

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI AND WILLIAM MORRIS: THE
PURPOSE OF ART AND THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

by

JAQUELINE MCLEOD

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Chapter	
I. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris: The Purpose of Art and the Role of the Artist	1
II. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Divine Inspiration: The Artist Attempting to Serve Man with God	30
III. William Morris and the People: The Artist Attempting to Build an Earthly Paradise	58
IV. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris: Contrasting Definitions of the Role of the Artist and the Purpose of Art	87
Notes	98
Bibliography	107

ABSTRACT

Because of the close ties between Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris and the apparent similarity between their works, many Victorian critics assumed that their art was closely connected, seeing in it a self-conscious attempt to establish a second Pre-Raphaelite movement. While modern critics have modified the Victorian assessment somewhat, judging Morris's work to be free of Rossetti's influence, especially following the break in their friendship, a study of the primary sources indicates that the two artists were more deeply divided in their attitudes towards art than even the modern assessment allows. It is the purpose of this thesis to determine the extent to which Rossetti and Morris were divided in their views about art by studying their works, their letters, Rossetti's art criticism, and Morris's lectures.

Aspects of the personal interaction between Rossetti and Morris, especially the effects of influence and imitation, are studied in the first chapter, in relation to their views about art. Rossetti believed that the great artist is divinely inspired, standing apart from his fellows by virtue of his vision. For him, the artist's duty is to reveal man's relation to the divine, portraying the immortal nature of man. Morris, in contrast, believed that the artist speaks in the voice of the people, his proper concern being with matters mundane. The purpose of art, according to Morris, is to enrich and

to reflect the quality of this life.

The following two chapters deal with Rossetti and Morris individually, exploring the degree to which each artist's theoretical statements complement and illustrate his literary and visual work. Rossetti's views about art are expressed in early pieces such as "Hand and Soul", the sonnets "Old and New Art", and his numerous critiques of modern painters, and these opinions are reiterated, with only slight shift in emphasis, in later poems such as "Soothsay", "Transfigured Life", "The Song-Throe", and the "Introductory Sonnet" from The House of Life. That Morris's views about art differ from Rossetti's is evident even in his early literary works, "The Story of the Unknown Church," The Defence of Guenevere volume, and The Earthly Paradise; rather than establish his connection with Rossetti, the attitudes expressed in these early pieces bear closer relation to Morris's own artistic theory, as it is articulated in his lectures or in his Utopian fiction, News from Nowhere.

Finally, the last chapter directly contrasts the attitudes towards art and the artist expressed by Rossetti and Morris in their literary works. While Rossetti's art attempted to portray the immortal nature of man, Morris's art posited the continuity of earth and the human spirit.

CHAPTER ONE

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI AND WILLIAM MORRIS: THE PURPOSE OF ART AND THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris shared an intimate professional and personal relationship between 1856 and 1871, years in which they became mutually involved in several artistic projects. Although the divergence between Rossetti and Morris was shadowed in the early years of their relationship, in 1871 the two were still close enough to assume joint tenancy in Kelmscott Manor; from this point on their relationship deteriorated. Both men shared the unique ability to create in either the literary or the visual arts with equal competence. Further, their work was similar in its tendency to focus upon subjects from the past, usually derived from literary sources. As a result of these similarities, many Victorian critics yoked their work together, often to illustrate a second development of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Most modern critics have stressed the differences between Rossetti and Morris, which become increasingly evident in their later works, and consequently the term Pre-Raphaelite is no longer strictly applied to them. To supply evidence for this evaluation, critics usually contrast aspects of their later work, confining Rossetti's influence upon Morris to early productions.

Certainly Morris praised Rossetti as the guiding force behind

his short lived but intense devotion to painting: "Rossetti says I ought to paint, he says I shall be able; now as he is a very great man, and speaks with authority and not as the scribes, I must try"; and later, "I want to imitate Gabriel as much as I can."¹ Morris's poetry, however, does not result so directly from Rossetti's influence, and his letters confirm that his poetic endeavours prefigure their meeting.² Even in his early literary works, "The Story of the Unknown Church", The Defence of Guenevere volume, and The Earthly Paradise, many of the statements that Morris makes about the purpose of art and the role of the artist suggest that his attitude differs significantly from Rossetti's; rather than establish his connection with Rossetti, these statements bear closer relation to Morris's own artistic theory, as it is later articulated in his lectures or in his Utopian fiction News from Nowhere.

As the division which exists between the work of Rossetti and Morris has not been fully explored, this thesis aims to clarify the division by comparing the artists' statements about the purpose of art and the role of the artist. The first chapter will compare statements which appear in their literary work, supplemented by their comments outside the literature, in letters, lectures, or criticism. Significant aspects of the personal interaction between Rossetti and Morris, especially the effects of influence and imitation, will be examined in relation to their views about art. The following two chapters will deal with Rossetti and Morris individually, exploring the degree to which each artist's theoretical statements complement and illustrate his literary and visual work. Finally, the last chapter will compare

Rossetti and Morris more directly, defining and underlining the differences between their work.

While Morris's mature statements about the purpose of art and the role of the artist are found mainly in extraliterary sources from his later years, Rossetti's views are well articulated in his early work, in both his literature and criticism. Early pieces, such as "Hand and Soul", the sonnets "Old and New Art", and his numerous critiques of modern painters, express an attitude towards art which he retains throughout his work. Later poems, such as "Soothsay", and "Transfigured Life", "The Song-Throe", and the "Introductory Sonnet" from The House of Life, exemplify this continuity.

Even in a summary comparison, it becomes immediately apparent that Rossetti's estimation of the purpose of art and the role of the artist differed radically from Morris's point of view. Rossetti believed that the artist must study his own soul for transcendent revelations. In "Hand and Soul" he described the successful culmination of the artist's quest for a moment of perfect creative inspiration; the painter Chiaro is confronted by a vision of his own soul, which represents the triple ideals of love, truth and beauty, and in which his connection with the Divine and mankind is revealed. Rossetti describes this visitation in mystical terms:

Give thou to God no more than He asketh of thee; but to man also, that which is man's. In all thou doest, work from thine own heart, simply; for his heart is as thine, when thine is wise and humble; and he shall have understanding of thee. One drop of rain is as another, and the sun's prism in all; and shalt thou not be as he, whose lives are the

breath of One? Only by making thyself his
 equal can he learn to hold communion with thee,
 and at last own thee above him. . . Know that
 there is but this means whereby thou mayst serve
 God with man:--Set thine hand and thy soul to
 serve man with God.³

If the painter's hand portrays his soul, so must the poet's, as the sonnet "Transfigured Life" suggests. The poet cannot merely transcribe his emotions, but must give them new birth and meaning in his work:

So in the song, the singer's Joy and Pain,
 Its very parents, evermore expand
 To bid the passion's fullgrown birth remain
 By Art's transfiguring essence subtly spanned;---
 ("Transfigured Life", XL, p. 94)

The artist, according to Rossetti, receives a special gift of grace, Divine insofar as it represents the Eternal, his creative performance being thus inspired and ecstatic.

As the passage quoted from "Hand and Soul" suggests, Rossetti believed that the artist must celebrate both his humanity and his special connection with the Divine, which places him apart from common man; the artist can expect man to "own thee [the artist] above him." As opposed to the deliberate didacticism of the uninspired artist, who appeals to his mind rather than to his heart for truth, and becomes "as a cloth drawn before the light, that the looker may not be blinded. . .but. . .sheweth thereby the grain of its own coarseness", Rossetti suggested that the inspired artist becomes a natural mediator between God and man ("Hand and Soul", p. 553). He envisioned a cosmos divided into a tri-level hierarchy--Divinity, artist, and common man;

while each of these levels is informed by elements of the human and the Divine, the proportion of the latter determines ascendancy. Although the artist's position in this scheme sounds very like the place awarded to the angels in the Renaissance Great Chain of Being, Rossetti's insistence upon the artist's humanity, his physical existence, discourages this parallel.

Rossetti assumed then, that the artist's transcendent visions strike a responsive chord in the hearts of men, an attitude typically expressed in his art criticism:

From time to time, however, a poet or a painter has caught the music, and strayed in through the close stems: the spell is on his hand and his lips like the sleep of the Lotus-eaters, and his record shall be vague and fitful; yet will we be in waiting, and open our eyes and our ears, for the broken song has snatches of an enchanted harmony, and the glimpses are glimpses of Eden ("Kennedy", p. 575).

If Rossetti claimed that all men are artists, he believed this only insofar as they can grasp the artist's vision, insofar as they, too, are possessed of a "poetic" soul.

Although Rossetti believed that a great artist must be inspired, he did not undermine the importance of skill and intellectual energy to a final work. He recognized a difference between the inspired conception, only visited upon those who practise introspection, and the careful execution which must ensue. On these grounds, Rossetti elevated Memling above his mentor Van Eyck:

Van Eyck's picture at the gallery may give you some idea of the style adopted by Memling in

these great pictures; but the light and colour is much less poetical in Van Eyck's, partly owing to his being a more sober subject and interior, but partly also, I believe, to the intrinsic superiority of Memling's intellect.⁴

Morris opposed Rossetti's view directly: "That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense. . . I may tell you that flat, there is no such thing."⁵ He believed that the fine arts are perfected by those who "have won mastery over their craft by dint of incredible toil, painstaking and anxiety."⁶ According to Morris's theory, the artist, with his craft perfected, should discover his subject in the tradition that he shared with his people; his work should then unfold organically. While he would have agreed with Rossetti that an artist should communicate his deepest, most genuine passions, Morris believed that these are only meaningful if they grow from and thereby embody the passions of his fellow men; the poet must become "the voice through which the poetry of mankind speaks."⁷ From Morris's point of view, every man is an artist, since the best art communicates with the people in a voice that is as theirs.

And so Morris believed that every man is literally an artist; he claimed that the fine arts are bound in symbiotic union to the lesser arts, the handicraft art of the people, in a healthy, creative society. According to his view of art history, the lesser arts are the foundation and definition of all creative endeavour, as they exemplify so well the primary aim of art: "Art made by the people and for the people, as a joy to the maker and the user."⁸ He believed that the fine arts had developed as an offshoot of the lesser arts only when

civilization grew in complexity:

Time was when the mystery and wonder of handicrafts were well acknowledged by the world, when imagination and fancy mingled with all things made by man; and in those days all handicraftsmen were artists, as we should now call them. But the thought of man became more intricate, more difficult to express; art grew a heavier thing to deal with, and its labour was more divided among great men, lesser men, and little men; till that art, which was once scarce more than a rest of body and soul as the hand cast the shuttle or swung the hammer, became to some men so serious a labour, that their working lives have been one long tragedy of hope and fear, joy and trouble. This was the growth of art; like all growth, it was good and fruitful for awhile; like all fruitful growth, it grew into decay; like all decay of what was once fruitful, it will grow into something new (XXII, p. 9).

As this passage suggests, Morris suspected that the nineteenth century, a period of decadence and decline, could not adequately nurture artistic creativity. He feared the degrading effect of growing mechanization upon the people; as a daily pursuit useless toil had replaced the lesser, decorative arts. He believed that the people were suffering in that they no longer received pleasure from art; art, itself, was suffering in that it no longer reflected the vital impulses and emotions of society, having become rather the expression of a small elite group.

Morris's hopes for art lay in the future, as he believed that the existing society must be shaken to its roots, if man was to move beyond merely mechanical or wholly intellectual thought, and deal instead with his imagination, intuition and emotion; man must

reactivate his faculty for non-rational perception, which both fosters and informs all meaningful creative work. The society in News from Nowhere, Morris's ideal, is organized on the belief that handicrafts, both useful and creative, can supply all man's needs; these activities are encouraged above intellectual pursuits, as one scholarly character in the novel laments:

I know he thinks me rather a grinder, and despises me for not being very deft with my hands: that's the way nowadays. From what I have read of the nineteenth-century literature (and I have read a good deal), it is clear to me that this is a kind of revenge for the stupidity of that day, which despised everybody who could use his hands (XIV, p. 20).

As the novel emphasizes, Morris believed that society must aspire to conditions which allow, simple, happy, and equal existence for all. He predicted that this change would occur, either by revolutionary upheaval or, as his more optimistic letters suggest, by peaceful evolution. In "The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle", a letter of 1893, his position is clarified:

I do not believe in the possibility of keeping art vigorously alive by the action, however energetic, of a few groups of specially gifted men and their small circle of admirers amidst a general public incapable of understanding and enjoying their work. I hold firmly to the opinion that all schools of art must be in the future, as they have been in the past, the outcome of the aspirations of the people towards the beauty and the true pleasure of life. And further, now that democracy is building up a new order, which is slowly arising from the confusion of the commercial period, these aspirations of the people towards beauty can only be born from a condition of practical equality of economical condition amongst the

whole population. Lastly, I am so confident that this equality will be gained, that I am prepared to accept as a consequence of the process of that gain, the seeming disappearance of what art is now left us; because I am sure that that will be but a temporary loss, to be followed by a genuine new birth of art, which will be the spontaneous expression of the pleasure of life innate in the whole people.⁹

The past is often idealized in Morris's literature, sounding more like his Utopia than an historical account:

Telling a tale of times long passed away,
 When men might cross a kingdom in a day,
 And kings remembered they should one day die,
 And all folk dwelt in great simplicity
 ("The Earthly Paradise", III, p. 84).

In his lectures, though, Morris admitted that political oppression and violence existed in the Middle Ages; these were balanced by general creative pursuit in the lesser arts and a strong sense of community so that "it was possible then to have social, organic, hopeful progressive art; whereas now such poor scraps of it as are left are the result of individual and wasteful struggle, are retrospective and pessimistic" (XXIII, p. 89). For Morris, nineteenth century art was "only a survival of the organic art of the past."¹⁰

Unlike Morris, who redefined the term art as it is generally understood by emphasizing the genres of the lesser arts above the fine arts, Rossetti was content to reform fine art within the bounds of its existing genres; because he believed great art to be divinely inspired, he criticized art that reflects conventional response. One of the founding principles of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was that art need not follow the dictates of the Royal Academy and the rules laid

down by Joshua Reynolds in his discourses. Rossetti condemned the influence of these dictates and rules in contemporary paintings, suggesting that exhibitions had begun to resemble one another when so many artists "are striving to do exactly the same thing as others. . . have done,--making use of exactly the same means as those who have gone before them, in hope of the same result and no more" ("Exhibition of Modern British Art at the Old Water-colour Gallery, 1850", p. 571).

It follows that Rossetti believed that great art may be created in any age, as the truly inspired artist relies upon himself, his soul, to comprehend visions of the Divine. Unlike Morris, Rossetti believed that great works from the past should spark a spirit of healthy rivalry in the artist; past masters should encourage the painter to hope that his will be "The hand which after the appointed days / And hours shall give a future to their past" ("The Husbandman", LXXVI, p. 100).

Although Rossetti shared Morris's admiration for many works from the mediaeval period, he did not restrict his appreciations to this age alone, as the eclectic nature of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's "List of Immortals" indicates; Jesus Christ heads the list of "the few far-seeing ones who revealed vast visions of beauty to mankind," ranging from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Leonardo Da Vinci and Raphael to more contemporary artists such as Shelley, and Keats, Tennyson and Browning.¹¹

The "List of Immortals", celebrating in unison the accomplishments of both painters and poets, illuminates a second point significant to Rossetti's definition of the artist. He believed that both poet and painter, when divinely inspired, shape visions of the one truth; the

poet sings "snatches of an enchanted harmony" and the painter paints "glimpses of Eden". In simple terms, both embody thought in a physical form. In Platonic terms, which Rossetti seemed to favour, both lend physical shape to thoughts which are themselves what Shelley called "The awful shadow of some unseen Power"; both painter and poet attempt to see beyond the veil of mortality. Thus, while the "List" is prefaced with a disavowal of Christian doctrine, Jesus Christ is honoured as the supreme artist for the undeniable depth and impact of his visions.

Rossetti used the word poetry as a metaphor for artistic vision; an inspired painting or poem comes from an artist's "poetic" soul. Describing C. H. Lear's painting of a Keatsian subject, Rossetti referred to the poetry of both artists:

he, [C. H. Lear] working from his own poetical resources, has found a sympathetic echo in the words of a brother poet. The heard melody is indeed sweet, so sweet that the unheard may scarcely exceed it; but the parallel is unnecessary; they are like voice and instrument. This picture should hang in the room of a poet: we will dare to say that Keats himself might have lain dreaming before it, and found it minister to his inspiration ("C. H. Lear", pp. 574-575).

For Rossetti, Lear's work is more than a literary narrative or a genre painting, as it is informed by the same type of poetic vision which inspired Keats. Of course he was well aware that technique separates the two mediums; Mackail reports Rossetti's early conviction that the poetic medium had been perfected by Keats, prompting his advice to Burne-Jones: "If any man has any poetry in him. . .he should paint,

for it has all been said and written, and they have scarcely begun to paint it."¹² Within the medium of the visual arts, still open to experiment and improvement, Rossetti believed that the greatest achievements could still be made; certainly the concerns of the Pre-Raphaelite Brethren, primarily focussed upon painting, suggest this bias. As William Michael Rossetti pointed out, however, Rossetti's youthful aspiration to excellence in the visual arts was not fulfilled when he finally estimated his achievement:

I have not unfrequently heard say that he considered himself more essentially a poet than a painter. To vary the form of expression, he thought that he had mastered the means of embodying poetical conceptions in the verbal and rhythmical vehicle more thoroughly than in form and design, perhaps more thoroughly than in colour.¹³

While for Rossetti painting and poetry alike record the artist's inspired vision, Morris believed that "all the arts hang together" as every work expresses a moral statement (XXII, p. 21); for Morris, art and morality, both individual and social, are inseparable:

However, I cannot forget that, in my mind, it is not possible to dissociate art from morality, politics, and religion. Truth in these great matters of principle is of one, and it is only in formal treatises that it can be split up. (XXII, p. 47).

His appreciation and evaluation of art is shaped by this attitude. In a letter of 1873, written during his tour of the Florentine art galleries, Morris contrasted Burne-Jones's aesthetic appreciations to his own responses, which were more moral and philosophic:

I ought to say a great deal about works of art here, but I had rather wait till I see you and we can talk over it. I am not at all disappointed with Italy, but a good deal of myself: I am happy enough, but as a pig is, and cannot bring my mind up to the proper pitch and tune for taking in these marvels; I can only hope that I shall remember them hereafter. . . I venture to think though that there is another side to it which may at least make one sad; change and ruin and recklessness and folly and forgetfulness of 'great men and our fathers who begat us'--it is only in such places as this that one can see the signs of them to the full. Well you remember my ways at Troyes, don't you? and they are scarce likely to be better in Florence: Ned already complains of me that I seem to pay more attention to an olive-tree or a pot than I do to a picture--mind you, though, an olive-tree is worthy of a great deal of attention, and I understand more of pots than of pictures.¹⁴

Burne-Jones's response was more akin to Rossetti's than to Morris's, as he was immediately sensitive to the intrinsic aesthetic value of the work itself; Morris was allied with Ruskin in his concern to connect art and ethics, as the critic Gerald Crow states: "To Morris, as to Ruskin, the principles governing art can be extracted from the moral and the natural order and are constant and external to art itself."¹⁵

While Morris's theoretical statements imply his belief that nineteenth-century art had fallen from greatness, he still expressed admiration for several contemporary artists. He outlined the obstacles to the fine arts in an age so antagonistic to beauty:

Therefore the artists are obliged to express themselves, as it were, in a language 'not understood by the people'; nor is this their fault; if they were to try, as some think they should, to meet the public half-way, and work

in such a manner as to satisfy only those prepossessions of men ignorant of art, they would be casting aside their special gifts, and would become traitors to the cause of art which it is their duty and glory to serve: they have no choice save to do their own personal work without any hope of being understood as things now are; to stand apart as possessors of some sacred mystery, which, whatever happens, they must at least do their best to guard: and by their isolation their loss is great.¹⁶

Morris believed that great contemporary artists shared his sense of the important past, and used their work to recall or reflect aspects of it; they, too, understood the deficiency of the nineteenth century, and automatically located their subject in the more vital traditions of the past: "the great artists I have been speaking about are what they are in virtue of their being men of very peculiar and especial gifts, and are mostly steeped in thoughts of history, wrapped up in contemplation of the beauty of past times. If they were not so constituted, I say, they would not in the teeth of all the difficulties in their way to be able to produce beauty at all" (XXIII, p. 147). In his Life of William Morris, Mackail records Morris's desire to guard mediaeval achievements against unnecessary contemporary refinements, as evidenced by his advice to Burne-Jones, his intimate friend and his favourite artist: "Sir Edward Burne-Jones told me that Morris would have liked the faces in his pictures less highly finished, and less charged with the concentrated meaning or emotion of the painting. As with the artists of Greece and of the Middle Ages, the human face was to him merely a part, though no doubt a very important part, of the human body."¹⁷ If the nineteenth-century artist was able to fix his eyes

upon the true beauty of the past, despite the contemporary corruption which surrounded and threatened his vision, he possessed, in Morris's opinion, outstanding moral wisdom and strength. He commended painters that "have developed and expressed a sense of beauty which the world has not seen for the last three hundred years", not only for the quality of their work, but also for their moral commitment:

Once more those devoted men who have upheld the standard of truth and beauty amongst us, and whose pictures, painted amidst difficulties that none but a painter can know, show qualities of mind unsurpassed in any age-- these great men have but a narrow circle that can understand their works, and are utterly unknown to the great mass of the people: civilization is so much against them, that they cannot move the people (XXII, pp. 35, 38).

Morris cited similar criteria when he praised the Pre-Raphaelite painters in his opening address at the 1891 exhibition of their paintings; Mackail describes his presentation:

Professing himself a humble member of the school, he stated as his deliberate conviction that its principle masters, Rossetti, Millais, Holman Hunt, and Burne-Jones, were names that ranked along side of the very greatest in the great times of art; then, not labouring this point, he commended their example to all artists, not primarily for any technical quality, but for the virtues of patience, diligence and courage. These were the qualities that went to make great men; and great men might be trusted to do great work.¹⁸

As Jessie Kocmanova summarizes, Morris's was an "essentially humanistic approach to the evaluation of art": "Above all, Morris valued the human quality in art, and the artist's enthusiasm for what he wished

to create."¹⁹ This is especially true in reference to Morris's view of contemporary art, the quality of which he believed singly determined by the artist's wisdom and dedication.

Although Morris praised Rossetti with the other Pre-Raphaelite painters, it is difficult to determine his attitude to Rossetti's work in any full sense, because his statements so often conflict. Certainly, in his youth Morris admired both Rossetti and his work. As late as 1870 he reviewed Rossetti's poems generously, concluding, "Nor do I know what lyrics of any time are to be called great if we are to deny that title to these."²⁰ A tone of genuine appreciation seems pervasive throughout the entire review, despite Morris's reluctance to "puff" his friends, making this critical exercise objectionable to him: "I have done my review [i.e. of D. G. Rossetti's Poems] just this moment--ugh'".²¹ As the split which occurred in their personal lives testifies, however, Rossetti's approach to life and art became increasingly antithetical to Morris's. On the basis of two letters Morris wrote in 1872, objecting to Rossetti's disruptive presence at Kelmscott, William Gaunt postulates their incompatibility:

The individual life of what was called 'the artist' Morris had now had the opportunity of examining at close quarters, without any of the false glamour round it which was imparted by youth and innocence. That hooded glance of his had taken in every detail, one may be sure, had weighed its feebleness, its tawdriness, its egotism, its self-indulgence, its sordid and furtive complications which rose like mud in a stagnant pool on some slight stir of the waters. What was to be set on the other side of the balance?--that after much fret and fuss, some expression of this emotional chaos was transferred to canvas or paper for the idle entertainment of a rich man

who did not know what on earth to do with the superfluity of his wealth.²²

Morris's reaction to the news of Rossetti's death in 1882 is not recorded, but a letter of 1883 exists in which he analyzed Rossetti's lack of political commitment:

I can't say. . .how it was that Rossetti took no interest in politics; but so it was. . . The truth is he cared for nothing but individual and personal matters; chiefly of course in relation to art and literature, but he would take abundant trouble to help any one person who was in distress of mind or body; but the evils of any mass of people he couldn't bring his mind to bear upon. I suppose in short it needs a person of hopeful mind to take disinterested notice of politics, and Rossetti was certainly not hopeful.²³

While Morris was not commenting directly upon Rossetti's work, this passage carries a general tone of reprisal; for Morris, it followed that Rossetti's personal weakness, his hopelessness, consequently weakened his art.

In fact, Rossetti might well serve as the prototype for the nineteenth-century artist whom Morris criticized so harshly in his lectures. He refuted Rossetti's belief in solitary and soulful inspiration, and disliked the haunting introspection which characterizes much of Rossetti's work; he considered this artistic impulse towards subjectivity and egocentricity as one further manifestation of the diseased state of society and culture. He praised instead the homely impulse behind mediaeval handicrafts, using Rossetti's image of "hand and soul" in this very different application:

I have been astonished when I have looked into the popular art of past ages to find work so refined and elegant done in times so rude and rough: work bearing so many tokens of quick wit and invention done in times so ignorant and superstitious: works showing so many signs of freedom of thought and pleasure in life and external nature in days which seem to us to have been so full of oppression, gloom and turmoil; all these, mind you, qualities of hand and soul which could not have been produced to the order of rich men; for such qualities are spontaneous and cannot be bought with money or compelled by power.²⁴

While Rossetti recognized a split between the common man and the artist, and relied upon an insular group of fellow artists to exchange ideas, support and understanding, Morris condemned this practice and the ^{kind} quality of work that it produced. He believed that as the division between man and the artist was becoming more emphatic, art was losing its meaning:

Sirs, I believe that art has much sympathy with cheerful freedom, open-heartedness and reality, so much she sickens under selfishness and luxury, that she will not live isolated and exclusive. I will go further than this and say that on such terms I do not wish her to live. I protest that it would be a shame to an honest artist to enjoy what he had huddled up to himself of such art, as it would be for a rich man to sit and eat dainty food amongst starving soldiers in a beleaguered fort. (XXII, pp. 25, 26).

Morris particularly disliked the economic bond which bound these artists to the whims of wealthy patrons: "the artists have been annexed by the rich and are their hangers on, their lackeys, their toy-makers: what wonder that they can no longer talk a language understood by the people."²⁵ Rossetti of course is still notorious for his ability to

market his work skillfully; referring to this sharp pecuniary sense, Mackail describes Rossetti's estimate of the two important classes of society: "The duty of the one class was to paint pictures, and it included all those who were competent to do so. The duty of the other class was to buy the pictures so painted."²⁶ Almost to a point, Rossetti exemplified the attitudes which Morris despised in the nineteenth-century artist. Since Morris strictly advised that the aims of art, rather than art itself, must be upheld, his distaste for the approach to art which Rossetti represents probably outweighed his admiration for the several beauties he discerned in Rossetti's work, particularly in the early pieces.

Rossetti was by nature as generous with his appreciation and encouragement of contemporary artists as Morris was guarded. An early instance of this trait occurred in his initial correspondence with Ford Madox Brown; his praise for the older man's work was so effusive that Brown suspected mockery and "called round at Rossetti's house with a 'thick stick'."²⁷ With similar generosity, Rossetti commended "two young men" in a letter of 1857:

Their names are Morris and Jones. They have turned artists instead of taking up any other career to which the University generally leads, and both are men of real genius. Jones's designs are marvels of finish and imaginative detail, unequalled by anything unless perhaps Albert Durer's finest works; and Morris, though without practice as yet, has no less power, I fancy. He has written some really wonderful poetry too. . . .²⁸

Although Rossetti particularly admired Morris's poetic ability, he was able to appreciate the larger scope of Morris's artistic creativity

as we note in a later letter:

[Morris is] the greatest literary identity of our time. I say this chiefly on the ground of that highest quality in a poet--his width of relation to the mass of mankind. . . You know that Morris is now only 35, and has done things in decorative art which take as high and exclusive a place in that field as his poetry does in its own. What may he not yet do?²⁹

Rossetti's enthusiasm for Morris's work lasted at least until 1872, when he praised "Love is Enough": "The poem is, I think, at a higher point of execution than anything that he has done, having a passionate lyric quality such as one found in his earliest work, and of course much more mature balance carrying it out. It will be a very fine work."³⁰ Biographical evidence supports the conclusion that Rossetti did not sympathize with 1876's Sigurd the Volsung, based upon a tradition in Icelandic literature. In The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy, William Gaunt reports that Rossetti's flippant response to the tale provoked Morris's anger:

When Morris tried to interest Rossetti in Sigurd the Volsung, he said, upon the entrance of Fafnir into the story, 'I never cared much for all that stuff. . . How can one take a real interest in a man who has a dragon for a brother?' It is related that Morris was stirred by this impious remark to an unusual sharpness, for him, that gazing fixedly at Gabriel he answered, 'I'd much rather have a dragon for a brother than a bloody fool,' an oblique allusion to William Michael.³¹

On the whole, however, Rossetti's appreciation of Morris's work seems pervasive and genuine; despite their personal differences, he nowhere

rescinded his high estimate of Morris's artistic ability.

William Gaunt further speculates that Rossetti adopted a bluff attitude towards Morris and his pursuits in order to camouflage injured pride and affection:

In such references there is a persistent effort to regard Morris as the boisterous undergraduate Rossetti had first known, with an uneasy consciousness that he was no longer that; that he had grown in dignity and even majesty of mind; that he was, in certain essential particulars, a stranger.³²

According to Jack Lindsay and William E. Fredeman, however, Rossetti's several satires of Morris indicate his unaltered good will. They cite the harmless nature of "a spoof on Morris's swearing and eating habits", written in 1868, and suggest that "The Death of Topsy", written as late as 1877, is no more malicious, though the piece was not intended for Morris's perusal, being addressed to Jane Morris.³³

Many critics argue that the split between Rossetti and Morris resulted from Rossetti's love for Jane Morris. Cecil Lang summarizes Rossetti's predicament succinctly: "he married a woman he did not love, he loved a woman he could not marry, and he lived with a woman he neither loved nor married."³⁴ But apart from the unpleasant entanglement of their personal lives, important ideological differences separated the two men. Biographical evidence indicates that Morris initiated and enforced the break by moving outside the sphere of Rossetti's interests, towards ideals which claimed his full attention, and which required, for their fulfillment, collective commitment. "I am here," Morris said in a lecture of 1877, "to ask you to help me in

realizing this dream, this hope" (XXII, p. 27). Rossetti never enlisted with him in support of this cause. From the early 1870's the breach between Rossetti and Morris, in their personal lives, their art, and in their views about life and art, became pronounced and irreconcilable.

From the start of their friendship, Morris's commitment to "Rossetti's way" never promised stability; many of his youthful attitudes were not permanently changed by his association with Rossetti, but were rather surrendered temporarily. These attitudes were resumed and enlarged in the formulation of his mature opinions about art and life, about the role of the artist and the purpose of art. Even a summary glance at their early involvement suggests that Rossetti and Morris were never of one mind. Morris's early association with the Birmingham set, a group who pledged "a crusade and Holy Warfare against the age", suggests the broad scope of his interest in social reform, especially when compared to Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their singular concern with the reformation of contemporary painting. Morris and his group reflected the concerns of students amassed in a liberal arts college, while Rossetti and his Brethren reacted to their specialized artistic training at the Royal Academy. Morris's early letters, expressing his desire to serve mankind by taking Holy Orders, reveal the depth of his social conscience. When he altered his ambition, deciding instead to pursue architecture, he still intended dutiful service to humanity, as a letter to his mother documents:

You said then, you remember, and said very truly, that it was an evil thing to be an idle objectless man; I am fully determined not to incur this reproach, I was so then,

though I did not tell you at the time all I thought of, partly because I wished to give you time to become reconciled to the idea of my continuing a lay person. . . .If I were not to follow this occupation (architecture) I in truth know not what I should follow with any chance of success, or hope of happiness in my work; in this I am pretty confident I shall succeed, and make I hope a decent architect sooner or later and you know too that in any work that one delights in, even the merest drudgery connected with it is delightful too. I shall be master too of a useful trade. . . . I will by no means give up things I have thought of for the bettering of the world insofar as lies in me. You see I do not hope to be great at all in anything, but perhaps I may reasonably hope to be happy in my work, and sometimes when I am idle and doing nothing, pleasant³⁵ visions go past me of things that may be.

While the full sincerity of this letter might be suspect, written as it was to appease his disappointed mother, the concerns here introduced are significant because they were later absorbed into Morris's mature opinions about "art and the people".

Mackail suggests that while Morris, encouraged by Rossetti, was spirited away from architecture by the claims of the painter's art, he possessed a natural predilection for architectural theory:

But for him, then and always, the word architecture bore an immense, and one might almost say a transcendental, meaning. Connected at a thousand points with all the other specific arts which ministered to it out of a thousand sources, it was itself a tangible expression of all the order, the comeliness, the sweetness, nay, even the mystery and the law, which sustains man's world and make human life what it is. To him the House Beautiful represented the visible form of life itself.³⁶

Certainly in his lectures Morris discussed architecture as the pivotal

craft between the fine and the lesser arts. Mackail blames Rossetti for leading Morris down the garden path, as it were, away from his natural inclinations and abilities:

How long Rossetti's daily influence might have kept him labouring at what he could not do, on the whole, better than any man living, it is needless to inquire.³⁷

Encouraged and influenced by Rossetti, who was already an accomplished painter and poet, Morris pursued painting with insistent, almost fanatic, devotion, even when the voice of reason obtruded a measure of uncertainty:

Yet I shall have enough to do, if I actually master this art of painting: I dare scarcely think failure possible at times and yet I know in my mind that my chances are slender. . .³⁸

This intense attitude was typical of Morris throughout his life, as his energy seemed to expand even as his interests grew in variety.

The friendship, as it developed between the two men, is capsulized in three particular episodes. In the first of these, Rossetti was the key figure, organizing a group of artists to paint frescoes in the Oxford Union Hall in 1857. A fun-loving but irresponsible atmosphere enveloped the entire project, which consequently dragged on without reaching completion; in fact Morris was the only one of the group to complete his mural. The proper techniques of fresco painting were not observed, however, causing the entire surface to fade and blur, as William Michael Rossetti describes: "for many years past the painted surface of the union walls has been a confused hybrid between a smudge

and a blank."³⁹ The project was terminated and the paintings were left, incomplete and unsatisfactory. Rossetti refused to take responsibility for the condition of the work, and finally refused negotiations with the Oxford organizers, following a pattern of unreliable behaviour he so often adopted with his patrons. Morris, on the other hand, wrote an apologetic note, lamenting the wasted time and materials:

In confidence to you I should say the whole affair was begun and carried out in too piecemeal and unorganized a manner to be a real success--nevertheless it would surely be a pity to destroy some of the pictures, which are really remarkable, and at the worst can do no harm there. I am sorry if this is 'cold comfort'; but I thought you would really like to know what I thought, and so here it is.⁴⁰

As early as 1856, Morris had vowed to maximize his time by following a rigorous schedule: "One won't get much enjoyment out of life at this rate, I know well, but that don't matter: I have no right to ask for it at all events--love and work, these two things only."⁴¹ For Morris, it is doubtful if idle pleasure could make up for the waste of his working hours.

The second significant episode, the organization of an arts and crafts guild, was Morris's project. Attempting to furnish Red House in 1857, he was appalled by the shoddy craftsmanship and hideous design of the furniture that was available; he became determined to improve contemporary standards in design and craftsmanship. Rossetti was involved in the early handicraft endeavours, contributing several designs; according to Burne-Jones's recollections, Rossetti acted as a benevolent overseer:

There were many scenes with the carpenter. . . especially I remember the night when the settle came home. . . I think the measurements had perhaps been given a little wrongly, and that it was bigger altogether than he had ever meant, but set up it was finally, and our studio was one third less in size. Rossetti came. This was always a terrifying moment to the very last. He laughed, but approved.⁴²

In 1861, Morris officially organized an arts and crafts guild. Rossetti was one of seven partners; and, considering the Union Hall fiasco which was in large part the result of his lack of specialized knowledge of the crafts, it is ironic that he authored the guild's prospectus, promising masterful workmanship:

These artists have for many years been deeply attached to the study of the Decorative Arts of all times and all countries, have felt more than most people the want of some one place, where they could either obtain or get produced work of a genuine and beautiful character. . . . It is only requisite to state further, that work of all the above classes will be estimated for, and executed in a business-like manner. . . .⁴³

Under Morris's guiding hand, the guild grew successfully. At maximum, Rossetti contributed several designs.

The last significant incident which occurred in their relationship was the joint tenancy of Rossetti and Morris at Kelmscott in 1871. Morris apparently instigated this intimate partnership with the hope that Rossetti, who was suffering from nervous insomnia and chloral addiction, might regain his health. Rossetti's letters from this period suggest an attitude of blasé condescension and boredom. Letters reveal that Morris, however, was made wretched by Rossetti's

"unsympathetic" presence. "I have been backwards and forwards to Kelmscott a good deal this summer and autumn," Morris wrote in 1872, "but shall not go there so often now as Gabriel is come there, and talks of staying there permanently: of course he won't do that, but I suppose he will stay some time."⁴⁴ In November of the same year, Morris's objections became more blatant:

Another quite selfish business is that Rossetti has set himself down at Kelmscott as if he never meant to go away; and not only does that keep me from that harbour of refuge (because it is really a farce our meeting when we can help it) but also he 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: this is very unreasonable though when one thinks why one took the place, and how this year it has really answered that purpose: nor do I think I should feel this about it if he had not been so unromantically discontented with it and the whole thing which made me very angry and disappointed.⁴⁵

During the period in which the two men shared Kelmscott, Morris discovered the beauty of Iceland, and made several excursions there. Rossetti did not understand Morris's enthusiasm, as William Gaunt explains:

Rossetti jeered at Iceland and seemed to be only interested in the frivolous side of the journey. He thought it very funny that 'Top' should have been called 'The Skala'. He made a caricature of him on the river with the verse.

'Enter Skald moored in a punt,
Jacks and Tenches exeunt.'

He was disappointed with Morris's diary because it wasn't funnier.⁴⁶

Rossetti's health had continued to deteriorate, and he left Kelmscott

permanently in 1874; Philip Henderson describes Rossetti's nervous paranoia:

A chance remark about his appearance overheard from a company of anglers persuaded Rossetti that he had been insulted again, and he at once turned and began to abuse them, Gordon Hake, who was with him, managed to get him away, and explained to the astonished fishermen that his friend was only a little eccentric. But the episode caused some bad feeling in the neighbourhood, and it was generally agreed that it was time for Rossetti to go.⁴⁷

Shortly after this Morris dissolved the business partnership, and the rift between the two men deepened because they could not reach a peaceable agreement on the division of the assets.

These three episodes illuminate the essential differences between Rossetti and Morris, certainly in George Meredith's phrase, an "ever diverse pair." Rossetti's influence upon Morris was short-lived and, at that, based on Morris's own terms: "I want to imitate Gabriel as much as I can." B. Ifor Evans is correct in his estimate that "Rossetti never influenced a man more unlike himself than William Morris";⁴⁸ that Morris was a very different man than Rossetti remained true even during the period of their closest intimacy. A tension was built into their friendship, engendered as it was by Rossetti's influence over Morris, or by Morris's imitation of Rossetti. Moreover, Morris was youthful, energetic and still relatively innocent of his artistic potential; if he submerged his strong characteristics for a time, these naturally re-emerged as he discovered new interests and abilities. As their friendship unfolded chronologically, it became

evident that Morris rather than Rossetti was the organizing force behind many of their joint ventures. Of course his influence upon Rossetti never assumed significance because Rossetti was older and had a good understanding of his artistic abilities. Further, Rossetti was a sick and unstable man, seeking supportive reinforcement for his work, unreceptive to change, and destroyed by criticism. Given these circumstances, the divergence in their personal lives, their art, and their views about art seems to have been inevitable.

CHAPTER TWO

Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Divine Inspiration:

The Artist Attempting to Serve Man with God

The first chapter of this thesis described Rossetti's definition of the artist and the purpose of art, which stated that the artist must be inspired if he is "to serve man with God." In "Hand and Soul", Rossetti suggested that the artist, in his moment of inspired vision, surpasses the common man in his understanding of the relationship between the divine and man, the immortal and the mortal. He believed that the inspired artist, balancing the two spheres of being in accordance with his vision, is able to lend physical reality to the otherwise abstract concept of man's immortal existence. In his own work, both literary and visual, Rossetti often focused upon this theme, attempting to capture the moment when the human and the divine co-exist. The purpose of this chapter is to study the relationship between Rossetti's work and his statements about the purpose of art and the role of the artist.

The artist that Rossetti described in his literary works is always a visionary, divinely inspired; his visions demand artistic expression, like those of the passive poet in "The Song-Three", who is assailed by arrows of his muse Apollo:

The Song-god--He the Sun-god--is no slave
 Of thine: thy Hunter he, who for thy soul
 Fledges his shaft: to no august control
 Of thy skilled hand his quivered store he gave:
 But if thy lips' loud cry leap to his smart,
 The inspir'd recoil shall pierce thy brother's heart
 (LXI, p. 95).

Rossetti described the artist as a special sufferer, reminiscent of the poet in Shelley's "Alastor", simultaneously haunted and inspired by the artistic impulse. The seeds of this great gift are present in the artist even from youth, according to Rossetti's description in "Hand and Soul":

conceiving art almost for himself, and loving it deeply, he endeavoured from early boyhood towards the imitation of any objects offered in nature. The extreme longing after the visible embodiment of his thoughts strengthened as his years increased, more even than his sinews or the blood of his life; until he would feel faint in sunsets and at the sight of stately persons (p. 549).

The artist as a young man is possessed by a creative compulsion, shadowing the direction that his life will take.

In fact, Rossetti's first experience with art and creativity began at an early age. His artistic development was nurtured from his youth as he was born into a family with an accomplished history of literary achievement. In a letter of 1835, his enthusiasm for the arts, both visual and literary, was already evident:

We went to a fancy fair in the Regent's Park, where I bought a box of paints. . . I have been reading Shakespeare's Richard the Third for my amusement, and like it exceedingly. I, Maria, and William, know several scenes by

heart. I have bought a picture of Richmond fighting, and I gilded it, after which I cut it out with no white.¹

Rossetti was encouraged by his family to assume the importance of art, as a letter from his father, written in 1853, indicates:

I am extremely pleased at the progress which you are making in your beautiful art, and at some profits which you are earning from it to maintain yourself with decorum in society. Remember, my dearly beloved son, that you have only your abilities to rely upon for your welfare. Remember that you were born with a marked propensity, and that, from your earliest years, you made us conceive the brightest hopes that you would become a great painter. And such you will be, I am certain.²

Emphasizing artistic ability as a special gift, his father believed that Rossetti's early predilection for the visual arts had marked him as a child protegee. On this basis he advised Rossetti to pursue painting as a lucrative profession.

In a letter of 1848, Rossetti received similar advice from Leigh Hunt, who admired his poems but recommended the financial security of painting:

If you paint as well as you write, you may be a rich man. But I need hardly tell you that poetry, even the very best-- nay, the best, in this respect, is apt to be the worst-- is not a thing for a man to live upon while he is in the flesh, however immortal it may render his spirit.³

In his article "Rossetti's Conception of the 'Poetic' in Poetry and Painting", Oswald Doughty cites Hunt's comment in order to conclude:

"And Rossetti did want to be rich!"⁴ From all accounts, Rossetti

approached art as a profession from which he expected to earn generous remuneration. In his article "Rossetti as Painter", Ralph Berry underlines Rossetti's skillful ability to market his paintings at a high price, also noting his attempt to secure favourable notices for his Poems, published in 1870: "He organized matters so that his friends, led by Swinburne, accounted for most of the reviews in the leading journals. And reasonably so, too. But it is possible that this element of worldliness, of calculation lies nearer to the centre of his art than is generally understood."⁵ William Gaunt suggests that the rumor of the personal scandal surrounding these poems was circulated to increase their sales, although not upon Rossetti's express orders:

The exhumation of the poems is one of the most famous events in literary history. Rossetti meant it to remain a secret. 'I have begged Howell to hold his tongue for the future,' he wrote to William Michael when breaking the news, 'but if he does not I cannot help it,' he added. He was scarcely hopeful. Knowing Howell, how could anyone expect it to remain a secret for long? . . . The report got about at once and greatly increased the interest with which the volume of poems was awaited.⁶

Both biographies and letters indicate that Rossetti treated his patrons with high-handed manipulation, always eager to accept advance payments, never reluctant to break contracts and promises. On the whole, he seems to have been unusually sensitive to the economic value of his art.

Rossetti approached art, then, as a profession; like his father he assumed that the artist should be paid well for doing what he excels at, and for doing, moreover, what no ordinary man could do.

Since Rossetti was convinced that the artist possesses a special grace which sets him apart from mankind, he believed that earthly glories, money, and of course fame, should be the corollary rewards. As he wrote in "Hand and Soul", the artist should expect man "to own thee [the artist] above him" (p. 554). For Rossetti, aggressive business sense complemented rather than contradicted his ideal of the artist as a romantic visionary figure.

Rossetti's youthful allegiance to painting rather than poetry is often dismissed as one more example of his strategic economic sense. But his application to Ford Madox Brown, the prototypical starving artist, and his defection from the Academy, together with the fact that his painting was remarked outstanding from his youth, suggests that this is not a fair assessment. According to Rossetti's view, the visual arts, dominated for so long by conventional techniques and subjects, were ripe for experiment and progress. It ^{was} ~~is~~ the innovative characteristic that initially attracted him to Brown's work, an innovation defined by John Nicoll in his analysis of Brown's mediaevalized "Wycliffe Reading his Translation of the Bible to John of Gaunt":

Begun in 1847 after his return from Rome, it is based on the techniques of the Nazarenes, a group of German painters who had formed a semi-religious fraternity in Rome where they hoped to regenerate art through the imitation of the early Italian masters. Clarity of colour and outline, simplicity of composition and directness of observation and appeal are characteristics of the paintings of the Nazarenes which Brown reproduces, and the awkwardness of posture, brilliance of colour, and angularity of detailing which result are all features that were to become prominent in Pre-Raphaelite art. Technically indeed he

anticipated one of the procedures which the Pre-Raphaelites used. He painted the whole picture on an undercoat of white: ('nothing like a good coating of white to get a good sunny colour,' he noted in his diary.)⁷

The colour and simplicity of this painting, hearkening back to mediaeval principles, directly contrast the refined chiaroscuro which Reynolds praised as characteristic of the "Grand Style". Rossetti wanted to abandon ~~stayed~~^{staid} and safe conventions in order to achieve a glorious new ideal in painting. Poetry, which he believed had been perfected by Keats, did not offer this same challenge to the artist to "see on, and far. / Unto the lights of the great Past, new-lit / Fair for the future's track" ("Not As These", LXXV, p. 99). His later disillusionment with his achievement in the visual arts, praising instead his poetry as the art in which he had done no "pot-boiling", suggests that he maintained the ideals of his youth, if not the practice, throughout his life. Artistic integrity is important, then, to Rossetti's definition of the artist's role.

Rossetti and his fellow Pre-Raphaelites, Hunt and Millais in particular, broke with the Academy in order to achieve a new excellence in painting, a general statement of artistic purpose which is one of the few that can be drawn from Rossetti's period of association with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. It is impossible to ascertain their collective aims with any exactness because they never produced a working manifesto. Moreover, the work of each artist projects characteristics which suggest individuality rather than unity. William Michael Rossetti, an original member of the Pre-Raphaelite

Brotherhood, cites morality, simplicity, sincerity, innovation and truth to nature as significant characteristics of Pre-Raphaelite art, exemplifying the vague generalities which typically surround the definition of their aims.⁸ The Germ, the short-lived Pre-Raphaelite journal, stresses a credo of realism, "fidelity to nature": "The endeavour held in view throughout the writings on Art will be to encourage and enforce an entire adherence to the simplicity of nature."⁹ William Fredeman points out that this principle is abandoned in many Pre-Raphaelite works, which causes "the unreconciled contradiction between the mimetic-- 'Follow nature'--and the expressive--'fidelity to inner experience'--theories of art."¹⁰

In accordance with Ruskin's beliefs, Rossetti's fellow Pre-Raphaelite painters believed that mimetic art served a moral purpose by revealing both the order and wonder of nature; as Wendell Stacy Johnson explains, they wanted the visual medium to project "the language of the botanist or of the moralist, or both."¹¹ The realistic detail in The Scapegoat, a work by Holman Hunt, reflects fanatic devotion to this principle. Certainly Rossetti never aspired to this type of mimetic fidelity, as his own statements indicate. As early as 1850 he wrote a comic doggerel to John Tupper disclaiming interest in nature, provoked by Hunt's enthusiasm for nature observation:

Though as to Nature, Jack,
(Poor dear old hack!)
Touching sky, sun, stone, stick and stack,
I guess I'm half a quack;
For whom ten lines of Browning whack
The whole of the Zodiac. . .¹²

In another letter of the same year, he protested that the practice

of copying directly from nature inhibited his work: "The fact is, between you and me, that the leaves on the trees I have to paint here, appear red, yellow, etc. to my eyes; and of course I know them on that account to be really a vivid green, it seems rather annoying I cannot do them so: my subject shrieking aloud for spring."¹³ This passage, dominated as it is by the subjective voice, implies Rossetti's belief that the artist's inspired vision is of primary importance; the exact details of external nature should not be allowed to shape or define the artist's subjective conception, unless essential to the development of this vision.

Rossetti believed that nature is important to art only as it expresses the inner experience, as "The Woodspurge" exemplifies:

The wind flapped loose, the wind was still,
Shaken out dead from tree to hill:
I had walked on at the wind's will,--
I sat now, for the wind was still.

Between my knees my forehead was,--
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas
My hair was over in the grass,
My naked ears heard the day pass.

My eyes, wide open, had the run
Of some ten weeds to fix upon;
Among those 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 (p. 205).

In the first stanza the speaker identifies directly with nature, as his emotions are absorbed and projected by the natural world. Here, the intimate relationship between man and nature surpasses conventional

pathetic fallacy. The speaker, experiencing "perfect grief", assumes a purely emotional identity, dissociated from both physical and intellectual awareness. His disembodied state is clearly indicated by his impersonal and disjointed description of his physical person in stanza two. In stanzas three and four, he stares fixedly at the wordspurge, which becomes the symbol of this mood and moment, a symbol which he emotionally associated with his grief. As this poem indicates, nature is not important by any inherent quality; the wordspurge is not examined for its beauty, but rather for its symbolic connotation. For Rossetti, the natural world was subjective territory in art. He did not embrace the doctrine of artistic realism, but rather adopted a realistic style when it was useful to the development of a subjective truth, when it helped capture a mood and moment in art.

Roger Fry identifies this same quality in Rossetti's painting, suggesting that it affected his treatment of all external objects:

The ordinary world of vision scarcely supplied any inspiration to him. It was only through the evocation in his own mind of a special world, a world of pure romance, that the aspects of objects began to assume aesthetic meaning. Passionate desire was the central point of this world, but passion in itself was not enough; it must rage in a curiosity shop, amid objects which had for him peculiarly exciting associations.¹⁴

Rossetti expressed his impatience with literal realism in a criticism of Ford Madox Brown's painting Work:

Brown gets on slowly but surely with his Work, which will certainly be, in many respects, his finest picture: but I am beginning to doubt more and more, I confess, whether that excessive elaboration is rightly bestowed on

the materials of a modern subject--things so familiar to the eye that they can really be rendered thoroughly (I fancy) with much less labour; and things moreover which are far from beautiful in themselves,--for instance, the flowing waistcoat of a potboy on which Brown has lately been spending some weeks of his life. Hogarth used to paint the things of daily life in a different way, and we do not find them wanting.¹⁵

Rossetti attempted social realism in only one painting, Found, which he never completed despite his many preparatory sketches and studies.

Towards the end of his life he resumed work on this picture, determined to prove his ability to render realistic style:

I have lately again taken up the Found. . .the perspective and other points were difficult to manage successfully. I hope soon to be well forward in this work also. It is one without which I should not attempt an exhibition on account of its furnishing a refutation (trust) to what is so often alledged against poetic painting such as I follow commonly to the best of my ability--I mean the charge that a painter adopts the poetic style simply because he cannot deal with what is real and human. I should wish to show--as such a picture as Found though small, must do if I succeed with it--that my preference of the ideal does not depend on incapacity to deal with simple nature.¹⁶

Critical argument still runs that Rossetti adopted romantic, poetic painting as a defense against his technical inability to treat perspective and distance.¹⁷ These technical weaknesses resulted from his youthful disinclination to submit to tedious academic exercises, preferring instead to create a holistic work, as John Nicoll explains:

working with Brown was less than a total success, as the elder artist's ideas of the proper means of learning to paint were not

so very different from those of the Academy Schools. He first set Rossetti to copy a little painting of his own of two angels watching over the crown of thorns and then to paint a still life of a group of bottles and artistic bric-a-brac that was lying around in his studio. Rossetti finished the first in a sketchy sort of way, but before the second was complete he was already looking for an excuse to stop.¹⁸

Rossetti never exerted himself to acquire the basic skills of copy art, sharing Blake's contempt for verisimilitude in art: "'No man of sense,' Blake wrote, 'ever supposes that copying from Nature is the Art of Painting--if the Art is no more than this it is no better than any other manual labour--anybody may do it and the fool often will.'"¹⁹ The sonnet "Transfigured Life" emphasizes Rossetti's belief that the artist should not mirror or reflect actual phenomena in his work. As the poem suggests, the poet should refine and transform mundane passions to a new birth:

So in the Song, the singer's Joy and Pain,
Its very parents, evermore expand
To bid the passion's fullgrown birth remain,
By Art's transfiguring essence subtly spann'd.
(LX, p. 94)

The statement that this poem makes, that contrary states should attain new harmony by the transforming process of art, could well stand as the thesis of all Rossetti's work. While this sonnet suggests the harmony of contrary emotional states, his concern is most often to balance elements of physical and spiritual, mortal and immortal being. As we saw in chapter one of this thesis, Rossetti did not define these two states as strictly dualistic, as they naturally co-exist in man and

God; all conscious life is informed by these two principles. Rossetti believed that the purpose of art is to give physical representation to the artist's moment of inspired vision, when he sees the harmonious interaction of these two states. Art promises earthly immortality to the artist's vision, as Keats described in his "Ode On a Grecian Urn":

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal--yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou has not thy bliss,
 Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Granted art's immortality, these figures will remain forever young and forever romancing. This concept is important to Rossetti, not because art provides a fortress against the flux of time, but rather because the earthly immortality of art shadows divine immortality. Thus, Rossetti believed, the highest subjects in art concern man's spiritual nature of the divine made flesh, the balance of the mortal with the immortal.

In "Hand and Soul" Rossetti depicted the artist's quest for perfect harmony between the physical and the spiritual of his art. He detailed the stages of artistic development which his character, a painter Chiaro dell'Ermo, undergoes in order to create a great work of inspired vision. Although he adopts three different approaches to art, Chiaro's purpose is always to serve man and God with "a feeling of worship and service" ("Hand and Soul", p. 551). In the first approach to art the painter is primarily concerned to win earthly fame, to which end he pursues technical excellence. His paintings, treating

conventional religious subjects, reflect the beauties of technical perfection, and he thereby dares to hope that they might "be seen of God and found good" (p. 551). His vision, however, is too firmly rooted in earth and the passions of this life, and "his Madonnas, and his Saints, and his Holy Children, wrought for the sake of the life he saw in the faces that he loved," portray purely secular idealism: "much of that reverence which he had mistaken for faith had been no more than the worship of beauty" (p. 551). Neither is the second approach, art of deliberate didacticism, more successful. While the didactic artist purports to serve God directly, using his art as a vehicle for moral instruction, his conceptions are still limited by earthly vision. His art becomes cerebral rather than emotional, alienating the audience whom he would instruct with "multiplied abstractions" (p. 551). Despite the artist's intentions, his work still suffers from the limitations of secular conception; he is unable to answer the demands of his own soul: "How is it that thou, a man, wouldst say coldly to the mind what God has said to the heart warmly?" (p. 554).

In both these approaches to art, the artist figure, Chiaro, attempts to address human and divine elements, but is unable to conceive them in a condition of proper harmony. Only when he is visited by his own soul does he see visual evidence of the intimate connection that exists between divine and human being. His ecstatic experience is an intimation of man's immortal nature, and he therefore paints his own soul as the symbol of transcendent reality. It is this vision which finally sets the artist apart from his fellows; he is



specially privileged, having glimpsed the human spirit in a moment of fleeting transcendence. Consequently he becomes duty-bound to give concrete shape to this image, to "serve man with God" (p. 555). Art, for Rossetti, should capture the artist's momentary vision of his own divinity. An inspired work provides visual proof that man can transcend his physical nature, standing as "a moment's monument."

Rossetti believed that love is a second evocation of man's immortal nature. In "Hand and Soul", Chiaro discovers that his soul's transcendence has occurred because of his capacity to love, which is identified as a divine impulse: "possess thy love in sufficiency: assuredly this is faith, for the heart must believe first. What he sets in thine heart to do, that do thou. . .Think not of Him; but of His love and thy love" (p. 554). Rossetti distinguished between two types of love in The House of Life, although he did not intend the divisions to be rigid. In Platonic love, the lover discovers his soul-mate, who is the extension of himself. Together the two Platonic lovers form one being, and they await a heaven of immortal union:

Even so, when first I saw you, seemed it, love,
That among souls allied to mine was yet
One nearer kindred than life hinted of.
O born with me somewhere than men forget,
And though in years of sight and sound unmet,
Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough!
(from "The Birth-bond", XV, p. 79).

Rossetti described the second type of love, the physical union between man and woman, as ecstatic self-annihilation. This type of love shadows the lover's divinity, as he loses himself to the beloved:

I was a child beneath her touch,--a man
 When breast to breast we clung, even I and she,--
 A spirit when her spirit looked through me,--
 A god when all our life-breath met to fan
 Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardours ran,
 Fire within fire, desire in deity.
 (from "The Kiss", VI, p. 76).

The House of Life integrates the two types of love, seeing in both the shadow of supra-mundane existence; Platonic lovers who share souls "born. . . somewhere that men forget" can achieve reunion on earth, if only temporary, through the bond of physical love:

Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
 Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
 Thee from myself, neither our love from God.
 (from "Heart's Hope", V, p. 76).

Rossetti's lovers look towards death for permanent union, dissociating themselves from the temporal world; the intensity of their love requires the fulfillment of life after death. From his belief that he had seen physical manifestations of the divine on earth--visions which allowed him to render concrete images of the divine in art--Rossetti derived his faith that the soul assumes physical shape in the eternal realm. For Rossetti, then, the divine is the principle of physical immortality, and the afterlife holds the hope that spirit will be united with flesh in eternal harmony. The sonnet "Stillborn Love" conveys the lovers' hope that eternal reunion will compensate for their lost hours:

But lo! what wedded souls now hand and hand
 Together tread at last the immortal strand
 With eyes where burning memory lights love home?
 Lo! how the little outcast hour has turned

And leaped to them and in their faces yearned:--
 "I am your child: O parents, ye have come!"
 (LV, p. 93).

Rossetti's art reveals his obsession with this image, so much of his work, both painting and poetry, attempting to capture the fleeting vision that appeared to the lover in "Willowwood":

I sat with Love upon a woodside well,
 Leaning across the water, I and he;
 Nor ever did he speak nor looked at me,
 But touched his lute wherein was audible
 The certain secret thing he had to tell:
 Only our mirrored eyes met silently
 In the low wave; and that sound came to be
 The passionate voice I knew; and my tears fell.

And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers;
 And with his foot and with his wing-feathers
 He swept the spring that watered my heart's drouth.
 The the dark ripples spread to waving hair,
 And as I stopped, her own lips rising there
 Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth.
 (XLIX, p. 91).

Hence, "The Portrait" assumes special significance for Rossetti, as it renders an immutable image of the beauty of the beloved:

Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note
 That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!)
 They that would look on her must come to me.
 (X, p. 78).

The portrait, in concert with memory, keeps the beloved alive in the lover's soul, encouraging him to nurture hope that she exists in a heavenly sphere; since he is able still to achieve momentary communion with an image of her body and soul, he refuses to believe her to be forever dead to him:

This is her picture as she was:
 It seems a thing to wonder on,
 As though mine image in the glass
 Should tarry when myself am gone.
 I gaze until she seems to stir,--
 Until mine eyes almost aver
 That now, even now, the sweet lips part
 To breathe the words of the sweet heart:--
 And yet the earth is over her.

Alas! even such the thin-drawn ray
 That makes the prison-depths more rude,--
 The drip of water night and day
 Giving a tongue to solitude.
 Yet only this, of love's whole prize,
 Remains; save what in mournful guise
 Takes counsel with my soul alone,--
 Save what is secret and unknown,
 Below the earth, above the skies. . . .

Even so, where Heaven holds breath and hears
 The beating heart of Love's own breast,--
 Where round the secret of all spheres
 All angels lay their wings to rest,--
 How shall my soul stand rapt and awed,
 When, by the new birth born abroad
 Throughout the music of the suns,
 It enters in her soul at once
 And knows the silence there for God!

Here with her face doth memory sit
 Meanwhile, and wait the day's decline,
 Till other eyes shall look from it,
 Eyes of the spirit's Palestine,
 Even than the old gaze tenderer:
 While hopes and aims long lost with her
 Stand round her image side by side,
 Like tombs of pilgrims that have died
 About the Holy Sepulchre.
 ("The Portrait", pp. 169-170).

As Wendell Stacy Johnson describes, Rossetti's lovers anticipate reunion in a realm that is "not timeless but intensified time."²⁰ The Blessed Damozel exists in this realm, feeling that "her day / Had counted as ten years," and petitioning Christ for a reunion with her earthly lover in heaven:

There will I ask of Christ the Lord
 Thus much for him and me:--
 Only to live as once on earth
 With Love,--only to be,
 As then awhile, for ever now
 Together, I and he.
 (p. 5)

While the earthly lover cherishes the same hope, he fears that his unworthiness may frustrate their desire:

(Alas! we two, we two, thou say'st!
 Yea, one wast thou with me
 That once of old. But shall God lift
 To endless unity
 The soul whose likeness with thy soul
 Was but its love for thee?)
 (p. 5)

These fears dominate the second half of The House of Life. The speaker, having received the laurel of earthly fame as "Love's Last Gift", is left alone to make sense of life "Without Her". He becomes consumed with desire to earn eternal reward, regretting that his achievements have been limited by a divided will, despising days wasted in idleness. Given "The Choice" between three approaches to life, epicureanism, asceticism, and what William Michael Rossetti called "the theory of self development", the speaker favours the latter.²¹ This choice accords with a passage in "Soothsay", a poem that records Rossetti's mature philosophy, which contends that one should apply oneself to duty, striving to achieve eternal reward despite the impossibility of finally proving that an afterlife exists:

How much too late at length!--to trace
 The hour on its forewarning face,
 The thing thou hast not dared to do! . . .
 Behold, this may be thus! Ere true

It prove, arise and bear thy yoke.

Let lore of all Theology
 Be to thy soul what it can be:
 But know,--the Power that fashions man
 Measured not out thy little span
 For thee to take the meting-rod
 In turn, and so approve on God
 Thy science of Theometry. . . .

Gaze onward without claim to hope,
 Nor, gazing backward, court regret.
 (p. 222)

Rossetti is according a second significance to art in the second section of The House of Life, then, suggesting that it provides the measure of the artist's life and, consequently, determines his fate:

O Lord of work and peace! O Lord of life!
 O Lord, the awful Lord of will! though late,
 Even yet renew this soul with duteous breath:
 That when the peace is garnered in from strife,
 The work retrieved, the will regenerate,
 This soul may see thy face. O Lord of death!
 ("The Heart of the Night", LXVI, p. 96)

As Rossetti stated in the sonnet "Inclusiveness", salvation or damnation is determined by one's activities in this life.

To summarize these attitudes, Rossetti saw both love and art as intimations of immortality. Because love cannot be satisfied within the bounds of mortal existence, it points towards an immortal realm; moreover, the ecstatic union of lovers, allowing a temporary communion between souls, shadows man's immortal nature. Art furthers this vision because it can give physical representation to the spirit, imaging the divine in man. The artist of inspired insight, able to record transcendent visions, may earn eternal afterlife by virtue of

his special devotion. In "Soothsay", Rossetti exalts the artist with the lover, suggesting that both have touched the divine:

Crave thou no dower of earthly things
 Unworthy Hope's imaginings.
 To have brought true birth of Song to be
 And to have won hearts to Poesy,
 Or anywhere in the sun or rain
 To have loved and been loved again,
 Is loftiest reach of Hope's bright wings.
 (p. 221)

In a verse fragment, however, he elevates art above other human passions:

TO ART
 I loved thee ere I loved as woman, Love.
 (p. 240)

Rossetti cherished art because with it he shaped both visions of love and visions of afterlife, winning immutable earthly existence for each. Art is therefore the most powerful evocation of man's immortality for Rossetti, as it lends physical reality to abstractions dealing with the soul.

The thematic progression noted in Rossetti's literary work is also evident in his painting. While his early art reveals man's divinity on earth, his later art attempts to give physical shape to man's spirit in the afterlife; he shifts emphasis from the god-like nature of man on earth to the physical nature of the divine. In his early pictures, Rossetti portrayed the Virgin Mary, the symbol of divine innocence and grace on earth. Like the artist in "Hand and Soul", Mary is blessed with divine conception while still in the

earthly realm; moreover, like Chiaro, she conceives by virtue of her love for the divine being. As these youthful productions indicate, focused on man's divinity in this life, Rossetti's early concern was to define the nature of man rather than to define a concept of afterlife.

A shift away from earthly affairs can be seen in many paintings from Rossetti's middle period, a thematic development similar to that which occurred in his poetry of the same period. In Carlisle Wall, Paola and Francesca, The Wedding of St. George and the Princess Sabrina, and The Wedding of St. George a sense of doom shrouds the lovers. Other pictures from this period--Sir Launcelot in the Queen's Chamber, Writing on the Sand, How They Met Themselves, and the several stories of Hamlet and Ophelia-- forecast the death of the beloved or the death of love itself. Rossetti's lovers seem stricken with the realization that the things of earth do not last; the lovers realize an earthly limitation upon their love similar to that which is given verbal expression in The House of Life :

There came an image in Life's retinue
That had Love's wings and bore his gonfalon:
Fair was the web, and nobly wrought thereon,
A soul-sequestered face, thy form and hue!
Bewildering sounds, such as Spring wakens to,
Shook in its folds; and through my heart its power
Sped trackless as the immemorable hour
When birth's dark portal groaned and all was new.

But a veiled woman followed, and she caught
The banner round its staff, to furl and cling,--
Then plucked a feather from the bearer's wing
And held it to his lips that stirred it not,
And said to me, "Behold, there is no breath:
I and this love are one, and I am Death."
("Death-in-Love," XLVIII, p. 90)

New to the paintings of this period is the sense of fear and desperation, mortality frustrating the lovers who require, for their fulfillment, union in an eternal afterlife.

Many of Rossetti's later paintings focus upon the figure of a woman, alone and usually trapped in a claustrophobic situation. La Pia de' Tolomei and Prosperine are trapped, the Blessed Damozel and Mariana await their lovers, Astarte Syriaca is too beautiful and Pandora too knowledgeable to adapt to earthly life. Innocence has been lost to each, and their faces share an expression of eternal sorrow. Like the speaker in the later sonnets of The House of Life, they expect neither release nor fulfillment from life. La Pia and Mariana, the two mortal figures, hope for death to escape the torments of earthly life and love; the mythologies that accompany Prosperine, Pandora, Astarte and the Blessed Damozel indicate that these figures still nurture hope for a future life. Rossetti's theme is particularly well expressed in the myth of Pandora, the goddess who loosed all the evils upon the world while at the same time she secured man's capacity to hope; the retention of hope has proven to be both blessing and burden.

Oswald Doughty suggests that Rossetti, like the painter Chiaro in "Hand and Soul", intended these female portraits to reveal the condition of his own soul; while the early portraits reflect his joyful optimism, the later portraits image his despairing frustration:

That strange procession of female portraits he created in many a picture and poem, was indeed the record his hand made of his soul as he foresaw. From the early ascetic Virgin of his 'Annunciation' and the earlier 'Girlhood of Mary Virgin', through the entranced "Beata

Beatrice' and 'Dante's Dream', the voluptuous 'Bocca Baciata' and 'Lady Lilith', to the menacing 'Mnemosyne' and 'Pandora', in whose eyes glimmers a sullen flame of madness, on to the darkly brooding 'Astarte Syriaca' and stony sphinx of the end. Rossetti expressed through the forms of women, the experience of his own soul, as he tried to live his myth, his ideal vision, amidst the frustrations of the outer world of reality. Both his poetry and painting overwhelmingly testify to the truth of his assertion, 'All my life I have dreamt one dream.'²²

Although Doughty's biographical inferences are speculative, his description of Rossetti's thematic development is apt; while Rossetti's early paintings celebrate "Lustral rite", "dire portent" is most immediately apparent in his last pictures. It is not that hope has been banished from the later portraits, but rather that these figures seem to be haunted by it. They are frozen in expectancy which is both dull and imploring, their despair so apparent because they are nagged with wan hope.

Much of Rossetti's work explores aspects of the connection between the human and the divine, and often his art reveals a mind possessed with mystical experience. William Michael Rossetti cited Rossetti's interest in occult matters: "he was superstitious in the grain, and anti-scientific to the marrow. . . Any writing about devils, spectres, or the supernatural generally, whether in poetry or prose, had always a fascination for him."²³ Pursuing this subject in his art, Rossetti often touched upon esoteric supernatural or transcendent experiences. He treats déjà vu in "Sudden Light", reincarnation in "St. Agnes of Intercession," The Doppelgänger tradition of fateful confrontation in

How They Met Themselves, and voodoo magic in "Sister Helen". He treats angels and devils, Mary and Mephistopheles, as these figures represent levels of existence beyond ordinary human being. These subjects, derived from religious and occult traditions, supplied Rossetti with physical images of spiritual presences. To be understood, they must be apprehended by the soul, and hence Rossetti believed that these images were the proper territory of the artist.

As we saw in chapter one of this thesis, Rossetti did not believe that by recreating works of the past the artist forfeited his claim to inspiration; rather the artist can be inspired by the original work, absorbing it into his own vision: "he [the painter] working from his own poetical resources, has found a sympathetic echo in the words of a brother poet" ("C. H. Lear," p. 575). As this quotation indicates, Rossetti saw no reason why the painter could not borrow his inspiration from the poet, or vice-versa; for him, the arts are connected, as they both express "poetic" vision. His paintings often depict a scene inspired from the literature of another artist. And so does his poetry often grow from the painting of another artist; he does not merely describe the visual details, but creates a poem based upon his distinctively subjective interpretation, as his sonnet for Leonardo da Vinci's Our Lady of the Rocks exemplifies:

Mother, is this the darkness of the end,
 The shadow of Death? and is that outer sea
 Infinite imminent Eternity?
 And does the death-pang by man's seed sustained
 In time's each instant cause thy face to bend
 Its silent prayer upon the Son, while He
 Blesses the dead with His hand silently
 To His long day which hours no more offend?

Mother of grace, the pass is difficult,
 Keen as these rocks, and the bewildered souls
 Throng it like echoes, blindly shuddering through.
 Thy name, O Lord, each spirit's voice extols,
 Whose peace abides in the dark avenue
 Amid the bitterness of things occult.
 (p. 171)

Rossetti's own paintings and poems often act in concert, one art form complementing rather than merely explicating the other. In "The Blessed Damozel", for example, the painting and the poem project a single vision. While the poetic medium can only evoke physical detail, it can give full expression to the psychological content; by contrast, the visual medium captures physical detail, but can only evoke or suggest the psychological content. The two genres are therefore important to the full expression of one theme, the visual representation balancing the literary description. Rossetti endeavours to minimize the difference between the two genres--rendering vivid visual detail in his poems and capturing psychological content by expression and symbol in his paintings--seeking to balance opposing principles even in the technical aspects of his work.

Recent studies have explored the similarity between composition and technique in Rossetti's painting and poetry, suggesting his deliberate attempt to achieve the same effect in both genres. Wendell Stacy Johnson cites a study by Eva Tietz, "Das Malerische in Rossettis Dichtung", which illustrates this technical interrelationship:

Dr. Tietz considers the detailed poetic description of light effects and contrasts in colour, as well as the use of vertical and horizontal forms to achieve pictorial and decorative results. She cites examples

from the verse of perspective as a painter would see it, and descriptions of objects that grow weak and grey as they recede, "green grass / Whiten'd by distance" ("Boulogne to Amiens and Paris"). Finally, she suggests that in both Rossetti's pictures and his poems, with their feminine figures and moonlit landscapes, the figure is the visual center, graphically described and surrounded by minute decorative detail with the landscape as a distant and subordinate background.²⁴

Bernie Leggett conducts a similar analysis of the painting and poem "Mary Magdelene", comparing the linear and rhythmic movement:

Rossetti's graphic device is to achieve motion from line: his verbal technique is to adapt sound patterns to the physical impetus of his speakers. The guiding principle of both artworks is the convergence of dialectical movements and the resolution of their suspension.²⁵

As these studies reveal, Rossetti's paired poems and paintings not only share the same subject, being also related by structure and technique.

Perhaps in his desire to merge the two art forms, Rossetti was responding, at least in part, to his fears that he pursued one art at the expense of the other. In despairing moments, he lamented that his talent and time had been divided between painting and writing. In "Lost on Both Sides", according to William Michael Rossetti's explanation, Rossetti addressed this dilemma:

I do not know what train of thought or of feeling impelled my brother to write the sonnet, but should conjecture that it was composed at some moment of discontent with his own endeavours, whether as painter or as poet. According to this view, the "separate hopes which in a soul had

wooded the one same Peace" would be his efforts partly in the form of painting and partly in that of poetry, at obtaining eminence (by which I do not mean worldly reputation so much as adequate self-development). This hoped for eminence is now contemplated as unattainable, or at any rate unattained; and the efforts themselves "roam together through that soul", its obscurer bye-ways and disused halting places.²⁶

But, putting this question aside, it is still clear that Rossetti was always plagued with fears that his artistic integrity might be compromised:

My own belief is that I am a poet (within the limit of my powers) primarily, and that it is my poetic tendencies that chiefly give value to my pictures: only painting being--what poetry is not--a livelihood--I have put my poetry chiefly in that form. On the other hand, the bread-and-cheese question has led to a good deal of my painting being pot-boiling and no more--whereas my verse, being unprofitable, has remained (as much as I have found time for) unprostituted.²⁷

As Ralph Berry explains, the offer of money, more than any living artist had ever been paid, enticed Rossetti to produce the pot-boilers he despised.²⁸ John Nicoll describes Rossetti's careless, hasty style in these works: "Essentially the changes in his own art that were to take place as a result of his relations with his patrons were firstly an increasing tendency to subordinate his creativity by repeating themes that had already proved popular with clients, and secondly. . .to lapse increasingly into a florid, hasty and sometimes only passably competent mannerism that betrays both the shallowness of his inspiration, and the technical improficiency which his

originality, commitment and pictorially expressed personality had hitherto transcended."²⁹ Not only are these paintings deficient technically, but many depict the fleshly physicality of "Body's Beauty", a subject which Rossetti had denounced in The House of Life, pledging himself instead to the service of "Soul's Beauty." These paintings exemplify the type of uninspired art to which Rossetti objected. As artistic expression they are neither unique nor sincere; they possess no vision.

Since Rossetti believed that the purpose of art was to shape and earn eternal afterlife, it is not surprising that he was haunted by fears lest "Work and Will awake too late"; he feared, similarly, the loss of artistic inspiration. For Rossetti, both arts must address the same purpose, giving shape and substance to his "one dream", his "one Hope." In both arts, Rossetti attempted to focus on a "poetic" subject, describing and portraying the divine in relation to man. He described his work in the visual arts as "poetic" painting, emphasizing the importance of inspired conception and content in art. For this reason, he resented the description of his poetry as "word painting"; he used visual detail in his poetry to lend shape and substance to his vision. Whistler's epigrammatic reference points to the close relationship between Rossetti's painting and poetry: "Rossetti, take down the picture and frame the sonnet."³⁰

CHAPTER THREE

William Morris and the People: The Artist Attempting to Build an Earthly Paradise

The preceding chapter states Rossetti's conviction that the quality of a work of art is determined by the quality of the individual artist; with personal dedication and divine inspiration the artist can produce a great work. In contrast, William Morris believed that a work of art reflects the society in which it is created; art flourishes when a whole society is involved in some form of creative pursuit, and, as a corollary, art decays when it becomes an individual pursuit. A statement of Morris's attitude towards the role of the artist and the purpose of art, as it was fully and finally articulated in his last prose work News from Nowhere, introduces this chapter. His early works are then studied in particular detail to establish the continuity of Morris's aesthetic throughout his own career as artist. Too often, this early literature is dismissed from the body of his work, only noted for the effect of Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite influence. As a general statement, this chapter maintains that Morris recognized an organic bond between art and society throughout his career, and that he was drawn, even in his earliest works, to mediaeval art, which he believed the product of a vital culture.

Chapter One of this thesis describes Morris's belief that art, in a vital society, is the genuine expression of the people, embodying

their mythos: "This is what is meant by the much abused word 'originality' which by no means signifies that the idea expressed is the sole property of the author. . .but that the author has been able to express it in his own way, and become the voice through which the poetry of mankind speaks so far."¹ He believed that traditional truth, the legacy of the past, is understood by the whole body of a healthy society; under these conditions, it is the role of the artist to give new expression to traditional truth, adapting it to the perceptions of his society. Morris admired certain traditional authors--Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, and Malory, among several others--in whose works he believed the essential idea of human being was contained:

These are the kind of book which Mazzini called 'Bibles'; they cannot always be measured by a literary standard, but to me they are far more important than any literature. They are in no sense the work of individuals but have grown up from the very hearts of the people.²

According to Morris, a healthy society, wherein the people understand and identify with art, requires that the people pursue creative exercise in their daily lives. Under this condition, both the fine and the lesser arts are alike an expression of the people, addressing the same aim, fulfilling the same purpose: "Art made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user" (XXII, p. 58). The lesser arts stand as the foundation of all art, representing man's initial need to create; the fine arts are a secondary manifestation which arises when man's creative needs and abilities become more complex. The best art is produced by a society that allows the two arts to exist side by side, ensuring a close bond between the artist

and the people:

I must tell you that in all times when the arts were in a healthy condition there was an intimate connexion between these two kinds of art; nay moreover that in those times when art flourished most, the higher and the lower kinds of art were divided from one another by no hard and fast lines; the highest of the intellectual art had an ornamental character in it and appealed to all men, and to all the faculties of a man; while the humblest of the ornamental art shared in the meaning and deep feeling of the intellectual; one melted into the other by scarce perceptible gradations; or to put it into other words, the best artist was a workman, the humblest workman was an artist.³

In a decadent society, the people become divorced from creative endeavour and the lesser arts become extinct; while the fine arts persist, they attain an unhealthy autonomy, divorced as they are from the life of the people.

Morris diagnosed the nineteenth century as a period of social and artistic decline. As his letters and lectures so often reiterate, he blamed the growth of industrial society for the death of the art of the people. He feared that the people, harnessed to the machinery of modern technology, were being forced to blunt their imaginative and creative impulses. He believed that the quality of individual life suffers when man is forced to labour at useless toil; and so does the collective culture suffer, as the people, with their imaginative sense blunted, can neither understand contemporary works of art nor the traditions upon which these build. Under these conditions, the genuine artist is isolated from society, working with traditions that have no vital connection with his contemporary world. According to

Morris's estimate, society in the nineteenth century imposed certain limitations on the artist and his work:

Therefore the artists are obliged to express themselves, as it were, in a language 'not understood of the people': nor is this their fault; if they were to try, as some think they should, to meet the public halfway, and work in such a manner as to satisfy only those prepossessions of men ignorant of art, they would be casting aside their special gifts, and would become traitors to that cause of art which it is their duty and glory to serve: they have no choice save to do their personal work without any hope of being understood as things are now; to stand apart as possessors of some sacred mystery, which, whatever happens, they must at least do their best to guard. . . .⁴

As this passage suggests, Morris despised the elitism of the art for art's sake movement, denouncing it as "art cultivated by a few, and for a few, who would consider it necessary--a duty, if they could admit duties--to despise the common herd, to hold themselves aloof from all that the world has been struggling for from the first, to guard carefully every approach to their palace of art" (XXII, pp. 38-39). And so was he critical of art that referred only to the reality of the nineteenth-century world, his novel News from Nowhere implying that social satire, especially as it appeared in Thackeray's works, opposed life and genuine creativity. Morris believed that a good artist in the nineteenth century naturally knew that his subject must come from the past; working within a decadent society, an artist still has access to the legacy of past traditions. While Morris admired art that communicates a sense of history and tradition, he believed that

art can only be great when it communicates a tradition which is itself vital to that culture.

In his own work Morris turned to the mediaeval past, discovering in it the vital culture of a communal society. The past for Morris functioned as a necessary imaginative escape from machine-like productivity to handicraft creativity, from industrial technology to folkcommunity, in short from ugliness to beauty. He admired the great Gothic structures, each a monument to man's joyful labour in a society that nurtured creative energy. As he suggested in News from Nowhere, this architecture is an assertion of mediaeval self-confidence, attempting as it does to reach beyond the limitations imposed by earth: "Like the mediaevals, we like everything trim and clean, and orderly and bright; as people always do when they have any sense of architectural power; because then they know that they can have what they want, and they won't stand any nonsense from Nature in their dealings with her" (XVI, p. 73). Morris admired the creative spirit which pulsed through the whole of mediaeval art, informing the chronicles of Froissart, the romances of Malory, the long Chaucerian narratives, and the Northern sagas and epics, each springing from the life, traditional and cultural, of the people. J. W. Mackail describes Morris's close identification with all things mediaeval:

For to Morris the Middle Ages, out of which he is sometimes seemed to have strayed by some accident into the nineteenth century, were his habitual environment: he lived in them as really and as simply as if he had been translated back to them in actual vision.⁵

Yet, as Chapter One states, Morris did not advocate the wholesale reinstatement of mediaeval ways. He was not oblivious to the violence and political disorder which he perceived ^{to have} ultimately destroyed the creative power of mediaeval society:

Years ago men's minds were full of art and the dignified shows of life, and they had but little time for justice and peace; and the vengeance on them was not increase of the violence they did not heed, but destruction of the art they heeded.⁶

This society lacked the stability to ensure the continuity of man's creative life. William Fredeman speculates that Morris's understanding of this deficiency in mediaeval society encouraged his interest in political theory: "His ultimate turning to politics was almost inevitable, and it may be explained simply by his desire to restore to the England of the nineteenth-century not the life of the Middle Ages but what he understood to be the animating spirit of art that flourished at that time."⁷

News from Nowhere supports Fredeman's assertion, as Morris in his utopia retains the mediaeval approach to the arts while he rejects mediaeval feudalism in favour of a larger system of communal organization; the socio-political structure of Nowhere is responsible for replacing the violence, cruelty and competitive heroics of the Middle Ages with a spirit of peaceful stability and fellowship. Morris creates an earthly paradise wherein the lives of the people are marked by a beauty and longevity unknown either to the mediaeval age or to the nineteenth century. In "Nowhere", the people grow old slowly and

gracefully, with the immediate evidence of death and decay removed from their lives. Life is Utopian, nurturing creativity; death, when it comes, is accepted as the inevitable order of cyclical nature. Since they hold no hope for after-life, content to focus on the things of this world, their society is structured to allow every man fulfillment through daily creative pursuits. Continually exercised, man's imaginative sense is fully activated allowing him to take real delight in the material of ancient myths; dialogue from the novel reveals the significance of myth to the people in Nowhere:

I saw at a glance that their subjects were taken from queer old-world myths and imaginations which in yesterday's world only about half a dozen people in the country knew anything about. . . I smiled, and said: 'Well, I scarcely expected to find record of the Seven Swans and the King of the Golden Mountain and Faithful Henry, and such curious pleasant imaginations as Jacob Grimm got together from the childhood of the world, barely lingering even in his time. I should have thought you would have forgotten such childishness by this time. . . .'

'What do you mean, guest? I think them very beautiful, I mean not only the pictures, but the stories; and when we were children we used to imagine them going on in every wood-end, by the bight of every stream; every house in the fields was the Fairy King's House to us.' (XVI, p. 100).

As Morris described, vivid imagination allows the people to understand the difference between great and lesser works of art from the past, the people of Nowhere rejecting intuitively the nineteenth century works which Morris himself disliked; thus, the guest in Nowhere comments:

"I smiled faintly to think the nineteenth-century, of which such big words have been said, counted for nothing in the memory of this man

who read Shakespeare and had not forgotten the Middle Ages" (XVI, p. 49).

In a dialogue about the purpose of art, the characters explain that it must engage their imaginative sympathy:

'Well,' said Dick, 'surely it is but natural to like these things strange; just as when we were children, as I said just now, we used to pretend to be so-and-so in such-and-such a place. That's what these pictures and poems do; and why shouldn't they?'

'Thou hast hit it, Dick,' quoth old Hammond; 'it is the child-like part of us that produces works of the imagination. When we are children time passes so slow with us that we seem to have time for everything' (SVI, p. 102).

In this society, imagination rules reason, creativity supercedes death and decay; the people retain child-like innocence, happy and productive in this life, accepting rather than fearing final mortality. In Nowhere, man no longer recognizes duality as the necessary condition of existence as he rather accepts for himself the same conditions that govern external nature; in harmony with the non-human world, man's life follows a cyclical process. As a result, the material around which the fine arts usually build, the tensions and complexities of life and the warring passions of man, are eliminated from Morris's Utopian society. One character in the novel objects that the ease and complaisance of life in Nowhere denies artistic expression and breeds a dull people: "How is it that though we are interested with our life for the most part, yet when people take to writing poems or painting pictures they seldom deal with our modern life, or if they do, take good care to make their poems and pictures unlike that life?" (XVI, pp. 101-102). But, as another character in the fiction points

out, art finds expression in the activities of daily life:

'Books, books! always books, grandfather! When will you understand that after all it is the world we live in which interests us; the world of which we are a part, and which we can never love too much? Look!' she said, throwing open the casement wider and showing us the white light sparkling between the black shadow of the moonlit garden, through which ran a little shiver of the night-wind, 'look! these are our books in these days--and these,' she said, stepping lightly up to the two lovers and laying a hand on each of their shoulders; 'and the guest there. . .and even you, grandfather' (XVI, p. 150).

For Morris, art is the expression of creative energy and imagination: "That thing which I understand by real art is the expression by man of his pleasure in labour" (XXII, p. 42). Art, the process of creativity, is the way of life in his Utopian Nowhere.

Morris explained that the creative society in Nowhere grew out of a social revolution which had formed in anarchic reaction against the nineteenth-century pattern of social organization. His letters and lectures reveal that the theme of revolution was very real to his social-aesthetic theory. While he sometimes contemplated the peaceful evolution of society towards a more healthy and creative state, suggesting that the people would not long accept the enforced impotency of machine-like productivity and would reclaim the right to creativity as the natural legacy of human being, more often he was willing that a revolution should obliterate art as it was known in the nineteenth century. As a character in News from Nowhere notes, the genuine artist in the nineteenth century, because he was continually frustrated

in his search for beauty, was the natural ally of the revolution:

'There are traditions--nay, real histories--in our family about it [the nineteenth century]: my grandfather was one of its victims. If you know something about it, you will understand what he suffered when I tell you that he was in those days a genuine artist, a man of genius, and a revolutionist' (XVI, pp. 96-97).

Morris declared that his own revolutionary ideals were formulated to defend traditional art against the currents of contemporary decadence:

And yet, I must tell you that I am an artist: art is that by which I live; it feeds me body and soul, and without it the world would be empty to me: judge therefore how I must love and long for the Art of the People! For which with me it comes to this, that I cannot live with any approach to happiness without art forming part of my life, and I know that my only chance of my having any real share in art, is that it shall be the Art of the People: nay more, I know that what art yet remains to us from the time when man had some pleasure in his labour, is lessening day by day, and that unless some change comes which will give all people a share in art, there will soon be no art at all left in the world. Judge, therefore, I say, how I must love the art of the People!⁸

In a letter of 1874, Morris ^{en}capsuled his Utopian vision of News from Nowhere, but stated that he felt powerless to effect the social changes which he envisioned; here, he implies that the role of the artist is passive, divorced from the world of action:

Surely if people lived five hundred years instead of threescore and ten they would find some better way of living than in such a sordid loathsome place, but now it seems to be nobody's business to try to better things--isn't mine you see in spite of all

my grumbling--but look, suppose people lived in little communities among gardens and green fields, so that you could be in the country in five minutes' walk, and had few wants, almost no furniture for instance, and no servants, and studied the (difficult) arts of enjoying life, and finding out what they really wanted: then I think one might hope civilization had really begun.⁹

A later letter, of 1881, indicates that Morris eventually determined a cause-and-effect relationship between passive artistic statement and active participation in the real world. He stated that man's verbal complaints against his age often serve as a prelude to social action; these complaints, formulated in art, inspire others with a zeal to reform, becoming "at worst like the music to which men go to battle. Of course if the thing is done egotistically 'tis bad so far; but then again, how to do it well or ill, is a matter of art like other things."¹⁰

News from Nowhere, envisioning a Utopia based upon Marxist principles to which Morris himself adhered, seems to contradict Morris's belief that art should not be deliberately didactic, but John Redmond correctly points out that it is not so much a piece of political propaganda, as it is the embodiment of traditional truths which comprise the myth of the Golden Age throughout literary history:

[What] Morris realized is that we must measure our lives imaginatively as well as rationally; but 'history', as we understand the term in the West for a century or so, is an objective, 'scientific' record rationally interpreted, whereas myths, legends, and utopian dreams are offered not as facts to the intelligence but as truths to the imagination. . . even in the very practically intended Manifesto of the Socialist League,

Morris could speak of his hope for England as being a return to a condition like 'that primitive Communism that preceded Civilization'.¹¹

For Morris, the chief purpose of the fine arts is to cultivate man's sense of beauty and imagination by recreating and re-stating intuitive, non-intellectual truths: "All the greater arts appeal to that intricate combination of intuitive perceptions, feelings, experience, and memory which is called imagination" (XXII, p. 235). He held that the lesser arts, too, should provoke similar imaginative response, as his design aims indicate: "You may be sure that any decoration is futile, and has fallen at least into the first stage of degradation, when it does not remind you of something beyond itself."¹² Addressed to this purpose, the arts fulfill a necessary social function, as Morris insisted they should: "nothing can be a work of art which is not useful; that is to say, which does not minister to the body when well under the command of the mind, or which does not amuse, soothe, or elevate the mind in a healthy state" (XXII, p. 23). Morris's art is suggestive rather than deliberately didactic, then, encouraging the reader to develop his faculty for imaginative perception.

Morris admired mediaeval art because it excited his full imaginative response. That he valued this art is evidenced by his allegiance to the Anti-Scrape League, a group pledged to save mediaeval monuments and structures from restoration and renovation at the hands of nineteenth-century architects. For Morris, the authentic mediaeval artifact communicated the rich imaginative spirit of its age. It is the mediaeval imagination which he emulates in his literary works,

attempting to reproduce the animating spirit rather than the literal context of his mediaeval sources. Morris believed that he could create new art, having imbibed the spirit of a mediaeval work: "Read it through. . .then shut the book and write it out again as a new story for yourself."¹³ Walter Pater aptly describes Morris's literary achievement:

Of that world this new poetry takes possession, and sublimates beyond it another still fainter and more spectral, which is literally an artificial or 'earthly paradise'. It is a finer ideal, extracted from what in relation to any actual world is already an ideal. Like some strange second flowering after date, it renews on a more delicate type the poetry of a past age, but must not be confounded with it.¹⁴

Even in his earliest literary work, Morris's practice was to borrow tone and atmosphere rather than fact from mediaeval sources. In his article "Morris's Treatment of His Mediaeval Sources", David Staines demonstrates that no exact correspondence can be made between Morris's poetry in The Defence of Guenevere volume and the stories that appear either in Malory or Froissart, although he cites "The Defence of Guenevere" as the poem most apparently derivative:

Though Froissart assumes a greater importance than Malory in the study of the 1858 volume in regard to the number of poems where dependence upon a source can be noted, his actual influence is almost impossible to detect with precise clarity. No poem is as indebted to Froissart as "The Defence of Guenevere" is to Malory. And many poems are reduplications of the atmosphere of Froissart's world, though an actual source is non-existent.¹⁵

Even in "The Defence of Guenevere" it is Morris's deviation from

Malory which is the most significant aspect of the poem; Morris's Guenevere defies Malory's version of her affair with Launcelot, her whole defence resting on her private interpretation of the past as opposed to the legendary account. According to her subjective interpretation, her love for Launcelot was inevitable, almost sacred, "That which I deemed would ever round me move / Glorifying all things" (I, p. 3). She suggests that by love Launcelot and she were lifted above mundane reality, and that her accusers, whose "bawling broke our dream up" are guilty of an offense against love (I, p. 9). She describes the progress of her affair with Launcelot in careful and graphic detail, not to antagonize the court, but rather to convey her vision of the significant past. In order to convince the court that her vision is true, she appeals directly to their imaginative sense to cultivate sympathetic identification. She knows that the court expects her defence to be more in keeping with their objective interpretation of the affair:

God wot I ought to say, I have done ill,
 And pray you all forgiveness heartily!
 Because you must be right, such great lords--still. . .
 (I, p. 1).

From her ~~perspective~~ perspective, Gauwaine, who relies only on the objective facts, lies; his accusations accrue from the historical past, as it is reported in Malory. Like Guenevere, many characters in the volume engage in a similar effort to name the important past, attempting to separate personal account from factual, imaginative recollection from historical. The volume, then, is both a study and reproduction of

the mediaeval imagination, the quality of which captivated Morris.

Several poems in The Defence of Guenevere focus on the role of art as it was perceived by the mediaeval mind. Characters in these poems approach life with energy and imagination, hoping to perform heroic deeds for which they will be immortalized in art. They struggle against the laws of nature, both earthly and human, which dictate flux and impermanence. Morris's mediaevals live and love with desperate urgency, eager to wring life from life, although they finally avail "just nothing, but to fail and fail and fail"; their names appear neither in Malory nor Froissart, so their version of the important past, within the context of these poems, is lost to time ("Sir Peter Harpdon's End", I, p. 60). Morris, however, saves these characters from oblivion by imagining them to life. Like the legendary Arthurian characters whose tales preface the volume, Morris's mediaevals pursue heroic ideals which finally meet with defeat. The Arthurian characters, famous in literary history, differ only because they have triumphed over time by gaining immortality through art. Their position in The Defence of Guenevere is structurally significant, as they appear first in order to introduce the central theme of the volume; they represent the essential mediaeval spirit and serve as the archetypal models upon which Morris based his own mediaeval characters.

In "Concerning Geoffray Teste Noire", John of Newcastle would submit his version of the important past to Froissart to win a place for it in chronicle history:

John Froissart knoweth he [Teste Noire] is dead by now,
No doubt, but knoweth not this tale just past;

Perchance then you can tell him what I know.
(I, p. 81).

The poem presents John's struggle to come to terms with the exact nature of the important past, as he is unable to free the tale of greatest historical significance, the material concerning Geoffroy Teste Noire directly, from vivid ideas that come to the fore by emotional association. His past, his inner world of imaginative reverie, finally dominates his recollection of the actual historical past; the story that John really wants to tell concerns two skeletons he had discovered in the woods, and their past life as he has imagined it. The female skeleton has excited his imagination particularly, and in his narrative he recalls, and almost re-lives, his necrophilic response:

Over those bones I sat and pored for hours,
And thought, and dream'd, and still I scarce could see
The small white bones that lay upon the flowers,
But evermore I saw the lady. . .

I kiss their soft lids there,
And in green gardens scarce can stop my lips
From wandering on your face, but that your hair
Falls down and tangles me, back my face slips.
(I, p. 79-80).

He has had a monument erected to honour the dead lovers, but the last lines indicate his fear that the monument will erode with time, just as all things of earth are doomed to perish:

This [the monument] Jaques Picard, Known through many lands,
Wrought cunningly; he's dead now--I am old.
(I, p. 81).

John's application to Froissart is one more bid to save his concept of

the important past from the destructive forces of time.

John's monologue illustrates Morris's belief that the creative imagination is the only human faculty capable of transcending the laws of death and decay; with imagination, John was able to make skeletons dance with new life, although their bones lie forgotten in the woods, and "After these years the flowers forget their blood" (I, p. 79). John is an example of Morris's own ability to make the skeleton past come to life; he is a figure of Morris's imagination, although he embodies the heroic mediaeval spirit as it was recorded by Malory and Froissart, especially in his desire to outrun the laws of nature and the limitations of life.

Similarly, the desire for fame and immortality in art is an important theme in "Sir Peter Harpdon's End". Peter wants to be immortalized as a second Hector, and therefore dedicates himself to the ideal of heroic action in love and war:

Why should I not do this thing that I think,
 For even when I come to count the gains,
 I have them on my side: men will talk, you know,
 (We talk of Hector, dead so long agone,)
 When I am dead, of how this Peter clung
 To what he thought the right; of how he died,
 Perchance, at last, doing some desperate deed
 Few men would care to do now, and this is gain
 To me, as ease and money is to you.
 (I, p. 43).

The futility of his bid for personal fame is underlined as the news of his death is accompanied, ironically, with a song of praise for Launcelot and his heroics:

Sing we therefore then
 Launcelot's praise again,

For he wan crownes ten,
If he wan not twelve.

To his death from his birth
He was muckle of worth,
Lay him in the cold earth,
A long grave ye may delve.
(I, p. 61).

Peter remains the unsung hero, then, but as his lady, Alice points out, albeit with subjective bias, the tribute to Launcelot could be as well applied to Peter; like Launcelot, Peter was defeated in his heroic pursuit. Alice portrays the element of despair which underlies the desire for fame when she admits that earthly renown is poor consolation in the face of death:

perhaps they will,
When many years are past make songs of us;
God help me, though, truly I never thought
That I should make a story in this way,
A story that his eyes can never see.
(I, p. 60).

But within the context of the poem, and indeed within the context of the whole volume, Morris is not censuring the mediaeval urge for earthly renown; rather, he suggests that there is something imaginative and fine in this quest for permanence that so often promotes heroic actions and ideals.

In an early prose romance, "The Story of the Unknown Church", Morris indicated his belief that the mediaeval attitude toward art as a vehicle for earthly immortality should still be comprehensible to a modern audience. On one level, this story emphasizes that the actions and passions of man fade, as do his commemorative monuments; the

reader is presented with a vision of nature and time triumphant over man and his past: "if you knew the place, you would see the heaps made by earth-covered ruins heaving the yellow corn into glorious waves, so that the place where my church used to be is as beautiful now as when it stood in all its splendour" (I, p. 149). But the dead hand of the past pens the story, as the narrator reveals that he died about six hundred years ago; despite his death and the decay of his monuments and sculptures, his truth--his conception of the important past--still reaches through time. The literal content of the story states that life and love are defeated by death, and that man, seeking to immortalize the events of his life in art, is defeated again; the lovers die, he dies, and the memorial sculptures erode. Yet because the spirit of his struggle can reach through time, still apprehensible to contemporary man, his life and work are not consigned finally to oblivion. As this work indicates, Morris assumed the continuity of the human spirit. He assumed that contemporary readers, despite growing insensitivity and thoughtless passivity, could still understand the mediaeval drive to achieve immortality in art. In this story, then, Morris not only presented a tale from the past, but also forged a connective link between the past and the present.

The Earthly Paradise further probes Morris's conception of the paradoxical past, a dead world which can never die. He suggests that the essence of the Middle Ages, preserved in the art of that period, retains potency, and that a modern poet may recreate this art, claiming a share in the vital vision of the past:

Think, listener, that I had the luck to stand,
 Awhile ago within a flowery land,
 Fair beyond words; that thence I brought away
 Some blossoms that before my footsteps lay,
 Not plucked by me, not over-fresh or bright;
 Yet, since they minded me of that delight,
 Within the pages of this book I laid
 Their tender petals, there in peace to fade.
 Dry are they now, and void of all their scent
 And lovely colour, yet what once was meant
 By these dull stains, some men may yet descry
 As dead upon the quivering leaves they lie
 (III, p. 81).

While Morris refers to his mediaeval characters as "hollow puppets", he invites the reader to imagine these characters to life and thereby lend vitality to his dream of the past; he urges his readers to submerge their contemporaneity in order to come to the work in complete receptivity. And yet, as The Earthly Paradise unfolds, it becomes clear that Morris did not want the reader to forget the nineteenth century so much as he wanted them to reconstruct it. For example, the reader cannot leave London, as the poet recommends, until he can reconstruct an image of mediaeval London; he must constantly replace the present with a vision of the past:

Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
 Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
 Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
 Think rather of the pack horse on the down,
 And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
 The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green. . .
 While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
 Moves over bills of lading--mid such times.
 Shall dwell the hollow puppets of my rhymes.
 (III, p. 3).

And on many points the mediaeval myths invite comparison with situations of the modern day. Within the context of the poem, the Wanderers and the Ancients respond to several tales with contemplative comparison, as

in the discussion of kingship following the tale of "The Proud King":

The story done, for want of happier things,
 Some men must even fall to talk of kings;. . .
 Remembering what a glory and a gain
 Their fathers deemed the death of kings to be.
 And yet amidst it, some smiled doubtfully
 For thinking how few men escape the yoke,
 From this or that man's hand, and how most folk
 Must needs be kings or slaves the while they live,
 And take from this man, and to that man give
 Things hard enow. (III, p. 266).

In this work, Morris prods the imagination of his contemporaries, encouraging them to shed their insensitivity and machine-like response in order to enter the earthly paradise of the imagination. Thus stirred to thought, the reader discovers that the ancient tales in The Earthly Paradise comment upon present reality. Dreams of an earthly paradise stimulate the creative imagination, which, increased in potency through the exercise of art, may in turn produce a more creative approach to life in the present. The poem's "Apology", in which the poet promises to produce dream-like reverie born of historical knowledge, suggests Morris's belief that art provides healthy escapism:

The heavy trouble, the bewildering care
 That weights us down who live and earn our bread,
 These idle verses have no power to bear;
 So let me sing of names remembered,
 Because they, living not, can ne'er be dead,
 Or long time take their memory quite away
 From us poor singers of an empty day. . . .

So with this Earthly Paradise it is,
 If ye will read aright, and pardon me,
 Who strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss
 Midmost the beating of the steely sea,
 Where tossed about all hearts of men must be;
 Whose ravening monsters mighty men shall slay,
 Not the poor singer of an empty day
 (III, p. 1)

In "The Muse of the North", Morris's final attitude towards art is encapsulated, as he identified the exact nature of his muse. While she is northern and cold, she is also kind in her determination to reveal man's fate without false promise: "The soft lips trembling not, though they have said / The doom of the World and those that dwell therein" (IX, p. 116). She pronounces that life is hard and that man must die. But the poet, by studying the past, can discern a pattern which connects human existence through the ages, in the struggle to endure. From the example of the past, Morris believed, nineteenth-century man should take his ideal; in the past, man lived more purely, more simply, and more nobly:

I may have a part
 In that great sorrow of thy children dead
 That vexed the brow and bowed adown the head,
 Whitened the hair, made life a wonderous dream,
 And death the murmur of a restful dream,
 But left no stain upon those souls of thine
 Whose greatness through the tangled world doth shine
 (IX, p. 116).

Discussing the Nordic mediaeval tale, Sigurd the Volsung, Morris praised its special power, which he believed resulted from the honesty and simplicity of both the poet and his story:

It seems as though the author-collector felt the subject too much to trouble himself with the niceties of art, and the result is something which is above all art; the scene of the last interview between Sigurd and the despairing and terrible Brynhild touches me more than anything I have ever met with in literature; there is nothing wanting in it, nothing forgotten, nothing repeated, nothing overstrained; all tenderness is shown without the use of a tender word, all misery and despair without a

word of raving, complete beauty without an ornament, and all this in two pages of moderate print. In short it is to the full meaning of the word inspired; touching too though hardly wonderful to think of the probable author; some 12 century Icelander, living the hardest and rudest of lives, seeing few people and pretty much the same day after day, with his old religion taken from him and his new one hardly gained--It doesn't look promising for the future of art I fear.¹⁶

In his own poetry, Morris wanted to reproduce both the strength and simplicity which were natural to Northern mediaeval verse. For Morris, the best poet recognizes the relationship between the past and the present, able to understand and identify with huge human sorrow in order to accept the conditions of life and affirm the continuity of the human spirit; thus he courted his muse: "for sure I am enough alone / That thou thine arms about my heart should throw, / And wrap me in the grief of long ago" (IX, p. 116). The continuity of the human spirit, to which Morris believed the history of art attests, affirmed the meaning of life for him; in a letter of 1876, he encouraged a despairing friend to remember the value of life by focusing upon the continuity of both earth and man:

I wish I could say something that would serve you, beyond what you know very well, that I love you and long to help you: and indeed I entreat you (however trite the words may be) to think that life is not empty nor made for nothing, and that the parts of it fit into another in some way; and that the world goes on, beautiful and strange and dreadful and worshipful. . .¹⁷

In "The Muse of the North", Morris makes his appeal to a muse who represents the principles of earth and natural order because he believed

man had a place in this order. He drew strength from the patterned permanence of its recurrent cycles, believing that man must understand the beauty of earth and his relationship to it if he is to live successfully. Hence he feared sophisticated civilization, in which the majority of men lived in crowded cities, cut off from daily confrontation with the world of nature:

in all that has to do with beauty the invention and ingenuity of man will have to come to a dead stop; and all the while Nature will go on with her eternal recurrence of lovely changes--spring, summer, autumn, and winter; sunshine, rain, and snow; storm and fair weather; dawn, noon and sunset; day and night--ever bearing witness against man that he has deliberately chosen ugliness instead of beauty, and to live where he is strongest amidst squalor or blank emptiness. (XXII, pp. 10-11).

Many of Morris's design principles reflect his aesthetic in the fine arts. For Morris "the arts all hang together" (XXII, p. 21); both the fine and the lesser arts engage the skill and creative imagination of the artist. As we have already seen, Morris's poetry refers to the past rather than to the present, often mythic rather than realistic; it refers to a tradition of non-rational, intuitive truth. Similarly, Morris believed that design should refer to a level of meaning beyond itself, as Gerald Crow describes:

Design, he said, must fill the eye and satisfy the mind. It must, therefore, be understandable, though not immediately, so as to interest the mind. Accordingly it must have a kind of intricate mystery, and to be comprehensible it must follow hard on already familiar material. He conceived of beauty in art as a constant principle, intimately connected with unchanging natural beauty.¹⁸

Morris defined the best designs as both beautiful and imaginative, recommending that the artist achieve these effects by imposing order or patterned form upon images from nature; following this practice, the artist is able to render new beauty to a well-known subject:

I have to say of it [order], that without it neither the beauty nor the imagination could be made visible; it is the bond of their life, and as good as creates them, if they are to be of any use to the people in general. . . . I have already said something of the way in which it deals with the materials which nature gives it, and how, as it were, it both builds a wall against vagueness and opens a door therein for imagination to come in by. Now, this is done by means of treatment which is called, as one may say technically, the conventionalizing of nature. That is to say, order invents beautiful and natural forms, which, appealing to a reasonable and imaginative person, will remind him not only of the part of nature which, to his mind at least, they represent, but also of much which lies beyond that part. I have already hinted at some reasons for this treatment of natural objects. You can't bring a whole countryside, or a whole field, into your room, nor even a whole bush.¹⁹

Nature, then, is the familiar element upon which the designer allows his imagination to play, finally imposing a new order on it to create his particular design. Design and poetry are alike for Morris in that they both attempt to give new expression or form to ideas or materials already understood; both arts work with materials that are first the property of the people.

And as we have seen, Morris's literary work often appears escapist while at the same time encouraging action by its implications; in this chapter, discussion of The Earthly Paradise particularly has

focussed on this point. In design, Morris was concerned to achieve this same balance between energy and stasis. In the main, he believed that design should convey a sense of peaceful repose, but at the same time he wanted design to excite imaginative response. Perceived as a whole, the design appears flat, but on closer inspection, Morris thought, a relief pattern should come into play. Ray Watkinson explains that as Morris's understanding of design increased, so did he accentuate lines of accent and stress, emphasizing the relief:

If, then, when he first began as a designer, Morris showed a warmer feeling for natural forms than was fashionable, it did not mean that he failed to understand that construction also played a part in what he regarded as the imaginative life of the pattern. From the very beginning he shows an instinct for appropriate form, making his pattern cover the whole field, not compelling the eye to dwell on each unit, but persuading us to wander from repeat to repeat without indicating too forcibly on the formal grid. Later, when much experience had brought him a fuller intellectual understanding of the processes of pattern making, he recognized that the masking of the repeat might rob us of some of the visual stimulus we should get from a pattern. What at first he did intuitively, he later came to modify; there are designs in which the repeat is allowed to assert itself strongly; and it is in those patterns most affected by his study of historic woven patterns.²⁰

For Morris, the quality of repose was essential to design, but at the same time it was necessary to add the sense of play and movement.

Just as Morris admired the content of mediaeval literature, believing it to embody the communal thought of a healthy culture, so did he admire mediaeval handicrafts, as the product of the people's daily labour. In his own life Morris pursued daily creative labour, attempting to recreate a mediaeval approach to life. From an early age,

he began to attain an understanding of all art forms: in his youth, he wrote poetry, studied architecture and began painting; from 1859, when he drew his first designs for the furniture of Red House, his interest in the lesser handicraft arts began to grow. Although he endeavoured to master the skills of each art, returning to drawing in 1873 only because he wanted to perfect his execution of the human figure, he never dedicated himself to the study of one art in particular. Rather, art, for Morris, was activity, a way of life. He sought a connection between his work in the fine arts, his poetry, and his activities in the lesser arts:

If a chap can't compose an epic poem while he's weaving tapestry, he had better shut up, he'll never do any good at all.²¹

Further statements reiterate Morris's determination to minimize the distinction between his work in the fine and lesser arts: "I am withal in the thick of poetry, blue-vats, and business";²² and:

I really don't think anything [in reference to poetry] I have done (when I consider it as I should another man's work) of any value except to myself: except as showing my sympathy with history and the like. Poetry goes with the hand-arts I think, and like them has now become unreal: the arts have got to die, what is left of them, before they can be born again. You know my views on the matter; I apply them to myself as well as others. This would not, I admit, prevent my writing poetry anymore than it prevents my doing my pattern work, because the mere personal pleasure of it urges one to the work; but it prevents my looking at it as a sacred duty, and the grief aforesaid is too strong and disquieting to be overcome by a mere inclination to do what I know is unimportant work.²³

Caught in the nineteenth century, Morris realized that his ability to recreate the spirit of mediaeval art was consequently limited. While he was like the mediaeval artist, insofar as his poetry was rooted in the creative activities of his daily life, he was finally unlike the mediaeval artist because his society did not partake in these activities with him. His art could not represent a living body, but rather had to take its main impetus from a culture that was historically dead. Thus, Morris feared the eventual death of art, as the role of the nineteenth-century artist was to create for a society that no longer understood the principle of creativity.

Morris, as artist, rejected the standards of nineteenth-century society and attempted instead to live the life of a mediaeval. His art grew out of this world. But because he feared the effect of his society on art, he never retreated from contemporary life; instead, he addressed himself consistently to the topic of social reform. Relentlessly, he objected to a society wherein the majority of men were forced to lead ugly and futile lives. His goal was to increase the quality of life, in order to revitalize the whole culture:

Unless something or other is done to give all men some pleasure for the eyes and rest for the mind in the aspect of their own and their neighbours' houses, until the contrast is less disgraceful between the fields where beasts live and the streets where men live, I suppose that the practice of the arts must be mainly kept in the hands of a few highly cultivated men, who can go often to beautiful places, whose education enables them, in the contemplation of the past glories of the world, to shut out from their view the everyday squalors that the most of men move in. Sirs, I believe that art has such sympathy with

cheerful freedom, open-heartedness and reality, so much she sickens under selfishness and luxury, that she will not live thus isolated and exclusive. I will go further than this and say that on such terms I do not wish her to live. . . .I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few. (XXII, pp. 25-26).

The example of Morris's own life affirmed his contention that the life process and the creative process could unfold as one. In juxtaposition to the life of the masses, Morris's life, active, creative and purposeful, exemplifies his understanding of the terrible disparity between "How we live and how we might live" (XXIII, p. 3).

CHAPTER FOUR

Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris: Contrasting Definitions of the Role of the Artist and the Purpose of Art

In the first chapter of this thesis, the close relationship that Rossetti and Morris shared between 1856 and 1871 was studied to determine the degree to which they agreed about the role of the artist and the purpose of art. While Rossetti was responsible for encouraging Morris to pursue painting, which led to their joint involvement in several artistic projects, their individual statements about art indicate basic ideological differences between the two. For Rossetti, the artist stands apart from other men by virtue of his special vision; consequently, it is the artist's duty to reveal the relationship of man to the divine in his art, which thereby suggests man's immortality. For Morris, by contrast, the fine arts are valuable as they express truths that are constant about the human condition and earth, allowing the recognition of an historical continuity. But more important for Morris are the lesser arts, which allow the enrichment of the quality of life, as a man receives pleasure from his labour, while at the same time constructing useful and attractive products. While Morris believed that art concerns the common man and mundane affairs directly, the fine arts revealing a pattern of continuity within the temporal realm, Rossetti believed that the artist should

commune with a realm beyond, divine and eternal.

The second and third chapters focussed upon the work of Rossetti and Morris respectively, to discover further evidence of their views about art. Rossetti's art is subjective and introspective, often combining elements of the ethereal and the earthly, in keeping with his belief that the best artist is inspired by God and therefore addressed divine subjects. The whole of his art, whether poetry or painting, attempts to balance opposites together in harmonious relationship: joy with sorrow, life with death, physical with spiritual, temporal with eternal. On one level each work symbolically re-enacts the artist's experience with divine inspiration, the single earthly moment when man communes directly with God, in perfect harmony. By contrast, Morris's work in the fine arts concentrates on man's experience with life and earth, as it occurred in a mythologized mediaeval past. Morris was intrigued by the Middle Ages because he respected the integration between society and art which he perceived to exist at that time. Hence, he believed that the mediaevals were able to create the most vital art, as it was always representative of the whole people. In his work, he reinterpreted mediaeval mythology to bring that literature to new life in the nineteenth century, hoping that the basic truths contained in this art might still appeal to contemporary man despite the changes which had occurred between the ages to alter radically both society and the quality of individual life. Morris believed that his contemporary society could still recognize the basic continuity of human thought and aspiration.

When the two artists, Rossetti and Morris, are compared directly,

it becomes clear that the former believed the purpose of art was to define man's immortal nature and his future state of being, while the latter was more concerned to define man's life on earth and establish a pattern of continuity within the temporal realm. Because Rossetti held that the artist should produce visions inspired by divine insight, it followed for him that great art could be produced in any age; by his argument, the quality of a work is wholly contingent upon the "soul" of the artist. And because the artist's real inspiration comes from the eternal realm, his immediate social milieu is of peripheral importance to his work. To the contrary, Morris held that the condition of the artist's society dictates the type of work that he is able to create. While Rossetti awaited divine inspiration, Morris chose to court the "Muse of the North", the basic principle of earth and nature. His work addressed the concept of day-to-day existence on an earth whose only guarantee of stability and recurrence is found in natural cyclicity. While Rossetti's art promised personal immortality, Morris's art merely posited the continuity of earth and of the human spirit.

These differences in opinion existed for Rossetti and Morris throughout their careers. As Mackail observes, Morris had a secluded country upbringing, which developed his love for nature at an early age: "There Morris, rambling with his brothers on foot or on Shetland ponies through the forest, formed his intense love of nature and his keen eye for all sorts of woodland life."¹ Later, this love for the natural world prompted his move to Kelmscott and his excursions to Iceland, a country where the powerful principles of earth, the landscape and the

climate, were unconquerable. In "Motifs from Nature In Morris's Design Work", K. B. Valentine underlines Morris's passionate admission of his love for earth:

An anecdote related by Mackail reveals Morris' embracement of nature. Two years before his death, when he was walking with friends near Kelmscott Manor, he stopped to rest in the middle of the dirt road with his legs straight out in front of him. "I shall sit on the world", he declared.²

As this article states in thesis, Morris expressed his appreciation for the natural world in his designs, each of which focuses on themes from nature.

By contrast, Rossetti felt no affinity with the natural world. As we have seen in Chapter Two, he interpreted the Pre-Raphaelite maxim of "truth to nature" in the expressive rather than in the mimetic sense, thereby ignoring the reality of the external world and concentrating instead upon the subjective vision. Rossetti's country excursions to Kelmscott and later to Penkill Castle with William Bell Scott were intended as recuperative therapy rather than voluntary retreat. At Penkill Castle, a single encounter with nature excited his interest, when he believed he recognized a spirit from the beyond in the form of a close flying bird;³ as this incident suggests, supernatural rather than natural phenomena were important to Rossetti. If anything, his fascination with occult interests became more pronounced in his later life.

Both Rossetti and Morris understood the necessity of skillful technique and execution in a work of art. In "Hand and Soul," Rossetti

stated that technical perfection is the foundation which underlies Chiaro's ultimate artistic ascendancy, although finally, of course, Chiaro creates a master work by trusting the visions of his "soul". Morris is like Rossetti in stressing the need for skill in art, but discarding Rossetti's belief in soulful inspiration, he contended that the artist must place ultimate trust in his own mind; thus, he encouraged a young writer: "for I have no doubt you will do better things. . .if you look at matters steadily and seriously, and do nothing but what you like very much yourself, finally you are the best judge of what you are likely to turn out."⁴ As Morris emphasizes in "The Aims of Art", the artist should always attempt to address the general aims of art, viewing his work within a larger historical context, rather than losing himself in an autonomous project. From his point of view, the act of artistic creation requires that the artist apply to his intellect for guidance, an approach antithetical to Rossetti's, which criticized the artist who "wouldst say coldly to the mind what God has said to the heart warmly" ("Hand and Soul", p. 554).

As their definitions of the role of the artist and the purpose of art differed, so too did Rossetti and Morris differ in their approach to the creative process. Rossetti believed that the content of a work should be inspired, and that its execution should be perfect. In the case of his own work, he lavished painstaking attention upon it, never finally satisfied with the technical aspects. As Rossetti said of himself, artistic creativity was an ordeal: "I lie on the couch, the wracked and tortured medium, never permitted an instant's surcease of agony until the thing on hand is finished."⁵ He held on to

paintings for years on end, attempting to attain perfection, and he was just as careful about his literary works, as the limited volume of his publications indicates. Writing to Jane Morris, Rossetti admitted his fanatic concern to produce a perfect work, noting that Morris would find this approach to art belaboured:

I have been working on what may be called the flea-bite principle, however, at my poetry going through the press, and I find that correction, when one suffers from the vain longings of perfectability, is an endless task,-- And Topsy will I fear look with utter scorn on this fidgety fretting over old ground. He is in the right for himself, I know; but I have nothing of his abundance in production; and to attain confidence first in the plan of any work, however small, and afterwards to aim at rendering it faultless by repeated condensation and revision, is the only system that gives me a chance. I have done a very great deal lately to bring these little things into a state which may lead one to hope they deserve all the extension of such life as is in them. Thus their getting finally printed off is prolonged from week to week.⁶

Morris, of course, was admired by his peers for the ease of his creative genius; May Morris describes the constant rate of her father's artistic production: "Work finished was done with: he did not linger over it or nurse it; the work before him at the moment was the thing that lived and mattered."⁷ Even as a young man, Morris parried the praise that his poetry excited among friends, Rossetti and Burne-Jones in particular, by citing its simplicity: "Well, if this is poetry, it is very easy to write."⁸

This does not mean that Morris undervalued fine artistic craftsmanship. Rather, he believed that it was something that could be

acquired through careful study and practice. His poetry was often composed to meet the strict requirements of difficult verse forms, and, as noted in Chapter Three, he returned to painting to perfect his execution of the human form; in fact, he was so exacting about craft in the lesser arts that in one instance he was prepared to abandon the use of textiles if he could not discover the proper dyes: "I am deeply impressed with the importance of our having all our dyes the soundest and the best that can be, and am prepared to give up all that part of my business which depends on textiles if I fail in getting them so."⁹ Mackail speculates that what Morris objected to in the fine arts was the tendency of certain artists to spend undue time and energy on a single creative project, because he held that all labour should be directed towards a useful goal:

But easel-pictures seem, as a rule, to have given him the uneasy feeling of decoration disproportionate in labour and finish to its decorative object. . . .He was quite satisfied with the simple and almost abstract types of expression that can be produced in tapestry; and he thought that the dramatic and emotional interest of a picture ought to be diffused throughout it as equally as possible. Such too was his own practice in the cognate art of poetry: and this is one reason why his poetry affords so few memorable single lines, and lends itself so little to quotation.¹⁰

Several comments by Morris about his own work in the fine arts indicate that he believed it needed justification; he was concerned that his literary endeavours should not be thought the product of luxurious indolence:

Poetry goes with the hand-arts I think. . . .
 You know my views on the matter; I apply
 them to myself as well as to others. This
 would not, I admit, prevent my writing poetry
 any more than it prevents my doing my pattern
 work, because the mere personal pleasure of
 it urges one to the work; but it prevents my
 looking at it as a sacred duty, and the grief
 aforesaid is too strong and disquieting to be
 overcome by a mere inclination to do what I
know is unimportant work.¹¹

As well as emphasizing the natural ease with which his poetry flowed, then, Morris also suggested that it provided him with a necessary creative outlet; by this explanation, Morris established that his work, at very least, was useful to himself, even if it had no significant effect on the people. But Morris always endeavoured to generate imaginative appeal in his work, hoping that the people could identify with it. Biographical evidence indicates that he was pleased when his art met with popular approval. Peter Faulkner's "Introduction" to The Critical Heritage suggests that while Morris could ignore the response of his critics, he was deeply affected by the response of the people:

[in the early 1870's] It was not that the reviewers had turned against Morris's poetry, but that the general reading public, which had been so delighted by Jason and The Earthly Paradise, remained indifferent. For a man with Morris's belief in the proper usefulness of art (and his conviction of the value of the Nordic myths) this indifference was deeply disturbing. He was not the kind of writer to be sustained by the confidence of a clique, and he now developed his activities in directions which led him away from poetry.¹²

Since Morris believed that art should be a joy to both the maker and the user, it follows that he wished his own art to fulfill both these criteria.

As opposed to Morris, Rossetti believed that the best artist appealed to the souls of his fellow artists. As the narrative frame of "Hand and Soul" suggests, only sensitive perception allows one to understand the full value of a work. In an essay on William Blake, he described what constitutes the artist's important audience:

while any who can here find anything to love
will be the poet-painter's welcome guests,
still such a feast is spread first of all for
those who can know at a glance that it is
theirs and was meant for them; who can meet
their host's eye with sympathy and recognition,
even when he offers them the new strange fruits
grown for himself in far-off gardens where he
has dwelt alone, or pours for them the wines
he has learned to love in lands where they
never travelled ("William Blake", p. 595).

Yet despite his elitist contentions, Rossetti was despondent when his own work was poorly received by the critical and popular audience. In "The Stealthy School of Criticism", Rossetti attempted to redress Buchanan's critical assault on his publication of 1870, Poems; this particular volume marked Rossetti's first literary publication in book form and the precautionary measures surrounding the event suggest the extent to which he feared critical rebuff.

Of course the opposition between Rossetti's and Morris's views about the purpose of art and the role of the artist is not absolute, and statements by each relieve, superficially, certain points of difference. For example, while Morris disclaimed the idea of artistic

inspiration--"That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense. . .I may tell you flat, there is no such thing."--he still borrowed this exact phrase to describe his favorite work, Sigurd the Volsung.¹³ But the source of the inspiration to which Morris referred is earthly, not emanating, like Rossetti's, from a higher order. And neither were the humanitarian concerns which motivated Morris completely alien to Rossetti, though his subjective absorption tended to mitigate their immediacy. Several of his poems comment on political events, and the poem "Jenny" and the painting "Found" both address the social issue of female exploitation in Victorian society, albeit in a sentimental vein as Lionel Stevenson points out: "Rossetti remains more concerned with emotion than with ideology."¹⁴ Similarly, William Michael Rossetti qualifies his estimate of Rossetti's political consciousness:

My brother had some feeling for political ideals and great movements, but none, except one of annoyance and disdain, for noise and bluster. It may well be that he did not always correctly appreciate the distinction between the noise and the ideals.¹⁵

It is fair to conclude, then, that while both Rossetti and Morris shared a feeling of devotion to art, their opinions about the purpose of art and the role of the artist were never in close correspondence. In fact, they disagreed even about the simple definition of art itself. For Rossetti, art appeared in the two mediums of painting and literature, created by men whose inspired vision set them apart from the dull masses. For Morris, art was an activity as well as a product, at its best when closely interwoven with life. The scope of the differences

between Rossetti and Morris in their beliefs about the role of the artist and the purpose of art is best summarized by William E. Fredeman's analogy:

Rossetti wanted a clean, well-lighted place for himself and his friends; Morris sought to make it of the world.¹⁶