Speaking of Kisses in Paradise: Burne-Jones’s Friendship with Swinburne

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‘Now we were four in company not three’.¹ This, according to Georgiana Burne-Jones, was her husband’s assessment of the change that occurred when he, William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti met Algernon Charles Swinburne in the autumn of 1857. A closely-knit trio, bound together by the strongest ties of friendship and hero-worship, had suddenly opened its ranks to admit a fourth member, but without losing an iota of intimacy or coherence.

The relationship of Burne-Jones to Rossetti and Morris has been exhaustively explored by historians of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Burne-Jones himself left abundant evidence that his meeting with Rossetti in January 1856 was the defining moment of his career. An astonishing fusion of complementary qualities, charisma and leadership on Rossetti’s part, devotional enthusiasm on his own, it released enough creative energy to see him through a lifetime of inspired and prolific production. As for his relationship with Morris, it was one of the most fruitful in the history of decorative art, with enormous consequences for stained glass, tapestry, book design, and so on.

By comparison, his association with Swinburne has been almost overlooked. Certain details are familiar enough, but the subject in general has received very little notice. The purpose of this article is to touch on some of the more salient points.

We might be more aware of the friendship if Swinburne had the appeal that both Rossetti and Morris possess for a modern audience. Not only does he lack the practical involvement in the visual arts which is so crucial in this context; as a poet, he projects a popular image which, however mistaken, is off-putting. He is seen as an exponent of windy rhetoric, lost in a maze of abstruse erudition, and, perhaps most damaging of all, guilty of fundamental insincerity – the point that Morris made in 1882 when he confessed that, despite their early intimacy, he ‘never could really sympathise with Swinburne’s work. It always seemed to me to be founded on literature, not on nature’.² As a man, moreover, Swinburne is elusive. An exotic, mercurial figure, engaging one moment, tiresome the next, we never feel we ‘know’ him as we do his peers. Edmund Gosse put his finger on the problem when he wrote that ‘he was not quite like a human being’ at all.³ True, his private life has those colourful aspects that are so integral to Pre-Raphaelite legend: his obsession with flagellation and sado-masochism; his bizarre liaison with the equestrienne Adah Menken; his chronic alcoholism; his extraordinary acceptance of slippered domesticity with Watts-Dunton at The Pines. But none of this quite has the resonance of Rossetti’s tortured love-life, Millais’s relationship with the
Ruskin's, Simeon Solomon's arrest in a public urinal, or Burne-Jones's head-over-heels affair with Maria Zambaco.

The problem of focus is compounded by lack of evidence. There was clearly a large correspondence between painter and poet, but Burne-Jones burnt Swinburne's letters in the summer of 1890 ('such brilliant ones... that I was loth to let them go'), and it seems likely that many of his own have been destroyed. Nonetheless, enough from both parties survive to shed valuable light on the relationship. More than twenty from Swinburne are included in Cecil Lang's edition of his collected letters, and a dozen from Burne-Jones remain unpublished in the British Library and the Brotherton Collection at the University of Leeds.

The two men's backgrounds could hardly have been more different. Swinburne came from a large family with the highest aristocratic connections, and had spent his childhood running wild at country houses in Northumberland, Sussex and the Isle of Wight. Burne-Jones had grown up in the commercial heart of Birmingham, the only child of a middle-class widower struggling to make a living as a carver and gilder. These early experiences coloured their respective approaches to their art, which in some ways were diametrically opposed. Swinburne's response to nature was so ardent that he is often compared to Wordsworth. His vision is highly dramatic, whether in terms of descriptions of natural phenomena, violence of human emotion, or simply literary form. Burne-Jones, on the other hand, went so far as to say that he 'hated the country'. His work, as Henry James acutely observed, is the product of 'a complete studio existence, with doors and windows closed', while in character it is static and emotionally tightly controlled.

But the friends also had much in common. The social and intellectual cohesiveness of the Pre-Raphaelite circle should never be underestimated. The crucial example in this case is the parallel relationship the two men had to Rossetti. Each complemented an aspect of their hero's dual genius, and there was even a touch of rivalry involved. Never was Swinburne closer to Rossetti than during the period in 1869-70 when he was helping him prepare his poems for publication, and to ease their passage into the world by eulogising them in the Fortnightly Review. Morris was also penning a review, and Burne-Jones confessed to Swinburne that he was 'jealous' of this opportunity to express their devotion: 'I wish I could praise him too'.

None of this would have counted for much if they had not had a genuine respect for each other's talents. Morris's misgivings about Swinburne as a poet were reciprocated. 'His Muse is like Homer's Trojan women...', Swinburne told Rossetti when the third volume of The Earthly Paradise appeared in December 1869, 'drags her robes as she walks;... my ear hungers for more force and variety of sound'. But no such reservations marred his friendship with Burne-Jones. When Tristram of Lyonesse was published in 1882, the artist wrote to him: 'nothing you ever did or that ever was done is more to my heart than this last poem of yours. I cannot tell you how glorious I think it.' Nor was he just being polite. 'Swinburne is a splendid artist', he told his assistant T. M. Rooke in 1896, 'he can go to the heart of the matter... in a masterly way'.

Swinburne was equally enthusiastic about Burne-Jones's painting. He was delighted when Ruskin praised it in a Slade lecture, claiming that no-one had hitherto said anything so 'perfectly apt and adequate', and he bitterly regretted
his inability to think of a ‘neat and appropriate’ title for ‘that glorious and fascinating picture’ known to us today as *The Depths of the Sea* (private collection). ¹³ So regular are the paean of praise on both sides that it would be easy to dismiss them as a classic case of mutual admiration. This, however, would be a mistake. Burne-Jones also told Rooke that he thought Swinburne ‘hurt himself’ as a poet by repetition,¹⁴ and it may well be that if we had more evidence we should find Swinburne expressing criticism of Burne-Jones.

Swinburne never failed to send his friend a presentation copy of his books, and he often invited him to the readings which he gave to selected guests. ‘There is not one fellow alive . . . that I should be half so glad to see’, he wrote when planning to read *Erechtheus* shortly before its publication in 1876.¹⁵ Equally, Burne-Jones could be confident that any praise from Swinburne was based on what the poet himself called ‘a sincere and studious love’ of art.¹⁶ Swinburne had been brought up with pictures. His family owned fine Old Masters, and his grandfather, Sir John Swinburne, whom he greatly revered as a boy, had been painted by Gainsborough and known Turner and Mulready. In the 1860s Swinburne studied pictures avidly in Paris and Italy, and his genuine understanding of the subject found literary expression. Both his book on Blake and his essay on Old Master drawings in the *Uffizi* were important pioneering contributions to their respective fields, while his review of the Royal Academy of 1868 is full of perceptive comment.

Art, poetry and mutual friends were not the only ground in common. Burne-Jones never went as far as Swinburne in toying with atheism, but both had a withering contempt for established religion. Moreover, in early life at least their politics were very similar. When Charles Eliot Norton described Burne-Jones in 1869 as ‘a strong, almost a bitter, Republican’, he might, ‘almost’ apart, have been referring to Swinburne.¹⁷ For both poet and painter, political views were inseparable from their love of Italy, and it is unfortunate that Swinburne’s plan to introduce his friend to Mazzini never seems to have materialised.¹⁸

The most vivid image to emerge from the correspondence is that of two clever men, England’s most learned poet after Milton and undoubtedly her most erudite painter, in intellectual communion. If Burne-Jones’s painting is, to quote Henry James again, ‘a reminiscence of Oxford’,¹⁹ how much more so is his correspondence with Swinburne. They are constantly lending one another books, and Burne-Jones can usually be relied on to supply his friend with an elusive literary reference. In one letter Swinburne pays tribute to Burne-Jones’s knowledge of Greek, no mean compliment from a man who was so good a Greek scholar himself that he had been known to correct even the great Benjamin Jowett.²⁰

Nowhere is this cleverness more apparent than in the correspondents’ humour, the acute sense of the absurd that each possessed, and which perhaps did more than anything to sustain their friendship. Swinburne’s letters in particular are, as Burne-Jones put it, ‘full of jest’,²¹ displaying to the full the writer’s gift for parody. Few are without their quota of Gambese or Micawberese, a reflection of the friends’ shared passion for Dickens, while many slide effortlessly into an overblown Augustan prose, replete with classical allusions, that went back, as Swinburne reminded Georgie Burne-Jones in 1884, to early days ‘when we used to talk Johnsonese together: (and when . . . you read the Life with Ned, for the first time)’.²² In March the previous year, for instance, he had written to suggest a visit
to The Grange with his sisters. Explaining that they were ‘genuine and fervent admirers of your glorious work’, he wrote:

perhaps you would give me the great pleasure of bringing them to see in private – shall I say, the fons et (if I may be allowed that familiar and endearing phrase) origo of those revelations from what in classic (if not Pagan) phrase might be called the adytum – or shall we say penetralia? – of the shrine whence of late no emanations have (so to speak) illumined the public.23

All this was innocent enough, but at least in the early years the badinage would often take a more Rabelaisian turn. ‘My dear but infamous pore’, Burne-Jones wrote to Swinburne some time in the early 1860s:

What a dreadful gift was yr last letter ... it lies before me now with its respectable edge of black and its wicked contents like ... a sinful clergyman. To the Jewjube [their mutual friend Simeon Solomon] I read it all, & our enjoyment was such that we spent a whole morning in making pictures for you, such as Tiberius would have given provinces for – but sending them seemed dangerous & might be inopportune & so we burnt them – one I shall repeat for you – it was my own poor idea not altogether valueless I trust – a clergyman of the established church is seen lying in an ecstatic dream in the foreground – above him a lady is seen plunging from a trap door in the ceiling about to impale herself upon him.24

There is also a revealing group of letters written by Swinburne to Burne-Jones in 1867, arranging ‘jolly evenings’ for themselves and his friend George Powell, the homosexual Welsh squire who exercised a malign influence on the poet in the 1860s and 1870s;25 and others were probably comparable to the notorious letters, now in the British Library, which he wrote about the same time to another sinister friend in common, Charles Augustus Howell. Anything of this kind, however, must have been consigned to the flames by Burne-Jones in 1890, and no doubt most of the scatological letters and drawings that he himself sent to Swinburne have also been quietly removed from the gaze of posterity. The drawings he is said to have made on the Menken affair turn out, alas, to be by another hand.26

The first scenes in the friendship are the most familiar. Swinburne, aged eighteen, had gone up to Balliol in January 1856, and the meeting with Rossetti and his two acolytes took place in November the following year in the Oxford Union, where the artists were painting the famous but ill-starred murals. Swinburne was to recall that he met ‘all three of them on the same occasion’,27 that the introduction was effected by George Birkbeck Hill, a fellow undergraduate who was later to edit Boswell, and that Rossetti ‘almost instantly asked me to sit (or stand) to him – but the intended “fresco” was never even begun’.28 Burne-Jones and Morris had only recently left Exeter College, but their early ambition to enter the Church had long since been undermined by their reading of Carlyle and Ruskin, while their meeting with Rossetti in 1856 had finally demolished any lingering doubts about devoting their lives to art. Although they accepted Rossetti as their undisputed leader, he himself was not yet thirty, and together they had experienced a heady
sense of youthful solidarity, creating a cult of female beauty based on the most romantic literary conceits, and showing utter contempt for artistic or social convention. Their choice of the _Morte d'Arthur_ as the subject of the murals was significant, since Malory, despite Tennyson's popularising, was still a minority taste. Oxford, moreover, was teeming with fogeys whom it was a positive duty to shock.

The advent of the alarmingly precocious Swinburne, with his jerky movements and mop of flaming hair, brought a frenzied intensity to a situation already overcharged. On one occasion he and Morris are described as ‘mad and deafening with excitement’,\(^{29}\) and Swinburne himself recounted how he and Burne-Jones, after work one evening in the Union, argued with two friends about

our idea of Heaven, viz. a rose-garden full of stunners. Atrocities of an appalling nature were uttered on the other side. We became so fierce that two respectable members of the University — entering to see the pictures — stood mute and looked at us. We spoke just then of kisses in Paradise, and expounded our ideas on the celestial development of that necessity of life; and after listening five minutes to our language, they literally fled from the room! Conceive our mutual ecstasy of delight.\(^{30}\)

No more revealing picture exists of the circle at this date, intoxicated with their own brilliance, self-consciously at war with the philistine, and reveling in the paradox that the passionate conviction with which they held their views did not preclude an element of tongue-in-cheek.

Burne-Jones returned to London early in 1858, but the friends kept in touch. A letter he wrote to Swinburne in August 1859 is still concerned with Oxford affairs. Addressing him as ‘Dear little Carrots’, he asks him to supply ‘legends’ for the scenes in the St. Frideswide window he is designing for the Cathedral at Christ Church. He then gives a trenchant account of their undergraduate friend Edwin Hatch, now ordained and about to leave for Canada ‘as Dean, professor and I don’t know what else’ on the ‘enormous income’ of £600, ‘cheaply got at a year’s outlay in cant and humbug’.\(^{31}\) A year later Swinburne himself left Oxford, his studies cut short by a riding accident, and settled in London. Burne-Jones had married his boyhood sweetheart, Georgiana Macdonald, in June, and they were living in Russell Place in the heart of bohemian Bloomsbury. Swinburne took rooms nearby at 16 Grafton Street, Fitzroy Square, thus enabling them, as Georgie recalled, to see ‘a great deal of him; sometimes twice or three times in a day he would come in, bringing his poems hot from his heart and certain of welcome and a hearing at any hour’.\(^{32}\)

This daily intercourse is vividly reflected in Burne-Jones’s work. The triptych showing the adoration of the shepherds and the magi which he painted for St Paul’s Church, Brighton, in 1861 (Tate Gallery) contains likenesses of himself, Georgie, Morris and Swinburne, who appears in the unlikely role of a bagpipe-playing shepherd. There is also the closest connection between some of his early watercolours and Swinburne’s contemporary poetry and prose. In his well-known picture _Sidonia von Bork_ (Tate Gallery) of 1860 he echoes the poet’s ghoulith obsession with Renaissance crimes. Wilhelm Meinhold’s gothic romance _Sidonia von Bork, die Klosterhexe_, a gruesome account of witchcraft in sixteenth-century
Pomerania, was an even more effective weapon with which to beat the philistine than the *Morte d'Arthur*. Published in Germany in 1847, and in an English translation by Lady Wilde two years later, it excited the whole circle, including Morris, who re-issued it in 1893 at the Kelmscott Press. No-one, however, was a keener devotee than Swinburne, who regarded the book as 'a real work of genius', albeit 'very horrible, the most horrible in literature'. It was in fact only one of a group of such horror stories that gripped his imagination at this date. He was already a finished student of the bloodier productions of the Elizabethan dramatists, and he was busily writing *The Chronicle of Tebaldeo Tebaldei*, based on the life of his 'blessedest pet', Lucretia Borgia.

Swinburne's preoccupation with the relationship between love and cruelty or pain was not limited to Renaissance subjects. With his Northumbrian background, he identified closely with the border ballads which so often treat these themes, and in an early play, *Rosamond*, he re-cast the story of Rosamond Clifford, the mistress of Henry II, who, according to legend, was murdered by the king's jealous wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Here again Burne-Jones offers visual equivalents. His *Clerk Saunders* of 1861 (Tate Gallery) illustrates a particularly sadistic ballad, and a group of watercolours of 1862-3 are inspired by the tale of Fair Rosamund.

Yet another watercolour, *Laus Veneris* (1861; private collection), treats the Tannhäuser legend that is the subject of Swinburne's well-known poem of the same name. It is true that Swinburne evokes more powerfully a mood of steamy sensuality, partly because of his different medium, partly because his vision is inherently more dramatic. But Burne-Jones uses all the same imagery, and conveys in his own terms a sense of stiflingly overheated, claustrophobic space. Even the cat which appears curled up in the painting has its counterpart in the panther, tiger and serpent which figure as symbols of passion and languor in the poem.

Many of these themes appealed to members of the circle other than Swinburne and Burne-Jones. Rossetti attempted Borgia subjects; Bell Scott, Arthur Hughes, Rossetti and Frederick Sandys were all drawn to the story of Fair Rosamund; William Morris made the Tannhäuser legend the subject of one of the narrative poems in *The Earthly Paradise*. None of this, however, weakens the link between Burne-Jones and Swinburne. Indeed Swinburne himself set the seal on the connection when he published *Poems and Ballads* in 1866 with a dedication to Burne-Jones.

Even without this formality, the book would abound in comparisons. Here is 'Laus Veneris', and the opening poem, 'A Ballad of Life', evokes an image of a beautiful woman standing in 'a place of wind and flowers', holding 'a little cithern by the strings' and attended by personifications of Fear, Shame and Lust. It is an astonishingly exact reconstruction of a Burne-Jones painting of the period, and the woman's wistful expression, 'sad with glad things gone', is precisely the one he gives to so many of his figures. Harry Quilter was right when he wrote that *Poems and Ballads* 'was only the poetical expression of Pre-Raphaelitism as exemplified in Burne-Jones's pictures'. The book casts its shadow forward, too. It was greeted by a storm of moral outrage; critics condemned it as decadent, 'unclean', the product of a 'putrescent imagination', and there were threats of a prosecution for obscenity. Some of this obloquy still attached itself to Burne-Jones's later oil version of his painting *Laus Veneris* (Newcastle), exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in
1878. Frederick Wedmore, writing that year in the magazine *Temple Bar*, found the figure of Venus ‘disagreeable’ and ‘offensive’, the artist having painted her ‘so wan and death-like, so stricken with disease of the soul, so eaten up and gnawed away with disappointment and desire’. Henry James, poking fun at the whole situation, observed that the figure had ‘the face and aspect of a person who has had what the French call an “intimate” acquaintance with life’.

A full account of the relationship between Swinburne and Burne-Jones would examine other parallels dating from the 1860s. It would consider the friends’ contributions to the prevailing classicism, Burne-Jones’s in terms of his study of the antique, particularly the Elgin Marbles, Swinburne’s in *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) and its sequel *Erechtheus* (1876), both verse dramas in a ‘pure Greek’ form. Burne-Jones considered *Atalanta* ‘a masterpiece. The thought in it is momentous, and the rhythm goes on with such a rush that it’s enough to carry the world away’ – not perhaps a strikingly original comment, but significant in this context.

Closely related to mid-Victorian classicism was the emergence of the Aesthetic ideal, the cult of beauty as an end in itself, divorced from didactic or narrative associations. Burne-Jones toyed with this idea and must have discussed it with Swinburne, who shows a clear grasp of it in assessing a picture by Albert Moore in his review of the Royal Academy of 1868. ‘The melody of colour, the symphony of form’, he writes, ‘is complete: one more beautiful thing is achieved, one more delight is born into the world; and its meaning is beauty; and its reason for being is to be’. Moore’s friend Whistler, of course, was the purest exponent of Aesthetic values, and it is interesting that Swinburne both introduced Burne-Jones to the American at a dinner party in July 1862, and seems to have taken him to his studio for the first time three years later.

Then there is the fascinating case of ‘Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence’, Swinburne’s pioneering article on Old Master drawings published in the *Fortnightly Review* in July 1868. It appeared just about the time that Burne-Jones was beginning to cultivate the Florentine style that reached a climax in his work of the 1870s, and we are constantly reminded of him as Swinburne expatiates on Michelangelo’s *teste divine*, analyses in proto-Paterian terms the ‘fair strange faces’ of Leonardo and his followers, describes mythological and allegorical subjects as painted by the Florentines, or draws parallels between Benozzo Gozzoli and Chaucer.

With so many straws in the wind, caution is clearly required when it comes to questions of priority and influence. Occasionally there is a hint, but in general we are talking about individual expressions of shared ideas. In one instance, however, Swinburne leaves us in no doubt. Writing to Burne-Jones in November 1869, he observed that in embarking on *Tristram of Lyonesse*, an epic treatment of the famous legend which he had meditated since Oxford days and intended, as Gosse puts it, to make ‘the very top-stone of his poetical monument’, he was ‘stimulated’ by ‘the thought of your painting and Wagner’s music’. In fact the poem as it eventually materialised was one of Swinburne’s most violently elemental and emotionally charged productions, exploiting to excess the themes of love and the sea. Nothing could be more remote from Burne-Jones’s work in spirit, or illustrate more vividly the fundamental difference in their conceptual approach. But Swinburne continued to see it in relation to his friend’s painting. When
Tristram finally appeared in 1882, he wrote to Burne-Jones: ‘when I had finished writing it, it came into my head that you would like it, and, if I may say so without seeming extra self-conceited, that it had something in common with your paintings in – shall we say, Tone?’

Whether or not Burne-Jones agreed with this assessment, he did, as we have seen, ‘like’ the poem, and his delight probably included a sense of relief that Swinburne had returned to the romantic themes that had engaged them both during their early, Pre-Raphaelite, phase. Having been so close during the 1860s, the friends had drifted apart. Swinburne had moved into areas which had less immediate appeal for Burne-Jones, putting his poetry at the service of the republican dawn which he hailed so ecstatically in Italy, France and elsewhere, and becoming increasingly involved in literary criticism. On a social level, too, the old ties had weakened. Swinburne was entering what Gosse called his ‘desert years’, the long period in the 1870s when his erratic lifestyle led to illness, depression, and the deterioration of many of his former friendships. He was also often away from London, partly because those who tried to help him were anxious to remove him from the baneful influences of the capital. The climax of these efforts came in 1879, when Theodore Watts-Dunton carried him off bodily to Putney. There, restored to health and apparently happy, he was to live for another thirty years, but at the cost of almost total isolation.

In fact Swinburne’s friendship with Burne-Jones did not suffer as much as many, and there is never the slightest hint that either the artist or his high-minded wife took a censorious view of their friend’s dissipations. Swinburne attended the house-warming when the Burne-Joneses moved to The Grange, Fulham, in 1867, and Gosse records how he, Burne-Jones and Arthur O’Shaughnessy spent an evening with Swinburne in 1873, hearing him read Bothwell, the second of his trilogy of plays on the theme of Mary Queen of Scots. ‘Lighted by the two great serpentine candlesticks he had brought with him from the Lizard’, the poet ‘shrieked, thundered, whispered, and fluted the whole of the enormous second act’. Nor was Burne-Jones one of the potentially dangerous friends whom Watts-Dunton excluded from Swinburne’s life after the move to The Pines.

Correspondence also continued, although its tone became more sedate. Burne-Jones had always been ‘My dearest Ned’ to Swinburne, but the artist no longer addressed his friend as ‘little Carrots’; now it was ‘my dear Swinburne’ or, towards the end, ‘dearest Hadji’, the name by which Swinburne was always known in his family. Politics had become a more divisive issue than formerly, and controversial subjects such as the Eastern Question, Mr Gladstone and Irish Home Rule – not to mention the baronetcy which Burne-Jones had received from Gladstone – were tactfully avoided. Instead, the friends discussed a threat to Keats’s grave in Rome, an article on Burne-Jones by Swinburne’s Russian friend André Raffalovich, or a likeness of Walt Whitman that was being sent to Swinburne by Burne-Jones at the behest of Oscar Wilde. In 1892 Burne-Jones sent Swinburne a photograph of himself with his infant grand-daughter Angela Mackail, well aware that it would appeal to a poet who by now had often celebrated his love of babies.

Humour still played a large part in the friendship, and there are even echoes of the old ribaldry. Burne-Jones promises to let Swinburne know if he is troubled with ‘theological problems’, or sends him a press cutting about The End of Sodom,
a play with 'a closing scene of somewhat equivocal character' that had been refused a licence in Berlin. Swinburne counters with extracts from a 'tragic drama' on the subject of Queen Victoria and John Brown, inspired by Her Majesty's More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands, which appeared with a dedication to the memory of her faithful servant in 1884. But here again a more mellow note is struck. Instead of schoolboyish drawings of ladies 'impaling' themselves on sexually aroused clergymen, Burne-Jones now offers the following: 'Georgie had a seamstress here yesterday who amid much gabble during the day told her of a friend she had lately lost. Georgie said sympathetically “Did she die suddenly?” “As suddenly Mum as I sit here”, said that seamstress, who had been sitting there for 4 or 5 hours & came on purpose to sit'.

In the last few years of Burne-Jones's life circumstances breathed new life into the friendship. In 1890 he found himself drawing the young Polish pianist Paderewski, and wrote: 'He looks so like Swinburne looked at twenty that I could cry over past things . . . it makes me fairly jump'. He also received a commission from Isabel Swinburne, the poet's sister, to paint a 'little picture for the pillar in [a] country church'. But what really brought the friends together was a sense that they were survivors in a shrinking world. Rossetti had died as long ago at 1882, and now another crucial link with the past was severed. When the Kelmscott Chaucer was published in May 1896, Morris and Burne-Jones gave Swinburne a copy to commemorate their joint friendship of almost forty years; but within five months, Morris was dead. This event was particularly traumatic for Burne-Jones, and the letters he wrote Swinburne from the time Morris entered his final illness are full of affection and tenderness. Signing himself 'always your ancient unchanging Ned', he confesses that he works 'with a heavy heart . . ., as if it didn't matter whether I finished my work or not. It's such a new world, Lord bless us') He bitterly regrets that they meet so seldom, and explains that, though he is 'a villainous correspondent', he frequently sends Swinburne 'spiritual letters' that 'never stoop to gross pen & ink'. Swinburne replied in his most delightful vein, comparing them to two Church fathers. 'I also often write letters and send messages and make remarks to you – such as S. Jerome might have exchanged with S. Augustine (if they were contemporaries – and I dare say they were quite capable of being so). A month after Morris's death, Swinburne lost his mother, and in writing to thank Burne-Jones for his letter of condolence, he stressed the comfort of 'such old and dear and true friendship as yours'.

It was against this background that Burne-Jones decided to make a public statement of his love and respect by writing a dedication to Swinburne on his painting Love Leading the Pilgrim (Tate Gallery) when this was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1897. This late, emotionally restrained, and tonally restricted work may not, as Graham Robertson remarked, have been the most appropriate tribute to so brilliant and passionate a creature as Swinburne, even in his tamed old age. But the poet was deeply touched, and, as it turned out, the gesture had only just been made in time. In the early hours of 17 June 1898 Burne-Jones died suddenly of a heart attack. Swinburne was devastated, writing to his sister Alice of 'the shock of so great and so utterly unexpected a sorrow'. He did not attend the funeral, but Alice sent a wreath inscribed with some of his verses, and he kept in touch with Georgie and allowed her to quote his letters in her Memorials of her
husband, published in 1904. His own memorial appeared the same year, when he dedicated his last collection of poems, *A Channel Passage*, to the memory of both Burne-Jones and Morris.

NOTES

5 I am grateful to Christopher Sheppard for supplying me with copies of the latter at very short notice.
6 *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, op. cit., I, p. 211.
9 *The Swinburne Letters*, op. cit., II, p. 68.
10 British Library, Ashley 2752, ff.29-30.
13 ibid., V, p. 140.
14 *Burne-Jones Talking*, op. cit., p. 82.
18 See *The Swinburne Letters*, op. cit., I, p. 242; letter to William Michael Rossetti, 29 April 1867.
22 *The Swinburne Letters*, op. cit., V, p. 53.
23 ibid., V, pp. 7-8.
24 British Library, Ashley A.3871, ff.34-5. The letter is addressed from 62 Great Russell Street, which dates it to 1861-4.
26 British Library, Ashley 3428.
27 *The Swinburne Letters*, op. cit., V, p. 177.
28 ibid., VI, p. 92. This seems to correct Lady Burne-Jones, who states that the introduction was made by another undergraduate friend, Edwin Hatch (*Memorials*, I, p. 163).
31 British Library, Ashley 941, ff.1-2; partly printed in *The Swinburne Letters*, I, p. 25. Hatch was the recipient of Swinburne’s letter about ‘kisses in Paradise’.
37 *The Painter’s Eye*, op. cit., p. 162.
38 Burne-Jones Talking, op. cit., p. 56.
39 *Essays and Studies*, op. cit., p. 361.
41 *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, op. cit., p. 262.
43 ibid., op. cit., IV, p. 283.
46 Brotherton Collection.
47 *The Swinburne Letters*, op. cit., V, p. 54.
48 Brotherton Collection. The letter can be dated to 1882.
50 Letter of 1896, Brotherton Collection.
51 British Library, Ashley 941, f.9, and Brotherton Collection.
52 Brotherton Collection and British Library, Ashley 941, f.6.
54 ibid., VI, p. 118.
56 Burne-Jones’s letter proposing the idea is in the British Library (Ashley 941, ff.8-9); Swinburne’s reply is in *The Swinburne Letters*, op. cit., VI, p. 122.
57 *The Swinburne Letters*, op. cit., VI, p. 128.