal and nestles within its limits,' 95). That Rossetti associated the diagonal elements of these and other works with the reconciliation of sacred and profane love is indicated both by their content and by their structural and thematic resemblance to his *Dantis Amor* (1859–60), where the figure of Love stands at the centre of the painting across a diagonal that divides and yet joins Christ and Beatrice, heaven and earth, the divine and the human (see Bentley, 'Staff and Scrip'). First in Morris's rooms in London and then in Red House, *Dantis Amor* graced a settle between panels depicting *The Meeting of Dante and Beatrice in Florence* and *The Meeting of Beatrice and Dante in Paradise*. Painted in the weeks following the Morrises' return from their honeymoon in the early summer of 1859, it is an exalted and epithal-amic vision of the sanctified human love denied to Launcelot and Guenevere and given its most tangible form in the furnishings, gardens, and architectural poetry of Red House (1859–64). But it is also unfinished, and when the Morrises vacated Red House in 1865, it was separated from its accompanying panels so that they could be 'framed together with a partition ... on to which Rossetti painted a second version of *Dantis Amor* in a narrow oblong' (Surtees 1:70): the lives and imaginations that had become irrevocably entwined a decade earlier had entered a new and less happy phase for which, ironically, Arthur, Guenevere, and Launcelot rather than Dante, Beatrice, and Dantis Amor would supply the pattern.

Writing apropos of Morris's wallpaper designs of the early 1860s, Fiona MacCarthy suggests that he 'always asked for meaning in a pattern. It acted as a code; it gave a stab of recognition. It was a good way of making a connection with the past' (182). 'These early wallpapers,' she adds, 'show how he used his patterns as a form of reminiscence.' MacCarthy's comments refer primarily to the imagery

of Morris's designs, but they can be extended to the generative structures of his patterns, for surely their reliance on systems of repetition also reflects a disposition towards 'reminiscence' and 'connection with the past,' since each repeated element is no more or less than a return to what was before and still remains but at a different place and time of observation. In the wallpapers, as in the medieval recreations of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, repetition combines with progression to suggest continuity and difference: the past persists, but only *like* it was. Seen or read in this way, Morris's wallpaper designs are figures of the (dis)continuities from which they stemmed, extensions of the broken serpentine line that runs into and out of *Arthur's Tomb*, 'King Arthur's Tomb,' and *Modern Painters*, connecting and dividing the high and the low, the left and the right, the sacred and the profane. To borrow some phrases from Morris's 'Lindenborg Pool,' his works of the late 1850s and early 1860s, like those of Rossetti and Ruskin from which they so often drew succour, are 'strangely double' – immensely appealing and semi-abstract artefacts of a 'proper nineteenth-century character' and repositories also of a 'long-past age' of turbulent feelings and high hopes (CW 1:247–8).

NOTES

1 David Latham introduces these issues 'of love, sin, death, and redemp-tion' in his discussion of the 'typological shadows that leave love haunted,' as 'Guenevere agonizes over her desire to kiss the lips of Launcelot "across my husband's head,"' with Morris's 'favourite prepo-sition – "across" – exploited as a momentary crucifixion image' (*Haunted Texts* 15–16). Numerous scholars have noted that the 'particu-lar episode depicted by Rossetti does not occur in *Le Morte d'Arthur*' (Surtees 1:34), but this is only true in so far as the final meeting of Launcelot and Guenevere that occurs in Book 21 of Malory's work takes place at Almesbury, where Guenevere had entered a nunnery, rather than Glastonbury, where Arthur was buried. In other respects, Rossetti is true to Malory in depicting Guenevere as 'a nunne in whyght clothys and blak' who at her last meeting with Launcelot denies his request that she 'Kysshe [him], and never no more' (Malory 718, 721). In the notes to her edition of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, Margaret A. Lourie identifies the tree in the painting with 'the Glastonbury thorn'

and suggests an inspiration for its subject in the episode in Book 21 in which, after Guenevere's death, Launcelot lies 'grovelyng on the tomb of Kyng Arthur and quene Guenever' (723). Although Rossetti may have come to Malory by way of the story of Paolo and Francesca (who, of course, were tempted into adultery by reading about Launcelot and Guenevere), he may also have been encouraged to read *Morte d'Arthur* by Ruskin or by Ford Madox Brown, whose diary entries for 21 March and 1 April 1855 state that he 'read King Arthur (7½ hours)' and 'talk[ed] about King Arthur, in prais [*sic*] of, & how it would illustrate ... Rossetti abusing Mrs. Ruskin & praising Mr.' (128, 130). Surtees interprets these statements as references to Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*, notes that 'one of Rossetti's contributions to Tennyson's *Poems* was an illustration of *King Arthur and the Weeping Queens*,' and observes that both *Arthur's Tomb* and *Paolo and Francesca da Rimini* were among the commissions that he received from Ruskin. It is possible, however, that Brown's 'read King Arthur' refers to Robert Southey's 1817 reprinting of Caxton's edition of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* under the title *The Byrth, Lyf, and Actes of Kyng Arthur*.

2 See also Morris's *La Belle Iseult* (1858), where Iseult wears a patterned dress with red sleeves and appears to be fastening or unfastening her girdle.

3 In 'Sir Galahad, a Christmas Mystery,' which follows 'King Arthur's Tomb' in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, Christ wears a 'raiment half blood-red, half white as snow' in Galahad's vision (*CW* 1:26).

4 See also Collingwood 1:193–4 for Ruskin's letter of circa October 1855 to Thomas Carlyle explaining that the new volumes of *Modern Painters* are 'ready for press' and will be dispatched on 5 November, and 1:199–203 for the letter of 10 December 1855 from Paris in which Robert Browning answers Ruskin's comments on his poetry in *Modern Painters* 4. Ruskin regarded Browning as 'unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages ... so that in the matter of art ... there is hardly a principle connected with the medieval temper, that he has not struck upon in those seemingly careless and too rugged rhymes of his' (4:377).

5 Just such a figure, flanked by two angels holding swords and by the words 'Eritus sicut deus [*sic*] scientes bonum et malum,' appears in Rossetti's 1858 drawing *Hamlet and Ophelia*. Both the design for *Arthur's Tomb* and the carving in *Hamlet and Ophelia* may owe a debt to Albrecht Dürer's engraving *The Fall of Man* (1504) (or *Adam and Eve*, as it is sometimes called), which contains an apple tree that was greatly admired by Ruskin (see *Modern Painters* 3:121 and 5:68–9, and, for Rossetti's as well

as Ruskin's enthusiasm for Dürer's engravings, see Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel* 168).

6 This effect is more obvious in the 1860 replica of *Arthur's Tomb* (Tate Gallery), where the light falling on the tomb is brighter and the shadows darker. There are several other notable differences between the 1855 and 1860 versions of the painting, the most significant being the omission in the latter of the serpent, an absence counteracted formalistically by the addition of a serpentine ribbon flowing from a band on Guenevere's left arm and iconographically by the addition of several more fallen apples in the forefront of the scene and by the addition of a head-like ornament to the end of Guenevere's girdle. In the replica, the white covering of Launcelot's horse is an insistent invitation to the eye to enter the picture at that point.

7 In Luke 23.24: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' See also Rossetti's *St. Cecelia* illustration in Moxon's Tennyson for the use of a sinuous line (from the angel's wing through the saint's face, neck, and body to her knee) in a highly eroticized depiction of the interaction of the heavenly and the earthly.

8 Lourie suggests that a '"V" was supposed to distinguish poisonous snakes' (190). The viper is the only poisonous snake in England. See also the omitted or cancelled opening of 'The Defence of Guenevere,' where Launcelot's 'colours' are a 'great snake of green / ... twisted on ... quartered white and red' (*CW* 1:xx).

9 In her biography of Morris, Fiona MacCarthy observes that he was 'not the first of the partners [of the Firm] to embark on [wallpapers]: already in January 1861 Rossetti was describing the paper he had made for his and Lizzie's rooms in Blackfriars. This was a fruit design in yellow, black, and Venetian red, and Rossetti asked the paper manufacturer to print it on "common brown packing paper and on blue grocer's paper," to see which looked the best' (182). MacCarthy observes of Morris's first three wallpaper designs that 'they are gentle flowing patterns which show Morris's belief in the purpose of pattern to impose a rhythm, to soothe and civilize' (182). MacCarthy describes the 'rose bushes' in *Trellis* as 'obviously, ominously thorned' (182). The birds in the design are usually assumed to be hummingbirds, but clearly this is not so; rather, they seem to be of two different species (perhaps swifts and woodpeckers).

10 Both the individual clumps of flowers and their bright blue background in the daisy hanging are strongly reminiscent of Ruskin's 'Cyclamen.'

11 MacCarthy also interprets the pomegranate as an emblem of 'loss' for

Morris (183). Given Morris's admiration and emulation of Browning in the late 1850s, he probably knew the explanation of the significance of the pomegranate that appears in the last number of *Bells and Pomegranates* (1856). Noting that 'Giotto placed a pomegranate fruit in the hand of Dante' (in the so-called Lost Portrait of the poet in the Bargello in Florence) and that 'Raffaelo crowned his theology (in the *Camera della Segnatura*) with blossoms of the same,' Browning quotes 'the Bellari and Vasari' on the fruit as *'simbolo delle buone opere* [good works] – *il qual Pomogranato fu però usato nelle veste del Pontefice appresso gli Ebrei'* (128; see Exodus 28.33–4, and also Browning's *Pippa Passes* 138). Rossetti's painting and drawing of *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*, which depict the poet with a pomegranate in his hand, were executed in 1852.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 2.1 Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Arthur's Tomb*. Watercolour on paper, 1855. 9 x 14 ½ in. British Museum, London. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

Fig. 2.2 William Morris. *Trellis*. Hand-block printed wallpaper. Morris & Co., 1864.

Fig. 2.3 William Morris. *Daisy*. Hand-block printed wallpaper. Morris & Co., 1864.

Fig. 2.4 William Morris. *Fruit (or Pomegranate)*. Hand-block printed wallpaper. Morris & Co., 1864.

3

William Morris, Shaper of Tales: Creating a Hero's Story in 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End'

Janet Wright Friesen

In 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End' – the fifth poem in William Morris's *Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858) – Sir Peter Harpdon, commander of a crumbling English fortress in France, confers with the leader of the besieging French army, Sir Lambert. Their situation reflects the complex alliances of the Hundred Years' War, as these men are cousins serving opposing armies. Sir Lambert comes under pretence of persuading Sir Peter to forsake the doomed English cause and to unite the family on the French side. However, as he speaks, Sir Peter suddenly interrupts their conference with a reference to ancient precedent, and asks 'but have you read / The siege of Troy? Then, speaking more to himself than to his opponent, Sir Peter observes that, in spite of the Trojans' fatal support of Helen's abduction, most readers sympathize with the Trojans and judge Hector to be a hero:

> take note
> How almost all men, reading that sad siege,
> Hold for the Trojans; as I did at least,
> Thought Hector the best knight a long way. (205–8)

Faced with his own inevitable defeat, Sir Peter entertains the question: What made Hector of Troy a hero? He observes that one's cause need not be successful for one to be remembered as a hero. Rather, heroism is comprised of an extraordinary dedication to virtue and a performance of noble actions for which there are no obviously supportive conditions. He wonders whether he too might be remembered as a hero