WHAT IS PRE-RAPHAELITISM IN POETRY?

ANNA JANNEY DE ARMOND *

To define a school of poetry, a school of any art, is always a difficult task. One may explain in a general way what it is and what it is not: one may illustrate its formal characteristics, discuss its ideas and principles, place it in historical perspective; but, like any other ultimate, it resists pigeonholing. For reasons with which this paper will be largely concerned, to define Pre-Raphaelitism as a poetic movement seems to me even harder than to define, for example, Neo-Classicism or Romanticism. Though Romanticism is admittedly a complex literary phenomenon, though one may make one's appoach to it from any one of several different angles—the return to nature, the revival of the medieval, the celebration of the individual, and so forth—still there is general agreement as to its characteristics. If one can scarcely put Romanticism into a sentence, one can be fairly sure that the lecture in which one introduces the Romantic Movement to one's students will be very much like that of one's colleague across the hall. But of the Pre-Raphaelite School one can speak, I think, with less certainty of agreement.

The difficulty in defining Pre-Raphaelitism lies not only in the universal difficulty just mentioned but, more important, in the fact that there is a difference between Pre-Raphaelitism as the Pre-Raphaelites themselves saw it and Pre-Raphaelitism as it has come to be looked upon by most outsiders, laymen and professional students of literature alike. Anyone who has read, let us say, both the collected numbers of *The Germ* and *The Defence of Guenevere,* both of which are considered to be of the Pre-Raphaelite canon, must surely recognize that he is dealing with two rather different sorts of literary work. In fact, the more one becomes familiar with the writings of the School, the more one is forced to admit the disparity between what Pre-Raphaelitism thought itself to be, so to speak, and what others have considered it.

Ford Madox Hueffer, writing in 1920 with the perspective of more than half a century, yet with the intimacy of one who had a

* Department of English.

family connection with the movement, made a distinction which my own reading convinces me is essentially valid: he believes that Pre-Raphaelitism, the original and genuine Pre-Raphaelite Movement, existed "at the very most" from 1848 to 1853;[1] and that the "medieval" or "aesthetic" movement of the Fifties, of which Swinburne, Morris, Burne-Jones, and Rossetti were the leading figures, and which has come to be thought the very flowering of Pre-Raphaelitism, was not really Pre-Raphaelite at all.[2] If one follows Hueffer's argument, one must admit a confusion of judgment in Laurence Housman's statement that "in no book of verse is the poetry of Pre-Raphaelitism so completely illustrated as in William Morris's first early book of poems, 'The Defence of Guenevere.' . . ."[3] It may be quite true, as Mr. Housman goes on to say, that "in that little volume . . . the Middle Ages have sprung to life as in no other book . . .; and only in the Pre-Raphaelite spirit and method could it have been done";[4] that is, it may be true that the Pre-Raphaelites pointed the way for Morris's peculiarly haunting synthesis of the Middle Ages. It is another thing, however, to say that *The Defence of Guenevere* is a typical Pre-Raphaelite volume: the book shows certainly the impact of the Pre-Raphaelite poetic impulse on the temperament and creative power of William Morris; but Hueffer would dispute, and with reason, the belief that it is a good example of Pre-Raphaelite poetry as Pre-Raphaelite poetry was originally conceived.

I do not wish, here or later, to labor the distinction beyond its real importance, still less to establish a "thesis"; it seems to me, however, that there is a genuine and rather unusual problem involved in an attempt to explain the Pre-Raphaelite movement in poetry, and that Hueffer has made specific a dichotomy which is not at all imaginary and which any discussion of the school must take into consideration. In the course of his book he suggests, though he does not systematically develop (and, it may be, does not fully recognize), the probable cause of the confusion between the two different phases—let us put it this way in order to avoid quibbling—of the movement. This confusion, I am inclined to think, has been brought about by the some-

[1] Hueffer, p. 2. See also Christina Rossetti's poem of Nov. 10, 1853 (*Poetical Works,* p. 424), and the conclusion of Chapter XIII in Holman Hunt, both of which give first-hand evidence of the dispersal of the group in 1853.

[2] *Ibid.,* pp. 8–12. The same point of view is implied throughout Holman Hunt's book.

[3] Housman, p. 19. Cf. Beers (p. 326), who has a rather similar point of view.

[4] *Ibid.,* pp. 24–25.

what anomalous position of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti is by far the best-known personality and the greatest poet of the original coterie; hence his poetry, quite naturally, has come to be considered as representative of the school; and if it is representative one can easily follow the transition of thought by which Mr. Housman, for instance, reaches the conclusion that *The Defence of Guenevere* is a characteristic expression of the movement.[5]

The crux of the matter lies, I think, in the very simple and obvious but frequently disregarded fact that of all the poets of the Brotherhood, Rossetti was the least typical. It is certainly neither new nor surprising to discover that a great poet differs from the group to which he belongs; indeed, such difference is usually the very mark of his worth. But the point here is not that Rossetti was different from, or better than, his literary colleagues of the P.R.B.—which anyone admits, and gladly—but that the mistake has been made of considering those very differences or points of superiority as typical of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. As the father of John Millais shrewdly complained to Hunt in the early days of the P.R.B., "People assume that Rossetti Gothicism is what you are aiming at." [6] If, for instance, one believes "The Blessed Damozel" to embody the salient traits of Pre-Raphaelitism, one can make out a good case for even "The Tune of the Seven Towers" [7] as being also characteristic. But the essential quality, as distinct from the external and adventitious aspects, of "The Blessed Damozel" springs from Rossetti, not from Pre-Raphaelite theory and not from Pre-Raphaelite practice: the addition of strangeness to beauty, which is at the core of "The Blessed Damozel" and gives it its high poetic merit, is characteristic also of much of *The Defence of Guenevere* but not of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, and it has very little place, if any, in Pre-Raphaelite poetic theory. As a matter of fact, "Jenny" [8] is more illustrative of the theory, and probably the practice, of the Brotherhood than "The Blessed Damozel," just as—to turn to another art—*Found* is more illustrative than *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin.*

Having attempted to suggest the existence of a difference be-

[5] Hueffer (p. 12) sums up the situation accurately when he says: ". . . Rossetti's trumpeters . . . have succeeded in transfering the very name of Pre-Raphaelite to a movement radically different. . . ."

[6] Hunt, p. 220.

[7] The poem was inspired, as it happens, by a similarly entitled design of Rossetti's (Beers, p. 305).

[8] The first version, now lost, was written in 1848, though the poem was not included in *The Germ.*

tween the two schools which are commonly included under one name, let us turn from generalization to a specific examination of what the self-styled Pre-Raphaelites stood for and created in art, especially in poetry. The story of the origin of the Brotherhood scarcely needs repeating. It was a revolt—originally and primarily of painters, not of poets—against the stultifying influences of the academic tradition.[9] The group chose its name not with the idea of going back to the techniques or principles of painting of the early Renascence but with the purpose of repudiating the conventions of art which had come to be associated with the name of Raphael.[10] They intended not to imitate the painters before Raphael, but to fulfil their own laws as those painters, presumably, had fulfilled theirs.[11] What the members of the group really wanted was the privilege of using their own minds and emotions, and their own eyes. It is certainly not strange that, in rebellion against their training, they sought first of all fidelity to nature, conceiving of it as the opposite of the tradition which they rejected and believing that it consisted primarily in accuracy of detail in presenting what they saw. This, after all, is but a familiar phase of the Romantic Movement over again.[12]

Instead, then, of concerning themselves with the precise proportions of light and shade in their pictures, with balance and symmetry, or with similar academic considerations, the Pre-Raphaelite painters began their revolt by attempting to reproduce with brush or pencil exactly what they observed. Hence, at the start, their meticulous study of the texture of wearing apparel, of the leaves of trees and

[9] Beers (p. 283) points out that, in England, painting was the last of the arts to catch the romantic inspiration.

[10] It is interesting that Millais in his illustration for Keats's "Isabella" (and elsewhere) did imitate the very technique of the early Renascence painters. The picture is two-dimensional; it shows no knowledge of perspective or anatomy. But Millais is exceptional in the group: for one thing, his faculty of technical imitation was highly developed; for another, he was probably less original and independent in his ideas than the rest, as his work seems to show.

[11] Hueffer, p. 82; Hunt, pp. 135, 139, and *passim; Rossetti: Family Letters,* I, p. 127. But for first-hand information, see John Seward's essay in *The Germ,* entitled "The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art" (pp. 65, 71). Any discussion of the technical innovations of the Pre-Raphaelite painters seems irrelevant here; besides, as Seward says in the article just mentioned (p. 67), the Brotherhood felt that though execution should not be neglected, it should be maintained only as an *"aid* . . . so that we do not forget the soul for the hand." (Note the juxtaposition of "soul" and "hand.") The chief technical novelty of the Pre-Raphaelites is explained by Holman Hunt (p. 276).

[12] It is significant, in this connection, that Rossetti felt that whereas poetry was already liberated and its course run, painting offered a new field for development. From the age of twenty-five till about 1870, Rossetti nearly abandoned poetry; his first poetic period dates from about 1847 to 1853. (See Walker, p. 495, and Welby, *The Victorian Romantics,* p. 118.)

plants, of atmospheric conditions at different times of day. Hence, later, Millais's long hours of painting in " 'an actual carpenter's shop in Oxford Street where they had some planks of real cedar' "; [13] hence Hunt's doing *The Light of the World* by moonlight and having a lantern made as a model of the one in his picture so that he could see exactly how the light fell through its interstices; [14] hence the day which Hunt and Millais gave to exploring the Ewell in order to find suitable backgrounds for *Ophelia* and *The Hireling Shepherd;* [15] hence the frequent requisitioning of friends and relatives to act as living models for their paintings.[16]

Fidelity to nature and to themselves meant not only the careful reproduction of visual detail but also truthfulness to life in the broader sense. One remembers Dickens's feeling of outrage at the representation of Christ and the Virgin in the Millais *Carpenter Shop* just referred to,[17] or one recalls the realism of the situation depicted, as well as of the treatment of it, in Rossetti's *Found.* In the third place, though it was no part of their stated intention to do so, the painters of the group usually attempted more than mere representation; [18] their pictures nearly always enshrined an idea or suggested symbolically more than they actually portrayed or, by association with another art—for example, poetry or drama—demanded specific intellectual cooperation on the part of the beholder. They were definitely concerned, as William Michael Rossetti put it, with "serious and elevated invention of subject." [19] Thus *The Light of the World* is pure allegory; while in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* Rossetti not only introduces the lily and the dove but gives the trellis which appears in the background the form of the Cross,[20] and in *The Carpenter's Shop* the gash in the palm of the boy's hand suggests, obviously, the Cruci-

[13] Hunt, p. 202.

[14] For most interesting commentary on the painting of *The Light of the World,* see Hunt, pp. 293, 299–301, 308–309, 346.

[15] *Ibid.,* pp. 262–263.

[16] Hunt's Rienzi = D. G. Rossetti; Deverell's Viola = Miss Siddal; Rossetti's child-angel in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* = four or more little girls in succession, "an untried one ever promising to be more manageable than the last" (Hunt, pp. 142, 198, 164 respectively). As is well known, Mary in both *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *The Annuciation* was studied from Christina.

[17] The exact words of the condemnation are quoted by Hunt (p. 218).

[18] Hunt (p. 172) says: "One scarcely expressed purpose in our reform, left unsaid by reason of its fundamental necessity, was to make art a handmaid in the cause of justice and truth." Compare John Lucas Tupper, *et al.*

[19] *Rossetti: Family Letters,* I, p. 127.

[20] Symbolism was particularly natural to one so steeped in Dante as was Rossetti.

fixion. In short, the large number of Pre-Raphaelite paintings which have religious subjects or connotations reveal both in matter and in details of execution a concern with ideas. Similarly, the many pictures connected with literature—for example, Hunt's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* or the Millais-Hunt illustrations for "Isabella"—indicate that the Brotherhood was interested in content perhaps even more than in form, since the full appreciation of such pictures depends on familiarity with the situation depicted as much as on aesthetic judgment. Indeed it is abundantly clear from an examination of their actual work, and from such a book as Hunt's autobiography, that these painters were far from being interested in art-for-art's-sake; they were concerned much more with ideas than with beauty in the abstract or with decoration or with mere representation of natural objects or scenes from life.[21]

The poetry of the Brotherhood has, I think, been less well known than their accomplishment in the fine arts. Probably the poetry is of less intrinsic merit; certainly it was a secondary interest of the group, an outgrowth of the impulse that brought together the seven young men who were the first Pre-Raphaelites.[22] William Michael Rossetti, who is a painstaking and honest witness, tells us that if his brother "cannot rightly be credited (in derogation of Hunt and Millais) with inventing the Præraphaelite movement and Brotherhood . . . he certainly *can* be credited with inventing *The Germ,*" [23] and he goes on to say that Dante was not only eager to have an outlet for his literary endeavors but was desirous of a medium by which the Pre-Raphaelite principles of art might be diffused abroad.[24] *The Germ,* therefore, is of special interest to our problem: first, because it was fathered by the greatest and most influential of the early Pre-Raphaelites, and, second, because it was a conscious attempt to set before the public both precepts and examples of Pre-Raphaelitism, not as it related to any one art but as it concerned art in general.

The magazine appeared but four times, from January through April

[21] It is significant, in my opinion, that the minute attention to realistic detail which the Pre-Raphaelites practiced is always, in the total effect, a subordinate element in their pictures. This is true alike of a genre painting like *The Blind Girl* or *The Hireling Shepherd* and of the more familiar paintings connected with literary or religious subjects.

[22] Hunt, Millais, the Rossetti brothers, James Collinson, F. G. Stephens, and Thomas Woolner. Woolner was a sculptor; William Michael was still undecided as to his career; the rest were painters.

[23] *Rossetti: Family Letters,* I, p. 149.

[24] Hunt (p. 139) says of Rossetti, ". . . he was with all his heart a proselytizer."

of 1850.[25] Its serious and missionary aim is indicated by its subtitle: "Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art"; by William Michael's sonnet on the front cover, with its demand that the artist speak the truth as he sees it; and by the advertisement on the back cover, which ran as follows:

> The endeavour held in view throughout the writings on Art will be to encourage and enforce an entire adherence to the simplicity of Nature; and also to direct attention . . . to the comparatively few works which Art has yet produced in this spirit.

The intentions of the Pre-Raphaelites, in theory rather than in practice, are most significantly expressed in two papers by John Lucas Tupper entitled "The Subject in Art," which seem to be an official utterance of the group. It is clear from this essay that Hunt's emphatic assertion was correct: truthfulness in art, to nature or to oneself, was to the Brotherhood a means to an end, not an end in itself. True, "fine art delights us from its being the semblance of what in nature delights";[26] but, says the essayist, art at its best addresses man's highest attributes, his mental and moral faculties, not his "less exalted," merely sensory faculties.[27] One wonders whether Ruskin himself could have expressed more uncompromisingly the moralistic view of art than Tupper does in these words: ". . . *Fine Art* shall regard the general happiness of man, by addressing those attributes which are *peculiarly human,* by exciting the activity of his rational and benevolent powers. . . ."[28] Moreover, his belief in the practical function of art led Tupper to the further conclusion that the "familiar incident," the "things of today" are more proper to artistic treatment than "antique or mediaeval subjects," since they are "fraught with more moral interest" and since their basic lack of "romantic attraction" may be supplied by the artist.[29] Seward, in "The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art," evinces the same bias in favor of didacticism as does Tupper. Not only does he object to "the introduction of false and meretricious ornament,"[30] but he believes that truth in art is important because only through it can the arts "ever

[25] The title of the third and fourth numbers was *Art and Poetry.*
[26] *The Germ,* p. 14.
[27] *Ibid.,* p. 11.
[28] *Ibid.,* p. 18.
[29] *Ibid.,* "The Subject in Art. No. II," *passim,* especially p. 138. F. G. Stephens (probably) in the essay "Modern Giants" makes a more effective, because less didactic, plea for "the poetry of the things about us." (See *The Germ,* pp. 188–191.)
[30] *Ibid.,* p. 69.

hold the position for which they were intended, as the most powerful instruments, the most gentle guides." [31] And John Orchard adds his testimony in the dialogue "In the House of Kalon," in which he says, among other things to the same point, that the "high and peculiar office" of the fine arts is "to refine." [32]

Of the other prose in *The Germ* the only piece of work important to our problem is Rossetti's "Hand and Soul." Though it is couched in the form of a short-story, it is substantially an expression of Rossetti's theory of art; one notes at once both the similarity to the opinion shared by Tupper, Orchard, and Seward, and the divergence from it. The gist of the story is that the artist succeeds only when he rejects as his aim both desire for fame and desire to teach, "the presentment of some moral greatness that should impress the beholder." [33] He should seek, instead, but one thing—to express what is natural to himself: "In all that thou doest, work from thy own heart, simply . . . ," [34] or, to paraphrase the motto, the hand should paint the soul. Thus, indirectly, says Rossetti, the artist truly serves God.[35] This theory, of course, cuts two ways, and in that lies its importance. On the one hand, in its emphasis on the artist's ultimate aim of fulfilling God's purpose, it seems to support the demand of the other three Pre-Raphaelite theorizers not only for truth in art but also for an art dedicated to the service of a good higher than itself. On the other hand, it affords a loophole of escape from any moral or didactic obligation whatever; it suggests—tentatively, but significantly—the right of the artist to present whatever subject he wishes in whatever manner he desires.

The poetry of *The Germ* reveals not alone the characteristics already discussed in connection with Pre-Raphaelite painting and the rather conflicting principles of art just outlined, but also, occasionally, those special traits which link it with the more familiar late Pre-Raphaelite poetry. The desire for naturalness which was fundamental to the creed, the "entire adherence to the simplicity of Nature," is manifested in the poetry chiefly by the tone of artlessness which characterizes nearly all the work which appears in the magazine. There is formal variety, to be sure; blank verse, the sonnet, the octosyllabic couplet, and a considerable number of different stanzaic patterns are to be found. But the effect of the poems, whatever the

[31] *The Germ*, p. 71.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 167.
[33] Baum, ed., Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 389.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 395.
[35] With "Hand and Soul" one should compare the three sonnets called "The Choice" written in 1848, later incorporated into *The House of Life*.

metrical or stanzaic scheme, is usually of spontaneity and lack of complexity of form. In addition, the vocabulary and style of these poets are, for the most part, unaffected and colloquial, particularly in the work of William Michael Rossetti, though there is, of course, a conscious archaism of word or phrase in such poems as Orchard's pseudo-ballad "On a Whit-Sunday Morn in the Month of May" and in "The Blessed Damozel." [36] The content of the poems, moreover, is what one might expect from the manner in which they are written; scarcely a single poem in the collection offers any barrier to the immediate understanding of the reader. On the other hand, the genuine simplicity of most of the poems is replaced in a few by a studied and self-conscious artlessness. Such, for instance, is the unfortunate "Go softly real worms [*sic*]" in "Of My Lady in Death," and such is the masterly assumption of naiveté which is an essential quality of "The Blessed Damozel" and which was to be taken up by the later Pre-Raphaelites.

A second important characteristic of the poetry of *The Germ* is the emphasis in many of the poems on description, especially on description appealing to the mind's eye by means of slight and carefully drawn bits of detail. The connection between this pictorial tendency in poetry and the similar tendency in early Pre-Raphaelite paintings is obvious, and there is a close relationship also between it and the strong sensuous appeal of the work of Swinburne and Morris. Description is a prominent element, for example, in Woolner's "My Beautiful Lady"; it is the whole purpose of Tupper's "A Sketch from Nature" and the chief purpose of William Michael's "Fancies at Leisure" or "To the Castle Ramparts"; and it makes, of course, a most important contribution to the success of Rossetti's "My Sister's Sleep" and "The Blessed Damozel." It is worth noting, too, that the intimate connection between literature and the fine arts, which is exemplified throughout the Pre-Raphaelite movement in painting, is again revealed here. Of the four illustrations in *The Germ*—one for each number—two go with poems that spring from earlier literature: "Cordelia" by William Michael and "Viola and Olivia" by John Lucas Tupper; while, on the other hand, of Dante Gabriel's eleven poetic contributions to the magazine, six are sonnets written for pictures.

The religious and symbolic elements which have so marked a place in early Pre-Raphaelite painting are noticeable likewise, though less conspicuous, in the poetry of the group. The sort of foreshadowing

[36] Baum (p. xxiv) speaks of the Pre-Raphaelite use of "the 'stunning' words which Rossetti culled from reading the old romances in the British Museum."

which has already been pointed out in such works as *The Carpenter's Shop* and *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* has an almost exact parallel in Collinson's lengthy poem called "The Child Jesus," in which the poet recounts five imaginary episodes from Christ's boyhood suggestive of various phases of the Passion. Except for this poem and William Michael's "Jesus Wept," however, the treatment of specifically religious subjects is absent from *The Germ*. Far more widespread and important is the use of symbols. Christina's "Song" (the one which begins, "Oh! roses for the flush of youth"), for instance, is a pattern of symbols, which, as it happens, are explained line by line. "Repining" is an allegory on solitude, or, to put it another way, a poem with a moral—as William Michael took care to note.[37] Indeed, Christina's poems of this period, both those in *The Germ* and those which were not published until later, are full of allegorical conventions—the lily and the rose, for example; and a poem of January, 1849, is even called "Symbols."[38] Woolner's "Emblems"[39] likewise indicates by its very title its dual significance, while the first stanza of "The Blessed Damozel" contains an example of the union of descriptive detail and symbolism which is one of the chief merits of the poem and which is characteristically Pre-Raphaelite:

> She had three lilies in her hand,
> And the stars in her hair were seven.

It is easy to find in the poetry of *The Germ* many instances of the qualities I have been discussing: the striving for simplicity, the concern for descriptive accuracy, the tendency to symbolize, all of which one finds almost invariably in the paintings of the Brotherhood. It is not so easy to see the poetry as exemplifying very completely the moralistic attitude expressed by Tupper and his fellow-essayists. Certain of the poems, of course, have a definite didactic element: Walter Deverell's "The Sight Beyond," Christina's "A Testimony" and "Sweet Death," and some others; but most of them seem to be the result of the look-in-thy-heart-and-write motive expressed by Rossetti. It is certain that moral earnestness was a characteristic of the original Pre-Raphaelites as a group, equally sure that *The Germ* was published in the crusading spirit—the note of "high seriousness" pervades the volume; but the poems themselves are by no means universally flavored with moralizing. On the other hand, however, very few of the poems—possibly only "The Blessed Damozel"—are touched by the

[37] Christina Rossetti, *Poetical Works*, p. 460.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 116.
[39] *The Germ*, pp. 140–141.

remoteness from life, the art-for-the-sake-of-art quality which seems characteristic of the more famous Pre-Raphaelites to come. The tone of the poetry in *The Germ* is prevailingly realistic; it generally follows Tupper's second injunction, if not his first, that "things of today" are the proper subject of the poet. This realism may take the form of the description of actual (or probable) places by William Michael, or the expression of real (or probable) emotions by Christina; it is a realism seldom broken by the intrusion of the strange or the romantic.[40] Typical is the poem by William Michael called "Mrs. Holmes Grey," which never appeared in *The Germ* but which the author considered an application of Pre-Raphaelite principles, "in short, a Præraphaelite poem." [41] A narrative in blank verse, the poem dealt with an unexceptional, though melodramatic, event, and a newspaper report of a coroner's inquest figured largely in the plot. On the poem Dante Gabriel made a comment which throws an interesting light on Pre-Raphaelite poetry: [42]

> . . . It is a painful story, told without compromise, and with very little moral, I believe, beyond commonplaces. Perhaps it is more like Crabbe than any other poet I know of. . . .

In those infrequent poems, such as the Whit-Sunday ballad or "My Beautiful Lady," which attempt to convey a sense of the past and to rise above, or go beyond, realism, we are near the ridiculous; except for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, none of the poets of *The Germ* showed any strong aptitude for, or affinity with, the medieval and the romantic. One can hardly avoid the conclusion that the early Pre-Raphaelites, in poetry as in painting, theoretically and practically, were realists. They were certainly concerned with truth more than with beauty.

As I have stated once and suggested several times, Dante Gabriel Rossetti is the link between these Pre-Raphaelites and those who came later. He stood, in many ways, firmly with the P.R.B. His three sonnets on "Old and New Art" [43] are full of the sense of a high purpose not very different from John Lucas Tupper's; the travel poems of 1849 (two of which, "The Carillon" and "Pax Vobis," appeared in *The Germ* [44]) are realistic pieces, largely descriptive; "My Sister's

[40] There are, of course, exceptions: for instance, the simple, yet highly suggestive, opening lines of Christina's "Dreamland."

[41] *Rossetti: Family Letters,* II, p. 63.

[42] *Ibid.,* II, p. 66.

[43] Originally separate, but later incorporated into *The House of Life* under this title. They were written in 1848 and 1849.

[44] "Pax Vobis" appears among Rossetti's collected poetry under the title "World's Worth."

Sleep" is narrative poetry of the same general category as "Mrs. Holmes Grey"—in fact, it is probably the most genuinely Pre-Raphaelite, in its combination of characteristics and its total effect, of all of Rossetti's poems. Like the other Brothers, Dante was thoroughly anthropocentric; the beauties of nature, for instance, he valued not for themselves but rather as "fuel to the fire of the soul," [45] and he disliked descriptive poetry because "it exhibits and extols objects instead of turning them into the 'medium of exchange' between the material world and the soul." [45] Such a distinctly Pre-Raphaelite spirit is revealed in a good many early Rossetti lyrics in no way connected with *The Germ;* "The Woodspurge" (1856), "The Honeysuckle" (1853), "A Young Fir Wood" (1850), "The Birth-Bond" (1854), "The Hill Summit" (1853) [46]—all these, and others, combine a simplicity of language and incident with significance, with meaning. And finally, throughout his life Rossetti showed the Pre-Raphaelite tendency to relate poetry to painting and painting to poetry.[47]

If Rossetti shared many characteristics with the others of the Brotherhood, he was not only more gifted as a poet than they but also different from them in personality and in interests. His poetry, indeed, and its influence can hardly be understood without some realization of his character and attitudes. In temperament he was highly emotional—passionate and inclined to morbidity, as the story of his life reveals. His one absorbing interest was art; William Michael speaks of his brother's "constitutional indifference, or indeed dislike, to anything that had not an artistic or imaginative appeal." [48] He was almost untouched by every other aspect of life—religion or politics [49] or science or any of the immediate problems or ideas of his day. His taste in literature was primarily for the intense, the individual, the symbolical, for that which dealt with the far away or the long ago or the mysterious; he liked Keats, Coleridge, Poe, Villon, and cared nothing for Wordsworth; he was enduringly devoted to Dante. Holman Hunt's book makes amply clear that he and Millais were conscious from the first how far Rossetti deviated from the Pre-

[45] *Rossetti: Family Letters,* I, p. 411. Baum (pp. xxix–xxx) discusses Rossetti's lack of sympathy with nature for its own sake.

[46] The last two of these poems are in *The House of Life.*

[47] This is one of the constants in Pre-Raphaelitism; it was almost equally characteristic of the early and the later groups.

[48] *Rossetti: Family Letters,* II, p. 71.

[49] "On Refusal of Aid Between Nations" is one of the very few evidences in his work of the concern with political events which one might expect Rossetti to have acquired from his father. William Michael probably summed up the matter: "My brother was essentially a man of the artistic, not the ethical, type" (*Family Letters,* I, p. 404).

Raphaelite conception and practice of art.[50] Hunt speaks, for example, of Rossetti's "devotion to poetic mysticism and beauty"; [51] he says that in Rossetti's eyes people who were different from those of the Middle Ages were not poetic,[52] while to Rossetti "the precedent of the older poets and artists in song and design was warrant for the ecclesiastical strain he favoured." [53] Moreover, Hunt mentions more than once [54] that Rossetti was interested in religious themes and stories from the Bible, just as later he was interested in the Arthurian romances, as storehouses of material for the artist. Hunt felt too that Rossetti's medievalism (for instance, in *The Annunciation*) "needed excuse"; [55] while Millais confessed that Pre-Raphaelitism had not given Rossetti the " 'freshness . . . instead of quaintness derived from the works of past men' " which he had hoped for.[56] Plainly "the elements of romance and mysticism in his nature were too strong to be curbed by the preciseness of delineation which his pre-Raphaelite creed required," [57] and the aspects of Rossetti's work which attracted what Hunt called his "younger proselytes at Oxford" [58] were more striking for their differences from original Pre-Raphaelitism than for their similarity to it.

The number of poems of Rossetti that can be considered links between the earlier and the later phases of the movement is small,[59] chiefly because the second came quickly on the heels of the first. "The Blessed Damozel" is perhaps the best single example of the transition; it has, as I have previously shown, definite early Pre-Raphaelite characteristics and it appeared in the unimpeachably Pre-Raphaelite *Germ*, but it reveals many of the traits of the second part of the movement.

[50] Hunt is speaking of painting, but what he says applies equally to poetry.
[51] Hunt, p. 139.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 147. Contrast Tupper's essay.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[54] *Ibid.*, for example, pp. 172, 307.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 221.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 267. In connection with what Hunt and Millais seem to have considered Rossetti's apostacy, one recalls the sheaf of early poems Rossetti sent to William Bell Scott under the title *Songs of the Art Catholic*. Says William Michael of the title (*Family Letters*, I, p. 114) : "He meant to suggest that the poems embodied conceptions and a point of view related to pictorial art —also that this art was . . . mediaeval and un-modern."
[57] Thompson, *C.H.E.L.*, XIII, p. 126.
[58] Hunt, p. 172.
[59] Many of these early poems were worked over or revised much later; Rossetti had, however, extraordinary power of recapturing a by-gone mood, so that such poems as "Sister Helen" or "The Blessed Damozel" remain, in spite of revision, typically early works. It is worth noting, also, that some of the most "Pre-Raphaelite" of his poems—"The Blessed Damozel," "My Sister's Sleep," "Ave," and "The Bride's Prelude"—existed in first versions before the P.R.B. came into being.

In an early letter Rossetti refers to what he calls the "Gothic manner" in which the poem was written.[60] The phrase is not a bad one, for it suggests those very qualities that mark the poem off from the others of *The Germ:* the combination of the mystical with the realistic, of the spiritual and aspiring with the sensuous and earthbound, of precision of descriptive detail with a veritable splendor of suggestion[61]—all these made one, within a frame vaguely but unmistakably medieval, by an artistic concept at once intense and remote. Despite its subject, there is no religious, no moral element in the poem; it aims at two things: to paint a picture and to convey a mood; it exists purely for its own sake, with no relation to life except that which is involved in aesthetic experience *per se.*

It is not necessary to discuss extensively the other early poems of Rossetti that are in various ways similar to "The Blessed Damozel." It is important, however, to point out that the artistic impulse which was behind the writing of this poem had other literary manifestations. One sees it at work in the early imitations of the ballad, of which the most famous and probably the most masterly is "Sister Helen," and of which "Stratton Water" and "The Staff and Scrip" are other examples. Such poems do what no other poet of the original Brotherhood could do (or, if he were in accord with Pre-Raphaelite theory, wished to do); they demand of the reader the "willing suspension of disbelief." Their very simplicity is artfulness; they are *tours de force;* yet they are rich in color and feeling, and they capture our aesthetic assent. The impulse appears in different guise in the long (but unfinished) narrative poem "The Bride's Prelude," which Lafcadio Hearn believed "the greatest thing that Rossetti did."[62] Here again is the "Gothic" manner: brilliant description, archaic turns of language, together with a dramatic and tragic story of the Middle Ages. More important, perhaps, is the strong element of psychological realism[63]—an element present too, but to a lesser extent, in "The Blessed Damozel" and "Sister Helen"—which is mainly re-

[60] *Rossetti: Family Letters,* II, p. 38. William Michael tells us that the comment refers chiefly to "The Blessed Damozel." Compare the elder Millais's use of the word "Gothic" in connection with Rossetti's work (see above, p. 69).

[61] Compare, for instance,

Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,

with

And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.

[62] Hearn, p. 90.

[63] It is interesting to note in this connection Rossetti's admiration for the work of Robert Browning. William Michael says that the attributes of Browning's poetry which appealed to his brother were "passion, observation,

sponsible for the form of the poem, the fitful and hesitant unwinding of the narrative, the vagueness of some of the details of the plot, the heavy and foreboding atmosphere. Yet this quality, also, seems to exist primarily not for its own sake, but for the sake of the total impression of the poem, not in order to develop character or to suggest a view of life, but to present a picture or a mood, to draw from the reader an aesthetic or emotional response.

It is with such poems as these that *The Defence of Guenevere* or *Poems and Ballads* can rightly claim kinship. Just as Burne-Jones shows an affinity with Rossetti's *The Annunciation* rather than with the more orthodoxly Pre-Raphaelite *The Carpenter's Shop,* so Morris and Swinburne are related directly, not to the typically Pre-Raphaelite poems of *The Germ* or of Rossetti himself, but to those poems which add to, or substitute for, the ordinary Pre-Raphaelite qualities other traits: a love of decoration for its own sake, and of the medieval; a sophistication of thought and manner masquerading as simplicity; a concern with subtle, complex, and often intense states of mind or feeling, and a desire to make them real. The result of these additions or substitutions is that the essential quality of *The Defence of Guenevere* differs from that of *The Germ;* differs, too, from that of Christina's volume of 1862, which, in many ways and as a whole, is the most perfect fulfillment by any one poet of the Pre-Raphaelite creed.[64] For here in Morris's first book is poetry at once remote and objective, yet fiercely moving, in which description and decoration often become the core of the poem, in which there is no aim but the telling of a story or the drawing of a picture or the conveying of a mood. Here, indeed, is an attempt to realize the Middle Ages, but not from within, neither with true understanding nor with genuine sympathy, but as though things medieval were a series of tapestries, strong in color, rich in suggestion, but infinitely removed from life, to be comprehended by the senses, neither by the mind nor by the heart. In some poems, in fact, as in "The Blue Closet" or "The Wind" or "The Tune of the Seven Towers," we move through a world as unreal as our dreams, distant alike from the Middle Ages and from our own day.[65]

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aspiration, mediaevalism, the dramatic perception of character, act, and incident" (*Family Letters,* I, p. 102). "Jenny" and "A Last Confession" are the two poems of Rossetti which are most clearly indebted to Browning. For some interesting sidelights on the relation of Rossetti and Browning to one another, see DeVane, pp. 81, 154, 323 ff.

[64] Saintsbury reaches somewhat the same conclusion (p. 294).

[65] Mackail suggests that the strongest influence in these poems may be that of Poe (I, p. 133). At any rate it is clear that Morris's ballads owe less to the old ballads than to the pseudo-ballad of the Rossetti style.

Morris himself felt that the title poem of his volume was most like Browning;[66] the resemblance is plain. Moreover one can frequently see in Rossetti, in Morris, even in Swinburne the influence of the poet who was still best known in the early 'fifties as the husband of Elizabeth Barrett. But "The Defence of Guenevere" recalls Rossetti[67] (to whom, after all, the volume was dedicated) surely as much as it does Browning: the picture of Guenevere—"her wet hair backward from her brow," the "long throat," "the light . . . falling so Within my moving tresses"—is typically Rossettian, whether one thinks of his painting or of his poetry; the halting and uncertain development of the narrative, with its central question left unanswered and its undercurrent of emotional tension, recalls "The Bride's Prelude." And the poem as a whole does not give the impression, as Browning's monologues nearly always do, of being written to present a character or an attitude towards life; instead, the poem (like "Sister Helen," for instance) tells a story and creates a mood; its impact is pictorial and emotional, not intellectual.

Similar, I think, is the effect of the volume as a whole. One finds in it much that recalls the P.R.B.—simplicity of form and style,[68] care for descriptive detail,[69] the repudiation of tradition for a more individual, hence a more genuine, way of artistic expression. But the spirit is different. For Morris, in spite of his early association with the very earnest *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine,* lacked "high seriousness" and was motivated always, as Rossetti was very often, by

[66] Mackail, I, p. 132. It is interesting that Morris reviewed *Men and Women* in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* of March, 1856, with what De Vane calls "an immense and naive enthusiasm" (p. 189). DeVane also tells us that Rossetti forced *Sordello* "as a kind of gospel upon the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood about 1850" and that Swinburne "knew *Sordello* from beginning to end when he was nineteen" (p. 81). *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* was reviewed by W. M. Rossetti in *The Germ.*

[67] I do not pretend, here or elsewhere, to discuss the dangerous subject of influences. I am concerned with resemblances only, with the observable similarities between writers whose work, we know, was born of somewhat like literary circumstances.

[68] Note the use of the couplet, the quatrain, and other simple stanzaic patterns, the colloquialism of "Sir Peter Harpdon's End," the persistent air of objectivity, and the primitive or folk-tale quality of many of the stories. Morris had, of course, no such technical mastery of form as either Rossetti or Swinburne.

[69] This trait is too striking to need illustration; it is interesting, however, to make certain comparisons: for example, Thomas Woolner's "My Beautiful Lady" and "Praise of My Lady." Incidentally, I should say that "Summer Dawn" is perhaps more like the poetry of the Brotherhood than any other poem in the volume; yet even it is reminiscent of "The Blessed Damozel," and the last two lines have the very cadence of Poe. "In Prison" also has claims to being genuinely Pre-Raphaelite.

love of beauty rather than love of truth. Whether Malory or Froissart or the ballads or a fairy-tale inspire him—and there is significance in the very fact that all but two or three of the poems spring from one or another of these sources—he is concerned primarily with the artistic effect of his work. His poetry has the quality of literality combined with strangeness that Rossetti imagined to be the essence of Chiaro's painting in "Hand and Soul," [70] and like that painting the poetry has no other purpose than the realization of the artist's vision. Indeed, "The Lady of Shalott," [71] written before the Brotherhood was dreamt of and by a poet quite outside the circle, is very much closer to the Pre-Raphaelite spirit than "Two Red Roses Across the Moon."

Of the poems which make up Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* [72] a comparatively small number can be considered in any real sense Pre-Raphaelite. It has been sometimes said [73] that Pre-Raphaelite influence is apparent in the large group of poems that express, in one way or another, either Swinburne's personal feelings—for example, "The Triumph of Time" or "Dolores" or "The Garden of Proserpine" [74]—or intense emotion in general—"Anactoria," for instance. It is true that these poems resemble in their intensity other Pre-Raphaelite poetry, and true that they breathe the spirit of revolt against tradition, but it seems likely that the emotional violence of much of the book was almost solely the product of Swinburne's temperamental and artistic bent; one can well believe that in his case the hand painted the soul with very little prompting from Pre-Raphaelite theories or practices. Besides, such conspicuously passionate poems as "Anactoria" or "Laus Veneris" or "Hermaphroditus" need no Pre-Raphaelite explanation for their quality; it springs from the subject-matter itself [75]—subject-matter which, by the way, was unlike that of all the other Pre-Raphaelites.[76]

[70] Fairchild (pp. 292–293) emphasizes the fact that all good medievalists try to give to the strange the air of reality.

[71] It is worth remembering that Holman Hunt illustrated "The Lady of Shalott" and was an early Tennyson enthusiast.

[72] The First Series was published in 1866, but much of it was written earlier or under earlier influences.

[73] For example, by Beers, p. 342.

[74] See Hyder, pp. 58–59. W. H. Mallock is the source of the statement that the three poems mentioned here may be considered autobiographical.

[75] As Welby says of Swinburne's treatment of his subject in "Anactoria" (*A Study of Swinburne,* p. 40): ". . . if Sappho is to be revived in modern poetry at all, it must be on her own terms, and not as the slightly overwrought head mistress of an academy for poetical young ladies."

[76] Swinburne himself said that after 1860 he wrote nothing that could be called Pre-Raphaelite (Welby, *Victorian Romantics,* p. 131). Swinburne's comments on *Poems and Ballads* specifically are also interesting and enlightening. (See Hyder, pp. 55 ff.)

There is, of course, on every page of the volume a fullness of description and imagery, and in some of the poems a simplicity of form and language which may well owe something to Pre-Raphaelitism. Moreover Swinburne's poetry as a whole conforms to his stated credo, which is, after all, an expression of what Morris and (in certain poems) Rossetti also practiced:[77] "Art for Art's sake first of all, and afterwards we may suppose all the rest shall be added to her (or if not she need hardly be overmuch concerned)." But the really Pre-Raphaelite poems are a mere handful, mostly near the end of the book, in which Swinburne shows a strong affinity with Morris and a less striking resemblance to Rossetti.[78] One sees Morris unmistakably, for instance, in such a poem as "August," with its artlessness of stanza and language, its ballad-like repetitions, its clear, bright color (with the emphasis, as often, on gold), its slight undercurrent of story. Such narrative poems as "The Leper" and the pseudo-miracle-play "The Masque of Queen Bersabe" have an obvious similarity to some of *The Defence of Guenevere.* "A Christmas Carol," significantly, was suggested by a drawing of Rossetti's and contrasts most interestingly with the poem of the same title by Christina Rossetti in the early Pre-Raphaelite manner.[79] "Saint Dorothy" is pseudo-Chaucerian, "The Two Dreams" is from Boccaccio—both of them extensions of Morris's medieval canon of ballad, fairy-tale, and chronicle. "Madonna Mia" is the familiar Pre-Raphaelite praise-of-my-lady poem. And there are, of course, the ballad and the pseudo-ballad: "May Janet" from the Breton, "The Bloody Son" from the Finnish, and the very Morris-like original ballad "The King's Daughter."

Swinburne's Pre-Raphaelitism, Earle Welby thinks,[80] was an interruption in his development rather than a real part of it; and it is certainly true that his few poems in the Pre-Raphaelite manner are different from his characteristic utterance.[81] More important to us is the fact that they lack, oddly, the strength of feeling that one finds in much of *The Defence of Guenevere* and in the poems of Rossetti that

[77] Quoted by Welby (*Victorian Romantics,* p. 132). On the same page is a quotation from Rossetti which makes an interesting comparison: "Colour and metre, these are the true patents of nobility in painting and poetry, taking precedence of all intellectual claims."

[78] Swinburne met Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Morris in 1857. He was attracted at first particularly to Morris, whose volume, *The Defence of Guenevere,* was about to be published.

[79] *Poetical Works,* p. 117.

[80] Welby, *A Study of Swinburne,* p. 58.

[81] Hugh Walker's point, that in Swinburne "the Pre-Raphaelite influence is conspicuous rather than profound," seems to be correct (p. 550).

and "The Masque of Queen Bersabe," even "When I Am Dead, My Dearest" and "Laus Veneris." One can, of course, solve the whole problem by sweeping both phases of Pre-Raphaelitism—quite correctly—into the Romantic Movement. However, if one *is* drawing distinctions, should not those distinctions have validity? Pre-Raphaelitism is certainly an arbitrary term and one fundamentally empty of content; but the group which applied the name to itself gave it, both by precept and by example, a definite meaning. The group to which the term is now usually applied is indeed greatly indebted (and, through Rossetti, closely linked to) the work of the original circle; but the spirit of the second group is leagues removed from the spirit of the pioneers, closer, in fact, to what came after than to what went before. For the second coterie—"Pre-Raphaelitism" having been already defined and illustrated in such a way that it seems scarcely applicable—one might discover another label; Hueffer suggests the Medieval Revival of the Fifties or, better, the Aesthetic Revival of the Fifties;[84] or there might be a neater tag—at any rate something that would mark a difference and convey a meaning.

Such a change of terminology is not, of course, to be expected, and at this distance in time perhaps not even advisable. The distinction it suggests, however, does exist: to define Pre-Raphaelitism in poetry, one must explain—as I have tried to do—not a single, static movement, but an actual development in poetic theory and poetic practice. The first phase of that development was relatively unimportant in its actual accomplishment, while the second brought into being some of the most memorable poems of the mid-nineteenth century.

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[84] See above, p. 68.

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