

*Modern Critical Views*

# THE PRE-RAPHAELITE POETS

Edited and with an introduction by  
**HAROLD BLOOM**



---

*Modern Critical Views*

---

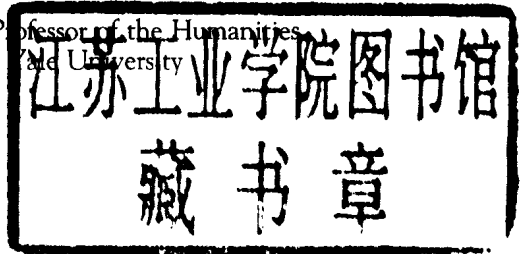
# PRE-RAPHAELITE POETS

---

*Edited with an introduction by*

Harold Bloom

Sterling Professor of the Humanities  
Yale University



1986

CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS

New York

New Haven

Philadelphia

PROJECT EDITORS: Emily Bestler, James Uebbing  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Maria Behan  
EDITORIAL COORDINATOR: Karyn Gullen Browne  
EDITORIAL STAFF: Laura Ludwig, Perry King, Bert Yaeger  
DESIGN: Susan Lusk

Cover illustration by Denise Satter

Copyright © 1986 by Chelsea House Publishers, a division of Chelsea House Educational Communications, Inc.

Introduction copyright © 1986 by Harold Bloom

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed and bound in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

The Pre-Raphaelite poets.  
(Modern critical views)  
Bibliography: p.  
Includes index.

1. English poetry—19th century—History and criticism—Addresses, essays, lectures.

2. Preraphaelitism in literature—Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Bloom, Harold. II. Title. III. Series.

PR595.P7P7 1986 821'.8'09 85-28053  
ISBN 0-87754-667-3

### **Chelsea House Publishers**

Harold Steinberg, Chairman and Publisher

Susan Lusk, Vice President

A Division of Chelsea House Educational Communications, Inc.

133 Christopher Street, New York, NY 10014

345 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, CT 06510

5014 West Chester Pike, Edgemont, PA 19028

## Editor's Note

This volume brings together what, in its editor's judgment, is the best criticism now available upon the major Pre-Raphaelite poets: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Meredith, Christina Rossetti, William Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne and Coventry Patmore.

The editor's "Introduction" attempts a brief synoptic view of this school's poetic achievement. In the case of each poet, the essays are printed in a thematic sequence, rather than in the chronological order of their publication.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti has five essays devoted to him, beginning with John Hollander's superb "Human Music," at once the finest critical description of Rossetti's verse, and another chapter in Hollander's life-long charting of the trope of music in Anglo-American poetry. A sensitive and acute reading of the dichotomies in *Jenny* by Lise Rodgers is followed by G. L. Hersey's examination of Rossetti's linking of poem and painting in a double work of art. Rossetti's two most famous achievements, "The Blessed Damozel" and the sonnet sequence, *The House of Life*, receive imaginative analyses by George Y. Trail and Joseph H. Gardner, respectively.

Two essays are given to the poetry of George Meredith, who remains better known and more highly esteemed for his novels, *The Egoist* in particular. *Modern Love*, Meredith's major sequence of quasi-sonnets (sixteen lines, rather than fourteen) is illuminated by the overview of John Lucas. The more problematical nature poetry is profoundly investigated and judged in Carol L. Bernstein's analysis.

Christina Rossetti's poetry also receives two essays, Jerome J. McGann's superb and comprehensive study, and the feminist analysis of *Goblin Market*, both pioneering and persuasive, by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. William Morris is accorded three essays: Carole Silver's informed reading of the major poems in *The Defence of Guenevere*, and two recent and learned approaches to *The Earthly Paradise* by Blue Calhoun and Charlotte H. Oberg.

Swinburne, like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a major poet now largely neglected, is given five critical studies, beginning with Ian Fletcher's extraordinarily apt reading of *Atalanta in Calydon*. Pauline Fletcher's superb account of Swinburne's natural sublime of ocean and sea-garden and

mountain is followed by Leslie Brisman's subtly Shelleyan reading of "Anactoria," by Camille A. Paglia's massively original exegesis of lesbianism, sado-masochism, and other instinctual ambivalences in "Anactoria," "Dolores," "Faustine" and "Laus Veneris" and by Peter M. Sacks's moving meditation upon "Ave Atque Vale."

The volume concludes with an erudite reading of aspects of Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House*, by Mario Praz. Unfortunately, there is no good criticism yet written of Patmore's best poetry, the sublime odes of *The Unknown Eros*. But that is another indication of how much remains to be done in the critical appreciation of Pre-Raphaelite poetry and the modes related to it.

# Contents

Editor's Note . . . . .	ix
Introduction . . . . . <i>Harold Bloom</i> . . . . .	1
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI	
Human Music . . . . . <i>John Hollander</i> . . . . .	7
The Book and the Flower: Rationality and Sensuality in <i>Jenny</i> . . . . . <i>Lise Rodgers</i> . . . . .	21
St. Cecily and the Lady of the Tomb: Rossetti's Double Works of Art . . . . . <i>G. L. Hersey</i> . . . . .	37
Time in "The Blessed Damozel" . . . . . <i>George Y. Trail</i> . . . . .	43
Rossetti as Wordsmith: The "Newborn Death" Sonnets of <i>The House of Life</i> . . . . . <i>Joseph H. Gardner</i> . . . . .	53
GEORGE MEREDITH	
Meredith as Poet: <i>Modern Love</i> . . . . . <i>John Lucas</i> . . . . .	67
"To Find a Plot in Nature" . . . . . <i>Carol L. Bernstein</i> . . . . .	77
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI	
The Poetry of Christina Rossetti . . . . . <i>Jerome J. McGann</i> . . . . .	97
Goblin Market: The Aesthetics of Renunciation <i>Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar</i> . . . . .	123
WILLIAM MORRIS	
In Defense of <i>Guenevere</i> . . . . . <i>Carole Silver</i> . . . . .	133
The Structure of <i>The Earthly Paradise</i> . . . . . <i>Blue Calhoun</i> . . . . .	155
<i>The Earthly Paradise</i> : The Apology and Prologue as Overture . . . . . <i>Charlotte H. Oberg</i> . . . . .	165
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE	
<i>Atalanta in Calydon</i> . . . . . <i>Ian Fletcher</i> . . . . .	179
The Sublime Recovered . . . . . <i>Pauline Fletcher</i> . . . . .	185
Of Lips Divine and Calm: Swinburne and the Language of Shelleyan Love . . . . . <i>Leslie Brisman</i> . . . . .	205
Nature, Sex, and Decadence . . . . . <i>Camille A. Paglia</i> . . . . .	219
"Ave Atque Vale" . . . . . <i>Peter M. Sacks</i> . . . . .	239

COVENTRY PATMORE

The Epic of the Everyday:  
    *The Angel in the House* . . . . . Mario Praz . . . . . 261

Chronology . . . . . 283

Contributors . . . . . 293

Bibliography . . . . . 295

Acknowledgments . . . . . 301

Index . . . . . 303



## Introduction

As a literary term, "Pre-Raphaelite" is almost meaningless, yet it survives because we need some name for the cluster of poets who are the overt Romantics among the Victorians. Most accurately, Pre-Raphaelite poetry was written by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his circle, to which we can add other figures for convenience, such as FitzGerald because Rossetti "discovered" and popularized his version of *The Rubáiyát*, Patmore because he published in the Pre-Raphaelite magazine, *The Germ*, and Meredith because his poetry has deep affinities with Rossetti's. Christina Rossetti is here for obvious reasons, though her devotional verse has not much in common with her brother's poetry. Rossetti himself and Morris are the Pre-Raphaelite poets proper; Swinburne is Shelleyan where they are Keatsian, and their characteristic mode of hard-edged phantasmagoria has little to do with his high rhetoric and polemical zeal. Still, insofar as Swinburne had a home in any poetic school of his age, it was here.

Pre-Raphaelitism started as a Brotherhood of young painters, in September 1848, the founders being William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais (later to elope with Ruskin's neglected wife), and Rossetti. Unhappy (with reason) at mid-century, they sought to change the nature of English painting. Not so much Raphael, but his imitators, had to be rejected, in favor of the example of Pre-Raphaelite artists, the freshness of Gozzoli (c. 1421–97) and other Pisan painters. Like many schools of art, their watchword was the ambiguous "Back to nature!"—which always turns out to mean something rather different. Painters, sculptors, and critics rallied to the three young founders, and a highly confused nonmovement had begun. About the only common characteristic of English Pre-Raphaelite painting was its obsession with naturalistic detail, rendered so artificially as to make it not natural but phantasmagoric. Essentially, Pre-Raphaelite painting failed (with a few brilliant exceptions) but the poetry associated with it did not, because the poetry was the legitimate continuation of a central Romantic current, the daemonic element in Coleridge's poetry and the main achievement of Keats (to some extent, as it had been modified in early Tennyson).

In the mid 'fifties, at Oxford, William Morris and the painter Edward Burne-Jones became Rossetti's disciples, and moved to London to



join him. Also at Oxford, in 1857, Swinburne met Rossetti through Morris and Burne-Jones and began a close, long friendship with the group. Through Swinburne's critical writings (rather than his High Romantic verse) the ideas of the movement, greatly altered, helped produce Pater and the characteristic theory of English Aestheticism, resulting in Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, the poetry of the 'nineties, and the early work of Yeats.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82), though out of favor in our time, seems to this editor the best poet of the Victorian period, after Browning and Tennyson, surpassing Arnold and even Hopkins and Swinburne (greatly undervalued as Swinburne now is).

Rossetti was born in London on May 12, 1828, the son of a Neapolitan refugee scholar and a half-English mother. Educated as an artist, and thinking of himself primarily as a painter, his literary culture was narrow but intense, owing most to Keats for English style, and to Dante and other early Italian poets for thematic procedures. His translations from Dante and allied poets are the finest of their kind in English. His own poetry suffered from the turbulence and irregularity of his life. He could not bear criticism, personal or artistic, and could be described, not unfairly, as a monomaniac, frequently drugged on his characteristic mixture of chloral and whiskey.

Rossetti married his model, the beautiful Elizabeth Siddal, in 1860, after an affair lasting nearly a decade. The marriage was unhappy, and Mrs. Rossetti killed herself after less than two years. Her contrite husband buried his manuscripts with her, and had to exhume them in 1869, when he was preparing his first volume of *Poems* (1870).

In 1857, three years before marrying Elizabeth Siddal, Rossetti had met the other two women in his life, Fanny Cornforth, with whom he lived after the death of Elizabeth, and Jane Burden, who married William Morris in April 1859. The difficult relation between Mrs. Morris and Rossetti was long-lasting, and helped to derange his already overwrought sensibility. Rossetti, when attacked in 1871 by Robert Buchanan (with Swinburne and Morris as fellow victims) as leader of "The Fleshly School of Poetry," reacted with the beginnings of a ghastly persecution mania, which continued until his death on April 14, 1882.

Rossetti is a difficult poet, not only because his art is deliberately committed to sustaining an intensity that precludes mere action, but because the intensity almost invariably is one of baffled passion. Though Rossetti's master was Keats, he was rightly associated with Shelley by Yeats, who observed that the genius of both poets "can hardly stir but to the rejection of Nature." Shelley, though skeptically accepting a prag-

matic dualism of heart and head, quested for a monistic Absolute, but one of his own curious invention, neither Platonic nor Christian. Rossetti, a convinced sensualist, writes a naturalistic poetry that yet rejects natural forms, which is almost an impossibility. His lyrics and sonnets are set in a world that is at once phantasmagoria and nature, giving the effect of an artificial nature. His Blessed Damozel leans down to him from a Heaven where a woman's hair glistens "along her back . . . yellow like ripe corn." It is impossible, amid the forests and fountains in *The House of Life*, to decide whether we stand in the remembered natural world, or in some purgatorial realm heavier and more naturally luxurious than nature could ever have been. Rossetti's symbolic world is oppressive to the spirit, but this oppressiveness is his poetry's unique strength. He gives us neither a vision of nature, as Keats did, nor of a second nature, as Shelley rendered, but a surrealistic or fantastic blend of both, and since all are damned in his mixed realm, he gives us also a wholly oblique, and finally nihilistic, vision of judgment in which we cannot be saved through sensual fulfillment, and yet achieve no lasting release without it.

George Meredith (1828–1909), though deeply affected by Rossetti, is by contrast a more refreshing, more simply naturalistic poet, though of lesser achievement. Never a popular novelist, and still not a poet who has attracted critics, let alone a public, Meredith nevertheless was a master in both mediums. At least three of his novels are still vital—*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), *The Egoist* (1879), *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), as are two of his major poetic works—"Love in the Valley" (1851) and the sequence *Modern Love* (1862).

Meredith was born on February 12, 1828, in Portsmouth, to a family of naval tailors. He had little formal education, gave up an early attempt to study law, and earned his living as a literary journalist and publisher's reader. His early poetry (*Poems*, 1851) had no success, and his marriage to Thomas Love Peacock's daughter Mary ended in 1858 after nine bad years, to be commemorated in *Modern Love*. He then attempted to share a house in London with Rossetti and Swinburne, a quixotic adventure from which he was rescued by his happy second marriage, in 1864. In his later years, as his literary reputation slowly grew, he worked out his own difficult version of a Wordsworthian natural religion. He died on May 18, 1909, still resolute and independent despite years of ill health.

Meredith's poetry is rugged going, because of his Rossetti-like clusters of detail, but he is rhythmically persuasive, open, and passionate compared with Rossetti. He lacks Rossetti's convincing originality, and can sound too much like Rossetti, like Wordsworth, like Keats, but his stature as poet deserves more from criticism than he has as yet received.

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830–94), twelve years younger than her brother, was born in London on December 5, 1830. Educated at home, she composed poetry from an early age, but did not publish her first book until the appearance of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* in 1862. Primarily a devotional poet (except for the powerful *Goblin Market*), she does not sustain comparison with Emily Dickinson, her American contemporary, but can be judged superior to any other woman who wrote poetry in English before the twentieth century.

Having twice declined marriage because of Anglican religious scruples (in 1850 and in 1866), and suffering ill health from middle age on, she gave herself over to a life of seclusion, emphasizing good works and religious meditation. Her poems are as intense as her brother's, but much simpler, being wholly orthodox in their sharp dualism of nature and spirit. Though she lacks dramatic juxtaposition, in which Hopkins abounds, her curious literal-mindedness produces a wholly original kind of devotional poetry, astonishing historically because it gives the effect of being free from self-consciousness—and this in the later nineteenth-century.

William Morris (1834–96), though he wrote a more diffuse poetry than the other Pre-Raphaelites, is a much better poet than his current reputation would suggest. Morris is remembered today more for his personality, energies, Socialist politics, and vision of the arts (in which he followed Ruskin) than for either his verse or prose romances, which is a pity.

Morris was born March 24, 1834, into the family of a wealthy discount broker. After private study, he entered Exeter College, Oxford, where he met Burne-Jones the painter, and the two together became disciples and friends of Rossetti. In 1855, Morris began to write romances in both poetry and prose, which he continued doing, but on and off, throughout the next forty, heroically busy, years of his life. After graduating from Oxford, in 1855, he studied both architecture and painting, and published a superb volume of Pre-Raphaelite poems in *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858). The next year he married Rossetti's beloved Jane Burden, and abandoned poetry for seven years, during which he founded a company whose intent was to reform all the decorative arts of England: furniture, wallpaper, windows, glassware, tapestries, carpets, tiles, and nearly everything else. Morris himself did much of the work, both in designing and manufacturing, and later he triumphantly extended his craftsmanship to the art of bookmaking.

He returned to poetry with the looser, less Pre-Raphaelite than quasi-Chaucerian, narratives of *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) and *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70). A further phase of his poetry, probably his

strongest as narrative alone, came with interest in Icelandic literature, resulting in his translation of the *Volsunga Saga* and his original *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876).

In the 1880's, Morris's Socialism became very active, in organizing, lecturing, and agitating, and resulted in the Socialistic prose romances *The Dream of John Ball* (1888) and *News from Nowhere* (1890). In his last literary phase, until his death in 1896, Morris wrote a series of visionary prose romances, which profoundly influenced Yeats, particularly *The Well at the World's End*, which inspired Yeats's fine play *At the Hawk's Well*.

Morris derives from a whole series of major nineteenth-century poets—Keats, Tennyson, Browning, and Rossetti—but his directness, detachment in depicting savagery, and ability to convey swiftly the effect of violent action are entirely his own, and still unique in the language (a comparison with Robinson Jeffers is not to the American poet's advantage). Medieval poems by Morris are utterly unlike Tennyson's; the blood shed in them is not word painting, and the freedom from intrusive moral judgments is absolute. Morris is one of the very few poets ever who can be criticized for not being ambitious enough. His poems demonstrate more genius than he was willing to concentrate. If his interests had been fewer, his poetry would have sprawled less, and meant more, but he valued his other enterprises at least as much as he cared for his poetry.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), a major lyrical poet now almost totally neglected, was born in London on April 6, 1837, son of an admiral and an earl's daughter. Raised on the Isle of Wight, Swinburne grew up obsessed with the sea (as Whitman did, and for much the same psychic reasons). After attending Eton and Balliol College, Oxford, Swinburne moved to London without taking a degree. A sado-masochist, at times a semi-alcoholic, and his health always uncertain, Swinburne cannot be said to have lived a happy life. But his genius was prodigal, from his best earlier poetry, *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) and *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (1866), through his critical studies of Blake (1868), Shakespeare (1880), Victor Hugo (1886), and Ben Jonson (1889), on to the superb late lyrics of *Poems and Ballads, Third Series* (1889), and *A Channel Passage* (1904). Politically, religiously, and critically, Swinburne followed in the path of Shelley, supporting Mazzini and Italian liberation, prophesying against institutional and historical Christianity, and celebrating the main Romantic tradition of nineteenth-century literature. Unfortunately, Swinburne's psychosexual nature was arrested in development, and his devotion to the Marquis de Sade cannot be accounted one of his prime imaginative virtues. Worn out by the time he was forty-two, he spent his last thirty years at a villa in Putney, nursed by

Theodore Watts-Dunton, a solicitor with literary ambitions. Swinburne died at Putney, on April 10, 1909, and was buried on the Isle of Wight.

Though he never wholly swerved away from Shelley's influence, Swinburne is an astonishingly original stylist, absurdly deprecated in a critical age that remains afraid of high rhetoric. His faults are too obvious to be interesting; his splendors are not so obvious as they at first may seem. His deliberate self-parodies, like "Poeta Loquitur," leave his negative critics no work to do, but they have gone on anyway, parodying Swinburne's parodies of himself. Swinburne was very nearly a great critic, though usually a touch too enthusiastic and overwrought; and his best poems, like *Hertha* and the elegy for Baudelaire, are intellectually more powerful than any Victorian poetry except Browning's. Yet the case for Swinburne is finally not to be based upon the power of the philosophical materialism of his poetic mind, authentic as that is, for here he compares poorly with his master, Shelley. The prime virtue of Swinburne's poetry, in the context that matters, of nineteenth-century verse, is the element of significant variety that it introduces. Faced by the problem of every new poet in the Romantic, that is to say, Modern tradition, Swinburne radically made it new, and wrote a poetry that does extend the circumference of literary experience.

Coventry Patmore (1823–96), remembered today mostly because of his friendships with Hopkins, Tennyson, and the Pre-Raphaelites, is one of the most neglected of good poets in the Victorian period. Born in 1823, he was a spoiled child, and never entirely grew up. He married in 1847, and celebrated his connubial bliss in the dreadful but very popular long poem, *The Angel in the House* (1854–62). Mrs. Patmore died in 1862, and under the influence of his second wife, whom he married in 1864, he converted to Roman Catholicism. His good poems are the odes of *The Unknown Eros* (1877). His complex, distasteful but compelling blend of sexuality and mystical religion is also manifested in the posthumously published prose aphorisms and essays. He died in 1896, largely forgotten, yet he has attracted a small but steady audience since.

JOHN HOLLANDER

## *Human Music*

It is nearly a hundred years since the death of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and for something like the last sixty of these he has been, like his younger friend Algernon Charles Swinburne, a remarkably underrated poet. This critical neglect was in some measure the result of the anti-romantic stance of literary modernism. Yeats acknowledged Rossetti's central role as a "subconscious influence" on the following generation. But it is precisely Yeats' supposedly utter repudiation of the old adornments of that generation in favor of "walking naked" that remains a central myth of modernist literary history. Ezra Pound praised Rossetti, early on, as a translator and for making available medieval materials. Certainly Rossetti's very great sestina, translated from Dante Alighieri's so-called "stony sestina" to the Lady Pietra degli Scrovegni, with its ringing penultimate stanza

Yet shall the streams turn back and climb the hills  
Before Love's flame in this damp wood and green  
Burn, as it burns within a youthful lady,  
For my sake, who would sleep away in stone  
My life, or feed like beasts upon the grass,  
Only to see her garments cast a shade.

is more powerful than any of the modernist poet's versions of the poetry of Guido Cavalcanti. Pound writes of Rossetti, whether in blame or praise, as if the latter were nothing but a stylist and a literary historian, from whom some good things could be learned and some bad ones avoided. Pound writes as if imagination were only rhetorical ingenuity, as if the substance of poetry and its mythologies of love and death, self and other,

quest and loss, only existed in the diseases of bad critical discourse. But the essence of what Pound is blind to in his work Rossetti reveals, brilliantly and darkly at once, in a miniature *ars poetica*, a poem of poetic craft. The prefatory sonnet written in 1880 to introduce his major poetic work, *The House of Life*, at first glance purports merely to deal with the sonnet form itself:

A Sonnet is a moment's monument,—  
 Memorial from the Soul's eternity  
 To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,  
 Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,  
 Of its own arduous fulness reverent:  
 Carve it in ivory or in ebony,  
 As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see  
 Its flowering crest impearled and orient.

A Sonnet is a coin: its face reveals  
 The soul,—its converse, to what Power't is due:—  
 Whether for tribute to the august appeals  
 Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue,  
 It serve; or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,  
 In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death.

But this is more than merely an exercise in a genre—the “sonnet-on-the-sonnet”—continued from Wordsworth and Keats. Rossetti's “moment's monument” is the monument *of*, or produced by, a moment's vision and work and also the monument *to* the very brevity of that moment: Rossetti's sonnet is always, no matter what its putative “subject,” the cry of its own occasion. The sculptural fable of art and life is revised from that of a free-standing figure, in the octave, down to the carved relief of a coin, in the self-characterizing sestet. It is an antique coin, still of great value; but as with all ancient coins, the matter of payment for the Stygian ferry creeps into the accounting as it does in Rossetti's closing, his bottom line, as it were, which reveals what had been implicit among the other transactions—with Life and Love—all along. This sonnet, conspicuously reverent “of its own arduous fullness” is about poetry altogether. The epigraph to the sonnet-sequence, *The House of Life*—itself a discontinuous frieze of moments' monuments—is thus a reminder of final costs, of the way in which the whole procession of life itself is always being viewed with an averted gaze.

In its central concern for human meaning, for the existential role of fable in our lives, the miniature bas-relief of Rossetti's coin (cut by the hand of the artist, caressed as art by the hand of the antiquary, passed on from hand to hand in ancient trade) thus constitutes a monument more



significant and more mighty than the guarded, scaled-down decorations, the enamels and cameos that Pound and Eliot adapted from the French poet Théophile Gautier. The painter-poet's late romantic half-personifications of Life and Death were far less attractive to subsequent twentieth-century poetry than the dismantled figurines of irony and pity of the later poet-as-sculptor. Once the modern reader can penetrate a high, post-Keatsian gesture, Rossetti's poetry will be felt not as "pre-Raphaelite" but rather as tough, creatively problematic, rejecting easy or fake answers to ultimate questions, masterfully coping with the central modern problem of treating the great in the small. Indeed, if Rossetti's poems seem sweet-meats to a reserved, modernist taste, there is yet a hard nut to crack within, whereas Pound's poetic rhetoric is like a candy with a hard surface which quickly melts away to the fudge within.

Rossetti was so much more capable of being overwhelmed by the poetic power of great art than were most nineteenth-century critics (save, of course, Ruskin and Pater) that he was unable, in his own painting, to transcend illustration to the degree that the major painters associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were (Ford Madox Brown, the best, and, before he went to the bad, John Everett Millais). His canvases have come in time to assume the true color of their provinciality, of their earnest, half-amateurishness. Even a return to trivial but profitable favor, and mindless, tasteless judgment in the contemporary art market of figurative illustration will not do much for the stature of Rossetti's painting. Not so for the poems; they look better every year. Aside from the central canon of his work—*The House of Life*, the sonnets for pictures, "The Stream's Secret," "Jenny," "The Sea-Limits," "Sudden Light," "Love's Nocturn," "Eden Bower," "Troy Town," "The Orchard Pit," fragmentary as it is—there are such poems as that splendid short lyric, "The Woodspurge," whose poetic "action" is that of a radical reconstruction of an available emblem into a far more powerful metaphor. The speaker, grief-stricken in a bleak windy outdoor scene, collapses forward in despair ("My hair was over in the grass, /My naked ears heard the day pass"—which is poetic language astonishing enough in itself). But then

My eyes, wide open, had the run  
Of some ten weeds to fix upon;  
Among these few, out of the sun,  
The woodspurge flowered, three cups in one.

From perfect grief there need not be  
Wisdom or even memory:  
One thing then learnt remains to me,—  
The woodspurge has a cup of three.

The flower is claimed here by no iconographic fancy: there is no trinitarian device, no allusion to ideal triads, lurking here. The *thisness*, as Gerard Manley Hopkins might have had it, of this unique perception of the wildflower's structure at that moment outlasts, for the speaker, any moralization of his own feelings. The epistemological moral only is left, which the reader, doing his own poetic work, must go on to draw. "The Woodspurge" not only embodies a Joycean epiphany, in which "a sudden light transfigures a trivial thing" (as Walter Pater, mediating between Rossetti and Joyce, was to put it), but it unfolds the very action of a modern short story (from *Dubliners*, say) in miniature.

In nineteenth-century English poetry, the music of nature takes precedence over the music of men. For German romanticism, Beethoven and his musical consequences are never far off. Even in the complex interaction of musical and poetic form, major composers, in their creative misreadings of lyric poetry in *Lieder* (I am thinking of Schumann's creative misprision of Heine, for example, in the *Dichterliebe*), could manage to cope with dialectical lyric and its deep expressive ironies. But in English poetry from Wordsworth and Coleridge through Tennyson and Browning, music is a problematic theme. The music of stage, concert hall, or salon is of less imaginative importance than the wind in the trees, or howling around a mountain crag; than the sound of distant water or any of the countless changes rung on the image of the Aeolian harp, or even, after all, of inaudibility as something palpable. What had been for classical and Renaissance poetry merely the cataloguing of the pleasant pastoral sounds of the *locus amoenus* became in the general figure I have elsewhere called "the mingled measure" an important nexus of nature and consciousness of subject and object. Browning and, before him, Leigh Hunt, are rare among English poets in their knowledge of, and attention paid to music in its structural and historical dimensions. The main stream of English romantic poetry invokes in its auditory imagery the music of sound, rather than of instruments or voices unaccompanied by the noise of nature.

One of the problematic qualities of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry is the way in which it seems to hang between the Tennysonian and Browningsque—between a mode of lyrical evocation in its imagery, and a more hard-edged emblematic use of figure. This is clearly manifest in his treatment both of actual instrumental and vocal music and of that figurative music of natural sound which remains so important for the representation of expressive eloquence in English romantic and Victorian poetry. What is interesting about these two modes of musical and sound imagery in Rossetti is the almost retrograde shift of their consciousness from a premature and even prophetic modernism back to an archaistic attention to