‘I thank you so much for thinking me still worthy of making so lovely a present to’: Gifts from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Jane Morris

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With the centenary of her death in 2014, scholarship turned once again to examining the complex persona of Janey Burden, wife of William Morris and muse of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Speculation stills surrounds her relationship with the Pre-Raphaelite poet and painter, who transformed a girl of humble origins into a goddess. The exact nature of their so-called love affair will remain shrouded in mystery, as the key letters charting their emotional entanglement have been destroyed.

However, the ups and downs of their relationship can also be gleaned by charting the works given by the artist to his model. These paintings and drawings carry sentimental associations as well as being of historical significance, numbering Rossetti’s first ‘souvenir’, a drawing of Janey dated October 1857, and works dating from the time when their relationship was most intense, including Proserpine and the Bower Meadow. Janey was still receiving gifts during the late 1870s, apparently after their intimacy had ended. The nature of these gifts reveals not only an enduring affection; they also appear to carry symbolic value. She was sent two chalk drawings for Dante’s Dream in August 1879, predella panels related to Dante’s Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice (1871) for which Janey modelled as Beatrice. Although Janey
appears to have distanced herself from Rossetti after 1876 (the last major work for which she sat was Astarte Syriaca), she continued to sit for him, as well as maintaining their intimate correspondence. Upon his death, she was granted three major chalk drawings of her own choice from the artist’s studio, plus The Day Dream or Monna Primavera, which hung over the mantelpiece. Rossetti kept many of his portrait-studies of Janey, being emotionally unable to part with them; they also formed the basis of his subject pictures. Writing in January 1870 Rossetti promised:

As soon as you are able to sit to me again I will send you that chalk drawing to hang up, and indeed may probably do so before if I find I am not needing it. How nice it would be if I could feel sure I had painted you once for all as to let the world know what you were; but every new thing I do from you is a disappointment...³

In 1878 the artist confessed that his studio ‘abounds in the old drawings of you all round now,- the Scalands one-the Pandora, Proserpine and no less than six others including the profile, now called Twilight in the autotype’ [later re-titled Perlascura].⁴ As late as 1879, Rossetti was still creating replicas of the drawings of Pandora and Proserpine ‘for the market’, as he ‘wouldn’t part with the originals’.⁵

Upon her mother’s death in 1914 May Morris inherited a considerable body of works by Rossetti; these were dispersed upon her death in 1938. Some were itemised in a Memorandum dated 1926, and earmarked to stay at Kelmscott Manor, near Lechlade, which May wished to preserve as her father’s home. Janey had already made provision for four important chalk drawings to be given to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.⁶ The remaining works were sold at the auction which followed the death of Miss Mary Vivian Lobb in March 1939; May bequeathed her long-time companion a life-interest in the Manor. Given the complexity of identifying these works, as several were photographic reproductions, those sold in 1939 are considered in an article to be published at a later date.

By reassembling Janey’s collection, I hope to ascertain how and why certain works ended up in her possession. I also document their whereabouts at Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, the family’s London residence from 1878, at 8 Hammersmith Terrace, May’s London home from 1890, and latterly at the Manor. This record provides a context for the works that remain at the Manor, while also recognising the losses resulting from the 1939 auction.

I. The Oxford University Bequest and 1926 Memorandum
Initially leased by Morris and Rossetti in 1871, Kelmscott Manor remained a summer
retreat for the Morris family until his death in 1896. Giving up Kelmscott House, Janey also spent summers at the Manor, purchasing it in 1913. It passed to her younger daughter May the following year. Thus a process of accumulation was begun, the Manor becoming a repository for the family’s heirlooms and relics; May gave up her London residence in 1923, intending to live at the Manor all year round. Believing the Manor enshrined her father’s ethos, May attempted to safeguard its future. In a letter to Dr Lewis Richard Farnell, Rector of Exeter College, Morris’s college, regarding the bequest of the Manor to Oxford University, May made her wishes clear: ‘as the furniture, etc., is arranged and the house remains almost exactly as it was in my father’s time, I should request that it and the garden too may be kept as far as is reasonably possible the same’. May’s Memorandum of 1926, a codicil to her will, designated those art works that were to remain at the Manor, even stipulating where they were to hang.

Although May wished to preserve the ambience of the Manor, she did not envisage a museum or ‘personality house’ of the type popular today; Hogarth, Dickens and Agatha Christie, for example, have been memorialised by conserving or reconstructing their homes. Although the Manor is now presented as the retreat of William Morris and his family, a place of pilgrimage for those wishing to commune with the great man, this idea did not occur to May. Her Memorandum shows that she intended the contents of the Manor to be culled; only objects of historical significance, which would chronicle her father’s life and perpetuate his artistic reputation, were to be spared. Few personal items were destined to remain; her selection would preserve Morris’s ‘public history’ but not the private man. May imagined a retreat for ‘literary men’, ‘a house of rest for artists, men of letters, scholars and men of science’; unfortunately, as it was some twenty miles from Oxford, with primitive amenities, few relished the prospect of isolation at the Manor. May’s injunction to maintain the fabric was impractical; in 1939 the University made significant structural changes in order to accommodate the new tenants. The Manor also proved to be a financial burden and in 1962 it passed into the custodianship of the Society of Antiquaries of London, named in the will as residuary legatee of the Morris estate. The structure of the house, which was in a parlous state, was rescued but the interiors could not be reinstated to the condition in which they had been during May’s or Morris’s day. An inventory, taken in 1967, indicates what was still extant; conducted room by room this document also records the location of objects within the Manor. By this time, the original relationships that May had sought to preserve had been eroded or destroyed.

The fate of Janey’s very personal collection surely reveals May’s ambivalence toward Rossetti. Time may have distanced complex feelings; on her visit to the Manor,
Margaret Horton (who was being interviewed for the position of schoolmistress at the village school) recalled that May took down from the wall two drawings of herself and her elder sister Jenny; “These are by Rossetti.” I feel her pride. In spite of everything that happened it is clear that as a child she loved Rossetti.9 During a long idyllic summer at Kelmscott in 1873, Rossetti even attempted to usurp the role of father, rather bizarrely suggesting that he adopt May; her response is surely an index of Gabriel’s charm, ‘Oh, mother, why didn’t you agree?’10 She sat for him on numerous occasions, her features appearing in the Blessed Damozel (1875-9, Lady Lever Art Gallery) and Rosa Triplex (1874, private collection).

Did May look back upon the ‘Rossetti’ era with affection? She was certainly not ashamed of her mother’s role as model and muse; in 1911 she took her American friend John Quinn to see The Blue Silk Dress (1866-68), Rossetti’s magnificent portrait of Janey, then hanging in the Tate Gallery.11 Quinn, who deemed the oil painting a ‘splendidly rich picture of a beautiful woman’, noted ‘MM now has the bracelet that Mrs M wore when she posed for the picture. It is dated 1868 but MM. said they got it in 1871’.12 Jane is also wearing the bracelet in La Pia de’ Tolomei (1868-80), a work which may reflect a developing triangular love affair; the subject has been interpreted as a commentary on Janey’s relationship with her spouse because La Pia, from the fifth book of Dante’s Purgatorio, was neglected and persecuted by her husband. However, as J.B. Bullen observes, the painting may also signify a triangulation of Rossetti’s neglect of Lizzie Siddal, his dead wife, and his growing ardour for Janey: ‘Jane and Lizzie, the living and the dead, were coming to figure in Rossetti’s disturbed imagination, and this would certainly not be the last time that he identified these two women in this way’.13 May bequeathed the bracelet, along with other pieces of jewellery which feature in Rossetti’s paintings, to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A): a silver girdle worn by Janey in Astarte Syriaca (1877, Manchester), a gold ring set with one ruby (worn by La Pia); a fine plaited gold chain with a crystal locket, and an Indian heart brooch of big stones mounted in silver, worn by Fanny Cornforth in The Blue Bower (1865, Barber Institute). The bracelet, composed of plaited gold wire and rosettes, resembles a design sketched by Rossetti in 1868; above is inscribed a cryptic message ‘Sept 1857 X April 14 1868’.14 Jan Marsh and Bullen conjecture that their affair was consummated during April 1868, their intimacy reaching a ‘new pitch of intensity’ during the course of painting La Pia de’ Tolomei.15 They were at last ‘lovers’ eleven years after Rossetti’s first sighting of her in an Oxford theatre. Bullen’s assertion that ‘something significant had happened’ is supported by Rossetti’s sonnets ‘Desire’ and ‘Reward’, alluding to sexual longing and fulfilment: ‘Come, beautiful mouth, O come again!/ Thinking of you at length, Love desires/Sweet dew in your rosy path’.16 The Blue Silk Dress is also seen as expressing Rossetti’s admiration, being inscribed ‘Jane
Morris AD 1868 D G Rossetti pinxit. Famous for her poet husband, and famous for her face, may my picture add to her fame’. William Michael Rossetti succinctly recalled ‘Of course, I know he was madly in love’.17

In the 1926 Memorandum The Blue Silk Dress was located in the Panelled Room hanging alongside the chalk drawings of May and Jenny produced during that first halcyon summer at the Manor. May’s inventory itemises the contents of the Manor by room, allowing their original positions and relationships to be mapped. Hilda James, who went to work for May in 1922, confirms this grouping at the Manor:

To the left of the door, on the wall, were drawings of the two daughters, then a little mirror above the doorway to the little room (China closet). Then there was the painting of Mrs. Morris on the big wall to the left, near the piano.18

The proximity of these works to each other suggests that May understood and respected their historical, as well as familial, associations.19 They had also hung together at Kelmscott House, where poet and explorer Wilfred Scawen Blunt had melodramatically declared ‘and there she sits under the portraits of her youth by Rossetti and the portraits of her two children as they were twelve years ago, merely a tomb’.20 Coming into Janey’s life the year after Rossetti’s death, Blunt was fascinated by her status; given his reputation as a womaniser, he clearly saw her as a trophy to be won.

A photograph in Country Life, dated 1921, shows Morris’s painting La Belle Iseult or Guinevere (1858) also hanging in the Panelled Room, ironically on the wall facing The Blue Silk Dress (Figure 1).21 La Belle Iseult marked Janey’s entry into the Pre-Raphaelite circle; she was discovered during the so-called Oxford summer of 1857, when Rossetti and his ‘Brothers in Art’ were painting the Debating Chamber of the Oxford Union. Janey was spotted at the theatre by Rossetti and Burne-Jones; according to Bryson they were there to see Ruth Herbert perform.22 This popular actress was ‘an old enthusiasm’ of Rossetti; he had drawn her on several occasions, inscribing one portrait drawing ‘Beatrice, Helen, Guinevere Herbert’, but, as Bryson observes, at that matinee Ruth Herbert’s star was ‘eclipsed by a girl who sat with her sister in the theatre’.23 Janey broke the Rossetti tradition for flame-haired ‘stunners’, as her curly locks were dark; she was not a conventional ‘doll-like’ beauty, being long-necked, tall and gangly with large hands and long fingers. Rossetti immediately cast her as Guinevere; she sat for ‘Sir Lancelot prevented from attaining the Holy Grail by a vision of Guinevere’, his contribution to the Oxford Union murals.

Suddenly propelled into the new role of artist’s model, one can surmise that Janey, the daughter of an ostler or stableman, was equally flattered and overwhelmed;
understandably her father, aware of the dubious social position of the professional model, was not so keen. Posing for Guinevere, she also met Morris, who was part of the group painting the Union. After Rossetti was called away by Lizzie Siddall, to whom he had been unofficially engaged for some years, Janey continued to pose for Morris, who was working on a new easel painting depicting La Belle Iseult in her chamber. Morris was soon devoted to his model, emulating Rossetti’s commitment to Lizzie, the daughter of a Sheffield-born cutler; Marsh contends that at this point Morris was determined to ‘imitate Gabriel in all respects’. Like Miss Siddall, Janey’s status would soon advance to that of respectable wife. It is said that Morris proposed by inscribing ‘I cannot paint you, but I love you’ on his drawing of Iseult, implying that his ardour crippled his ability to capture her likeness. To decline Morris’s offer of marriage would have been unthinkable; as she commented towards the end of her life: ‘I suppose if I was young again I should do the same again’. Conversely, as poet Algernon Swinburne loquaciously observed, Topsy, as he was known to his friends, should have been ‘content with that perfect stunner of his-to look at or speak to. The idea of marrying her is insane. To kiss her feet is the utmost men should dream of doing’. However, marriage was the only course of action which would preserve Janey’s respectability and enable her to remain within the Pre-Raphaelite circle.

Figure 1: Looking from the North Hall into the Panelled Room in the north wing of Kelmscott Manor. Not Used CL 27/08/1921. La Belle Iseult or Guinevere (1858) hanging in the Panelled Room, on the wall facing The Blue Silk Dress and chalk studies of May Morris and Jenny Morris. (Credit: Country Life)
After struggling to finish *La Belle Iseult*, and ‘hating the brute’, Morris appears to have abandoned the painting; according to W.R. Lethaby, ‘Rossetti took it to finish’ but it apparently ended up in the studio of Ford Madox Brown.\(^28\) In June 1874 Rossetti wrote to Oliver (‘Nolly’) Brown, Ford Madox Brown’s son, offering to purchase the painting for £20; he wanted it ‘as an early portrait of the original, of whom I have made so many studies myself’.\(^29\) The request came after Rossetti’s mental and physical breakdown in June 1872; his desire for an ‘early portrait of the original’ may have been stirred by nostalgia and lingering regrets. Moreover, by June 1874 he realised that once he left Kelmscott Manor, access to his muse would be restricted; Morris had expressed his wish to terminate their joint tenancy. Rossetti abandoned Kelmscott, never to return, in July 1874. Given his state of mind, and perhaps comprehending its sentimental associations, the painting was apparently given to Rossetti. After Morris’s death, William Michael Rossetti restored it to Janey; it was in her possession by 1897.\(^30\) As the only completed easel painting attributed to Morris, dating to a crucial period in his life both personally and artistically, May obviously deemed *La Belle Iseult* of national importance; consequently it was bequeathed to the Tate Gallery.

The Panelled Room clearly enshrined Janey’s status as a Pre-Raphaelite ‘Stunner’, being further enhanced by a copy of Rossetti’s oil painting *Water Willow* hung over the fireplace; it can be seen in a *Country Life* photograph taken in 1921.\(^31\) The original, dating from 1871, memorialises Rossetti and Janey’s first summer at the Manor, before his breakdown the following year put increasing strain on their relationship; she holds willow branches, signifying sorrow and longing. The Manor can be seen in the background, alongside St George’s, the parish church, and the boat house at the Manor. Despite the painting’s sentimental value, facing financial difficulties Rossetti sold it to William Alfred Turner in 1877. It was then purchased from Turner’s deceased estate by the American collector Samuel Bancroft Jr., and Charles Fairfax Murray, Rossetti’s studio-assistant, copied the work at Janey’s request: ‘she was to have had the picture, it being a great favourite of hers’.\(^32\) She was delighted with the result; ‘it is so kind of you to take all the trouble and then give it to me. You can’t think how very much I shall prize it.’\(^33\)

Basing her selection on their value as true likenesses, May itemised only four drawings of her mother in the 1926 Memorandum. The very last entry records ‘2 Drawings D.G.R. of Mrs Morris’; these are probably the double portrait study for the head of the Virgin in Rossetti’s altarpiece *The Seed of David*, Llandaff Cathedral (1858-64). The *Inventory and Valuation* describes these as ‘D.G. Rossetti: “Mrs Morris” Two charcoal drawings one dated 1861’.\(^34\) Secured for the artist through the auspices of the architect John Pollard Seddon, the altarpiece presented Rossetti with a
He worked on the triptych intermittently from 1858 until its completion in 1864. Morris posed as King David. Ruth Herbert was the original model for the Virgin; Janey replaced her in 1861. Did Rossetti intend to reinforce the iconography of his Adoration through his choice of models or was this simply fortuitous? His stated aim was the congruence of different classes coming together to worship the Lord:

It is intended to show Christ sprung from high and low in the person of David, who was both Shepherd and King, and worshipped by high and low—a King and a Shepherd—at his nativity. Accordingly in the centre-piece an angel is represented leading the Shepherd and King to worship in the stable at the feet of Christ, who is in his mother’s arms. She holds his hand for the Shepherd, and his foot for the King, to kiss—so showing the superiority of poverty over riches in the eyes of Christ.

Christ sprang from David Shepherd, and even so From David King, being born of high and low. The Shepherd lays his crook, the King his crown Here at Christ’s feet, and high and low bow down.

Janey was a ‘low born’ working-class girl married to ‘high born’ university educated, independently wealthy gentleman. Fittingly she was now an authentic model for the Madonna: when Rossetti drew the study around Christmas 1860 she was within a month of giving birth to her first daughter; Jane Alice, always known as ‘Jenny’, arrived on 17 January 1861. May deemed these studies of her mother ‘particularly valuable as portraiture in their freedom from type-exaggeration’; they clearly held value as ‘true’ likenesses. The 1938 probate inventory places these works, at the time framed together, in ‘Miss Morris’s room’. They can also be seen hanging over the fireplace at 8 Hammersmith Terrace (Figure 2).

Another family treasure Mrs Morris/Jane Burden 1857, inscribed ‘J.B. AETAT XVII’ and dated ‘DRG Oxoniae primo del Oct 1857’, can be seen hanging on the wall opposite. This is considered to be the earliest portrait of Janey aged only seventeen. As Janey was born on 19 October 1839, the drawing may have been a gift, intended as a keepsake of her first ‘sitting’ for the artist, or as an indirect payment. Marsh notes that it was certainly presented to Janey and she kept it for the rest of her life; the drawing therefore marks a watershed in three intertwined lives. In a photograph from 1921, the drawing can be seen hanging beside the four-poster bed in Morris’s bedroom. The 1926 Memorandum also places it in Morris’s bedroom (‘Early pencil drawing of Mrs Morris’), while the 1938 probate inventory describes this work as Miss Morris’ Mother.
The drawing *Mrs Morris lying on a sofa*, dated 12 August 1870, currently hanging in the Panelled Room at Kelmscott Manor, was listed in the 1967 inventory with an uncertain provenance. The 1926 Memorandum mentions a ‘Pencil drawing of Mrs Morris’ in the Passage Room; fortunately the *Inventory and Valuation* gives a more precise description, ‘D.G. Rossetti Mrs Morris Reclining pencil drawing’ in the Passage Room. As Fiona MacCarthy observes, ‘[t]here remains the mystery of the ill health of Mrs Morris, who took to the sofa in 1869, at the age of twenty-nine, and never really left it’; Janey’s health became precarious around 1869-70. Wendy Parkins has discussed at length the nature of her ‘illness’, which has been viewed as both physically real and psychosomatic. Some authorities have deemed it convenient or even strategic, a means of keeping her husband at a distance or retreating from Rossetti’s demands. Her most cited symptom was chronic back pain, although she was still able to travel (by train, boat and even a gondola) in a semi-recumbent position. The large cane Regency couch from ‘Queen Square with embroidered fittings’ has survived. It was listed in May’s Memorandum in the Panelled Room; it has been relocated to Burlington House, London.
Rossetti’s first dated ‘couch’ drawing is notated ‘July 14 1869’. A sequence which follows spans the period April to November 1870. These drawings were intimate studies, in pencil or pen-and-ink, rather than the more elaborate coloured chalks he used for formally posed drawings. They were good likenesses, largely free ‘from type-exaggeration’. Several of these ‘couch’ drawings remained in Rossetti’s possession, being sold after his death. Others were given to friends; Marie Spartali Stillman acquired a drawing dated 26 July 1870 bequeathing it to her step-daughter Mrs Bella Middleton. Janey gave another drawing dated 27 July 1870 to Mr and Mrs Watts Dunton on their marriage in 1905; it is now in the British Museum. Janey possessed at least three other ‘couch’ drawings; one notated ‘Scalands April 30 1870’ can be seen hanging in the photograph of Mrs Morris’s room at Kelmscott House (Figure 3), indicating it was in her possession until 1896. It was acquired by John Bryson, who reproduced it on the front cover of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence (1976), and donated to the Ashmolean in 1977. Another, ‘Mrs Morris lying on a sofa, pencil drawing, 1870’, identified by Surtees as Mrs Morris 25th July 1870, was Lot 326 at the 1939 Kelmscott Sale; it can be seen hanging in the Dining Room at 8 Hammersmith Terrace, in an undated photograph (c.1914?) (Figure 4). It was purchased by John Bryson and subsequently acquired through the dealers Colnaghi by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston in March 1958. Hanging next to this is a drawing dated 6 January 1872; part of the Cecil French Bequest it was assigned to the British Museum in 1954. This drawing was not mentioned in the Inventory and Valuation nor does it appear in the Kelmscott sales catalogue, which suggests it was no longer in May’s possession.

Two other mementoes commemorating the relationship between Rossetti and Janey are mentioned in the 1926 Memorandum; ‘Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy, containing a pen and ink drawing of Mrs Morris by DGR’, given to her at Christmas 1873, and the Vita Nuova (1829) inscribed ‘Jane Morris from D.G. Rossetti, 1878’.

As executor of May’s literary estate, Robert Steele’s allocation of letters to the British Museum included a number accompanied by drawings. One, dated 21 July 1869, contained the famous cartoon The Ms at Ems. During the summer of 1869, Morris accompanied Janey for her to take the ‘cure’ at Bad Ems in Hesse-Nassau; although at the time Rossetti wrote the poem ‘Secret Parting’, their correspondence remained open and affectionate. The cartoon was to prepare her for the worst; either seven tumblers of spa water or seven volumes of Morris’s poems; the first volume of The Earthly Paradise had been published in 1868. Both Rossetti and Burne-Jones delighted in producing cartoons in which Morris is the butt of the joke. These appear to have been taken in good spirit; Janey was also sent The German Lesson and Resolution or The Infant Hercules, in which an angry Morris is trapped in a glass of spa water.
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Figure 3: Mrs Morris’s room at Kelmscott House, c. 1896. Hanging on the far wall, a ‘couch’ drawing by Rossetti notated ‘Scalands April 30 1870’. It was acquired by John Bryson, who reproduced it on the front cover of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence (1976), and given to the Ashmolean in 1977. Also seen on this wall ‘Jenny and May’ is a watercolour by George Howard, Earl of Carlisle (Society of Antiquaries). Located in May’s 1926 Memorandum in the Panelled Room; Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, p. 15, no. 155. (Credit: Hammersmith and Fulham Archives)

Figure 4: Dining Room, 8 Hammersmith Terrace, c. 1914? Hanging to the left is ‘Mrs Morris lying on a sofa, pencil drawing, 1870’, identified by Surtees as Mrs Morris 25th July 1870. Lot 326 at the 1939 Kelmscott Sale, it was purchased by John Bryson and subsequently acquired through the dealers Colnaghi by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (1958). Hanging next to this is a ‘couch’ drawing dated ‘6 January 1872’; part of the Cecil French Bequest it was assigned to the British Museum in 1954. Running around the top of the room is part of the Triumphal Procession of the Emperor Maximilian, a monumental sixteenth-century series of woodcut prints by several artists, including Hans Burgkmair and Albrecht Durer, commissioned by the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. The composite image was printed from over 130 separate wood blocks; a total of 139 are known. The prints were restruck in 1883 and 1884 as Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses. Given his interests, the Triumphal Procession of the Emperor Maximilian would have appealed to Morris, who also owned Durer’s Apocalypse (Kelmscott Manor). (Credit: Emery Walker Trust)

Figure 5: Mrs Morris’s Room at Kelmscott House, c. 1896. Hanging over the fireplace, from left to right are: Water Willow, print (Kelmscott Manor); La Ghirlandata, pen and ink study (untraced); ‘Roman Widow, pen and ink study’, 7 1/8 x 6 ½ in (Ashmolean); ‘Proserpine, pen and ink study’ 8 ½ x 4 ¼ in (Ashmolean); below, ‘Blessed Damozel, chalk drawing 1879’, 15 11/16 x 36 5/8 in (1876, Grenville L. Winthrop Bequest, Fogg/Harvard Museum of Art) (Credit: Hammersmith and Fulham Archives)
Many of Rossetti’s gifts were hung in Janey’s private domain; studies of the Blessed Damozel, La Ghirlandata, the Roman Widow and Proserpine can be identified over the fireplace in her room (Figure 5). Janey also acquired four major works by the artist upon his death; two of these, Reverie (1868, Ashmolean) and Perlascura (1871, Ashmolean) were displayed in the Dining Room of Kelmscott House.

II. Rossetti’s Bequest

In his will dated 8 April 1882, the day before he died, Rossetti granted Janey the pick of his studio: ‘three of the largest and best of the chalk drawings for the subjects of which she sat that are now hanging in my studio at Cheyne Walk Chelsea aforesaid to be selected by her and also the profile head of her in chalk now hanging over the mantelpiece in the studio’. The latter was The Day Dream or Monna Primavera (1872-78), which may be the original drawing of 1872; Janey sits in the branches of a sycamore tree holding a sprig of honeysuckle. In the popular Victorian Language of Flowers, this sweet-smelling climbing plant symbolised the bonds of love; here it alludes to the relationship between artist and model. Catherine Gaskell, upon visiting the studio in July 1879, was ‘immensely struck with the one [study] seated in the tree’; ‘So the old studies of you go on being useful yet’. Indeed, Rossetti’s faithful patron Constantine Ionides commissioned an oil painting (1880, V&A) from this original drawing. In addition to The Day Dream, Janey chose Perlascura (1871), Pandora (1871) and Reverie (1868).

Reverie was based on a photograph of Janey posed by Rossetti and taken by John R. Parsons at Cheyne Walk in July 1865; Rossetti valued Reverie as a good likeness of Janey. He described the work as ‘that drawing of you with the head resting on the hand’, declaring ‘[I] think it certainly the best I have done’. At Kelmscott House, Reverie was hung in the Dining Room, over a doorway and facing Perlascura on the opposite wall, as seen in photographs taken by Emery Walker dating from 1896. Janey also chose Proserpine; this sexually charged work being conceived during their first summer at the Manor. Dated 1871, this chalk drawing is now considered to be the ‘study’ for the versions in oil of which there are bewildering variants.

Perlascura (1871), a beautiful profile of Janey, was named in recognition of the sitter’s complexion, emphasising her colouring; Rossetti considered this profile ‘much the most like you’. Inspired by this work Rossetti planned Perlascura Twelve Coins for One Queen, twelve autotypes accompanied by a sonnet, in homage to his muse. Although this project was never realised, he intended to include Janey as Silence, Water Willow, La Pia de’ Tolomei, Pandora, Proserpine, Mariana, Astarte Syriaca and Mnemosyne. Perlascura was photographically reproduced by the English Picture Publishing Company; Frederick Shields, a partner in the company, later renamed the Fine Art
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Autotype Company, had fired Rossetti’s enthusiasm for this new process. He explored its potential in a series of quality-control tests based on the chalk drawing *Silence* (1870). Proofs were eventually pulled and the reproduction published in 1877; in December, Rossetti informed Janey:

I think it probable that the large profile head of you which was autotyped (*Perlascura*) and of which I retouched a copy for a fresh negative may be immediately reprinted and published. The *Silence* you know is out. They have tried the drawing that I did at Scalands in several forms but they never get the tone to please me nor will they, I am sure, without retouching and a fresh negative.

Rossetti sent Janey autotypes of *Silence* and *Perlascura* in June 1878. *Silence*, dating from 1870, was to be accompanied with the text:

*Silence* holds in one hand a branch of peach, the symbol used by the ancients; its fruit being held to resemble the human heart and its leaf the human tongue. With the other hand she draws together the veil enclosing the shrine in which she sits.

Many have read the symbolic peach as alluding to their clandestine love, about which both parties must remain silent.

In addition to *Silence* and *Perlascura*, Janey was sent an autotype from the ‘Scalands drawing’ the following year:

How dear of you to stick to your old belief in me and my doings and to frame and hang the autotypes. I have another autotype (not published) from the Scalands drawing, but I never thought it thoroughly good. Of course it shall be yours if you care to have it.

The ‘Scalands’ drawing, still in the artist’s studio in 1878, must date from Rossetti and Janey’s sojourn on the Scalands estate owned by the suffragist and painter Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. This episode is now seen as a prelude to their intimacy at Kelmscott. Janey arrived on 12 April, lodging at Fir Bank while Rossetti stayed at Scalands Farm; Marsh conjectures that they saw each other ‘on a daily basis for three intimate weeks’. Apparently Morris ungrudgingly came to escort Janey home, all three travelling back to London on 9 May; as Marsh observes, ‘[n]ow, lady, husband and lover were as well-established as Guinevere, Arthur and Lancelot’.
Rossetti was afforded ample time to sketch his ‘lady’; many of the ‘Couch’ drawings date from this interlude. These drawings, recalling their closeness, were clearly charged with romantic sentiment for both parties. Rossetti treasured ‘The old head of you done at Scalands’; forming the basis of a new work undertaken in 1879, Rossetti reflected ‘the head is as like you I think as if done from nature’.72

Rossetti was possibly referring to *La Donna Della Finestra* or *Lady of the Window* as the ‘Scalands drawing’; this subject from Dante’s *Vita Nuova* allowed Rossetti to conceive Janey as his Lady of Pity. William Michael Rossetti claimed that this was the first autotype to be published: ‘In February one of Rossetti’s large chalk heads, *Donna della Finestra* […] was being autotyped for sale; and it was soon afterwards followed by the Silence, and by the *Head of Dante*, a study for the figure in the picture of Dante’s Dream’.73 There are two companion studies of *La Donna Della Finestra* dating to 1870; the pastel remaining in the studio was sold at Rossetti’s deceased estate sale (Lot 35) and is now in the Whitworth Art Gallery.74 Marillier considered this to be the earlier of the two; the other was sold or donated to H. Virtue Tebbs (Bradford City Art Gallery).75

Janey also owned a reproduction of *Water Willow* (1871, Birmingham), another chalk drawing which Rossetti proposed issuing as an autotype; this drawing is considered to be a preliminary study for the oil with Janey holding a pansy, a symbol of love and remembrance, rather than willow boughs. Janey would fittingly adopt the pansy or ‘heartsease’ as her personal emblem. Both works relate to Rossetti’s group of ‘Willowwood’ sonnets dating from December 1868, which centres on the poet’s suffering and the hope of fulfilment. The 1938 *Inventory and Valuation* placed a ‘framed engraving “The Water Willow” after D.G. Rossetti’ in the Green Room; the print can also be seen in Mrs Morris’s room at Kelmscott House, hanging to the left of the fireplace (Figure 5).76 Many of the treasures seen in this photograph were dispersed at the Kelmscott sale:

308 ‘*Dante’s Dream*, 2 chalk drawings 1879’ (£28)
309 ‘*Blessed Damozel*, chalk drawing 1879’ (£15)
313 ‘*La Ghirlandata*, pen and ink study’ (£11)
326 ‘Mrs Morris lying on a sofa, pencil drawing, 1870’ (£16)
335 ‘*Bower Meadow*, pen and ink study’ (£8)
336 ‘*Roman Widow*, pen and ink study’ (£9)
337 DGR Mrs Morris and William Morris, 2 pencil drawings

The 1938 *Inventory and Valuation* places the majority of these works in May’s bedroom, essentially her private domain; although they clearly held historical and sentimental
value they were not to figure in the public history of Kelmscott Manor. The residue of her estate – those items not specifically mentioned in her will – were bequeathed to Miss Lobb, who was granted a ‘life-interest’ in the Manor. Upon her death, they were consigned for auction on 19 and 20 July 1939. Their significance and eventual dispersal is considered in a separate article.

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NOTES

2. As requested by Jane, Rossetti left explicit instructions, drawn up and signed by him at the end of April 1876, that upon his death her letters were to be destroyed. Jane expurgated the letters in her possession; the critical years from 1870-77 are missing. Robert Steele, the literary executor of May Morris, presented over a hundred letters from Rossetti to her mother to the British Museum. They carried the caveat that they were not to be opened to public scrutiny until fifty years after her mother’s death. The expiry of the restriction, on 7 January 1964, was preceded by much speculation. R.C.H. Briggs gave a detailed account of the letters and their content in ‘Letters to Janey’, JWMS, 1: 4 (Summer 1964), 2-22. John Bryson and Janet Camp Troxell’s Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) printed the correspondence in full. More recently, Frank Sharp and Jan Marsh have edited The Collected Letters of Jane Morris (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2013).

3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence, ed. by John Bryson and Janet Camp Troxell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 33. (Afterwards Bryson and Troxell). For an image of Rossetti’s studio at the time of his death see Henry Treffry Dunn’s painting, Detail of the Interior of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Studio at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea (1882?). The walls are lined with paintings; Proserpina is visible on the left, while the later version of The Salutation of Beatrice can be seen on the right. Illustrated in H.C. Marillier, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), p. 224. (Afterwards Marillier).


5. Ibid., p. 89.


11. When Quinn saw The Blue Silk Dress in 1911, it could have been at the National Gallery or at the Tate – both sites were categorised as the National Collection and pictures moved between them frequently. The Blue Silk Dress was on loan to the National Gallery between 1897 and 1914. Information kindly supplied by Frank Sharp.


14. DGR, Notebook sketch, c. 1868, British Library, Ashley ms 1410 (1) f.9v.


16. Ibid.


19. Hobbs and Chambers, Miss Mary Morris decd. Inventory and Valuation of the Furnishing Contents of the Residence, Oil Paintings, Books, Manuscripts, Silver, Plate, Jewellery, Personal and Miscellaneous Effects at Kelmscott Manor, Kelmscott, near Lechlade, Glos (1938), p. 15. (Afterwards Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation). Valuations for section 46 (157), DGR Mrs Morris dated 1868 oil painting £200 and (158), DGR Jenny and May two chalk drawings £32. Manuscript held at the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow. May’s will and memorandum is reproduced in Dufty. A copy of the full memorandum, including all May’s bequests, is held at Kelmscott Manor; it is not paginated.


23. Ibid.


35. Ruskin had approved of Miss Herbert, despite her scandalous private life, commenting ‘I want you to get her beautiful face into your picture as soon as possible’ (Marsh, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 193). Emulating William Holman Hunt’s veracity, Rossetti gave the Virgin dark colouring in order to make her more like a Jewish woman. Ruskin was appalled, commenting Jane’s mulatto complexion was ‘nigra sum’ (ibid., p. 218).

36. Marillier, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 75.


38. Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, p. 20; section 46 (227). In the inventory taken by the Society of Antiquaries in 1967, these studies were located in the Panelled Room.

39. Cat. 86, Anarchy and Beauty, dates this photograph to 1896. The V&A date their photograph to c.1923. However, Mrs Morris/Jane Burden 1857 was located in William Morris’s bedroom at the Manor by 1921, as recorded in Anon., ‘Kelmscott Manor’, p. 259. After Janey gave up Kelmscott House, she usually spent the summer at the Manor and divided the winter between London, where she sometimes stayed at 8 Hammersmith Terrace, and resorts including Lyme Regis, where her sister-in-law and niece lived. Hence, Janey may have already placed some of the family treasures in May’s care. However, it is more likely the photograph dates to after 1914, when May inherited her mother’s estate.


41. Marsh, Jane and May Morris, p. 18.

42. Anon., ‘Kelmscott Manor’, p. 259; image number: 527003.

43. Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, p. 11; section 46 (29). Here the date is transposed as ‘1875’. In the 1967 Antiquaries inventory it is listed as hanging in the Closet off the Panelled Room.

44. KM064 Portrait of Jane Morris, reclining (pencil), by D.G. Rossetti, 1870; Received from: May Morris’s will (47). 1967 Inventory no. (54), the brackets denoting its uncertain provenance; Surtees, I, p. 177, no. 381: ‘Aug. 12 1870’, where the provenance is given as the Society of Antiquaries.

45. Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, p.13; section 46 (83).


50. After her return from Scalands, Janey remained in London for the summer, joining her mother-in-law at Torquay in November; Morris joined her in December for a week’s holiday.

51. Surtees, I, p. 177, no. 379: ‘26 July 1870’. By descent to her daughter Mrs M.M. Reynolds.

52. Ibid., no. 380: ‘27 July 1870’. Sold from The Pines, following the death of Mrs. Watts Dunton, Sotheby’s 1939; Cecil French Bequest, British Museum, 1954-5-8-4.


54. Surtees, I, p. 177, no. 378: ‘July 25 1870’; MFA, Boston Accession number 58.735. Situated in May Morris’s bedroom in Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, p. 31 (‘Residue’).

55. Cecil French Bequest 1954-5-8-2; Surtees, I, p. 179, no. 393: ‘6 January 1872’.

56. The German Lesson, BM, 1939-5-13 (2) S.603 and Resolution or The Infant Hercules, BM 1939-5-13 1 (8) S.604. Gordon Bottomley feared that these had been ‘swept into Miss Lobb’s residue’: ‘These cartoons were kept in a queer countryfied [sic] looking wooden oak-grained box with a very deep lid and an iron handle. MM used to allowed me to rummage in it, and its contents were priceless [...] a riotous set of caricatures, unmistakably Rossetti’s, of “The M’s at Emms” - the prize one being of Mrs Morris prostrate on a sofa while Morris and a very Teutonic washerwoman are making out the washing list - Morris waving undies [sic] enquiringly - and the pen-work as ravishingly rich as any of Rossetti’s best
drawings’. Letter from Bottomley to Bryson, 16 June 1942; Bryson papers, Ashmolean Museum.


58. Surtees, I, p. 154, no. 259A.


60. Ionides Bequest, V&A.

61. These four chalk drawings were bequeathed by May to the Ashmolean, where they had been on loan for several years. Four chalk drawings are listed as being in the possession of the Morris family in 1882: 185 Reverie or Waiting (owned by William Morris); 241 Head of May as a child (owned by William Morris); 289 Day Dream (owned by William Morris); 291 Proserpine (owned by Mrs William Morris); William Sharp, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and Study (London: Macmillan & Co., 1882), appendix. Janey lent the following to the Burlington Fine Arts Club: Pictures, Drawings, Designs and Studies of the late Dante Gabriel Rossetti (BFAC 1883): 53 Portrait of Mrs Morris, 1868; 62 Head of Miss Jane Morris, 1871; 63 Head of May Morris, 1871; 76 The Day Dream, 1878; 81 Proserpina, 1871, catalogued as the original drawing; 133 Perlascura, 1871. Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, pp. 9-10, probate values: section 45 (in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford); DGR Perlascura, large crayon drawing dated 1871 £20; DGR Reverie, large crayon drawing dated 1868 £23; DGR Daydreams, large crayon drawing (cartoon) £20; DGR Proserpine, large crayon drawing dated 1871 £21. Total £109.


66. His partners were Charles Rowley and George Milner.

67. Bryson and Troxall, p. 47.

68. Ibid., p. 71.

69. Ibid. A favourite of Rossetti’s, it was sold without his knowledge during his absence in Scotland, recovering from his breakdown, to John Aldam Heaton. Although recovered it was sold to Charles Rowley in 1876, shortly after its reproduction as an autotype.

70. Ibid., p. 90.


72. Bryson and Troxall, p. 89.


76. Hobbs and Chambers, Inventory and Valuation, p. 25 (‘Residue’). Although not cited in the 1926 Memorandum the print remains at Kelmscott Manor; KM195. Jane never owned the original, which passed through the hands of Cornelius Fox and Charles Fairfax Murray to Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.