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# The Golden Chain

## *Essays on William Morris and Pre-Raphaelitism*

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ROSSETTI AND MORRIS :  
"This Ever-Diverse Pair"

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti met William Morris in 1856, a crucial time in the life of each. With the decline of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Rossetti found himself caught between the changing moods of Elizabeth Siddal and the technical difficulties of his art. Never at a loss for conceptual inspiration, he welcomed the arrival of new young minds under his influence. Morris, completing his studies at Oxford, had given up plans to enter the Church and was just starting his apprenticeship in an architect's office. He was finding the technical side of architecture difficult and was looking for other ways to use his talents. Mesmerized by Rossetti's ability to dominate young minds, Morris, for a year or two, surrendered himself to the spell and gave all his energies to painting and poetry. For a brief space of time the impact of the two on each other was considerable. Rossetti gave intensity to Morris' writing, and though Morris succeeded little as a painter, his mentor led him into the more congenial field of design and decoration. Morris, in turn, imbued his master with his own medieval enthusiasms and induced the master to try design himself. With Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and their friends, Rossetti created a second P.R.B. and with these young men indulged in such undertakings as the Oxford Union frescoes, the decoration of Red House, and the creation of Morris and Company. Until 1862 when relations cooled, this group shared in the production of a wealth of painting, poetry, and interior design.

The association of Rossetti and Morris, even for a brief period of time, was an unlikely one, for the two were certainly an "ever-diverse pair." Rossetti was a strange combination of Italian exile and cockney Londoner. From the first he was committed to the bohemian way of life, on easy terms with London streets and London amusements. Morris, of Welsh-English middle-class stock, grew up to country pleasures and the schooling of a gentleman. His father's copper fortune allowed the family to reside at Woodford Manor, a large Georgian house next to Epping Forest. While his father attended to business in London, Morris enjoyed rural sports and pleasures. Marlborough School and Oxford were leading toward a career in the Church, but new friends and ideas at Oxford were to lead him in a different direction.<sup>1</sup>

At Oxford Morris met his lifelong friend, Edward Burne-Jones, a slender, quiet young man from Birmingham who was also considering taking orders. But under the influence of mutual reading and discussion, especially of Ruskin's works, the pair moved from religion toward art. A group of Burne-Jones' Birmingham friends at Pembroke was congenial, and a kind of brotherhood gradually developed. First through Ruskin's Edinburgh Lectures and then through paintings and a reading of The Germ, the Oxford group became interested in the Pre-Raphaelites and in Rossetti in particular. By 1855 Morris was showing talent as a poet and Burne-Jones was considering a painting career. The Oxford friends took vacation tours of Belgium and Northern France, just as Rossetti and Hunt had done in 1849. Where the latter were most interested in paintings, Morris followed a long-standing fascination for architecture and considered a career in that field. Back at Oxford late in 1855 the Pembroke brethren joined in plans for a literary magazine. Heavily supported

by Morris' money and literary ability, The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine appeared monthly through the next year, 1856, a year that was to be the annus mirabilis for the two Oxford friends.

Rossetti's earliest impact on Morris came through the latter's discovery of The Germ about 1855. Morris had read at least the first two issues of this Pre-Raphaelite magazine as indicated by Burne-Jones' reference to "Hand and Soul" and "The Blessed Damozel" in a review of Thackeray's The Newcomes in the first issue of The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine.<sup>2</sup> From these two Rossetti works alone, before any personal contact had been made, certain influences or similarities can be discerned between Rossetti and Morris.

The motif of the dream plays a significant role in Morris' early prose tales and poems, and the same is true of Rossetti's work as well. "One of the nicest young fellows in--Dreamland" is how Rossetti described Burne-Jones on first meeting; at that time he praised Morris' tale, "A Dream," from the March issue of The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine.<sup>3</sup> Late that year Morris would echo Rossetti's words: "I can't enter into politico-social subjects with any interest.... My work is the embodiment of dreams in one form or another."<sup>4</sup> In its use of the dream, Rossetti's early tale, "Hand and Soul," bears striking resemblances to Morris' early work.

Rossetti's is a somewhat autobiographical tale of a young Renaissance painter's search for fame and moral influence. His ego is crushed when his allegory of "Peace" is besmeared with blood during a civic feud. Feverish and frustrated in the noon day heat of his studio, the painter, Chiaro, becomes aware of the presence of a woman clad in grey and green. She is an image of the painter's own soul come to teach him how to serve God and man unselfishly. She casts her golden hair about the

artist as she instructs him, and as he listens, he weeps salt tears into her hair. Her instruction ended, she has Chiaro paint her image as a guide for his future life. He finishes at dusk and falls asleep watched over by his mystic soul. Thus dream remains on in reality to watch over reality lapsed into the world of dreams.

Having finished, he lay back where he sat, and was asleep immediately: for the growth of that strong sunset was heavy about him, and he felt weak and haggard; like one just come out of a dusk, hollow country, bewildered with echoes, where he had lost himself, and who has not slept for many days and nights. And when she saw him lie back, the beautiful woman came to him, and sat at his head, gazing, and quieted his sleep with her voice.<sup>5</sup>

The italics for hollow country are my own, for they are an obvious source for Morris' tale "The Hollow Land," published in two parts in the September and October issues of the magazine. This tale bears many points in common with Rossetti's. Instead of observing others staining art's moral allegory with blood, Morris' young protagonist himself enacts the ritual of blood, assisting his brother to take revenge best left to heaven. Defeated ultimately by the victim's son, young Florian de Liliis falls into a strange, dream-like land called "the Hollow Land." There he meets a fair maiden named Margaret, clearly his soul-mate. She wears a long gown and her rich golden hair hangs down, like Rossetti's lady, but Margaret's gown is white streaked with red though the light about her is a cool green. Colors are very important in Morris' allegory.<sup>6</sup> The streaked gown suggests Florian's innocence now sullied by bloodshed. The green light

suggests a promise of rebirth and redemption. In "The Hollow Land" Florian finds and buries his dead brother. He is in anguish that his brother should have died for killing the cruel queen, Swanhilda, but his soul instructs him that revenge is for God. Swanhilda's conscience would have made her pay for her crimes. Then the pair meet a weeping woman, clearly an image of Swanhilda, wearing a scarlet robe.

With his moral regeneration begun, Florian is suddenly transported back to the real, yet unreal, world to come to terms with Swanhilda's son, Red Harald. The tale continues in dreamlike style as the two men of blood, Red Harald and florid Florian, meet in Florian's castle where Harald paints scarlet portraits of "God's judgments": a form of revenge on the De Liliis clan for having shed his family's blood. Argument again leads to conflict, and Florian wins a sword fight, perhaps a sign that he is nearer regeneration. Florian paints Harald's face, but then he has pity on his wounded enemy and succors him. Harald recovers and the two learn to paint in softer colors: purple and green instead of scarlet and yellow. Then they ride forth and join a procession of penitent knights and ladies clad in mixed colors: scarlet and yellow for blood mingled with purple and green for penitence and hope. A sleeping or dead king (Arthur or the Fisher King) is at the center of the procession followed by younger maidens and knights. Harald and Florian ride out after the procession. Harald, who carried a lock of black hair in his bosom, meets a fair woman in scarlet with black hair (his soul-mate or an image of his mother). The woman weeps, and Harald remains behind to comfort her. Florian, redeemed, rides on to the Hollow Land. After a lethargic sleep he awakes to his soul-mate singing of

Christ's forgiveness. They re-achieve the golden age as they walk together into a stainless Eden.

This long summary of Morris' tale shows how he used Rossetti's ideas and how he greatly enriched them with his own ideas. Keats and Tennyson also seem influential. Florian has earned his Lamia and Palace of Art and has recaptured his innocence. Just as Rossetti's tale is an allegory of the writer's search for proper motive in art, so is Morris' tale an allegory of art as the salvation of life. Rossetti focuses on his own inner motives where Morris moves out of self through the agency of Red Harald, the second man. Florian's exultation in the sword duel suggests Morris' strong temper and love of single-stick. Both must learn art and the love of man. Later, when he had succeeded as a decorative artist, Morris' love of man drove him on into his socialist involvements. News from Nowhere is, in some degree, an attempt to recapture the simpler life of Eden. Though Rossetti taught at the Workingmen's College when Burne-Jones first sought him out, he was always more a private man than a public reformer.

At this early stage in their careers, as these tales show, both men freely mingled the worlds of reality and art. Many of Morris' prose tales from The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine are narrated either as dreams or as the half-remembered, dream-like past. "The Hollow Land" starts off as an old man's narration though the narrator blends into the young, redeemed Florian by the end. "A Dream" has several narrators. The mason who narrates "The Unknown Church" speaks from beyond the grave as must the knight-narrator of "Golden Wings." Both describe their own deaths. The speaker of "Lindenberg Pool" has killed a man, though we never know why as he quickly turns to a dream narrative in a

Poe-like medieval setting. As we have seen in "The Hollow Land," Morris' characters often move from a seemingly real world into an allegorized dream world. The mason in "The Unknown Church" dreams an elaborate fantasy while supposedly working on the Church. The lovers in "A Dream" use reality to actualize momentarily their ghostly existence. The Byronic, frustrated lover of "Frank's Sealed Letter" dreams five to eight years of his life, then returns to the present, cured of his melancholy. Thus dream allows Hugh to test the wrong course for his future life so that he may improve matters in reality. Morris often uses dreams as a testing ground where his characters may redeem themselves.

Rossetti was a dreamer from his youth; in the opening passage from "St. Agnes of Intercession" he recalls hearing his father sing before the fire.

I used to sit on the hearth-rug, listening to him, and look between his knees into the fire till it burned my face, while the sights swarming up in it seemed changed and changed with music: till the music and the fire and my heart burned together, and I would take paper and pencil, and try in some childish way to fix the shapes that rose within me. For my hope, even then, was to be a painter.<sup>7</sup>

The painter-protagonist of this early tale falls in love only to find that his lady and himself are doubles of a painter and model who lived in Renaissance Italy. As the earlier painter did his lady's portrait just before death, so the protagonist fears he must do.

The tale is unfinished, but Rossetti was always intrigued with the idea of the fatal double or doppelgänger, as evidenced by such designs as How They Met Themselves and Bonifazio's Mistress. His

own name suggested his affinity with Dante Alighieri, and Lizzie Siddal was his Beatrice. His long poem, "Dante at Verona," focuses on the poet's conflict between the petty world of affairs and his own deep visions of hell and heaven. Holman Hunt noted Rossetti's disregard for modern science: "For when men were different from the culture of mediaeval days they were not poetic in his eyes; they had no right to be different from the people of Dante's time."<sup>8</sup> Hunt also notes Rossetti's complete abstraction from the real world of the present when rapt in imagination while composing poetry: "His tongue was hushed, he remained fixed and inattentive to all that went on about him, he rocked himself to and fro, and at times moaned lowly, or hummed for a brief minute, as though telling off some idea. All this while he peered intently before him, looking hungry and eager, and passing by in his regard any who came before him as if not seen at all."<sup>9</sup> In a fragment jotted down in his notebooks Rossetti himself described his abstraction:

I shut myself in with my soul,  
And the shapes come eddying forth.<sup>10</sup>

The relationship between the living and the dead, the real and ghostly worlds, especially as particularized in the theme of separated lovers, is a theme common to both Rossetti and Morris. "The Blessed Damozel" and "Staff and Scrip," two poems that Rossetti contributed to The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, deal with this theme. In one the woman dies first, in the other the man; the living are then haunted by the dead until reunion is achieved. Morris uses this theme in "Gertha's Lovers." Gertha, the peasant girl who has wed a king, must be queen after King Olaf's death until the

nation is preserved from its enemies. She is a figurehead for victory and inspires Leuchnar, Olaf's rival in love, to die heroically. The battle won, Gertha returns to the grove where Olaf is buried; there the ghost comes forth to claim his bride in death. A more ghostly set of reunions and separations is enacted in "A Dream," where two lovers are bewitched in an enchanted cave and forced to wander as shades for hundreds of years, only materializing at certain spots of time when they take over the bodies of living mortals for a moment to reaffirm their love. Finally they are reunited in peace on New Year's Eve. In "The Chapel at Lyonesse" Ozana waits, dying, for reunion with his lady. The speaker of "Hands" bemoans separation from his lady, and a dead lover seems begging a prayer from his lady in "Pray But One Prayer for Me" (retitled "Summer Dawn" in the Guenevere volume), for the phrase "up in the stars" in line two suggests that one of the pair is dead. The lovers are only briefly separated by death in "The Unknown Church," and as we have seen, Florian and Harald must learn compassion and endure separation from their soul-mates in "The Hollow Land."

Morris not only shares the separation motif with Rossetti, he also uses the double or doppelgänger motif. One may be brought face to face with one's soul, as in "Hand and Soul" and "The Hollow Land," or one may be haunted by a dead love, as in "The Blessed Damozel" or "Gertha's Lovers."

(To one, it is ten years of years.  
. . . . Yet now, and in this place,  
Surely she lean'd o'er me--her hair  
Fell all about my face . . . . .  
Nothing: the autumn fall of leaves.  
The whole year sets apace.)<sup>11</sup>

An intimation of cascading hair haunts the lonely lover in "The Blessed Damozel"; the lady drapes her hair about Chiaro in "Hand and Soul"; the angel envelops St. Cecilia in his hair in the Tennyson engraving. Portraits evoke lost love in "St. Agnes," "Staff and Scrip," and "The Portrait." Morris probably knew all these works of the master by the middle of 1856; he himself uses ghosts, locks of hair, and tomb effigies. The latter is a favorite image. Amyot composes himself as an effigy just before his death in "The Unknown Church." Gertha lies in the same pose just before Olaf's ghost comes to claim her. In "Svend and His Brethren" Siur carves the effigy of his lost lady, the Peace-Queen Cissela, but refuses to do the same for her husband, King Valdemar, who then lies down on his tomb in effigy manner and dies. Rossetti's two depictions of the dead King Arthur, in the illustrated Tennyson and in the watercolor, Arthur's Tomb, depict the king in effigy pose. As we shall see, Morris made much use of the watercolor.

Morris' contributions to The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine during the latter half of its one-year existence may have come under direct influence from Rossetti. At the beginning of 1856 Burne-Jones went up to London and sought out Rossetti, first at the Workingmen's College and then at his studio. Rossetti received him cordially and asked much about Morris' poetry. By Easter, Burne-Jones had given up his Oxford degree to become Rossetti's pupil. Morris took his degree and began work in G. E. Street's Oxford architectural office. Soon he too took up painting, spending most weekends in London with Burne-Jones and Rossetti. Rossetti was excited with his new disciples. He contributed three poems to their magazine and took up medieval subjects for painting in keeping with the joint enthusiasm for Malory and the world of King Arthur. Despite Street's move to London in August, Morris gave up

architecture by the end of the year to study painting full time. Rossetti was now his Svengali:

Rossetti says I ought to paint, he says I shall be able; now as he is a very great man, and speaks with authority and not as the scribes, I must try. I don't hope much, I must say, yet will try my best.<sup>12</sup>

Burne-Jones, as the Memorials attest, was as much taken up by his master as was Morris, but he had a natural bent for painting where that craft came harder for Morris. "If any man has any poetry in him," Rossetti urged repeatedly, "he should paint, for it has all been said and written, and they have scarcely begun to paint it."<sup>13</sup> In this Rossetti echoed advice given him earlier by Leigh Hunt when the former was divided between poetry and painting. Just as Rossetti subordinated his poetry to his art, so for a time did Morris. But poetry came easily for Morris while painting was hard. He only managed to complete one canvas as far as we can tell, but he was always ready with one of his "grinds" as Rossetti called the medieval narratives and lyrics he was now writing.

After he left Oxford, Morris began to let his beard grow, and under the bohemian influence of Rossetti both he and Burne-Jones took on the care-less, scruffy air of artists. Rossetti set the pair up in his old studio at Red Lion Square. The two designed their own furniture for the studio, and Rossetti helped paint it, doing scenes from Morris' poems on two heavy chair-backs. The bantering comedy of these days has become a legend, but the easy life of conversation, city walks, plays, and artistic production bound the Oxonians to Rossetti and his circle. They were soon on easy terms with Hunt, Brown, Ruskin, and Hughes. This communal atmosphere fostered fresh ideas and shared literary and artistic influence.

Early in 1857, Morris undertook to learn painting by working up subjects from Malory. Just as Rossetti had, he found difficulty in executing the human figure. When, in the summer of 1857, Rossetti and his associates undertook to fresco the Oxford Union debating hall with subjects from the Arthurian legends, Morris again had trouble with his figures. To disguise this shortcoming, he painted great numbers of sunflowers in the foreground with his figures rising out of them. Rossetti laughed at all the sunflowers, but he himself often preferred to compose his figures from the waist up. Morris set earnestly to work at a scene showing Iseult's rejection of Palomydes for Tristan. Finished before the others, he then undertook to decorate the ceiling of the Union. He found decorative work more congenial to his talents, a discovery significant to the course of his life.

The social high spirits of Red Lion Square continued on at Oxford; the anecdotes are too well known to need retelling. In blissful ignorance, the young men used distemper on whitewash over brick. After a brief early glow, the pictures faded away or flaked and peeled from the walls. Subsequent attempts at restoration were less than successful. A more lasting result of the project was the discovery by Rossetti and Morris of a stableman's daughter, a real "stunner" named Jane Burden. First spotted in the theatre at Oxford by Rossetti and the group, all the artists agreed that here was a dark-complexioned beauty just perfect for Guenevere. Soon she was sitting for the painters, and before long Morris had fallen in love--but with what: a dream of Guenevere or a stableman's daughter? Morris was a shy lover, and there is little said of the romance, save that Morris spent some time reading Barnaby Rudge to Miss Burden. But it is interesting that the Pre-Raphaelites had a Pygmalion-like tendency to fall in love with their

models. Rossetti had Lizzie Siddal and Fannie Cornforth, Brown married his Emma, Hunt planned marriage with Annie Miller until Rossetti charmed her, Millais carried off Mrs. Ruskin after painting her picture, and even the reticent Burne-Jones later had an affair with the Greek beauty, Marie Zambacco. This proclivity could cause tension when two artists became involved with the same woman, such as Hunt and Rossetti with Annie Miller and, later, Rossetti's involvement with Jane Morris. In any case, this mingling of art and life, of subject and model, is a common occurrence among the Pre-Raphaelites.

During the vintage years of 1856 and 1857 Rossetti and Morris had a great deal of influence on one another. After 1858 love, marriage, and differences in temperament would draw them apart. But the exact degree and flow of influence is not easy to determine, for the two artists lived in an atmosphere of imaginative influences and friendships that created an environment for art and letters. In addition to sharing their ideas and projects, these young men shared a literary background rich in the romantic spirit. They imbibed the lush imagery of Keats and Tennyson; the medieval and gothic spirit of Scott, Poe, Mrs. Browning, and Ruskin; and the psychological subtleties of Browning. The influence of Men and Women (1855) was strong on Morris before he met Rossetti, but Browning's earlier work was the acid test of Pre-Raphaelite enthusiasm from the earliest days of the movement. For Rossetti, Browning's appeal lay more in the romantic renaissance atmosphere of Sordello while Morris drew on the style of the dramatic monologue and the medieval idealism of "Childe Roland." Other influences were not equal on each: Rossetti was closer to Keats than to Tennyson while Ruskin loomed larger to Morris than to Rossetti. Morris carried Rossetti strongly into the world of Malory for awhile; the latter used Malory more as a source for effective iconography while Morris felt the



symbolism and atmosphere of the Arthurian world more intensely than his mentor. Although the nature of each influence might differ for each person, all these young men were steeped in romanticism through personal and communal reading habits. Sordello's story was told at meeting after meeting of the first P.R.B. while the Oxford brethren read aloud from Tennyson, Milton, Shakespeare, and Ruskin. Rossetti and Morris in particular were known for resonant voices. One must not underestimate this communal reading as a resource of shared ideas and images.

Morris' poems in The Defence of Guenevere, a major product of these two years of close association, are in many ways closely connected to Rossetti's watercolors of this period. Rossetti influenced these poems in four ways: through a continued presence of Rossettian motifs and symbols, through a shared interest in themes from Malory, through Morris' direct use of certain Rossetti watercolors as subjects for poems, and through a mutual interest in the ballad form. The same motifs from the prose romances also appear in the Guenevere volume, but with some differences. The motif of the dream is used in this volume in a more realistic manner than before. People often lapse into reverie, but they tend to recall the real past rather than move through fantastic distortions of reality. The past often haunts and mocks the present. Both Lancelot and Guenevere are haunted by the happy past in "King Arthur's Tomb." Galahad envisions Ozana's happy reunion with his lady in heaven as the latter lies dying in "The Chapel in Lyonesse." Peter Harpdon dreams of his Lady Alice during his struggle with the French, and his lady dreams of him after his death. John of Castel Neuf imagines the living lovers whose remains he discovers in "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire." He even falls in love with his vision of the lady, at least for a moment. Sir Guy of "A Good Knight in Prison" is so absorbed in reverie that he hardly comprehends the siege going on around him. The atmosphere of

dream engulfs the fairy-tale poem, "Rapunzel," but this poem is unlike any other in the volume. Its looseness of narrative fabric leaves it a poem of color and atmospheric mood. As Robert L. Stallman has pointed out, Morris has purged the Grimm fairy tales of action in favor of rendering the story in five artistic tableaux.<sup>14</sup> The use of dream in "Rapunzel" harks back to the style of the prose romances. Except for this poem, Morris does not indulge in long dream allegories in The Defence of Guenevere as he had in the prose tales. A harsh reality seems to work against romantic fulfillment in these poems. Love is manacled to death and duty; there is no Eden-like hollow land awaiting true lovers.

The motif of separated lovers is very strong in the Guenevere volume. Lancelot saves the Queen in the title poem, but love must surrender to higher values in "King Arthur's Tomb." Galahad yearns for an earthly love such as that which haunts Lancelot or Palomydés, but a divine vision assures him of the more perfect love that awaits God's knight. After long suffering, Ozana dies to rejoin his lady. Sir Peter Harpdon is separated from his lady first by war and then by death, much as Rossetti's pilgrim is in "Staff and Scrip." Though separation is successfully overcome in "A Good Knight in Prison," "Rapunzel," "Welland River," and "Two Red Roses Across the Moon," death is more often the only way to reunion. The valiant knight in "The Gillyflower of Gold" fights to avenge his dead love. Lambert in "The Eve of Crecy" rides not to glory but to death. The knight of "The Wind" has killed his love many years earlier. Long separation from her lover in "Golden Wings" causes Jehane to commit suicide. Another Jehane sees her lover slain before her eyes in "The Haystack in the Floods." And a dead lover returns from the grave in "The Blue Closet." The knight of "Spell-bound" endures a living death, held by magic from rejoining his beloved. Though the world of the supernatural plays a role in this poem and several others, The Defence of Guenevere volume is firmly founded in the world of action, whether chivalric as in Malory or more plainly realistic as in Froissart.



Whit-Sunday), Sir Ozana finally senses his redemption and reunion with his lady as he expires. Sir Bors and Sir Galahad look on, but only the latter comprehends what has happened. The theme of separated lovers, as we have noted, suggests Rossetti, as also does the use of religious imagery for a passionate, somewhat secular reunion of lovers. One is reminded of "The Blessed Damozel" and "Staff and Scrip." Morris' companion piece, "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery," also combines religious and sensuous images in the manner of Rossetti, the self-professed "Art Catholic." Sir Galahad achieves the benison of divine love, of the Grail, but the rest of the Round Table crumbles in his wake.

Rossetti's Arthurian watercolor was just the first of several paintings on medieval themes that influenced Morris' poems. On the other hand, the friendship with Morris and Burne-Jones led Rossetti to undertake a number of art works on medieval themes. From his earliest days Rossetti had a penchant for medieval settings, making designs for medieval subjects from Goethe, Poe, and Browning--and then from Dante. But in 1856 and 1857 Rossetti undertook a great number of paintings, mostly in watercolor, drawn from Malory and other medieval sources. These designs are clearly a product of his friendship with the two Oxonians. Rossetti also designed five woodcuts for the Moxon illustrated Tennyson in 1856 and 1857, and these woodcuts have a strongly medieval flavor. Moments of intense feeling are heightened by symbolic appurtenances that hem in the major figures and echo forth the mood of the scene. Galahad dedicates himself at the Grail altar as angels below the scaffold ring a bell; King Arthur, surrounded by weeping queens, is taken off to Avalon; the Lady of Shalott, dead on her candle-lit barge, is viewed by a pensive Lancelot; St. Cecilia plays her organ on a castle rampart hovered over by an intense angel; and the southern Mariana kisses the feet of her crucified

savior. These are but the first of many designs and poems by Rossetti and his new followers that create the passionate, symbolic medievalism of this second form of Pre-Raphaelitism.<sup>15</sup>

As we have seen, Arthurian matter became the theme for the Oxford Union frescoes. Rossetti's main design, Sir Launcelot's Vision of the Sanc Grael, shows idealism overcome by passion as Lancelot is denied the Grail vision by a dream of Guinevere in cruciform pose beneath an apple tree. His second design, never even begun in fresco, depicts idealism triumphant in Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival Receiving the Sanc Grael. In comparison to this design and the Galahad woodcut, consider Morris' Grail scene in "Sir Galahad." The knight falls asleep as a bell rings nearby; then, Morris specifies: "Enter Two Angels in white, with scarlet wings; also, Four Ladies in gowns of red and green; also an Angel, bearing in his hands a surcoat of white, with a red cross" (28). Such stage effects closely parallel Rossetti's designs. Morris' fresco remains only by reputation; the original quickly faded off the wall, and save for the giant sunflowers, little of the picture has been preserved. The subject, the love rivalry between Sir Palomydes and Tristram for Iseult, is a recurrent motif in Morris' work as we have seen. Rossetti designed a third Arthurian subject that some critics suggest was meant for an Oxford fresco, Sir Launcelot in the Queen's Chamber. This scene of Lancelot's entrapment by Gawain and the traitor knights is also described by Morris in his poem, "The Defence of Guenevere." Jane Burden is the Guenevere for Rossetti's designs and also, no doubt, for Morris' poems. Her portrait is clear in "Praise of My Lady."<sup>16</sup>

At the same time as Morris was slowly falling in love, he and the entire Rossetti circle were enjoying a raucous time at Oxford painting and poetizing in a world of Malory and medievalism. Morris

bought a number of Rossetti's Arthurian watercolors of this period: The Damsel of the Sanct Grael, The Chapel Before the Lists, and The Death of Breuze Sans Pitié. And outside of Malory, Morris drew on Rossetti's inspiration through two medieval watercolors that he purchased and used as subjects for poems: The Blue Closet and The Tune of Seven Towers.

Rossetti's Blue Closet is a careful arrangement of subject, color, and design evocative of the artist's sense of the Middle Ages. It is a mood painting with no literary allusion nor suggested action. Two aristocratic ladies in the foreground, one wearing a crown, play an organ-like instrument with their right hands. The crowned lady also plays a zither-like instrument with her left hand while her companion rings bells with her left. Two damozels stand behind singing from song sheets. The arrangement is carefully balanced: organ in the center foreground with a lady on each side using dual keyboards. Zither and bells are set upright against the wall behind, and the damozels stand behind and mark the side borders of the watercolor. Floor and back wall are set with the blue tiles that give the picture its title. The women are richly attired in red, green, mauve, and gray. Symbolic motifs are suggested by heraldic designs on the musical instruments, by a tree and bird hanging down from the upper center, and especially by a flower sprouting up from the floor. The women's faces are quite passive and meditative; only the damozels sing. Though space is concentrated by the nearness of the wall and the figures crowded around the instruments, the symmetry gives relief, and the curving flow of the female figures acts as contrast to the geometric arrangement of the furnishings and tiles.

Morris turns Rossetti's mood piece into a song of doom, death, and reunion. Despite the inclination of such critics as Noyes and Drinkwater to equate Morris' poem with Rossetti's painting as "vague and somewhat chaotic scraps of wind-music,"

Morris' poem has meaning, and strong, carefully prepared meaning at that.<sup>17</sup> The four women are imprisoned in a tower of some deserted, perhaps exchanged castle. Their lives are a kind of living death, locked up and abandoned but allowed once a year, by some mysterious "they," to sing one song in the tomblike "Blue Closet." Morris recreates their song in musical dialogue, a song that is a call to Lady Louise's lost lover to return and rescue them. There is no time here to go into the many fine interlacings of theme and symbol, dream and reality. In summary, the ladies sing of the departure, capture, and death of Louise's knight, and of his "sea change." Then the dead man returns, first sending the flower, and leads the damozels and ladies to freedom through death—or rather they lead him, sand-blind, across the bridge to a happy reunion in Eden with his Lady Louise. Morris' poem is a macabre tale of death in life and life in death on his favorite theme of separation and reunion, a theme also favored by Rossetti. But here Rossetti's painting is more art and mood than story while Morris has given it a narrative turn in a darker key by using the picture and its symbols.<sup>18</sup>

Morris does much the same thing with Rossetti's watercolor, The Tune of Seven Towers. Like The Blue Closet, the painting has two central figures and two subsidiary figures set around a musical instrument, but the composition here is balanced in a less symmetrical manner than in the other picture. In the foreground sits a lady playing a psaltery attached to her elaborately constructed chair. The chair has a compartmented base and a high back topped by a box containing a bell. To the left of the lady sits a courtier bent over to listen to the playing. Another lady, perhaps a maidservant, stands leaning behind the lady's chair on the right of the picture. In the left background, behind the courtier, is a bed hung with tapestry and backed by a sliding panel through which a maidservant leans to deposit a bunch

of orange-tree cuttings on the bed. Rushes cover the floor; a lance in a stand cuts diagonally across the picture from lower right to upper left, supporting a pennant that hangs down the left side of the picture. The upper background includes a window framing a dove on the right and a hooded shape protruding from the wall back of the bell-chamber on the chair. Richly colored in red, green, blue, and gold, the painting suggests music, reverie, and love in a rich and crowded medieval setting.

Again Morris creates song and story to accompany the painting, but the song here is less closely tied to the setting in the picture. Morris' poem suggests that the lady singer tempts the courtier-knight to undertake a mission to a haunted castle from which he will probably not return. For a sensual first kiss Oliver is urged to recover the lady's coif and kirtle from the castle. Though Yoland and priests will pray for him, Oliver seems destined to make another in a grey row of graves. Morris thus creates a grim situation from what, for Rossetti, is a richly painted mood scene. The bed and the orange branches in the picture suggest sensual passion, perhaps the nuptial bed. The bell and the dove are also symbols of dedication. Morris passes over these symbols and creates a tale of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" entrapping a hapless victim.<sup>19</sup>

Several other watercolors of this period show Rossetti working in the medieval mood. The Wedding of St. George and the Princess Sabra, with embracing lovers and bell-playing angels, is rich in music and heraldic design as is A Christmas Carol where a lady, playing an organ, is flanked by maid-servants combing out her long tresses. These works are similar to The Blue Closet and The Tune of Seven Towers in texture and design. In the same vein is Before the Battle which shows damozels hanging pennons on lances. St. Catherine, Rossetti's only oil of these years, depicts a medieval artist in

his workshop painting a model posing with a Catherine wheel. Saints in medieval mode for stained glass would soon become a staple of Morris and Company, and St. George with his princess and dragon was one of the favorite saints.

The final point of comparison between Rossetti and Morris relative to The Defence of Guenevere is a common interest in the ballad. From Bishop Percy through Scott the traditional ballad enjoyed a revival in the nineteenth century. Inspired by the collectors, Wordsworth and Scott wrote ballads of their own as did many of the romantics. Rossetti and Morris were both raised on the romantic tradition, and the medieval setting and narrative excitement of the ballad appealed to both. In his youth Rossetti translated Burger's balladic Lenore and wrote a ballad romance of his own, "Hugh the Heron." Other ballads followed as he matured: "Jan Van Hunks" (completed in old age), "Dennis Shand," "Staff and Scrip," "Stratton Water," and "Sister Helen." He also designed paintings from the ballads and planned a series of illustrations in concert with Lizzie Siddal for a collection of ballads to be edited by William Allingham. Found, the famous contemporary oil that Rossetti began in 1854 and never finished, is taken from William Bell Scott's ballad-style poem, "Rosabell." And a design that much impressed Morris and Burne-Jones, the book illustration for Allingham's "The Maids of Elfin Mere," is from a ballad. Several of Morris' earliest poems are ballads, such as the two in William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist: "Where have you been so long to-day" and "Malmston had a dream in the night." The first combines "Lord Randal" and "Edward" while the second echoes many ballads where one lover's death soon brings on the death of the other. Morris' entire bent was toward medieval romance, and the ballad was a form he often adopted.

The ballad formed a point of common interest for Rossetti and Morris, but each discovered the form for himself and used it in his own manner. Morris writes of the harsh realities of medieval life with strong influence from Froissart. Love may be involved, but it is often lost or frustrated love. Combat and violence share the stage with love. Rossetti prefers to focus on the love relationship; he softens the hard realities of medieval life. Morris' ballads seem more masculine and bold; Rossetti's are gentler and more intimate. Perhaps Morris is truer to early ballad style, but he does not always capture the open, blunt, matter-of-factness of the old form. Symbolic innuendos sometimes replace plain statement. Rossetti's ballads seem more clearly "literary ballads," an artistic imitation of old forms adapted to the poet's own predilections and skills. The plain refrains Morris uses are open to subtle alterations in such a poem as Rossetti's "Sister Helen." Blunt diction in "Staff and Scrip" is used to tell of courtly devotion rather than of combat. The palmer is killed "off-stage," but his armorial dedication to his lady is fully described. In true balladic spirit, however, the Pre-Raphaelites loved to recite their productions during social gatherings of the clan; Rossetti often called to Morris: "Topsy, read us one of your grinds."<sup>20</sup>

One of the favorite ballad motifs among the Pre-Raphaelites was that of the rejected lady who manages to regain her knight's fealty. As in the traditional ballads "Fair Annie" and "Child Waters" (Child, English and Scottish Popular Ballads, nos. 62 and 63), the cast-off lady is pregnant, unknown to her lover who is often in the process of planning marriage with another. Fidelity even up to the new marriage generally regains the knight's true love; in "Child Waters" the lady serves as the knight's page on his journey home to wed, and her own birth-pains finally bring him back to her.

Rossetti made sketches for both these ballads, and W. L. Windus, a Liverpool follower of the Pre-Raphaelites, painted Burd Helen in 1856, a version of "Child Waters." In the mid-1850's both Rossetti and Morris wrote ballads on this theme.

During a walking tour of Warwickshire in July 1853 Rossetti observed the flooding of the Avon around Stratford and began a ballad in such a setting, later titled "Stratton Water." The ballad opens as Lord Sands looks out from his castle at the flooding fields. A white form on a nearby rise catches his eye. Balladic question and answer ensues with a servingman seeking to dismiss the form as sail, swan, or smock. Sands investigates for himself and finds the shape to be Janet, his beloved whom he thought dead. Janet and he were separated by his family's duplicity, and now she is about to bear his child. Vowing revenge in the future, Sands reclaims his love, finds a drifting boat, and rows to the flooding kirkyard to legitimize his unborn child in marriage.

The empty boat thraved i' the wind,  
 Against the postern tied.  
 "Hold still, you've brought my love with me,  
 You shall take back my bride."

.....  
 Now make the white bed warm and soft  
 And greet the merry morn.  
 The night the mother should have died  
 The young son shall be born.<sup>21</sup>

Morris' ballad, "Welland River," plays on the same theme. Fair Ellayne's belly grows as she awaits Sir Robert's return from fighting abroad. She is shocked when Sir Robert returns leading a new bride, richer and healthier far than she. Ellayne at her window catches Sir Robert's eye and tells him a parable of two hounds, one old and faithful, the other new and untried. When Robert says that choice should favor the faithful, Ellayne

bids him apply the situation to himself. Robert thereupon abandons the new to do justice to his old love and the child soon to be born.

At about the time of the publication of The Defence of Guenevere, Morris turned from ballads to work on a series of dramatic narratives in the style of "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" called "Scenes from the Fall of Troy." In the former poem, Sir Peter refers to the Troy story as a parallel to his own pursuit of glory in a losing cause:

I like the straining game  
Of striving well to hold up things that fall;  
So one becomes great. (43)

It is in this spirit of the twilight of a heroic cause that "Scenes from the Fall of Troy" are cast. Morris completed over half the poem by the early 1860's and gradually laid the project aside. Meanwhile, Rossetti made drawings in 1861 for an intricate, many-figured picture called Cassandra, depicting Hector's departure for his last battle amidst the wild warnings of Cassandra. Rossetti suggested in a letter that Meredith's poem "Cassandra" was his source. But a reading of Meredith's poem and Morris' "Scene" titled "The Defiance of the Greeks" makes it apparent that Morris and not Meredith is the real source for Rossetti's design. Morris' dramatic depiction of Trojan confidence in the face of Cassandra's dire prophecy includes the entire cast of characters from Rossetti's picture. Rossetti described this work in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton in 1869:

The Cassandra subject I hope one day to paint. I mean her to be prophesying the death of Hector before his last battle. He will not be deterred from going, and rushes at last down the steps, giving an order across her noise to the Captain in charge of the soldiers who are going around the ramparts on their way to battle.

Cassandra tears her garments in rage and despair. Helen is arming Paris in a leisurely way, and he is amused at the gradual rage she is getting into at what Cassandra says of her. Other figures are Andromache with Hector's child, the Nurse, Priam and Hecuba, and one of the Brothers who is expostulating with Cassandra.<sup>22</sup>

In Morris' dramatic scene, Troilus is the brother who expostulates with Cassandra who in turn urges Andromache with her child to plead with Hector. Morris began his "Scenes" before Rossetti drew his design, so this may be a case where Rossetti plucked a good idea from his disciple. While Rossetti was most generous in helping others, he could, on occasion, help himself.

Throughout the 1860s Morris and Rossetti continued to make use of the Troy theme. Morris helped design a tapestry for his Red House called Flamma Troiae; later, this was made into a screen of three queens and it is now at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Rossetti painted Helen of Troy in 1863 with Troy burning in the background. The next year he started work on a painting of Venus Verticordia, depicting the goddess naked to bust level with her fatal dart and apple in hand. An accompanying sonnet explains that she contemplates the fate of Troy:

But if she give the fruit that works her  
spell,  
Those eyes shall flame as for her Phrygian  
boy,  
Then shall her bird's strained throat the  
woe foretell,  
And her far seas moan as a single shell,  
And through her dark grove strike the  
light of Troy.<sup>23</sup>

As Rossetti prepared his first volume of poems, he turned again to the Troy theme. He wrote two

sonnets on the Cassandra design and a sensuous ballad of Helen's fatal charms titled "Troy Town":

Heavenborn Helen, Sparta's queen,  
    (O Troy Town!)  
Had two breasts of heavenly sheen,  
The sun and moon of the heart's desire:  
All Love's lordship lay between.  
    (O Troy's down,  
    Tall Troy's on fire!)<sup>24</sup>

Such lusty imagery clearly suggests the naked Venus and the burning city in the Helen painting. Helen singing outside the wooden horse is the subject of "Death's Songsters," a sonnet of 1870, and this episode is also described in Morris' "Scenes." "Venus Victrix," a sonnet of 1871, describes the goddess as a Helen. To Rossetti Venus and Helen were interchangeable symbols of the femme fatale, a favorite theme of later years. Morris' "Scenes," on the other hand, is an energetic but tragic delineation of the fall of a great city. He returned to the Troy story again in "The Death of Paris" from The Earthly Paradise, but by now his style had moderated and grown less dramatic.

A final area of cooperative endeavor among Morris, Rossetti, and their friends began with Morris' marriage to Jane Burden in April 1859. Morris asked his friend from Street's office, Philip Webb, to design a house for him, a design realized in the famous Red House of 1860, still standing in Bexleyheath, Kent. By the end of this year Rossetti and Burne-Jones had also gotten married, the former at long last to Lizzie Siddal and the latter to Georgiana Macdonald. Morris called on his Pre-Raphaelite friends for aid in decorating the interior of the house. From this project would soon emerge the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Company. Though unnamed in the title of the firm, Rossetti, Brown, and Burne-Jones were active partners with Morris in the early days of the company. All this

is history, but in designing furniture and stained glass, Morris and Rossetti were drawn into cooperative endeavor.

Though the first Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood discussed interior design and considered entering the field, according to Hunt's memoir, their plans never went beyond the talking stage.<sup>25</sup> Only Ford Madox Brown seems to have actually designed his own furniture, generally in connection with pictures he was working on. He built models for his own needs and occasionally made copies for friends.<sup>26</sup> He was also meticulous in designing his own picture frames. Rossetti also designed picture frames, often to allow for poetry to be printed on them. But Rossetti's real entry into the field of design came with Morris and the Firm.

As we have seen, Rossetti painted some of the furniture Morris and Burne-Jones designed for their Red Lion Square studio. He and his wife helped out at Red House, and Rossetti was largely responsible for drafting the prospectus for Morris' new company. But Rossetti's actual participation in the practice of interior decoration came in conjunction with the Firm's display at the International Exhibition at South Kensington in 1862. For this occasion Rossetti designed seven panels of stained glass on the theme of The Parable of the Vineyard. He designed a couch and a chair for the display and painted two panels of ten for a cabinet designed for the architect, J. P. Seddon. Though the couch has disappeared, the Seddon cabinet and the stained glass survive today, as does a chair made to Rossetti's design.<sup>27</sup>

Though Rossetti made no more designs for furniture, he was a regular designer of stained glass during the early years of the Morris firm. Since Morris and Webb designed the layout of the windows, including color, background, lead lines, canopies, lettering, and ornamentation, Rossetti's work combined perforce with that of Morris. Since one



window in a church or other building had to be consistent with the design of other windows, there is a good deal of similarity among stained glass originally designed by Rossetti, Brown, Morris, or Burne-Jones and carried out by the Firm. The windows at Selsley, Gloucestershire, for instance, are a well-matched ensemble by various hands. The Tristan series consisted of thirteen stained glass windows by six artists.

The Firm was the last endeavor shared by Rossetti and Morris. With the death of his wife in 1862, Rossetti drew away from Morris and Burne-Jones and the conviviality of Red House. Rossetti's furniture and stained glass designs had all been executed in 1861-62. When Morris moved back to London in 1865, Rossetti was no longer doing work for the Firm but was exclusively a painter. Jane Morris' beauty was more important to him than her husband's talents.

The association of these two poet-artists had always been an unstable one, so very different were they in character. As William Gaunt and others have suggested, Rossetti was of a southern, passionate temperament where Morris was a staunch Northman. Rossetti was a foreigner and city-dweller where Morris was a Briton of rural preferences. Still, over the brief period of the late 1850s, their impact on one another was considerable.

Rossetti caught Morris at an impressionable time of life when Morris was turning from religion and architecture to painting and the decorative arts. Rossetti confirmed Morris in a bohemian way of life; Morris' hirsute face and careless artist's habits date from this period. The Defence of Guenevere will stand as a monument to Rossettian Pre-Raphaelitism, the first published volume of poems to represent the movement. For all the polish of the later narratives, never again did Morris attain the brilliance, variety, innovative style, and tensile strength of these poems. As B. Ifor Evans has

put it, Morris never fulfilled the promise of these early poems.

His whole poetical fibre slackened; the fevered passion and bitter wisdom of this youthful work pass into the more placid story-telling of The Earthly Paradise period. . . . One can register the change, but one cannot explain it, for it is easier to weave explanations around an introspective soul who forever tells you why he does things than around an active personality who is too busy doing things ever to explain why they are done. He lost the stimulus of Rossetti, and from this loss the emotional temper of his poetry suffered as the art of Millais had done.<sup>28</sup>

As Evans suggests, poetry soon became a by-product of Morris' craft activities; he could weave fabric and a poem at the same time.

Rossetti, on his side, was himself inspired by the refreshing worship of these new disciples. As he lent them his encouragement, they in turn gave his creativity new energy and direction. Rossetti never painted as well as he did during these years. The later pictures of languid ladies in oils are far less dynamic than the Arthurian watercolors of the 1850s. When he later turned again to writing poetry, his repeated use of the medieval ballad form suggests the lingering impact of the Morris years. The later oils of long-necked ladies from literature are far less dynamic than the Arthurian watercolors of the 1850s. After 1860, in his more solitary way, he also became a craftsman, turning out paintings by formula.

However brief its flourishing, the late 1850s was a golden period for Rossetti, Morris, and a whole circle of artists and poets. They shared enthusiasms, combined on various projects, and produced works that represent their best efforts. A

medieval dream took life amidst the bustle of London, and a new craftsmanship was given to English interior decoration. Thus "the union of this ever-diverse pair" of artists and personalities will remain a landmark in English art and letters.

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### Notes

1. The sources used for biographical data concerning Morris are J. W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, 1899); rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968) and Philip Henderson, William Morris (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). The biographical source for Rossetti is Oswald Doughty, A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Muller, 1949).

2. The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, No. 1 (January 1856), p. 60.

3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. Oswald Doughty and J. R. Wahl (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), I, 292-93.

4. Mackail, I, 107.

5. The Germ, No. 1 (January 1850), p. 32; also in Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Works (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 555.

6. Carole Silver offers another reading of Morris' color symbolism in a paper, "William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement," given at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum of the Smithsonian Institution on March 21, 1978.

7. Rossetti, Works, p. 557.

8. William Holman Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (London: Macmillan, 1905), I, 147.

9. Hunt, I, 153.

10. Rossetti, Works, p. 241.

11. Rossetti, Works, p. 3.

12. Mackail, I, 106-7.

13. Georgiana Burne-Jones, Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones (London: Macmillan, 1904), I, 145; also in Mackail, I, 110.

14. "'Rapunzel' Unravelled," Victorian Poetry, 7 (Autumn 1969), 221-32.

15. Rossetti's art work is reproduced and commented on in two lengthy studies: Virginia Surtees, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: 1828-82, The Paintings and Drawings, 2 vols. (London: Oxford, 1971) and Henry C. Marillier, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of His Life and Art (London: Bell, 1899).

16. For an extended discussion of Morris' Pre-Raphaelite women in the Defence volume, see Florence Saunders Boos, The Poetry of Dante G. Rossetti (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), pp. 122-30.

17. Alfred Noyes, William Morris (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. 21; John Drinkwater, William Morris, A Critical Study (London: Secker, Martin, 1912), pp. 65-66.

18. For a more mythical interpretation of the poem see Charlotte H. Oberg, A Pagan Prophet: William Morris (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), pp. 143-50.

19. A careful reading of this poem that varies somewhat from mine is offered by David Latham, "Gothic Architectonics: Morris's 'Tune of the Seven Towers,'" The Pre-Raphaelite Review, 2 (May 1979), 49-58.

20. Burne-Jones, Memorials, I, 162.

21. Rossetti, Works, p. 204.

22. Rossetti, Letters, II, 690-91.

23. Rossetti, Works, p. 210.
24. Rossetti, Works, p. 214.
25. Hunt, I, 110, 151.
26. Raymond Watkinson, Pre-Raphaelite Art and Design (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1970), pp. 149-51.
27. Watkinson, p. 195. For Rossetti and Morris' work in stained glass, see A. Charles Sewter, The Stained Glass of William Morris and His Circle (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). The Seddon cabinet and the chair are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and are illustrated in Isabelle Anscome and Charlotte Gere, Arts and Crafts in Britain and America (London: Academy, 1978), pp. 15, 76-77.
28. English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century (London: Methuen, 1933), pp. 90-91.

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