Forthcoming Morris Society Sessions in Seattle, Modern Language Association Convention, January 2020

Re-evaluating the Pre-Raphaelites
Saturday, 11th January, 8:30 A. M.-9:45 A. M

Moderator: Anna Wager (Hobart and William Smith Colleges)

Andrea Wolk Rager (Case Western University):
"'I seek no dream…but rather the end of dreams': Exhibiting Edward Burne-Jones"

John Ruskin once categorized Edward Burne-Jones as a painter of the mythic school, a class of extraordinary artists who tend to elicit fiercely divergent reactions from the public. Writing in 1883, Ruskin proclaimed:

> …in the case of ordinary painters, however peculiar their manner, people either like them, or pass them by with a merciful contempt…But in the case of painters of the mythic schools, people either greatly like them, or they dislike in a sort of frightened and angry way, as if they had been personally aggrieved.[1]

Perhaps this explains the startling degree of hostility expressed by several critics in response to the exhibition *Edward Burne-Jones* when it opened at Tate Britain in the fall of 2018.[2] Most egregious, perhaps, was the assessment of Jonathan Jones in his review for *The Guardian*. Jones was so flustered by what he perceived as the "desiccated" and "sentimentalized" medievalism on display that he resorted to the juvenile aspersion, "To put it bluntly, Burne-Jones is a stupid artist."[3] The reviews for the recent Tate exhibition closely echoed those for *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer*, which debuted at the Met in 1998.[4] With a barely concealed sense of disdain, Francine Prose described the work of Burne-Jones as "adolescent," "cosmeticized," and infused with "a fairy dust of vapid androgynous beauty."[5] In my talk, I will explore the entrenchment of Burne-Jones as the Victorian "artist-dreamer" through five successive monographic exhibitions, beginning just after the artist's death in 1898 and culminating in the Tate exhibition of 2018.[6] However, I will also examine moments of resistance that challenge this perception, demonstrating that Burne-Jones was engaged in a fundamental defiance of the artistic, social, and political hierarchies of his age. I will propose ways in which this distortion of his legacy could be effectively overturned in future mediations of his work.

1. John Ruskin, "The Art of England," (Sunnyside, Orpington, Kent: George Allen, 1884), Rpt. in *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 33 (London: George Allen, 1908), 303-4.
2. The exhibition was on view at Tate Britain from October 24, 2018 to February 24, 2019.
3. Jonathan Jones, "*Edward Burne-Jones* review – art that shows how boring beauty can be," *The Guardian*. 22 Oct. 2018 https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/oct/22/edward-burne-jones-review-pre-raphaelite-tate-britain
4. Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998).

   The exhibition was on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from June 4 – Sept. 6, 1998; it was then on view at the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, UK, from Oct. 17 – Jan. 17, 1999; and finally the exhibition traveled to the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, from March 1 – June 6, 1999.
5. Francine Prose, "What's Wrong With These Pictures?" *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern edition 11 Jun. 1998: A20.
6. The first retrospective was held at the New Gallery shortly after Burne-Jones's death, from Dec. 31, 1898 to April 8. 1899, titled *Exhibition of the Works of Sir Edward Burne-Jones*. The next followed in 1933, with the *Centenary Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Bart. (1833-1898)*

(June 14 – Aug. 31, 1933). In 1975, The Arts Council organized an exhibition that toured several collections in the UK, titled *Burne-Jones: The Paintings, Graphic, and Decorative Work of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, 1833-98* (Hayward Gallery, London, Nov. 5, 1975 – Jan. 4, 1976; Southampton Art Gallery, Jan. 24 – Feb. 22, 1976; City Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham, March 10 – April 11, 1976.

Monica Bowen (Seattle University):
"The Radical Roots of William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites"

The art exhibition *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts and Crafts Movement* is based on the argument that William Morris, the Pre-Raphaelites and their associates were "radicals" for their day in their interests, artistic styles, and political leanings. Today, common definitions for the word "radical" include "extreme" and "different," but these definitions are misleading if one considers how Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites turned to the past and tradition for inspiration. Even though the *Victorian Radicals* exhibition catalog explains that the origin for "radical" means "root," this definition is not integrated enough in the exhibition to emphasize how these artists were grounded in the past to create a future with a strong and moral foundation. This talk aims to remedy this issue and reconnect these "radical" artists with their "roots" in a visual way: through an analysis of art from the *Victorian Radicals* exhibition with trees, roots, stalks, and other forms of flora. In order to understand William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites as "radical" and "avant-garde" in their pursuit of artistic and societal change, one must unearth the past and utilize the early meanings of these words.

Imogen Hart (University of California, Berkeley):
"Race and the Radicals: Victorian Racial theory and the Arts and Crafts movement"

The political significance of the English Arts and Crafts movement has usually been located in the Socialist allegiances of its leading figures. To a lesser extent, the movement has received attention from feminist historians. This paper argues that the class and gender politics of the Arts and Crafts movement can only be fully understood in dialogue with the politics of race, which have rarely figured in accounts of the movement. It reveals that assumptions about race are embedded in Arts and Crafts ideology. Hopes and fears for the future of craft were closely bound up with contemporary concepts of racial development drawn from debates about evolutionary theory, class conflict, sexual difference and imperialism. Recent scholarship has explored the scientific and colonial contexts of Pre-Raphaelitism, but the implications of this work have yet to be fully explored by historians of the Arts and Crafts movement. Examining texts and objects by leading Arts and Crafts designers including Walter Crane, C. R. Ashbee, and William Morris, this paper reconsiders the nationalism, primitivism, and utopianism of Arts and Crafts ideology in the context of race. Oscillating between visions of continuity and rupture, of individualism and collectivism, Arts and Crafts thinkers grappled with questions that had profound racial implications in Victorian England. Recent exhibitions unifying the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement have supported the movement's famous challenge to the hierarchy of art and craft, which is imbricated with social hierarchies—not only those of class and gender, but also those of race—but how far do the radical politics of the Arts and Crafts movement extend into the realm of race? This talk re-evaluates the Arts and Crafts movement in the light of this question.

Julie Codell (Arizona State University):
"Toward a Historiography of Pre-Raphaelite (Post)Modernism and the Future of the Pre-Raphaelite Past"

In this talk I will investigate the cultural location (history, ideology, national identity) of recent exhibitions' applications of "modern" and "avant-garde" to the Pre -Raphaelites. I would argue for a historiography of current constructions of Pre-Raphaelite modernism. European artists, historians and critics c. 1900 debated which country's artists epitomized the modern and segregated art into national "schools" with competing claims to modernity across Britain, France and Germany, a Euro-centric, parochial, provincialized battle over modernisms (plural). These critics labeled 1848 Brotherhood (PRB) artists as rebels, but c1900 the PRB, developed into diverse movements including Arts and Crafts, was thoroughly conventional, sanitized, domesticated, nationalized and lauded for its un-avant-garde economic success. PRB rebellion was nostalgically asserted to rival French modernism, e.g., Hunt and Millais both publicly attacked Impressionism. Recent exhibitions covering from 1848 to WWI still echo earlier debates when "modern" served ideological functions far beyond style. Curators anxiously champion PR as modern/avantgarde but by whose definition (Baudelaire's? Ruskin's? Clement Greenberg's?)? These terms resonate with 1900 nationalism and nostalgia in some of the curators' un-poststructuralist topics (e.g., "origins"). If curators claim a distinct, monolithic PR modernity, unlike "pragmatic" Victorian modernism with "multiple and always contingent centers"[1] and aligned with the PRB's ambitious, innovative attention to gender, class, science, urbanity and temporality, what is it? Why does modern/avant-garde matter now? Why do curators ignore postmodernist culture's "power of representation,"[2] and instead promote insulating modernism that echoes Victorian defenses against incursions of other, usually colonial, cultures into Englishness?[3] Why not engage neo-Victorianism and the archives of ubiquitous Pre-Raphaelite art on book covers, *greeting* cards, etc.? The curators' residual modernism defense reflects a failure to consider literary critiques of modernism, ignoring interdisciplinary opportunities. Finally, how, briefly, would Pre-Raphaelitism look if we considered postmodernism and neo-Victorianism as archives embracing changing public spaces and public receptions of Pre-Raphaelitism in the past and in the present?[4]

1. Jessica Feldman, *Victorian Modernism* (Cambridge UP, 2002), 3.
2. Nancy Armstrong, "Postscript: Contemporary Culturalism: How Victorian Is It?" in J. Kucich and Dianne Sadoff, eds. *Victorian Afterlife* (U of Minnesota P, 2000), 312.
3. Ibid., 311.
4. Ibid., 313.

Ecosocialism and the Late Victorians
Sunday, 12 January 1:45 P. M.-3:00 P. M

Moderator: Florence Boos (University of Iowa)

Heidi Renée Aijala (University of Iowa):

"Full Steam Ahead? Ecosocialist Thinking in Late-Century Women's Fiction"

In 1825, a nearly seven-foot-tall marble statue was erected in St Paul's Chapel in Westminster Abbey to memorialize James Watt, the Scottish engineer who perfected and manufactured what may be the most influential invention of our contemporary age: the steam engine. Victorian steam technologies effectively ushered in an age of innovation and invention that boasted developments such as the spinning jenny, the power loom, the railway system, and the mechanized printing press. While impressive, such technologies were also instrumental in producing environmental destruction, industrial violence, and social unrest. As the nineteenth century progressed, it became clear to all – from the Luddite machine breakers of the early 1800s to the compilers of the Parliamentary Blue Books in the 1830s to Queen Victoria, who refused to visit London when the "sea-coale" was too thick – that steam technologies were creating immense environmental and social upheavals.

In the wake of burgeoning industrialism, some Victorians sought to rediscover the natural world. Mary Mann, Katherine Conway Glasier, and Shiela Kaye Smith are three late-century women writers whose fiction frames rustic living as a contrast to the industrial city. Building on Jan Marsh's work with the rural / industrial dichotomy, I propose that the insights of ecosocialism, particularly the preservation of natural and social resources and the protection of the environment, are expressed through the late-century fiction of these women authors. In celebrating the rustic village and bucolic countryside, Mann, Glasier, and Smith imagine generative societies that celebrate (rather than denigrate) women and the environment. I show that, for the late-century reformists, ecosocialist thinking provided a way to imagine alternative social and economic systems based in community. Such thinking prefigures modern ecofeminists such as Naomi Klein and Caroline Merchant, who stress the necessity of community efforts as absolutely necessary if we are to face the looming environmental crises of the twenty-first century.

Jude Nixon (Salem State University):
"'A pretty never-never land': Ecosocialism and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*"

In "Two Stages of Ecosocialism," Paul Burkett observes that attempts to engage ecosocialism—the harmonizing of Marxist ideology with ecological concerns—leaves us still desiring "a deep conceptual synthesis of green and red theories." Burkett, regrettably, overlooks Morris and his attempts to address it in *News from Nowhere* (1890), an anti-novel, which, says Patrick Brantlinger, "stands in clear opposition to the 'sordid, aimless, ugly confusion' created by industrial capitalism." *News* is a historical revisionist attempt to work out Morris's fantasy on seminal concerns: labor, leisure, art, crafts, capitalism, the environment, slavery, sexism, racism, class, sustainability, waste, and production. Natural resources were "*mis*managed" when exploited for their "practical or commercial value," "to make money of," instead of the pleasure they provide. How, Morris probes, do we pursue a capitalist enterprise mindful of the environment and the need to sustain "this strangely changed society with all its wonders"? Using critics such as John Bellamy Forster, in *The Vulnerable Planet* (1999) and "Ecological Imperialism," and Richard Hammond, Morris's spokesperson, this talk investigates Morris diagnoses and prescriptions for the ecocritical crises of the late nineteenth century. In the "ceaseless endeavour" expended on cheap production, says Hammond, "everything was sacrificed." In this deforestation and its environmental impact, "villages were almost destroyed," "Houses were allowed to fall into decay and actual ruin; trees were cut down for the sake of the few shillings." *News* explores the delicate balance, Marx's "metabolic rift," for creating quality products (red) with ecologically sustainable production (green), capitalist production within a sustainable environment—ecological economics tied inextricably to ecopolitics. The society Morris creates is one that has evolved—a second or perhaps third childhood—but apparently one no longer developing absent conflict, aggression, problems, and growth.

Frank Palmeri (University of Miami):
"William Morris's Ecosocialism, Then and Now"

The influence of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and his lectures of the 1880s on twentieth and twenty-first century ideas and practices in economics, ecology, and the arts stems from his rejection of the ideology of progress—a conviction that we should cease making shoddy, unnecessary commodities to be sold at the lowest price produced by workers earning barely subsistence wages. He therefore embraced the idea of a stationary economy (desired even by Mill) that would reduce or eliminate the ugliness and pollution of industrial, coal-based products and means of (over-) production. In his utopian *News from Nowhere*,

Morris anticipated by almost a century the emergence of the theory of a low- or de-growth economy, as well as the politics of philosophical anarchism (such as the Occupy movement), which does not depend on leaders, hierarchies, or the mediations of representative government.

As an alternative to mechanical and dehumanizing processes of production, Morris championed the use of low-tech means for the making of goods by individual craftsmen that would be both beautiful and useful. From such convictions he developed the textile designs for Morris and Co. (based mostly on vegetable forms) and the book designs of the Kelmscott Press, which find a response in the movement toward craft production of goods beginning in the 1960s. His emphasis on the local and the organic anticipates the emerging turn away from industrial farming and oil-based long-range transportation of foods.

Throughout his career, Morris's ideas and practices in economics, politics, and art follow from and seek to address the harms to human societies and ecological networks caused by industrial processes and capital markets; his work thereby helps us theorize the current turn away from high-tech, carbon-based, and hierarchical production, distribution, and government.