

‘THE PRAE-RAPHAELITE SCHOOL’: RECENT APPROACHES

Abstract

The assumption of easy translatability between the different idioms of poetry and the visual arts and a focus on an established canon of poets has short-circuited sustained investigation into “Pre-Raphaelite” poetic style. This article considers work published since 2008 by way of three connected challenges facing critics keen to test the term “Pre-Raphaelite”, which I explore under the headings of ‘ambidexterity’, ‘brotherhood’ and ‘style’.

‘THE PRAE-RAPHAELITE SCHOOL’: RECENT APPROACHES¹

You will excuse my saying in private what I cannot well say in public; but I object generally to the critical habit of division and arrangement of poets by classes into schools, as a bad and loose kind of system tending to warp and discolour the judgement—as it certainly did in the days of Lake and Satanic School nicknames
—A.C. Swinburne to John Nichol, 2nd April 1876

Does Pre-Raphaelite poetry exist? What does it mean to call a poet or a poem ‘Pre-Raphaelite’? These questions are not tautological, but are implied in each other. Terms which designate movements are both descriptive and evaluative. This seems to be especially true in the case of Pre-Raphaelitism.² However, criticism of literary Pre-Raphaelitism has not kept pace with reappraisals of Pre-Raphaelite visual arts. While the facts about how and why Pre-Raphaelite artists sketched, painted, sculpted or wove are at least established enough to provoke debate, basic truths about the technique, influences and innovations of Pre-Raphaelite literary style remain to be established. As I aim to show here, this is changing. However, in order to justify the term, critics must first consider the extent to which a focus on the visual arts and on poet-painters has distracted critics from sustained investigation into the specific character of literary Pre-Raphaelitism.

For the poet A.C. Swinburne the appellation provoked ‘mild protest’. As he explained to his old college friend John Nichol, by then Regius Professor at Glasgow:

I do not see one point in common, as to choice of subject, turn of mind, tone of thought, trick of speech, aim or method, object or style, except that each... is a good workman who chooses and uses his tools...to the best of his ability. I really see no bond of community or even connexion between us beyond the private and casual tie of personal intimacy at one time of life. The always (I think) rather foolish and now long since obsolete word Preraphaelite was never applicable to any but the work of my earliest

¹ I am grateful to Mark Samuels Lasner, Margaretta Frederick, Ashley Rye and Florence Boos for their generosity in discussing these questions with me during my time as Fellow in Pre-Raphaelite Studies at the University of Delaware in 2013. I am especially thankful to both the Delaware Art Museum and The University of Delaware Library for the granting of this fellowship.

² As the art-historian Elizabeth Prettejohn argues: ‘The Pre-Raphaelites could be welcomed as precursors by some modernist artists and writers... and violently repudiated by others... but for neither side was the Pre-Raphaelite legacy a matter of indifference’ (Barringer, Rosenfeld and Smith 232). The major exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite works shown in London, Washington and Moscow in 2013 presents an opportunity to reconsider this movement’s coherency and influence.

youth written at college, and has so long ceased to be applicable... to the poetic work of my two elders that I think for the sake of common accuracy it should now be disused.
(*The Swinburne Letters* III 168)

Swinburne's challenge to Nichol hints that further enquiry into literary pre-Raphaelitism may result in an impasse.³ Yet there are strong reasons for not abandoning the question just yet. In fact, his response also contains the means by which to test the question at hand: it is to 'the choice of subject, turn of mind, tone of thought, trick of speech, aim or method, object or style' that we might look, in our investigation into the usefulness, or otherwise, of the term pre-Raphaelite. In the remainder of this introduction I wish to focus on the question of pre-Raphaelite style. However, in order to understand why we should look to this, rather than content, context or theme, as our criteria, it is crucial to understand the importance of style—not as gloss or finish—but as that which contains within it all the other elements. In doing so I wish to remake two arguments which have already been made for this emphasis in style, building on arguments made by the philosopher Theodor Adorno, and more recently, by the poet Simon Jarvis.⁴

Style has a historical truth-content. To claim this is not to argue, as some recent work in Victorian poetics has suggested that form in art is connected to forms in social life.⁵ Instead, Adorno's understanding of the poem as a 'philosophical sundial telling the time of history' claims something quite different. As he asserts in 'Lyric Poetry and Society', in a moment in which Adorno's interest in lyric poetry becomes clear, 'the distance from mere existence' assumed of and within the lyric poem 'becomes the measure of what is false and bad in the latter' ('Lyric Poetry and Society' 40). Put more pithily: 'Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it' (*Aesthetic Theory* 9). This understanding is founded on the recognition that art works are both like and unlike empirical reality, a double-character which they achieve by means of their form. Since form is the mediating factor by which poems attain their 'step away' from the world, 'form converges with critique'. There is therefore no need for philological

³ Nichol had proposed using the term in the draft of his *Tables of European Literature and History, A.D. 200-1876* (1876) to designate a group including Swinburne, William Morris and D.G. Rossetti.

⁴ See Simon Jarvis 'What Is Historical Poetics?' in *Theory Aside* ed. Jason Potts and Daniel Stout (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); T.W. Adorno, 'Coherence and Meaning' in *Aesthetic Theory* (London, 1997: Continuum) pp.180-214. All other references are to the page numbers of this edition and will be given in the text.

⁵ In their joint introduction the special issue of *Victorian Poetry* on Victorian prosody Meredith Martin and Yisrael Levin write of how 'the scholars in this special issue no longer view prosody as an aesthetic category that is distinct from the political or cultural sphere'. Martin, Meredith and Yisrael Levin, 'Victorian Prosody: Measuring the Field', *Victorian Poetry*, 49.2 (Summer 2011) p.150.

attempts to extract meanings from style. Instead, what is most interesting about Pre-Raphaelite poetry is the way in which it might make a critique of society, simply because it is art. From this comes a new question: not what is the relation between poetic form and historical events? But: how is history registered within the work of art by way of form?

This view of art has consequences for literary pre-Raphaelitism and verse-history more broadly. While the aesthete asks: what is form?, the verse-historian asks: what techniques were available, and what use did the poet make of them? What continuities are there—unconscious and conscious, indirect and direct—between works of this moment, and works at other periods? The idea of a ‘school’ is re-enlivened here, as a tool for thinking which far exceeds the question of nomenclature. Pre-Raphaelite poetry, we know, would not have been possible without the poetry of John Keats. Likewise, it is impossible to understand the technique of much modernist poetry, or its theorization of the relationship between the arts of poetry and painting, without a rigorous discussion of that which went before. Style emerges here, not simply as an important focus, but the best means available by which to judge what poetry has been, is, and may be capable of.

And yet style has not been the exclusive focus of any recent work which approaches literary pre-Raphaelitism. Were we to offer reasons as to why, we might return to the two vexed questions which emerge in Swinburne’s ‘protest’ to Nichols, namely: the relationship between literary Pre-Raphaelitism and the visual arts, and the canon. This might be demonstrated by briefly considering two critics who book-end the history of reading and writing about pre-Raphaelite poetry. Although separated by almost a century, Elizabeth Helsinger and George Saintsbury encounter both questions, though they solve them very differently.

Elizabeth Helsinger’s *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (2008) attempts to close the gap between literary and visual pre-raphaelitism. This ‘fascinating new book’, Prettejohn writes, ‘brings together the two sides of Pre-Raphaelite art, visual and verbal, that have—regrettably and unaccountably—largely remained sundered in previous scholarship on the movement’ (Helsinger, back cover). However, Prettejohn’s optimism that the problem of the relationship between the literary and the visual has been solved is held in check by the caution of Helsinger’s preface:

What this book offers should be taken as tentative: a proposal for giving more substance, from the perspective of literature, to “Pre-Raphaelitism”—and thus for retaining the term. This is, then, an essay in literary history that seeks to take better account of the uniquely active role of visual and material arts practices in making poetry new. (Helsinger 3)

Helsingers reassessment of the term “Pre-Raphaelite” is very careful. We can set her approach beside that of the prosodic historian George Saintsbury who first used it in a chapter called ‘The Prae-Raphaelite School’ in 1910. However, Saintsbury’s use of the term is far less tentative:

A special name ... for this period is rather wanting; even for the remarkable group who began to publish between the very late fifties and the very early seventies, no quite satisfactory term has been invented. There has been a certain habit of calling the verse of the Rossettis, Mr. Morris, and Mr. Swinburne “Prae-Raphaelite[sic?]” poetry. There is more reason for it than the fact that the eldest member, and in a way the master of the group, was a painter, and a Prae-Raphaelite painter. (Saintsbury 308)

Saintsbury searches for a name to describe a change in prosodic technique in the latter third of the nineteenth century and trusts to serendipity. If Saintsbury and Helsingers demonstrate two very different approaches to “Pre-Raphaelite” poetry, this is also true of their focus. While Helsingers detailed study of poems by Rossetti and Morris assumes a productive interrelation between the literary and visual, Saintsbury’s attention to the visual arts is cursory. Although he acknowledges the “ambidexterity” of Rossetti as a poet who writes with one hand and paints with the other, his search for a name to differentiate between the middle and last thirds of the nineteenth century is concerned only with the ‘particular domain of prosody’ (307). This different basis determines the parameters of their reading in two further ways, since it also affects who they include, and the concentration on poetry as an idiom.

Helsingers, following her focus on the visual arts, concentrates on Rossetti and Morris as two poets ‘who were most deeply engaged in the visual arts...as the place to begin any test of the usefulness of the term “Pre-Raphaelitism”’ (Helsingers 3). In contrast, Saintsbury’s selection expands the triumvirate-plus-Swinburne, reflecting that:

after all, tickets, though convenient, are unnecessary. I shall deal in this chapter with the four poets just named ; adding to them that very remarkable verse -smith Mr. O’Shaughnessy, Canon Dixon, who, for “one thing that he did,” if not for others, could not be omitted, and James Thomson the Second... (308)

Where Helsingers study of Pre-Raphaelite poetry remains within the canon of Pre-Raphaelite poets, Saintsbury’s suggestions challenge us to consider other writers, some of whom are now hardly read at all.⁶

⁶ The last comprehensive editions (excluding facsimiles) of these three poets were 1923, 1909 and 1934 respectively. *The Collected Poems of Canon Richard Watson Dixon* was edited by Shirley M.C. Johnson and Todd K.

This different take on the interrelation between the arts also registers in their treatment of style. Helsinger takes her cue from Walter Benjamin, concentrating on the psychological and technological conditions which inform repetition (119).⁷ Her reading of Rossetti's much redrafted poem "The Portrait" is suggestive, proposing that 'the poem ends with stasis and sterile repetition, the speaker caught in a web of inconclusive echoes and reflections from which the portrait can offer no release' (136). However, just how this particular encounter with the text arises is left to the reader. Nothing could be more different from the approach of George Saintsbury, whose attention to technique borders on the myopic. Yet his interest in the prevalence of repetition and the refrain—'that eminently mediaeval thing'—in the poetry of this period (311) does have the advantage of what Theodor Adorno calls 'complete submission to the matter at hand' ('Lyric Poetry and Society' 39)

None of these considerations are separable, since the critic's judgement as to the importance of the analogy between poetry and the visual arts will in turn influence their selection of poets and works for reading. For example, if we continue to focus on literary pre-raphaelitism as handmaid to the visual arts, we may continue to prioritize poems which accompany paintings, and poets who paint at the expense of independent poems, or poets who did not. The poetry of Swinburne—hardly mentioned in Helsinger's study, but placed 'indisputably at the head of the choir of the poets of our days' in Saintsbury's *History* (334)—is a case in point. In addition, concentrating on the visual arts may prove a distraction from the particularities of the poetic idiom. It is a hunch of this essay that the traditional grouping of Pre-Raphaelite poets on the basis of their involvement in the visual arts, and a tendency to read one medium in terms of another, has cut short a natural line of enquiry perhaps grasped in Saintsbury's sense of a common set of prosodic innovations at work in the period. It would be impossible to make good on this hunch within the constraints of a single essay, even if it were the aim of this review essay—which it is not. What follows is an attempt to introduce the current state of debate surrounding literary pre-Raphaelitism, by focusing on the problems outlined above: ambidexterity, brotherhood, and style.

Ambidexterity

Bender in 1989. However, its publication as part of a series of *Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins* suggests comparison with Hopkins, rather than a study of Dixon as a poet in his own right.

⁷ This is one answer to Isobel Armstrong's reflection that, with the exception of Walter Benjamin's work on Baudelaire, 'no major European critic has seen Victorian poetry as relevant to his or her purpose' (Armstrong 3).

The revisions to the fourth edition of *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Cushman & Greene 1102-4) suggests a changing attitude towards the question of how one art form might be mediated via another. In the third edition an article entitled 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' gave a mainly biographical summary. In the fourth edition this version appears expanded, but sits alongside a separate article on 'Pre-Raphaelitism'. These revisions suggest that criticism may not favour a different basis for literary pre-Raphaelitism other than links between the literary and visual arts. However, Helsinger's assumption of translatability between poetry and painting remains in the expanded article on the 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood': 'As in painting, so in poetry PRB contributors experimented with a spare, antirhetorical style and cultivated sensory and emotional intensity' (1102).

Elizabeth Prettejohn notes in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to The Pre-Raphaelites* that 'The present volume does not attempt to analyze all of the myriad, and fascinating, interconnections among the Pre-Raphaelite media... it aims to explore the whole movement, art and literature together at an introductory level' (9). Two chapters in particular concentrate on the relation between poetry and painting. Isobel Armstrong's chapter on 'The Pre-Raphaelites and Literature' emphasizes the 'transgressive hybridity' of the poets linked to the art-movement. Catherine Maxwell's introduction to Swinburne describes the 'craftsmanship' of *Poems and Ballads* (243). However, her description of the poem 'August' as having a 'strong palette', with its basis in hybridity, risks emphasizing the painterly aspects of Swinburne's poem at the expense of attending to its poetic technique.

In the introduction to their ambitious re-evaluation of *The Germ* as a 'laboratory' for aestheticism, Paola Spinozzi and Elisa Bizzotto note that 'While the paintings have gained wide recognition, the poetical works have been the object of intermittent study' (Spinozzi & Bizzotto 7). Yet their study does not set out to correct this oversight. Commenting on Rossetti's sonnets for pictures, Bizzotto and Spinozzi suggest that 'Most poems are inspired by Italian and Flemish masters from the late Middle Ages' (170). This is just one example in which what they call 'interart osmosis' between the visual arts and poetry is affirmed but not explored. Taken out of context, the reader might be forgiven for assuming that the 'masters' referred to here are master-poets. Bizzotto and Spinozzi refer to the paintings which form the subject or impetus for the sonnet series, and not to any relationship between Rossetti's poems and previous examples in the sonnet genre. Their argument seems to take from the structuralist hypothesis, that is to say, they seem to assume that since culture is structured like a language, all systems are inter-translatable. Therefore: 'As an ekphrastic poet, Rossetti attempted to surpass the limits of a specific medium and to experiment with the possibilities of transcodification. Ekphrasis in the

six sonnets deconstructs the concept of mutual illumination of the arts, since it reveals that resignifying a visual artwork in verbal form engenders semantic disseminations' (172). The comparison between poems and paintings in this study consistently calls for further complication of the relationship between the arts at this period. The authors' reflection that Walter Deverell's poem 'The Light Beyond' and William Holman Hunt's painting 'The Light of the World' aimed to '[approach] the same topic from different artistic perspectives [as] they thought they would achieve cohesion and yet produced variety and diversity' (169) is a case in point.

Helsingier's article 'Listening: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Persistence of Song' (2009) looks forward to her second book *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (expected September 2015). This important new research aims to explore music 'as it offered possibilities for thinking about poetry' in the period. The article presents several innovative ways of thinking about the 'peculiar' forms of attention required by Pre-Raphaelite pictures and poems. In her contribution to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia* she suggests that Pater was 'probably the first and best' critic of Pre-Raphaelitism' (1103) and Pater is very much present in her provocation that: 'This is not poetry meant to be sung: it means to subsume the functions of lyric and music into poetry.' (415) Helsingier's interest in music is, for the most part, thematic. She continues to work on the basis of translatability between the arts, at one point suggesting that: 'Rossetti draws attention to the sound(lessness) of music absorbed through touch and transfigured into painting or poem, inviting us to listen with the ear of the mind' (411-2).

David Bentley's article 'Pre-Raphaelite Typology' demonstrates the vexed attitude to 'ambidexterity' which characterizes much recent work. It presents a thorough overview of the origins of this mode of thinking and its centrality to Pre-Raphaelite art. How typological thinking might function differently in visual and linguistic artworks is hard to say. The assumption of seamless ambidexterity is broken towards the end of the article on typology, when he notes that 'A wide chasm separates "The Song of the Bower" from *The Scapegoat* not only because they are in vastly different media, but also because the two works are governed by vastly different assumptions and aims...' (847) Nevertheless, there remains a rich series of provocations here concerning the typological imagination and Pre-Raphaelite poetic technique.

David Latham's introduction to the recent essay collection *Writing on the Image* situates the 'interdisciplinary' nature of Morris' art within Northrop Frye's advice that we should 'choose' to study an author 'whose boundaries stretch beyond our own reach' (10). Arguing for the difficulty of exhausting Morris in this way leads to a reading of 'Writing on the Image' as a moral tale about how knowledge is perceived and shared within the community. Latham's comment on a

perennial split at Morris conferences between artisans and academics suggests a division of opinion over the centrality or otherwise of making (4). This point, though not pursued, has resonances with the fact that certain traditions of literary criticism have become detached from a discussion of poetic making. Arguing that Jerome McGann's hypertextual editing at the Rossetti archive has done much to push reader-response back towards the writerly, Latham argues for attentiveness to the poetic idiom. Admiring, rather than questioning, Morris' ambidexterity, his introduction thus sets up a series of suggestions for "how we write and how we might write" which set the challenge for subsequent essays on Morris' poetry by David Bentley, Janet Wright Friesen, Florence Boos, Jane Thomas and Chris Jones.

Linda K. Hughes' chapter 'Visible Sound and Auditory Scenes: Word Image and Music in Tennyson, D.G. Rossetti, and Morris' (Colligan & Linley 137-57) begins with an understanding of ambidexterity which is antagonistic at base. This is explained in terms of the idea of 'remediation' between the arts in Bolter and Gusin. However, it also draws on her careful reading of Pater's 'Essay on Style'. Pater uses the word *anderstreben* (to move beyond) to describe how one art aspires to the conditions of another art, the differences between media mean that no easy interdisciplinary interchange between painting, poetry and music can be assumed. Working out of Pater, Hughes reads two paired pictures and poems in order to consider how John Hollander's axiom that music and poetry are 'dissimilar crafts that similarly ennoble and alienate their artisans' plays out in the Victorian era. Hughes convinces that 'the challenge mounted to music by the supremacy of visual culture' (Hughes 138) is a Victorian problem. For a reader who wants to deal with poems as poems, this essay complicates the assumption that poems are exclusively poem-like, requiring us to acknowledge the presence of '[a]lternative approaches to the relation among word, image, and music... often overlapping and contradicting with each other, sometimes within a single figure's work' (42).

Brotherhood

The collector Arthur Sackler once explained his logic in choosing artefacts: 'I collect as a biologist. To really understand a civilization, a society, you must have a large enough corpus of data. You can't know 20th century art by looking only at Picassos and Henry Moores.'⁸ Though curation remains a vital part of the continuing interpretation of Pre-Raphaelite visual arts, the curation of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, whether it takes place in the form of anthologies or critical

⁸ Grace Glueck, "Dr. Arthur Sackler Dies at 73" *New York Times*, May 27, 1987, accessed January 2, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/27/obituaries/dr-arthur-sackler-dies-at-73-philanthropist-and-art-patron.html>.

overviews and introductions, is far from approaching the “biological” standard applied by Sackler.⁹

A student coming to Pre-Raphaelitism via the *New Princeton Encyclopedia* article may be pleased to see Christina Rossetti challenging the assumption of a ‘brotherhood’ (1103). However, the second part of *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, which features chapters on the ‘main protagonists’ of the movement is, as Prettejohn admits, a ‘very conventional canon’ (9-10). It comprises Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti, Morris and Swinburne. As Prettejohn notes, this traditional grouping is connected to the fact that ‘painters slightly outnumber poets in this sequence’ (10).

Reassuringly for literary studies, the editor of *The Pre-Raphaelites: from Rossetti to Ruskin* does not doubt the existence of Pre-Raphaelite poets. However, [‘d]efining just who these poets were is a tricky business’ (xviii). Dinah Roe explains the rationale behind her anthology—the first since Harold Bloom’s in 1986—as follows: ‘It is not my aim to propose a neat resolution of this difficulty. Rather, I wish to suggest that the difficulty itself offers an opportunity...’ ‘Shared themes mask a radical diversity of style and tone, a stubborn clinging to individual vision’ (xxx). While her openness succeeds in challenging the traditional ‘brotherhood’ (plus Christina), the anthologising of poems on the basis of ‘shared themes’ places stylistic concerns on the back-foot. George Saintsbury’s attempt to fathom the prosodic variety of the poets collected in his chapter on ‘The Pre-Raphaelite School’ remains the most sustained attempt to anthologise on the basis of style. The innovation of this collection is its inclusion of poets without the canon. Poems by Elizabeth Siddal, Philip Bourke Marston, Arthur O’Shaughnessy, John Payne and George Meredith sit alongside the usual suspects. Meredith’s inclusion is justified on the basis of Buchanan’s 1871 review of *The Fleshly School of Poetry*. Future collections could do well to follow Roe’s lead in seeking out those poets who had “Pre-Raphaelitism” ‘thrust upon them’ by contemporary reviewers.

The second chapter of Bizotto and Spinozzi’s aforementioned study comprises individual biographical studies of the contributors to *The Germ*. Three hints for expansion of the collection of Pre-Raphaelite poets are John Lucas Tupper and John Orchard—whose friendship with Dante Gabriel began when he sent an ekphrastic sonnet inspired by their meeting—and Coventry Patmore. A valuable reading list of previous attempts to anthologise Pre-Raphaelite poets is provided in the bibliography. Their literature review—which takes in Walter Hamilton’s

⁹ The reader will recall that the way in which historical truth-content registers in literary artworks was one of my provocations for a return to the question of ‘style’ over other criteria such as ‘theme’ or ‘content’ when considering the importance of literary Pre-Raphaelitism (see above).

The Aesthetic Movement in England (1882) and Lothar Hönnighausen's *The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature* –might be considered beside Saintsbury's *History* as a further reminder of how past and current understandings of whose work might be considered "Pre-Raphaelite" differ (131-6).

One further addition not considered 'prae-raphaelite' by Saintsbury, not considered by Roe or given significant space within the *Cambridge Companion* is suggested by the last volume of the *Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Writing to Richard Watson Dixon, Rossetti reflects that 'you are one of the most subtle as well as varied of our poets, and... the neglect of such works as yours on all hands is an incomprehensible accident' (Letters May 26th 1875). Herbert Tucker has written enthusiastically of the significance of Dixon's *terza rima* poem *Mano* (Tucker 534-6). However, the neglect of Dixon suggests that much recovery work in the form of editions and anthologies remains to be done.

Style

Not all recent work on Pre-Raphaelite poetry is interested in the idiom of poetry. However, the addition of an extra article on 'Pre-Raphaelitism' to follow separately from an article on the 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' in the fourth edition of the *New Princeton Encyclopaedia* seems a major step. Though the article begins by suggesting that the terms is 'loose but useful to describe the shared ideals and practices in circles around D.G. Rossetti and William Morris in the later 1850s and 1860s...', Helsinger does not focus on the style of these poets, mentioning George Meredith, G.M. Hopkins and Thomas Hardy alongside the usual suspects (1103). The stylistic characteristics of literary Pre-Raphaelitism are 'poetic innovation and experiment...emphasising verbal rhythm, texture and design in a variety of lyric forms and skilfully working the interplay of graphic and aural patterns to produce meaning', thereby 'expanding the ling[ui]stic and formal possibilities for Eng[lish] poetry' (1103). While these assertions are difficult to demonstrate in an encyclopaedia entry, Helsinger's second entry convinces us of the importance of understanding Pre-Raphaelitism as part of the wider sweep of verse-history.

Given its focus on painters over poets, *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites* proves less provocative for readers interested in poetic style. However, Jerome McGann's deft attention to the way in which D.G. Rossetti 'visibilizes (so to say) his poetry's musical

relationships' (92) is suggestive. Catherine Maxwell's reading of Swinburne points out the resourcefulness of parody in stylistic analysis. Swinburne's pastiche of Rossetti's sonnets for pictures in *The Heptalogia* show that he had observed with a wicked accuracy the sometimes stagey, mannered mode of these early ekphrastic sonnets with their dramatic pauses, rhetorical exclamations, recondite vocabulary, and identifiable Rossetti key-words ('monochord') and mannerisms such as hyphenation ('wild-eyed woes') (246).

If parody presents one way of engaging with the style of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, two alternative routes to doing so include manuscript evidence and pastiche. The publication of Roger C. Lewis' variorum edition of *The House of Life* encourage what Latham calls a 'writerly' perspective on this poet, drawing attention to technique by considering how it might have been otherwise. Likewise the making available of three previously unpublished interim drafts between Rossetti's poems 'On Mary's Portrait' and 'The Portrait'—which bookend the dates at which Rossetti was active as a painter and poet—invite a reconsideration of both Rossetti's drafting practice and the technique of a poem which remains a crucial test-case in any attempt to determine the usefulness of the term "Pre-Raphaelite" beyond the visual arts.¹⁰ A further attempt to get to grips with technique is Tony Pinkney's rewrite of part of the preface from *News from Nowhere* in 'something like the forceful anapaestic manner of *Sigurd the Volsung*' (Pinkney 127-8). Pinkney explains: 'Morris himself did something like this...since May Morris notes that he would occasionally write a particular story first as prose and then, not liking that version, as poetry – or vice versa. We might regard such stylistic rewritings as a kind of five-finger exercise that any keen Morrisian ought to chance his or her arm at now and again' (128)

For a reader who wishes, like Saintsbury, to keep her eyes 'on the actual face of the actual poetry' (516) *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry* will be a tremendous resource. Although no chapter addresses Pre-Raphaelitism explicitly, the commissioning of essays on rhythm, beat, address, rhyme, diction and syntax in the first part of this book, to engage with the 'complexity of suggestion generated by style' (12) is something which every reader of Pre-Raphaelite poetry must consult. If the case for "Pre-Raphaelite poetry" exists, some definition of how the movement differs from or fits within the larger arguments about style advanced here will be crucial. Starting points will include Michael Hurley's sense of how rhythm in this period is one resource for the 'sensate richness' of the 'fleshly school' in poetry (21) and Herbert Tucker's thoughts on the recognisability and limits of the Pre-Raphaelite plot (144). Geoffrey Hill

¹⁰ For an account of the manuscripts see Florence Boos, with Mark Samuels Lasner, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Portraits' Three New Drafts, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 22 (Fall 2013). My response to the stylistic aspects of Rossetti's revisions, "'Rubbish?': Three Newly Extant Drafts of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'The Portrait'" was published in *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 27:4, 166-170.

deserves mention as a contemporary poet whose style responds to the Pre-Raphaelites (478), while Pre-Raphaelitism is an important alternative way of looking backwards in Isobel Hurts's essay on 'Victorian Poetry and the Classics' (301). Further resources for thinking about Pre-Raphaelitism are provided by Matthew Townend's chapter on Victorian medievalism, J.B. Bullen's chapter on D.G. Rossetti's Willowwood sonnets, Clive Wilmer's chapter on Morris and Simon Jarvis' reading of *Tristram of Lyonesse*, to which I will return.

The introduction to Bizotto and Spinozzi's study of *The Germ* announces a discussion of the interaction between style and image, arguing that the main innovation of Germinal poetry is 'a novel poetic imagery [is] expressed through traditional rhyme and metre' (Bizotto & Spinozzi 7). However, form is allowed to slip from the agenda in the second paragraph, when the argument is made that proto-imagist innovations happen in spite of poetic form: 'Although a clear preference for highly codified genres and conventional rhyme schemes is evident in the abundance of sonnets, lyrics, idylls, pastorals, and elegies, a wholly new imagery took shape' (129). Perhaps a detailed investigation into style could not be attempted in this reevaluation of *The Germ* as a 'laboratory' of aestheticism in English, in which poetic innovation is but a part. However, this lack of focus risks repeating the Imagist polemic which, having isolated rhythm, metre and form under the label 'traditional', reduces their complexity, letting certain aspects of verse-craft slip from the critical agenda. Nevertheless, their claims that these early poems 'have been studied, but not systematically and often superficially. An assessment of how they usher in post-1850 modes is fundamental' (136) is a welcome call to further work.

Bentley's exploration of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Inner Standing Point' offers several provocations, including the debt to Browning's dramatic monologue (682) and the legacy of Keats' style (684). He also offers a number of observations on technique—such as person, persona, voice, address and allusion—which may prove important in any comprehensive survey of Pre-Raphaelite poetry.

Helsing's aforementioned article, 'Listening', argues that the Pre-Raphaelite interests in medieval liturgical music and courtly song (412) will spark considerations of style. Among these she considers memorability (414) and repetition—but this is theorized before it has been adequately described: 'Sound, pause, and return of sound in rhythmic repetition: to hear this is to listen to the sound of time itself.' (417) However, this tendency to skip from a technique to its theorization at the level of theme may—as I shall suggest below—be an apt response to one of the main characteristics of Pre-Raphaelite style.

Naomi Levine's study of Morris' *The Defence of Guenevere* goes back to the first Pre-Raphaelite poem, arguing that if 'read through its rhyme scheme [the poem] becomes a meditation on, and an aestheticization of, the problem of sexual love' (Levine 506-7). The result is a careful study of how theme and form interact without yoking, or reducing one to "fit" with the other. Levine's focus demonstrates how technique brings about certain effects, making a convincing case that "art-catholicism" is visible in the 'oft-neglected regions of Morris's poetic form... as much as anywhere. (514).

Herbert Tucker, commenting on the different ways in which Morris and Swinburne construct epic simile, places style at the centre of his investigation of Swinburne's intellectual aims: 'Enjambed syntactic continuity expands the revelation of Iseult's beauty from a moment to an interval, via a tracking shot that moves the boat through air and sea, over waves of pentameter and couplet rhyme... These comparisons... fly from the barely sketched scene of Swinburne's story as purposefully, in their way, as Morris' simile homes in on his... it is this virtually scientific monism toward which the whole passage drives, like the whole story it initiates' (526-7). This is a dazzling account of the verse-craft and ambitions of Book I of *Tristram of Lyonesse*.

Simon Jarvis' chapter on this long Arthurian poem begins by acknowledging the complaints usually made about Swinburne's famed weakness in description, taking these as his initial co-ordinates for an engagement with style. Arguing for rhyme as central to Swinburne's 'prosodic thinking' (522) allows him to explore Swinburne's 'closely felt compositional economy' with his central verse-word ['sea']. Attending to how we encounter rhyme across the poem allows Jarvis to suggest a tension in this poem between rhyme and narrative, which has a certain 'fidelity to the shape of erotic experience' (527). Here a large-scale interpretation is not so much achieved, nor is there any "result". Instead Jarvis' engagement with how the poem achieves its effects succeeds in convincing us that the relationship between style and thinking is complex, and cannot be reduced. Though not explicitly interested in Pre-Raphaelitism, Jarvis' article is suggestive for further work, leading us to ask: if "Pre-Raphaelitism" might (as Saintsbury suggests) be justifiably used to refer to an innovative set of writing practices in the latter third of the nineteenth century, what kinds of thinking does this stylistic matrix involve?

Forrest Thomson perceived clearly the need to grasp literary pre-Raphaelitism in order to understand the nineteenth-century influence on modernist poets such as Ezra Pound.¹¹ She

¹¹ My sincere thanks to Forrest-Thomson's editor, Gareth Stuart Farmer, for discussing her interest in Pre-Raphaelitism with me at length.

chooses to leave painting out of her discussion of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's style, since 'it distracts from the main line of argument' (Forrest Thomson 37). She suggests that what we now usually term 'impersonality' has its origins in Pre-Raphaelitism, arguing that: 'Rossetti's allegorizing lacks the literal level...which is felt as such by the reader who then tries to supply it from the other realities of sound and poetic technique' (42). This perhaps explains why so much criticism of Pre-Raphaelite poetry tends to leap from the technique to theme, appearing to discount the history of genre and technique: 'Thus is allegorizing made the main agent of unrealism... which frees the poet from the foul rag and bone shop of the heart and carries him into the artifice of eternity.' (43) Forrest-Thomson suggests that 'this allegorizing of the emotional life by means of technique' might be better understood by considering 'their obverse in Browning' and their passing into 'the 'Nineties'.¹² Although she drops the phrase 'pre-Raphaelitism' fairly early in this article ('never more than an ill-thought out battle cry' (37)) this article remains one of the most sustained investigations into the style of Pre-Raphaelite poetry.¹³

Conclusion

This hunt after clues cannot begin to approximate a description of either Rossetti's style, or that larger chimera, the Pre-Raphaelite poem. To make a rigorous case for the Pre-Raphaelite poem, further comparison of stylistic traits will be required. To understand whether a difference is discernible between this poetry and poetry of the mid-century, as Saintsbury claimed, will require extensive comparison with the poetry of the previous and subsequent generations. Throughout, the challenge will be to stay trained on the idiom of poetry without becoming, as Saintsbury sometimes risks becoming, blind to the charms of the sister arts.

*

¹² Forrest-Thomson takes up both concerns in a longer article on Ezra Pound, 'His True Penelope Was Flaubert', also reprinted in *The Chicago Review*.

¹³ Forrest-Thomson's posthumously published essay 'Swinburne and Eliot: A Reconsideration' is a detailed reading of A.C. Swinburne's 'The Triumph Of Time'. It was published in *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* (Fall, 2006) 15.

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