Reviews


Three of Morris’s biographers, beginning with Mackail, have seen Morris’s relationship with his sister Emma, four years his senior, as the most significant in his early emotional life. The first three letters in Norman Kelvin’s _The Collected Letters of William Morris_ were written to Emma by her brother from Marlborough in 1848 and 1849, and show the strength of this early attachment. But while Morris was still at Marlborough, Emma fell in love with and married Joseph Oldham, the young Tractarian curate at the church in Walthamstow attended by the Morris family. The couple soon moved to Downe in Kent, and then to Clay Cross in Derbyshire, where they ministered to the local community with total commitment for many years, as Dorothy Coles informed us in the Winter 2004 issue of this _journal_. In _The Life of William Morris_ in 1899, Mackail wrote of the sixteen-year-old Morris: ‘He felt the separation keenly; the brother and sister had been closely intimate in all their thoughts and enthusiasms; and it was to some degree under her influence that the Church was settled on as his own destined profession’ (quoted p. 11).

Jack Lindsay, in his _William Morris: His Life and Work_ (London: Constable, 1975) examined the relationship in more detail, asserting that as a result of the marriage ‘the close bond with Emma was ruptured’ and that the rupture initiated an important theme in Morris’s writings, ‘the conflict of two friends for the same girl’ (p. 29), as in the early poem ‘The Three Flowers’, and in more complex form in the story ‘Frank’s Sealed Letter’. Here the hero, Frank, may be able to prove himself in the world, but he
fails disastrously in his private life. 'This pattern of experience', Lindsay claims, 'runs through his whole life, both before and after the roles of Emma and Oldham had been more powerfully taken over by Janey and Rossetti...' (p. 33). Lindsay sees this psychic pattern as not unusual within the restrictive confines of the Victorian family, but insists that we cannot say 'in any simple way: Morris was in love with Emma ... The situation was far too complex for any such crude formula to explain it' (pp. 39-40).

Lindsay sees the death-fantasies in some of the early Oxford poems such as 'The Three Flowers' and the 'The Willow and the Red Cliff' as expressing Morris's 'morbid' imaginings at the time as 'playing round a death-wish associated with Emma', and postponing solutions until after death (p. 58). He suggests that the feelings associated with Emma also played an important role in the early prose romances, referring to the early 'Story of the Unknown Church' as combining 'the Emma-theme with a picture of medieval craft-devotion' (p. 62), and asserting that several of 'the stories cluster round the Emma-complex of ideas, emotions, imagery' (p. 63). Lindsay believes that this kind of inner conflict continued in Morris's writings up to the abandoned novel of 1871-72 and to *Love is Enough* in 1873. He also sees the 'Emma motif' in Morris's contribution to the Oxford Union murals, 'How Sir Palomydes loved La Belle Iseult... and how she loved not him again but Sir Tristram' (p. 90). In Lindsay's account of *The Defence of Guenevere* volume of 1858, 'we see the Emma-image raised to a new level, partly through Morris's whole development in the Oxford years, partly through his wondering love of Janey'. Lindsay then argues that the 'Emma image' was 're-created ... in terms of Janey' (p. 101); this left Morris with an unresolved psychological problem, which fed into the failure of the marriage.

Later, Lindsay considers the poems of the early 1870s that seem to refer to that failure and to show the reader 'what he [Morris] was suffering in his withdrawn and baffled affection' (p. 180). The poems include 'The Doomed Ship' and the unfinished 'Why dost thou struggle?' Lindsay reads the latter, quoted at length, as an attempt to 'get inside Janey's mind and understand
her rejection' (p. 181). For Lindsay, the most important of these poems is ‘Alone unhappy by the fire I sat’, which, we are told, ‘makes best sense if we read it as addressed to Georgie, with Rossetti as ‘the friend’ and as ‘he’, and ‘they’ as Rossetti and Janey in the last stanza’ (p. 182). Georgie Burne-Jones is seen as the focus of Morris’s feelings at this time, expressed in a number of poems, the most moving of which is ‘Near but Far Away’. Lindsay points out that, at the climactic moment of the sonnet, the woman addresses the man she has kissed as ‘Brother’. He then comments, ‘It has been argued that here Morris is revealing his unassuaged passion for Emma; but that is untenable. We might say however that his feeling of hopelessness at the moment of closest union (with Georgie?) awakens some sort of recollection of primal patterns of loss and denial. In saying ‘Brother’ instead of ‘Husband’ or ‘Beloved’, Georgie revives the taboo against which there is no appeal, making his exclusion final’ (p. 188). We find in a footnote that the rejected claim for Emma had been made in an unpublished lecture to the William Morris Society by John Le Bourgeois in 1972. In his final chapter, ‘Some Conclusions’, Lindsay pays eloquent homage to Morris’s self-fashioning, away from private fantasies into social vision: ‘what had begun as the weak romanticising of the first poems to Emma ended as the richly-based concepts of News from Nowhere’ (p. 379). It is clear that Lindsay attached great importance to Morris’s attachment to Emma as part of his early psychological development, but believed that as Morris matured he moved beyond its sway.

The latest full biography is Fiona MacCarthy’s, of 1994. MacCarthy does not give Emma the amount of attention given to her by Lindsay, but nevertheless acknowledges her significance:

Emma was the sister Morris adored ... Edward Burne-Jones was given the impression that Morris felt deserted when his sister married. It seems he went on yearning for such closeness of companionship which, later in his fiction, takes on sexual overtones. Morris’s late romantic heroines are sisterly and comradely, hard-
running and fast-shooting, sharers of physical as well as intellectual pleasure. The difference is that they are – mostly – to be captured. His desertion by Emma and the breaking of that bonding was the beginning, for him, of a tragic cycle of female intimacy vouchsafed and then withdrawn.

(MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*, Faber, 1994, pp. 50–51)

Thus the intensity of the youthful relationship between Morris and Emma has been recognised by biographers. But none of them has seen it as having the significance that Le Bourgeois attributes to it. For him – in an argument that he has been advancing, as we have seen, since 1972 – the relationship is the single key to Morris’s whole emotional life. The Preface asserts that the book will show ‘how Morris’s love for his sister evolved, how it destroyed his marriage and how it produced the great achievements of his life. For his sister was a guide to heroic behaviour as well as a source of erotic emotion’ (p. 5). In the text this argument is advanced clearly and with evidence that deserves the reader’s attention. However, the title and cover of the book strike me as melodramatic, and the claim in the blurb on the rear cover, that ‘Scholars portray the artist as a victim, bound to an adulterous wife’, is surely false: all Morris’s biographers have tried to explain the failure of the marriage as a complex matter, not an occasion for moralising. The picture on the cover – the only visual material in the book – is a partial reproduction of Arthur Hughes’s *April Love*. This was the first painting that Morris bought, and the Preface tells us of the importance Le Bourgeois attaches to it: ‘The picture shows a young woman turning away from her lover. For Morris, it captured perfectly the feeling of love denied that had overwhelmed him after his favourite sister married. It was the same emotion that made him a poet’ (p. 5). But how do we know that the painting had this meaning for Morris? It certainly appealed to him, as he asked Burne-Jones to go to the Royal Academy and ‘nobble it’ as soon as possible, but he gives no clue to his feelings about the painting. MacCarthy finds in it a sense of ‘sexual expectancy’ (p. 113)
rather that repression. I find its deployment on the cover rhetorical.

Le Bourgeois’ text consists of sixteen short chapters in chronological order, each with a quotation – usually from Morris’s writings – as its title. Again, these operate rhetorically to advance Le Bourgeois’ case. Chapter Two is entitled ‘Do you keep your child-love, Brother?’ It deals with Morris at Oxford, and gives a clear account of his life at this time, with well-chosen quotations from Mackail to substantiate it. The line of argument concerning Emma emerges at the end of the chapter, with quotations from a poem sent to her and said to express ‘his disappointment over her marriage’ (p. 17):

Do you keep your child-love, brother?
As you vowed to keep it then?
Will you love me, if another
Be my lover among men?

We are told that the poet cries, but makes no answer, but that the sister offers ‘a consolation’:

Earth will not hold us forever,
On the earth we live not long.
When we live in heaven together
God will make our weak love strong.

Le Bourgeois’ comments on the poem raise the whole question of his interpretative procedure, which is to see pieces of imaginative writing consistently in biographical and personal terms. Is this always the appropriate way to read Morris’s poems? My view is that special reasons need to be advanced in each specific case to justify such readings. Le Bourgeois has no time for such equivocations. He finishes the chapter with a brief account of the prose story ‘A Dream’, in which we are told ‘Morris incorporated Emma, barely disguised as Ella, as his lady-love and guiding light’ (p. 20). Morris is said to have ‘acknowledged at the beginning “that in some way, how I know not, I am mixed up with the strange story I am going to tell you”’. But these words are given in the story to its elderly narrator, who is not the dreamer
but an observer of the cousinly romance involving Emma.

Chapter Three deals with the years 1854–58, when Morris is said to have been battling with ‘the twin difficulties of prohibited love and vocational mission’ (p. 21).

The continental tours are recorded, and the decision not to take holy orders but instead to become an architect. The Emma theme is discussed in relation to the story ‘Frank’s Sealed Letter’, in which, we are told, Morris takes the form of Hugh, and Emma that of ‘Mabel, the love of his life’ (p. 26). Le Bourgeois’ reading says nothing of Morris’s presentation of Hugh as deformed, and presents Mabel as deserting rather than rejecting Hugh, which she does in a highly dramatic scene in the story. Perhaps Morris’s disappointment over his sister’s marriage might have led him to figure the situation in so negative a way, but it is equally possible that he was here entering into the dramatic possibilities of an imagined situation. Le Bourgeois concludes by referring to the letter from Hugh’s friend Frank, now dead, which Hugh has been told to read in the event of misfortune. In it, we are told, ‘Frank distinguishes between the earthly Mabel and the pure’ (p. 27). It seems to me that the distinction conveyed here is rather between two aspects of Hugh; he should not allow his distress at the failure of his relationship with Mabel and the revelation of her selfish side to destroy the love that he had felt when he saw her as the ideal woman. The story ends with Hugh’s words, ‘Oh Mabel, if you could only have loved me! Lord, keep my memory green!’ But it is clear that Mabel never reciprocated his love, which is presented as extravagant and perhaps self-defeating.

Chapter Four reverts to Christmas 1855 and the meeting soon after of Morris and Burne-Jones with Rossetti, which led to Morris’s attempts to become a painter. It also covers quite fully the days in Red Lion Square and the painting of the Oxford Union murals. It was then that Morris bought Hughes’s April Love, which is here said to portray ‘a young woman pulling away from a lover’s attempt to kiss her hand, with rose petals at her feet symbolizing the transience of young love and ivy suggesting reunion in the next life’ (p. 31). The Emma theme is less empha-
sised in this chapter, but the account of the story ‘The Hollow Land’ seems to be offered to suggest a parallel between Morris and Emma and the characters in the story, Florian and Margaret. Florian is defeated by the forces of Red Harald and driven into a strange underground world; here he meets his true love, Margaret, who seems to have come from the distant past. Le Bourgeois describes the story as ‘a tale of defeat and retreat’, but his description of the story’s ending – ‘Florian and Margaret open a set of golden gates and enter a great space filled with flowers. No one is there to deny them’ (p. 33) – seems to me more romantic and hopeful. But, however the conclusion is interpreted, the relation of the story to Morris and Emma remains tendentious.

Chapter Five deals mainly with The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems, published in 1858. Le Bourgeois, like many other critics, regards these poems as Morris’s best, and writes appreciatively of ‘Sir Peter Harpdon’s End’, ‘The Haystack in the Floods’, ‘The Chapel in Lyoness’, ‘Sir Galahad’, and ‘The Defence of Guenevere’. Most attention is given to ‘Sir Galahad’, where Galahad’s predicament is described as Morris’s own:

In love with his sister he is cursed and will end, as he fears, cold, chaste, and dead, only remembered for his potential:

But me, who ride alone, some carle may find
Dead in my arms in the half-melted snow
When all unkindly in the shifting wind,
The thaw comes on at Candlemas: I know

Indeed that they will say: ‘This Galahad
If he had lived had been a right good knight;
Ah! poor chaste body!’

(p. 45)

This seems to me one of Le Bourgeois’s most interesting readings, in the attention it draws to the issue of celibacy, but again there is no necessity for this to be related to Morris’s feelings about his sister. The chapter ends with the remark that ‘The ten-
sion between desire and prohibition, high purpose and failure run through these poems because Morris could not get his mind off of them’ (p. 46). Few critics would disagree with this as an assessment of the troubled tone of the volume, though the cause of the distress is nowhere shown to be what Le Bourgeois takes it to be. However, it must be admitted that no critic has so far succeeded in giving a full explanation for the unspARINGLY sombre tone characterising the volume.

Chapter Six begins with an account of the ‘discovery’ of Jane Burden by Rossetti and Burne-Jones at the theatre in Oxford, and Morris’s attraction to her. Le Bourgeois quotes ‘In Praise of My Lady’ at some length, and adds: ‘They spent long hours together as he read to her and she sat for him. Soon they were falling in love. By February 1858 it was apparent they would marry’ (p. 48). Nevertheless, Morris was troubled and often unwell in 1858; Mackail described him at the time as ‘languid and subject to strange fluctuations of mood’ (quoted p. 50). Le Bourgeois’ explanation is that Morris knew that ‘marriage meant breaking faith with his childhood pledge of ‘love and lealry’ to his sister’ (p. 49). Webb recorded Morris’s agitated behaviour during the summer trip they took with Faulkner to France. According to le Bourgeois, ‘The strain of failing at work and reneging on pure love was too much. He suffered an emotional breakdown’. After this, it is surprising that he then continues: ‘Nonetheless, William Morris and Jane Burden were married in the spring of 1859, and remained happily married for about seven years’ (p. 50). The chapter goes on to recount – with quotations from Georgie Burne-Jones’s Life of Sir Edward Burne-Jones – the story of the happy years at Red House, with the births of Jenny and May, and the establishment of the Firm. It seems to me strange that Le Bourgeois could give such an unproblematic account of the marriage in view of his own thesis: if Morris had felt for Emma as deeply as has been argued, could he have simply have fallen in love with Jane, and lived with her happily, in this way? Le Bourgeois shows little interest in any possible complexity in Jane’s feelings at this time. His Bibliography does not include Jan Marsh’s Jane and May Morris, nor does he refer to
Jane’s words, as recorded by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt immediately after Morris’s death, ‘it is a terrible thing, for I have been with him since I first knew anything. I was 18 when I married – but I never loved him’ (quoted in Peter Faulkner, *Jane Morris to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*, Exeter University Publications, 1986, p. 106). Blunt is notoriously unreliable as a memoirist, but since no merit accrues to him from this statement, it seems to me to be of some interest. But Le Bourgeois prefers an account of the marriage which proceeds from uncomplicated early romantic love to later disillusionment.

Chapter Seven offers an account of the failure of the marriage after the giving-up of Red House and the return of the family to London and Queen Square. The development of Morris’s active life as a craftsman is stressed, and his return to poetry with *The Life and Death of Jason* in 1867. Le Bourgeois tells us that Mackail ‘hinted’ that, in the story of the Jason’s turning away from Medea to Glaucë in *Jason*, Morris was describing his own marriage. The quotation from Mackail, however, runs: ‘In the verses that frame the stories of *The Earthly Paradise* there is an autobiography so delicate and so outspoken that it must be left to speak for itself’ (quoted p. 58). This certainly encourages us to see autobiographical elements in the framing poems of *The Earthly Paradise*, but does not refer at all to *Jason*, in which Morris was perhaps committing himself to the flow of a dramatic and powerful story. In accordance with his view that it was Morris’s unacknowledged passion for his sister that poisoned the marriage, Le Bourgeois sees Rossetti as perfectly innocent in the matter. Indeed, he is presented as a kind of marriage guidance counsellor. He is said by Le Bourgeois to have ‘understood the barely disguised but confessional nature of *Jason*’, and to have responded by painting Jane as ‘La Pia de Tolomei’, the victim in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* of her husband’s tyranny. According to Le Bourgeois, Rossetti gave a party in April 1868 to unveil the portrait, on which occasion he explained the story and its implications to his guests. No source is given for this claim. Jan Marsh, in *Jane and May Morris* (London: Pandora, 1986, p. 74) gives a very different account. She tells us that on 2 April Gabriel gave a
party in Jane’s honour ‘to celebrate the fine pictures he was painting of her’, one of which was ‘La Pia’. But she goes on: ‘Had anyone else been aware of what was developing between them – or had either of them wished to prevent it – such an event could not have taken place without embarrassment, yet everyone in the artistic circle attended, including Morris, in the curious position of husband to the guest of honour’. This seems to me more likely than Le Bourgeois’ dramatic scenario, especially as the Morrices were to give a return party six weeks later to celebrate the publication of *The Earthly Paradise*.

Another omission from Le Bourgeois’ Bibliography is Jan Marsh’s *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999). There Marsh has a chapter called ‘La Pia’, in which she says of the painting: ‘Perhaps the sombre cast of Jane Morris’s features in repose struck his fancy; or something in her current situation recalled that of La Pia. From the outset, subject and sitter were linked’ (p. 336). Marsh then quotes a letter from Brown to Rae, ‘With Mrs M as model and Rossetti for the painter and such a subject, you can imagine some of the tragic, fearful beauty of the picture!’ (quoted p. 337). This seems to suggest aesthetic approval rather than any sense of the personal. Rossetti gains even more praise from Le Bourgeois as an expert on marriage by the advice he gave at this time to Warington Taylor, who had quarrelled with his wife. Rossetti scolded Taylor into apologising to her, she returned to him to his great satisfaction, and Taylor expressed his gratitude to Rossetti for having pointed out ‘what a damned scoundrel I was’ (quoted p. 60). There is no reference to the fact that Taylor was soon to be left alone again, before his early death.

With Morris, however, we are told, ‘Rossetti failed’. This was due, Le Bourgeois argues, to Morris’s recognition of his incapacity any longer to love Jane. He finds evidence for this in the ‘Apology’ to *The Earthly Paradise*, which he claims is ‘addressed to Janey’ and declares his incapacity to help her. ‘Punning on her maiden name, Burden, he wrote, ‘I cannot ease the burden of your fears ... Or bring again the pleasure of past years’ (p. 60). It is true that the book is dedicated to the poet’s wife, but the
"Apology" is usually felt to be addressed to readers in general, expressing the poet's regret that his art cannot heal mankind's deepest problems. (I find it difficult to see the alleged pun on Jane's name.) The chapter ends with what would be a very telling piece of evidence for Le Bourgeois' case if we were to accept his interpretation of it, the sonnet 'Near but Far Away' of May 1867 or 1868, which May Morris included in the first volume of *William Morris. Artist, Writer, Socialist* in 1936. In Le Bourgeois's account of the poem, "the sister turns to look at her brother ... He starts to speak, fighting to overcome restraints of shame, but she stops him. Instead, they kiss as she pulls him into paradise. She then withdraws, leaving him with unwelcome truth; pinned down between a threatening sea and a blank wall" (p. 61). The poem is dramatic and effective, but certainly problematic if we seek to explain it biographically – as in this case the personal urgency of the mode encourages us to do. Its crux is the moment of the kiss:

She stayed me, and cried 'Brother!' our lips met
Her dear hands drew me into Paradise.
Sweet seemed that kiss till thence her feet were gone...

The woman withdraws, leaving the man in isolation. The crucial question is whether we should interpret the word 'Brother' literally, or whether it marks the moment when a beloved woman terminates the scene by using the term to tell the man that the relationship can go no further. The latter has been the view of most critics, in particular that of Lindsay, as we have seen. MacCarthy quotes the whole poem and also relates it to Morris's feelings for Georgie Burne-Jones at this difficult time; she concludes, 'Perfect self-abnegation and the clarion call of comradeship: they seem to have arrived at a solution from one of the chivalric novels of Charlotte M. Yonge' (p. 250). Earlier, in 1975, Penelope Fitzgerald in her *Edward Burne-Jones* (Sutton Publishing, 2003 [1975], p.119 – a book not referred to by Le Bourgeois) sees the situation in similar terms: 'it appears that Morris did make some kind of declaration, how decent and embarrassed can be judged from the transparent goodness of his
character’. Sue Mooney considered this poem with other related material in ‘William Morris: Biographical Gleanings, 1865–75’ in the Autumn 1989 edition of this Journal, arguing against the view of Jack Lindsay in William Morris: His Life and Work in 1975, that Morris had found consolation with Georgie. Mooney argued, on the contrary, that ‘the trouble Morris faces in the poem is his failure to gain Georgie’s love’ (JWMS 8: 3, p. 5). The word ‘Brother’, in Mooney’s view, may represent Georgie’s attempt ‘to persuade herself that their shared intimacy is not a betrayal of her own high standards’. Mooney does not seem to see that love might be manifested more deeply in maintaining distance than in sexual surrender. Be that as it may, it does not seem to me likely that Morris is here imaginatively dramatising a scene with his distant sister rather than with a woman in his immediate circle.

Chapter Eight deals with the troubled years of Jane’s increasing involvement with Rossetti. Le Bourgeois continues to present Rossetti as the sympathetic friend in whom the ‘springs of affection’, frozen since the death of Lizzie, ‘began to thaw as he opened his heart and soul to the suffering wife of his friend’. He suggests, without any explicit evidence, that Morris ‘perceived an inviting but improbable solution. Rossetti would fall in love with Janey and take her off his hands’ (p. 64). It is crucial to Le Bourgeois’ argument that Morris should somehow have rediscovered his passion for Emma in these years, and he bases his case for this on poems of the period, particularly a poem of 1868 or ’69 quoted from the Morris MS in which the unnamed participants are identified as Morris, Emma, Jane and Rossetti. Then, we are told, the ‘moment for immolation came early in 1869 when Morris and Burne-Jones decided to leave their wives’ (p. 65). This confident assertion, which in relation to Morris is based as far as I know on no independent evidence, is Le Bourgeois’ take on Burne-Jones’s affair with Mary Zambaco. Rossetti’s account in a letter to Brown of 23 January 1869 is quoted – ‘she tried to drown herself in the water in front of Browning’s house’. Then, according to Le Bourgeois, ‘Faced with marital disasters, Morris and Burne-Jones headed for
Rome ... [But] The delinquent husbands got no further than Dover. Burne-Jones was too ill and distraught to go on. He and Morris returned to London a few days later. Neither had the stomach for total ruin' (pp. 65-66). This account is very much at odds with the others I know of, in which Morris simply acts as a friend to Burne-Jones, agreeing to go with him to the continent to help him recover from his tempestuous affair, and turning back at Dover when Burne-Jones became ill. Marsh writes: ‘Shaken, Ned sought Morris’s help, and agreed to go abroad quickly, so that Mary could not stage another ambush’ (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 354).

Soon after these events, Le Bourgeois notes, Morris began to write another poem for The Earthly Paradise, one based on an Icelandic source, ‘The Lovers of Gudrun’. Le Bourgeois finds no difficulty in identifying the central characters in the story – Kiartan the adventurer, who goes abroad and marries the sister of a foreign king, Gudrun, who is left behind when Kiartan goes adventuring, and Bodli, Kiartan’s friend and fellow adventurer, who brings back the news of Kiartan’s marriage and who falls in love with Gudrun – with Morris, Jane and Rossetti respectively. A passage expressing Kiartan’s self-pity is quoted, but the reader is left to make what he or she can of this. No sense is given of the overall tragic power of the poem, or of its relation to its Icelandic sources. We are simply told, ‘Not surprisingly, Janey Morris grew sicker as the collapse of her marriage manifested itself in art and poetry’ (p. 68).

In view of Jane’s poor health, Morris now took her to Bad Ems to take the waters, but did not ‘try to set the crooked straight’ (p. 68). Le Bourgeois quotes passages from a letter by Morris to Webb on 15 August 1869 – ‘I turn in at 1/2 past 10, which is about the time Janey composes herself to sleep’ – to suggest that Morris and Jane were no longer making love; he notes that May ‘expunged’ this passage when she printed some of her father’s letters. He also claims that the postscript that Jane added to the letter shows that she ‘saw that Morris had no desire to fix their marriage’ (p. 69). This postscript – in which Jane claims that if she suddenly becomes well her friends might also change ‘and
would not be able to stand me’ – has occasioned a good deal of discussion. But Le Bourgeois assures us that Webb would have been able to ‘decipher’ it: ‘If her husband could not bring himself to love her again and thereby cure her illness, she would turn for love and health to [Rossetti] the man who found her ‘too lovely and noble not to be loved’ even at the risk of losing all of her other friends’ (p. 69). But I was far from persuaded that when Jane wrote ‘I feel that I have not much else about me that is good for anything’, in a letter signed ‘Your most affectionate W. & J. Morris’, she was referring, as is suggested here, to her husband.

Chapter Nine advances the view that it was after the return from Bad Ems that Jane realised that her relationship with Morris was effectively over. She ‘finally accepted her husband’s estrangement and she now began for the first time to see Rossetti alone’. Le Bourgeois notes, without any explanatory comment, that these visits ‘were not joyous nor particularly secretive but cloaked in sadness’ (p. 73). Earlier he had suggested that Rossetti found himself in a difficult situation, ‘caught in the contradictory roles of family counselor and lover-in-the-wings’ (p. 71). Morris had been alerted by Warington Taylor to the financial problems of the Firm and was giving his attention to these. But he found time to write Jane, who was staying with Rossetti at Barbara Bodichon’s house in Sussex, ‘a seemingly cordial note’ on 26 April 1870. In it Morris expressed pleasure in news of Janey’s improved health and told her that he had been making good progress in writing ‘The Hill of Venus’, the last tale in *The Earthly Paradise*. Le Bourgeois maintains that Jane would have recognised ‘the layers of irony in her husband’s communication’: Morris ‘is delighted that she suddenly feels well, out of his sight and in the company of Rossetti, allowing him, undisturbed at home, to stay up all night to complete his imaginary exploration of the mound of Venus’ (p. 74); some erotic lines from the poem are quoted to suggest a sense of perversity in the situation, and in particular in Morris’s part in it. In such a complex human situation, it does not seem to me appropriate to take so simple an approach. Le Bourgeois goes on to discuss the novel that Morris began to write at around this time. He quotes passages from it as
from the ‘Morris Papers’. It is surprising that he makes no mention of the edition published by Penelope Fitzgerald as *The Novel on Blue Paper* in *Dickens Studies Annual* in New York in 1982 and by the William Morris Society and the Journeyman Press in London in the same year. Le Bourgeois claims that through the character of Parson Risley, whom he describes as ‘the major character’, Morris ‘tackled the problem that now nagged him deeply’, that of a man who marries a woman whom he does not love (p. 74). Risley’s outburst to the woman he really loves expresses his despair at being separated from her: ‘To live and pretend to love this ugly stupid woman, bad-hearted too she is—when I have the cleverest and most beautiful woman in the world in my arms’ (quoted p. 75). How this is to be read in association with Morris is not explained; surely it cannot be suggested that Morris thought of Jane in these derogatory terms. Le Bourgeois now goes so far as to suggest that by now Jane may somehow have become aware of Morris’s feelings towards his sister. In late 1870, Jane spent some time with Morris’s mother and two eldest sisters in Torquay. He wrote a letter to Jane there on 25 November, letting her know that the last volume of *The Earthly Paradise* was about to appear. The letter contains the following sentence, which Le Bourgeois finds ‘incomplete but revealing’:

Tell Emmie I shall have a Christmas present for her which I hope may tend in some degree towards counteracting a youth spent in—ah!—Have the kids written? (quoted p. 75)

This is certainly obscure, and I do not share Le Bourgeois’s confidence that Jane would have ‘understood the allusion and its irony’. For him, the irony is that the final poem in the volume to be given to Emma would be the erotic ‘Hill of Venus’, so that the gift would ‘celebrate and, in a sense, consummate his love’ (pp. 75–76). Morris’s letter of some days later is quoted (Kelvin notes the difficulty of dating this letter, but settles tentatively on 3 December; *Collected Letters*, I, p. 128, Note 1). In it Morris writes that ‘imaginative people’ do not want to die but rather ‘to live and see the play played out fairly—they have hopes that they are not conscious of—’. The letter is one of the most obscure that
Morris wrote, but Le Bourgeois is confident that Jane ‘knew what hopes he [Morris] harboured’ (p. 76). Again, I find it difficult to share this certainty of explanation.

Chapter Ten deals with the period after the publication of the final volume of *The Earthly Paradise*, the taking of Kelmscott Manor on a joint tenancy with Rossetti, and Morris’s first visit to Iceland. Morris’s diary of the journey is quoted, showing the depth of his feeling for the Icelandic landscape. When he recorded that he felt let down by the ‘calmness’ of his correspondence as he read his letters from London in the post office at Reykjavik, Le Bourgeois enquires: ‘Did he hope to hear from some one that his marriage was over?’ (p. 79). My answer would be that this seems highly unlikely. On his return to England Morris started to write what is perhaps his strangest poem, *Love is Enough; or, The Freeing of Pharamond: A Morality*. For Le Bourgeois the Emperor and Empress in the poem are ‘projections of Rossetti and Janey’ (p. 80). He emphasises the scene in which Pharamond finds his love, Azalais, in a woodland garden ‘in the shape of his sister’ – the text runs, ‘As my twin sister, young of years was she and slender’. Pharamond’s vision is indeed, as Le Bourgeois says, ‘hazy and romantic’, but he can nevertheless see in it a clear moral: that ‘it is better to be free in the quest of love than to remain mired in the mundane. Pure love, in short, is sufficient’ – though Pharamond concedes that ‘Love were enough if thy lips were not lacking’. Morris, we are told, sent a copy of this poem to Emma inscribed ‘from her most affectionate brother William Morris’ in December 1872 (pp. 80–81). Le Bourgeois concludes the chapter with another piece of speculation, prompted by a remark by Philip Webb about an untoward event he had experienced while visiting Kelmscott Manor in late summer 1872. (Quotations are given as from ‘Morris Papers’). Le Bourgeois admits that we ‘cannot know exactly what Webb saw or heard’, but then goes on: ‘we can surmise that Morris exploded at Janey. Morris could no longer endure the fact that Rossetti and Janey had not declared themselves *de facto* partners. He wanted his freedom’ (p. 81). I find the certainty with which this speculation is asserted inappropriate. Le Bourgeois evidently thinks that its
truth is somehow established by the admiring and supportive letters that Webb wrote to Jane in September 1872. In the later of them, the admirable Webb expresses his deep sympathy for Jane in her troubles, and then remarks, ‘Please believe that I in no way wish to penetrate into sorrows wh I can in no way relieve; I, from my own self, know the impossibility of two people bearing one's burden’ (quoted p. 82). This seems to me a dignified and sympathetic statement, and I cannot see why Le Bourgeois thinks that the final word offers a pun on Jane's maiden name. Le Bourgeois concludes that Webb ‘admired Jane for the dignity with which she bore the pain of rejection and the unpretending way that she found such solace as she could from her friendship with Rossetti’ (p. 82) It seems to me likely that Webb had a wider understanding of the pains that both Jane and his close friend Morris were going through.

Chapter Eleven begins with the confident assertion of further speculative views: ‘Morris felt trapped. Janey would not leave him to live with Rossetti (though she would allow Rossetti to live with her at Kelmscott) ... Hoisted like a knight errant on his own petard, Morris was stuck. He turned to Aglaia Coronio for sympathy’ (p. 83). We do know that Morris developed a friendship with Aglaia from about 1870, and it is true that she became for Morris ‘a sympathetic listener’ – certainly a sympathetic correspondent. But it remains debatable whether he ‘modified her name (Aglaia) for the name of Pharamond’s love in Love is Enough (Azalais)’ (p. 82). Le Bourgeois quotes several of Morris's revealing letters to Aglaia, expressing among other concerns his irritation at Rossetti for having 'set himself down at Kelmscott [Manor] as if he never meant to go away' (quoted p. 84). In this chapter Le Bourgeois maintains a clear narrative, telling of the move from the crowded upper floors of Queen Square to Horringdon House, on the road between Hammersmith and Turnham Green; the visit to Italy with Burne-Jones in April 1873; the second journey to Iceland in the same year; and the beginning of Morris's attempts to reorganise the Firm on more secure financial lines. He gives a fairly detailed account of the difficulties Morris encountered before the prob-
lems with the Firm could be resolved and Morris and Co. inaugurated, though it is surprising that at no point does he refer to the work of Charles Harvey and Jon Press on the business. However, his use of letters by Morris, Rossetti and Brown adds immediacy to his account.

In Chapter Twelve Morris is shown running the newly reorganised Company, and seeking to improve the colour quality of his textiles by devoting himself to dyeing, at Thomas Wardle’s works in Leek and in his own vats at Queen Square. He also began to write his adaptation of the Icelandic saga, which he called *Sigurd the Volsung*. Le Bourgeois quotes several passages from Book Three of the poem in support of his claim that the story of Sigurd’s love for Brynhild and his marriage to Gudrun ‘was essentially Morris’s story. Sigurd’s love for Brynhild is true love at first sight. His marriage to Gudrun is fortuitous’ (p. 93). The account given of this part of the poem is accurate: Sigurd and Brynhild are tragic romantic lovers, and the marriage of Sigurd and Gudrun fails because of this. But how, or indeed why, we should relate this to Morris’s own marriage is by no means obvious; and Le Bourgeois in fact makes no direct attempt to relate Brynhild to Emma. He does, however, go on to claim, in one of the most important moments in his argument, that the letter Morris wrote from Leek to an unknown recipient in March-April 1876 was in fact to Emma. The question of the recipient of this letter, included by Mackail in his biography but no longer to be found, has indeed been a challenge to Morris scholars. Mackail introduced the letter with the remark that it was written to ‘a friend who was passing through one of those darkneses in which the whole substance of life seems now and then to crumble away under our hands’ (quoted p. 96). In a long footnote, Le Bourgeois points out that Henderson believed that the letter was written to either Edward or Georgiana Burne-Jones, and MacCarthy believes it to be the former. Norman Kelvin suggested that it might have been addressed to Jane. Le Bourgeois argues that there is no reason to suppose that any of these three possible recipients was in any particular distress at the time. He goes on, in an important passage that I will quote in full:

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I believe that Morris wrote the letter to his sister because she was the woman he loved most deeply. It is likely that during his visits to Leek he saw her frequently, since Leek is about thirty miles from Clay Cross where she lived. It is likely that she was deeply troubled at this time. She had lost two of her three children, her husband’s career in the Church had not advanced and her generous giving to local charities diminished her wealth. By 1876 her income from the copper mining company, like her brother’s, had ceased. Morris’s words of comfort in the letter, moreover, resonate closely with Sigurd’s effort to arouse Brynhild at the end of part three of the book. The lines in the letter and the comparable lines were written within weeks, if not days, of each other. (p. 96)

The argument seems to me interesting but far from conclusive. There is no evidence that Morris ever visited Clay Cross from Leek, and the suggested resemblance between the poem and the letter cannot prove anything more than a verbal link. Above all, even if Morris was aware of a crisis in Emma’s life at this time, this could be attributed to ordinary human and brotherly generosity rather than to a suppressed early love. But Le Bourgeois sees March 1876 as a ‘key moment’ in Morris’s life: now ‘Morris put romance aside and ceased to be the idle singer of an empty day’ (p. 97). This certainly gives energy to the narrative from here on.

The title of Chapter Thirteen – ‘Do you know them? Greedy gamblers on the Stock Exchange’ – suggests the change of narrative focus from the private to the public. We are given a clear and vigorous account of Morris’s growing involvement in public affairs, through the establishment of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and the activities of the Eastern Question Association, for which he wrote the angry letter from which the title of the chapter is taken. Le Bourgeois rightly points out the novelty of Morris’s conclusion, that ‘Moral leadership could come only from the working class’ (p. 103), placing this neatly in the context of discussions on the board of the Mining Company in 1874 about payments to investors in relation to the
cutting of the amount to be given for the education of the miners’ children (p. 104). Attention is rightly drawn to Morris’s first public lecture, in which he deplored the divorce since the Industrial Revolution between the ‘the lesser and greater arts’ (p. 105).

The increasing radicalism of Morris’s political position is made clear, though Le Bourgeois argues in Chapter Fourteen that Morris ‘drifted for a while in the early 1880s’ (p. 109). But on 13 January 1883 he took the decisive step of joining the Democratic Federation led by Henry Hyndman, and he was soon giving outdoor speeches for what he came to term the Cause. This is familiar ground, which Le Bourgeois deals with briskly and informatively. He considers the sacrifices Morris made for his ideals, and devotes some time to his ‘disastrous trip to Scotland’ in August 1883 (p. 113). He quotes Bruce Glasier’s reminiscence about Morris’s admission when asked whether he accepted Marx’s theory of value:

I am asked if I believe in Marx’s theory of value. To speak quite frankly, I do not know what Marx’s theory of value is, and I’m damned if I want to know. (quoted p. 114)

Not many critics since the publication of E. P. Thompson’s *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* in 1955 have been prepared to accept the accuracy of Bruce Glasier’s memory on such points, but it is certainly a good story. The conclusion, as were are reminded here, was that Morris blamed Hyndman – of whose arrogance he was increasingly critical – for causing the mischief, and decided to resign, with his sympathisers, from Hyndman’s organisation. Le Bourgeois usually deploys his quotations accurately and appositely, but here he fails to do so in summarising Morris’s letter to Georgie on Christmas Eve 1884. The passage runs:

He [Morris] decided it was not worth fighting and persuaded his supporters to resign. Hyndman could keep his Federation and frighten the government, which I really think is about all his scheme... (pp. 114–15)
But Morris was not so naïve as to think that Hyndman, with his tiny party, would be able to ‘frighten the government’. In the letter, Morris preceded these words with ‘try if he really can make up a bogie of it [the Federation] to frighten the government’ – a much more realistic assessment of the situation (The Collected Letters of William Morris, II (1987), p. 353).

Chapter Fifteen concludes the story of Morris’s life with an account of the Socialist League and the insistence (in my view justified) that ‘Morris envisaged a violent revolution to break down the class system. He did not imagine that the rich and powerful would concede control merely for the asking’ (p. 118). Le Bourgeois shows how, amid the problems and despondencies of the time, Morris found satisfaction in writing his three socialist romances, The Pilgrims of Hope, A Dream of John Ball, and News from Nowhere. In between the last two, Morris wrote his two Germanic romances, A Tale of the House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains, of which it is accurately said, ‘Both books are about fierce and bloody fighting ending in triumph.’ In the real world of politics, however, things were very different: Bloody Sunday in Trafalgar Square is rightly described as ‘a heavy blow’ (p. 122) to Morris and his hopes. Le Bourgeois refers briefly to the founding of the Kelmscott Press and to Morris’s problems in the Socialist League, but gives more space to an accurate and enthusiastic account of News from Nowhere, though with his preference for the identification of characters he refers throughout to William Guest as ‘Morris’. This prepares us for the conclusion of the story in these terms:

Morris himself is drawn to a woman he meets and seems to know. She is beautiful; her name is Ellen. She has grey eyes and looks like a fairy in a fairy garden. She makes him feel young again. She is his sister Emma; for she knows, in some way that Morris is careful not to explain, that men make ‘stories of me to themselves – like I know you did, my friend’. (pp. 125–26)

This seems no more convincing to me than any of Le Bourgeois’ other identifications. As has often been pointed out, grey eyes were one of Georgie Burne-Jones’s characteristic fea-
tures; but, even so, must we assume that Morris could portray his hopes for the future only by looking back into his past? The chapter ends with Morris’s death, and a salute to his achievements—for it is clear that this book has been written in no derogatory spirit. ‘In 1896 he died’, we are told, ‘mourned by many who appreciated his diverse talents as designer, innovator, socialist and dreamer of dreams. Admirers today still stand amazed at his inordinate energy’ (p. 126).

But Le Bourgeois allows himself one further chapter to reiterate his case. In it he surveys the relevant biographies of Morris, and that of Rossetti by Oswald Doughty. Mackail’s reticence is stressed, while Doughty is said to have ‘created a sensation’ in 1949 with his revelation about Rossetti’s love for Jane (p. 127). Le Bourgeois argues that Doughty was mistaken in reviving ‘an old rumour’ about the relation between Rossetti and Jane in Oxford in 1857 as an explanation of the affair (p. 128). E. P. Thompson in 1955 is given credit for not accepting the story of an early love between Rossetti and Jane, but his view that the marriage foundered on ‘the rock of Jane’s passivity’ is clearly felt to be inadequate (p. 129). Philip Henderson’s biography of 1967 argued that Morris was deeply distressed by the affair, and, in support of this view, quoted ‘Near but Far Away’, said to be addressed to Jane, which Le Bourgeois shows to be unconvincing. (The poem had already been discussed in Ch. 7). Jack Lindsay’s 1975 book argued that Jane found it hard to return to the discomforts of London after Red House, and allowed herself to be courted by Rossetti, while Morris moved towards an unconsummated intimacy with Georgie; as we have seen, Lindsay considered ‘Near but Far Away’ in this light. Here Le Bourgeois draws attention to his own earlier argument for Emma as the object of Morris’s love: ‘When he wrote this passage [about the poem] Lindsay dismissed my argument, first made in 1972, that Morris was displaying his passion for his sister as ‘untenable’ [Lindsay, 138–39, 186, 188]. He provided no further comment or explanation’ (p. 130). Fiona MacCarthy in 1994 is admitted to have acknowledged the early importance of Emma to her brother, but Le Bourgeois is upset by her reading of ‘Near but
Far Away', which concludes that the male in the poem is rejected. To Le Bourgeois, 'Her reading of the poem is extraordinary, even perverse, given that they kiss and she draws her man into Paradise' (p. 131). However, the ending of the poem surely supports MacCarthy's reading: the moment of ecstasy passes as the two return separately to ordinary life - a point Le Bourgeois had seemed to accept in his earlier consideration of the poem (p. 61), when he wrote that ‘She then withdraws, leaving him alone with unwelcome truth'. Le Bourgeois has one further item of support for his thesis, and he suggests that Lindsay and MacCarthy ‘agreed on the proper reading of another important and revealing poem, known by its opening line ‘Why Dost Thou Struggle'. But quite what that ‘proper reading' was remains obscure, as the two critics are then taken to task for believing that the woman speaking in the poem is Jane. For Le Bourgeois, ‘The sense of the poem only comes together when we recognise that the speaker is Morris's sister' (p. 131). The poem is to be found in Vol. XXIV of the Collected Works and certainly deserves careful consideration. But the question of its biographical significance cannot easily be answered. I am not persuaded that ‘we may infer that Morris described her [Emma] accurately in the poem above' (p. 133).

Le Bourgeois has presented his argument with much skill. His final paragraph tells of Emma living in Lyme Regis after the deaths of her husband and her brother, until her own death in 1915. The final sentence reads: 'In her bedroom, in the back of a bureau drawer where a niece discovered them in 1921, she kept her brother's early poems, including the one that asks ‘Do you keep your child-love, brother?’ (p. 134). This is certainly a poignant detail. But does it imply everything that Le Bourgeois wants it to? I think not. Overall we have been given a clear and often vivid account of Morris’s life, though one which tells us nothing about his work as a designer. Nor does it justify its melodramatic title: the idea of ‘forbidden fruit' remains obscure though disturbing. Fortunately the fruit that Morris so freely offers us in his designs and his whole creative achievement is full of rude health. We have no reason to believe that Morris failed to retain a deep affection for his sister after her marriage, but it is
likely to have been on a far less intense plane than Le Bourgeois would have us believe. This would be more in keeping with the tone of Morris’s letter to Jenny of 14 May 1883: ‘I almost expect to see Aunt Emma this week; she has come up to town on what I must irreverently call holy larks.’

Peter Faulkner
Sad to report, the letters in this third volume of the re-collected correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti are often so dull that I kept falling asleep. This was not only because I had previously read nearly all the letters when writing my biography of DGR, but also because they contain so little of his inner affective or creative life.

The volume starts in 1863, ten months after the death of Elizabeth Siddal, Rossetti's wife, and three months after his move to a large old house in Cheyne Walk, on the riverbank in Chelsea. It continues to the end of 1867, when he was painting for a range of new clients including Frederick Leyland and William Graham, whom he had recently met.

The five years yield over 860 extant letters. As is inevitable, a large proportion are the phone-call kind, fixing times to meet and dine; these build up a picture of the (mainly male) world of painters, patrons, go-betweens and hangers-on. A second large group is effectively business correspondence about sales, commissions, deliveries and disputes. A sequence at the start covers Rossetti's contribution to Alexander Gilchrist's pioneering book on William Blake, in collaboration with Gilchrist's widow, but the most interesting, because newly published in full, are the letters to George Rae of Birkenhead, surely the best patron an artist
ever had, who bought the ‘medieval’ watercolours that originally hung in Red House, and commissioned both *The Beloved* and *Sibylla Palmifera*. For the most part, however, there are too many short notes to arch go-between Charles Howell and too few on significant matters to hold the reader’s interest.

Of course painter-patron relationships are always interesting for the light they shed on the cultural market. But, having been one of the most inventive artists of his generation, in the 1860s Rossetti began painting for and making money (in order to pay off the large debt owed to the estate of T. E. Plint) by producing what he frankly called pot-boilers—mainly the half-length female figures now known generically as ‘stunners’. And with a few exceptions, the letters reveal no further aesthetic aims, to illuminate the works. One exception is the extensive gloss on *The Seed of David* (letter 64.84) but this work was of much earlier conception. The correspondence does however demonstrate his struggles to secure sales, sometimes favouring the dealer Gambart, mostly preferring to sell directly and risk buyers reneging on an agreement. Hence the importance of a client like Leyland, and Rossetti’s careful flattery of John Miller, who introduced them.

To have the complete correspondence is immensely useful, but for a scholarly edition, the present volume is perplexingly opaque in respect of responsibilities. Volumes I (1835–54) and II (1855–62) were issued in 2002 over the name of William E. Fredeman, who had devoted decades to the task and died in 1999, having completed the editorial apparatus, statement of principles, introduction and acknowledgements, all of which are written in the first person singular. Subsequent volumes are being prepared by an editorial committee, chaired by Betty C. Fredeman. Three ‘editors’ are listed: Roger C. Lewis, Jane Cowan and Roger W. Peattie, plus seven ‘contributors’ and nine ‘advisors’. All very reputable figures, but nowhere is the division of labour specified. It is unclear who has written the annotations, which are brief, even sparse, with many references left unexplained. One minor example is the absence of Shakespeare’s name to elucidate ‘tercentenary celebration’ in 1864; a larger omission is the identity of recipient Mrs Thompson in letter
64.131, who can only be the erstwhile Annie Miller and had evidently called to remind DGR of a promised drawing.

With regard to the often tangled history of his paintings in this period, the editors have in my view rather lazily relied on the catalogue raisonné of 1971, a landmark of its time but now inevitably outdated; there is much more recent information available. But the strangest aspect is Volume III’s introduction by Allan Life, who describes himself as Fredeman’s research assistant, graduate student and crony, and states that the editorial committee asked him to write not an overview of Rossetti’s life in the mid-1860s, but ‘a reminiscence of Fredeman as editor’. This personal memoir, starting in 1966, has excursions into Fredeman’s extraordinary childhood, his domestic life and the vicissitudes of the project over thirty years, of which the most startling are the claims that Fredeman confused his own life with that of his subject, and that at a fairly early date he came to dislike and despise Rossetti. No wonder publication was so endlessly delayed.

Though the 1860s were the crucial years for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co, and though Rossetti’s active involvement, in both design and business promotion, is well recorded from other sources (see pp. 233–39 in my Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet and articles on Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in West Sussex in this journal, spring and autumn 2000) there are relatively few allusions to either the Firm or the family in the current volume. In October 1864 he took Lady Ashburton to Red Lion Square to order tiles and glass; in March 1865 he endorsed the appointment of Warington Taylor as business manager, offering to contribute £25 to the salary. In August 1865 he took the Cowper-Temples to see furniture bought by Vernon Lushington, and a little later urged them to commission a window, Morris having ‘a special genius for this class of Art’ (letter 65.129). There is sadly no reference to Morris’s illness in autumn 1864, the date of the newly-discovered letter from Philip Webb, nor to the move to Queen Square a year later.

The letters are almost equally silent in relation to Jane. In April 1865 she and her husband were among guests at a large evening
day in the New Forest, Rossetti told his host William Allingham that 'the confusion in my head & the strain on my eyes' were worse rather than better. This was in confidence, as 'it wd. be injurious to me if it got about'. In fact both were symptoms of the deteriorating mental state that accompanied his affair with Jane, culminating in paranoid mania in 1872.

On a more positive note, one of the very last items in Volume III is a letter from Madox Brown adding his and DGR's signatures to Swinburne’s appeal on behalf of the Fenian Brothers condemned to death in Manchester for killing a policeman. The letter was published in the Morning Star (no relation) on 22 November 1867; it would be interesting to know if Morris’s name was also there, a decade before his involvement in other political causes.

Jan Marsh
party at Cheyne Walk. A month later DGR sold a drawing of ‘Mrs Topsy’ to George Boyce, which we may infer was executed during the April visit, although it is undated and may have been done at Red House in 1860–61. During the April visit, the famous photo shoot was certainly discussed, for on 3 June Rossetti told Rae that he had just begun ‘a picture for which I have succeeded in getting a lady, wife of a friend of mine & the very Queen of Beauty, to sit to me. It will be sure to beat everything I have done yet, and is as yet unseen and unengaged’ (letter 65.86). The following day he wrote directly to Jane: ‘the photographer is coming at 11 on Wednesday. So I’ll expect you as early as you can manage. Love to all at the Hole. Ever yours DG Rossetti’ (letter 65.87). There is no record of who accompanied Jane to Chelsea on 7 June; it is likely that Morris escorted and collected her, perhaps leaving sister Bessie as chaperone while he attended to Firm business.

The photographs were for the ‘Queen of Beauty’ painting, which ‘itself will be its only subject’ – that is, an image of Jane against a landscape background. Its price was to be 400 guineas, and the day after the photo shoot DGR received advance payment of £100. Four or five profile drawings of Jane followed, perhaps done from the photographs, but within a few weeks commission was replaced by a different subject, from ‘a glorious new model’, named Alexa Wilding (letter 65.172).

This familiar sequence of events, in which Rossetti raised money to finish existing commissions by offering new ones, also illustrates that despite his admiration for Janey’s striking looks, there was no intimate relationship in the years 1863–67. Though the allusions are brief and oblique, they accumulate to show that in this period the woman closest to Rossetti was Fanny Cornforth. ‘I never go out Sundays,’ he told Howell at the end of 1867, ‘as it is almost the only evening I spend with Fanny and it is very dismal for her to be left quite alone’ (letter 67.148).

The infatuation with Jane began as Volume IV (reviewed below) opens, in January 1868 with plans and sittings for La Pia. We will probably never know exactly what happened but an ominous detail is contained in letter 67.140 when after a short holi-

The years of 1868–70 are often regarded as some of the most significant in terms of the life of, and mythology surrounding Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He seriously began to paint (and fall in love with) Jane Morris, made the decision to publish a volume of his own poems, involving the notorious exhumation of Lizzie Siddal’s grave, and the famed wombat arrived at the Cheyne Walk menagerie. But beyond the well-worn mythos, reading a writer’s correspondence – even in as extensive an edition as this one – is a strangely one-sided activity. I found myself reaching for Jan Marsh’s 1999 biography of Rossetti as a means of piecing together the bigger picture, where numerous extracts from some of DGR’s more well-known letters will also be found. As both Jan Marsh and Richard Frith say in their reviews of the other
‘Prelude to Crisis’ volumes, many of Rossetti’s letters have previously been published, most fully in Oswald Doughty and John Wahl’s four-volume edition of 1965–67 and John Bryson’s *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence* of 1978. But Fredeman’s edition gathers all the previously published letters and then adds substantially to them – notably in this volume a number of long letters to William Bell Scott are published for the first time, along with many short letters to a great variety of recipients.

The work-a-day life of Rossetti the painter is evoked in many early letters from 1868, which concern commissions or related business matters to be dealt with by his secretary and assistant Charles Howell. There is a sense of Rossetti being somewhat hard up: a letter to Frederick Leyland, director of the Liverpool shipping line, in August 1868 asks him for £150 on account of a commission as ‘I have no other way of managing what is necessary’ (68.129; p. 97). He repeatedly defers on a payment of £50 owed to F. S. Ellis, and by December is requesting £500 from Alicia Losh.

Rossetti is certainly not short of commissions at this time, but it is very clear from this volume that a renewed sense of creative energy, somewhat aside from financial concerns, is unleashed by DGR’s re-engagement with his poetry. He is ‘writing a few new [sonnets]’ by the end of 1868 (68.173; p. 136), and many of these and subsequent new poems will be inspired by Jane Morris. By July 1869 he writes to Bell Scott that ‘I am about to have all the poetry I can get together of mine printed roughly for my own use in slips, & keep it by me as stock for selection ultimately with a view to a possible volume’ (69.86; p. 205). There are numerous references to Rossetti working productively on his poetry at this time, and by the autumn it is clear that the conception of this volume is moving to something more public. This decision will, of course, involve the manuscript exhumation that Rossetti was keen to keep as private as possible. Several letters refer to the practicalities of the exhumation, which took place on the night of 5 October 1869. On 9 October DGR wrote to Bell Scott that ‘The Howell business is concluded and successful [Howell being
Rossetti’s legally-authorised stand-in on the night]. I have not the thing yet, as it is in someone’s hands for necessary arrangements. It, and all with it, was found quite perfect’ (69.177; p. 299). Whatever this enigmatic last sentence refers to, it proved not to be entirely the case, as DGR would go on to draw the ‘great worm-hole’ (69.183; p. 304) through the manuscript pages of ‘Jenny’ (one of the poems he was most eager to retrieve) in a letter to William Michael on 15 October. Also on 9 October Rossetti wrote to Henry Tebbs offering a drawing of his wife. The note to this letter suggests that this crayon portrait was given ‘for [Tebbs’] part in facilitating the legal aspects of the exhumation’ (69.178; p. 301). DGR would also only tell even some of his closest confidantes of what he had done after the event. One senses that he is looking for a certain understanding and benediction from Swinburne, as fellow poet (which he duly receives), in his letter of 26 October.

It becomes very clear that Rossetti wishes his poems to be well reviewed, and he does all he can to set this up. He writes to John McLennan in Edinburgh on 31 December of his concern that his poems should not be a ‘literary failure’ (69.225; p. 343). The letters from the first part of 1870 are overwhelmingly concerned with the publication of Poems, and chart DGR’s attentiveness to the binding, format and design of the volume, as well as its content. The Introductory Note to the letters of 1870 states that Rossetti ‘built the volume] with painstaking craftsmanship into what is by any standard one of the most noteworthy collections of poetry published during the nineteenth century’ (p. 346). This concern with Poems as an aesthetic object has been noted in recent years by critics interested in the material book (such as Jerome McGann), and reading the letters from this period confirms how obsessive Rossetti was about all aspects of the volume’s production. For example, he writes to Frederick Ellis, who is to publish Poems, on 21 February: ‘I should like to have a proof sent me with a very little Raw Umber mixed with the Yellow ochre. Also one printed in dark Blue & another in dark Green—all on white’ (70.30; p. 375). As the debate about the best ink colour continues by March DGR is asking ‘Have you got
Morris’s views about it? (70.67; p. 411). Endless revisions and amendments are made by Rossetti as printing gets closer – one can only imagine that Ellis had the patience of a saint here – and once the volume is printed he immediately suggests changes to the binding for future reprints. By 3 May DGR is telling Ford Madox Brown that the first edition of 1000 is nearly sold out, and that he is ‘flooded with letters about my book – a rather shabby one I must say from Tennyson, & none from Browning as yet’ (70.133; p. 466). It is abundantly clear how much this volume mattered to Rossetti from these letters; indeed, he can write about nothing else for months. The letters thus set up the context into which Robert Buchanan’s ‘Fleshly School’ review would come.

The other topic of obsession in these years is more covert, and, as with the exhumation, reveals at least some of the interest in Rossetti’s letters being in what they don’t or can’t say, where desires go well beyond the limits of decorum. Letters 68.138, 68.143 and 68.146 see Howell acting as a go-between for letters between DGR and Janey in the autumn of 1868. A previously unpublished letter to Bell Scott of 26 November 1868 mentions Rossetti having ‘enjoyed myself mightily last night at your party’ (68.160; p. 127), and a long footnote reveals that Bell Scott wrote to Alice Boyd about DGR’s behaviour towards Jane at this party, which was apparently ‘the first recorded mention of the artist’s reckless infatuation with JM’ (p. 127). In January 1869, when Morris took Burne-Jones away on a recuperative holiday after the Maria Zambaco scandal, Rossetti wrote to Howell, ‘Janey has stopped her sittings by order during foreign service – just as I supposed’ (69.10; p. 148). Morris is somehow always there in the background, implicitly if not explicitly, and this is again very much the case when Jane becomes ill in the summer and is taken to Bad Ems to recover. Several of the long letters written to Jane during this trip are the occasion of Rossetti’s pen and ink caricatures of Morris, including *The M's at Ems, The German Lesson, Resolution; or, The Infant Hercules*, and the drawings are reproduced in the volume. The drawings offer more of the affectionate ribbing characteristic of how Rossetti sometimes treats Morris;
indeed, it is quite hard to believe that Morris didn’t see them. The tone of the letters to ‘Good Janey’ (69.91) is affectionate and solicitous after her wellbeing, but they lack the much greater intensity of several letters from early 1870, when Rossetti writes ‘For the last 2 years I have felt distinctly the clearing away of the chilling numbness that surrounded me in the utter want of you; but since then other obstacles have kept steadily on the increase, and it comes to late’ (70.11; p. 358. See also 70.15 and 70.28).

In terms of Morris the poet, however, Rossetti is always very respectful and generous. He writes to John Skelton, who had written on Morris in Fraser’s Magazine in February 1869, that Morris is ‘the greatest literary identity of our time’; and of Morris’s current work on The Earthly Paradise that ‘In some parts the poet goes deeper in the treatment of intense personal passion than he has yet done. After this work is finished, I trust his next step will be in dramatic composition, in which I forsee some of his highest triumphs’ (69.15; p. 153). Rossetti’s deference to Morris as a poet is evident as he starts to consider preparing his own volume: writing to Jane in August 1869, he says ‘Topsy’s mountain must indeed view my mouse with scorn even ifhe finds his way into the world at all’ (69.134; p. 244). In a long letter to Bell Scott of September 1869 DGR expresses some caution about parts of The Earthly Paradise, which ‘are not of [Morris’s] best’ (69.165; p. 288), but he is full of recommendations to Joseph Knight once the new volume of TEPis out, saying ‘I think Gudrun is the most glorious thing he has done yet’ (69.203; p. 323). In August 1870 Rossetti tells Scott that ‘Topsy will get his last vol. of Earthly Paradise out at Xmas, & after that means to drop poetry & paint pictures’ (70.200; p. 514), and the final letter in the volume is to the publisher Alexander Macmillan and is characteristically generous in wishing to promote Morris’s talent:

By the bye, my dear Macmillan, it is all very well talking about ‘Fame in the next generation,’ but why does your magazine resolutely ignore the best things going? It’s no business & no meaning of mine to speak for myself – let anyone do that who
pleases – but why in the world has Morris been left in the lurch till now? (70.274; p. 571).

Whilst it is quite difficult to take the sentence about Rossetti’s own work at face value here, in light of the considerable effort he made to ensure that Poems was well received, the championing of Morris as poet does seem very genuine, whatever his thoughts towards him as husband of the woman who was currently his muse.

There is much to say about this fourth volume of Fredeman’s massive project, and inevitably much must be omitted here. I can ultimately only commend these volumes as a highly significant addition to Pre-Raphaelite scholarship. Just in case you thought I’d forgotten, news of the wombat’s arrival in Chelsea was announced to Janey in September 1869 (69.152; p. 270), and he features in several subsequent letters. His fate, however, was not to be a terribly happy one in the Rossetti household, and his name was ‘Top’.

Rosie Miles

This volume brings to a close *The Chelsea Years, 1863–1872*, the second of three projected parts of William E. Fredeman’s posthumously-published edition of Rossetti’s letters. It is valuable not least for the cumulative ‘Biographical and Analytical Index’ to the entire edition so far, which takes up the last 190 pages, and which stands as a testimony to the commitment of the group that has been labouring to complete Fredeman’s great work. The final volume of the entire edition will presumably include a completed index, superseding this one, which should
prove a priceless resource to scholars of Rossetti’s life, art, and poetry.

Considered in terms of its comprehensiveness, textual meticulousness, clarity of presentation, and scholarly apparatus (volume five includes nine appendices, addressing issues such as ‘The Death of Elizabeth Siddal’ and ‘Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Spiritualism’, as well as the index), Fredeman’s edition is an immeasurable advance on its index-less predecessor, _The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti_, compiled by Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl in the 1960s, and this alone should be more than enough to commend it. Having said this, however, it is a matter of some surprise that a work that adds so enormously to the canon of Rossetti’s letters should thus far have added so comparatively little to our knowledge of him. By the time its nine planned volumes are completed, Fredeman’s edition will include 5,800 letters to 330 recipients, in comparison to the four-volume Doughty-Wahl edition, which collected just over 2,600 letters to 150 correspondents. Volume five, devoted entirely to the two years 1871 and 1872, covers some of the central events of Rossetti’s life: the controversy surrounding ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’, the abusive review essay on Rossetti’s poetry published by Robert Buchanan in the _Contemporary Review_ in October 1871 and later as a pamphlet; Rossetti’s subsequent breakdown and attempted suicide in June 1872; and his joint tenancy of Kelmscott Manor with Morris, coinciding with probably the most intense period of his relationship with his sometime friend’s wife. Yet revelations are few in number. Disappointingly, no extant letters to Janey from this period have yet emerged. The months of the ‘Fleshly School’ affair do yield some new letters to various contacts, mostly concerned with Rossetti’s attempts to discover the authorship of the article, which Buchanan had published pseudonymously under the name Thomas Maitland. These do at least serve to underline further the unhealthy extent to which the review was preoccupying Rossetti’s thoughts. In particular, a letter to Swinburne of 6 November 1871 (one of the most significant discoveries in the volume) discusses the issue at length, with Rossetti asking
whether his unconvinced friend can ‘possibly persuade [him] self that [Buchanan] did not deposit on that particular dungheap the contribution in question’ (p. 178). The urgency of Rossetti’s questioning, though half-hidden behind the high-spirited, scatological banter that characterises Rossetti and Swinburne’s correspondence, betrays an increasingly obsessive need to know.

About the breakdown itself, the letters remain largely silent. There is a previously uncollected note to Robert Browning dated 5 June 1872, warmly acknowledging receipt a copy of Browning’s new book Fifine at the Fair. Only a few days later, however, Rossetti had found within the volume allusions to his own personal amours, and Browning had become in Rossetti’s mind a leading member of a great conspiracy against himself, headed by Buchanan. We then hear nothing more until 21 June, when Rossetti writes to assure his mother of his safe arrival in Perthshire, where he had been taken by Ford Madox Brown to recover from his attempt on his own life. To compensate for the lacuna, the appendices to the volume include a chronology of the affair, and an abridged reprint of Fredeman’s 1971 article, ‘Prelude to the Last Decade: Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the Summer of 1872’.

There is much in this volume to interest Morris students, and indeed much to challenge the image of Rossetti that a Morrisian perspective might normally encourage. For example, there are various passages displaying an obviously unfeigned enthusiasm for Morris’s poetry. Rossetti seems to have had a strange (though emotionally convenient) ability to separate Morris, the major poet, from ‘Topsy’, the buffoon whom he liked to ridicule and to cuckold. This odd bifurcation is made quite explicit in a letter to Alicia Losh in which he speaks of the ‘triumphant success’ of The Earlyh Paradise and remarks that Morris ‘is becoming so well known as Morris that one is almost liable to forget his being Topsy until his presence brings the fact vividly into prominence’ (p. 10). Also worthy of note are Rossetti’s remarks about Kelmscott, which he repeatedly describes in terms such as ‘the loveliest “haunt of ancient peace” that can well be imagined’ (p. 79). As the edition’s notes point out, the description ‘recalls
Morris’s own love for the property’ (p. 80, note 1), and this perhaps calls into question Morris’s insistence, understandable as it may be on personal grounds, that Rossetti ‘has all sorts of ways so unsympathetic with the sweet simple old place, that I feel his presence there as a kind of slur on it’ (Kelvin, ed., Collected Letters, I, p. 180). Inevitably, though, the unorthodoxy of the domestic arrangements at Kelmscott casts an uneasy shadow over these letters: the description of nine-year-old May Morris as ‘quite a beauty the more one knows her [with] a real turn for drawing when she gets a little less lazy’ (p. 86) is charming enough until one remembers that at this time when Rossetti was making himself so at home with the Morrises, May’s father was separated from his family, touring Iceland in a kind of semi-enforced exile.

Nevertheless, it is the more positive aspects of Rossetti’s character of which this volume speaks most strongly. Prominent among these are his generosity to his friends, and his ability to inspire loyalty in them. Perhaps most striking of all is his friendship with Madox Brown, who, in the days and weeks following Rossetti’s suicide attempt, dropped everything to take him to Scotland, determined against all medical advice to keep him from being committed to a mental asylum, a move which he knew would be fatal to Rossetti’s career. Towards the end of 1872, Rossetti in turn expended a considerable amount of energy in support of Brown’s candidacy for the Slade Professorship of Fine Art at Cambridge – an application which he surely realised was speculative at best. There was in Rossetti’s life and work a certain love of hopeless causes (surely one of the reasons for his inclination to embark on an affair with a married woman which could never be wholly satisfying); and this abortive campaign on a friend’s behalf seems a fitting way to close the volume. Rossetti is now on the cusp of his last decade, in which his initial rally from the crisis of June 1872 eventually subsided into a period of long, slow decline, exacerbated by a self-destructive addiction to chloral.

Richard Frith