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"'SINCERITY' IS NOT ENOUGH": "DROOD," *DROOD*, AND VICTORIAN CAMP

By Caroline Reitz

> One is drawn to Camp when one realizes that "sincerity" is not enough.
>
> —Susan Sontag

WHEN HERB SUSSMAN, THE EDITOR OF "Victorians Live," confirmed with me that I would write a review on the Roundabout Theatre Company's 2012–13 revival of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," he wrote, "I myself cannot imagine how *Drood* can be turned into a musical." Interestingly, I couldn't imagine anything else, having seen the original production in 1986 (as a high-schooler with a Dickens-loving mother) long before I ever read it. Twenty-seven years later, Roundabout is true to Rupert Holmes's original musical adaptation of Dickens's unfinished final novel, in which Edwin Drood disappears with signs pointing to his murder; the production solves the most obvious problem of whodunit by having the audience vote on who might be responsible, while the cast plays out any number of possible endings (Figure 19). The over-the-top, good-natured high jinx of this highly interactive show seemed fitting for the 80s, a world of theatrically exaggerated hair, shoulder pads, and jewelry, and of sincere, feel-good ensemble entertainment like "The Cosby Show" and "Cheers."

But in 2013, having spent more time with Boz than on Broadway, I see precisely the difficulty of imagining a dancing Drood. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is often considered,

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Figure 19. (Color online) The usual suspects in the evening's line up: Neville, Bazzard, Rosa, Jasper, Helena, Durdles, the Princess Puffer, and Reverend Crisparkle. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Roundabout Theatre Company at Studio 54. Pictured (l-r): Andy Karl, Peter Benson, Betsy Wolfe, Will Chase, Jessie Mueller, Robert Creighton, Chita Rivera, Gregg Edelman. © Joan Marcus, 2012.

along with *Our Mutual Friend*, to reveal Dickens's terminal pessimism. The healing powers of Rose Maylie's fire-side domesticity or the sunny Esther Summerson jingling her keys give way in *Drood* to the stagnation of Cloisterham and the truly creepy violence of Deputy, "a hideous small boy in rags," who is paid to stone Durdles, the novel's stonemason, if he stays out too late drinking amidst the tombs (31). One person's sincere interest in another, in which the younger Dickens places so much faith, becomes, by *Drood*, a deadly focus. Jasper's potentially annihilating interest in his nephew, Edwin, is expressed both in his "look of hungry, exacting, watchful" (6) intensity and in his envy of Edwin's future *with* fiancée Rosa Bud and *far* from Cloisterham, the cathedral town where Jasper is dying slowly from the monotony of his life as choirmaster. So *Drood* is pretty dark source material for a musical, a particularly merry art form. Add to this that it is 2013 and not 1986. We are post-Seinfeld members of the Colbert nation, in which satiric doublespeak rules the day. Add to this again that Scott Ellis's revival, which opened last November, takes place in the former Studio 54. The jarring juxtaposition between late-Victorian entropy and ghosts of disco fever raises the question: is Victorian culture now like disco, the stuff of theme parties and cheerful kitsch? From the Dickens World theme park (for real; Google it – or better yet see Marty Gould and Rebecca Mitchell's "It Was the Worst of Times: A Visit to Dickens World")

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to Robert Downey, Jr.'s buffed, cross-dressing Sherlock Holmes, is Victorian culture now Camp?

Both the Victorianist and the Colbertian in me wondered how to read a show that is both laughing with and laughing at the Victorians. This feeling that one is on shaky tonal ground is underscored by the framing device of the musical, which is that Studio 54 is actually the "Music Hall Royale" in 1895 and its regular troupe just happens to be putting on "The Mystery of Edwin Drood." The cast members are both actors in the troupe, with their own identities, ambitions, and petty jealousies, *and* characters in that evening's performance of "Drood." But before I could become as addled as the Princess Puffer on a busy night, it occurred to me that the campiness of this most recent "Drood" might provide a genius insight into some redemptive energies stirring, however deeply buried, in the hidden tombs of Dickens's last act.

The combination of artifice and sincerity displayed by "Drood"'s show-within-a-show can best be understood as Victorian Camp. This is a rather obvious thought. Local reviews called the show "mock-Victorian" (*New Jersey Newsroom*) and suggested that it "spoofs the hoary clichés of the genre" (*WSJ*) with winking sexual innuendo and melodramatic mustache twirling. There is even a glowing review on "The Raving Queen" blog. But this is also a musical sincerely in love with the richly patterned costumes and interactive oom-pah-pah of the Victorian music hall, evident in the ensemble kick-line number "Off to the Races." This sing-along number, at the very end of Act 1, not only makes good use of the serious musical theater chops of Chita Rivera ("West Side Story"), but it welcomes the audience into the troupe's evident esprit-de-corps (Figure 20). Similarly, there are informal yet in-character interactions between audience and cast before the start of the show. The costumed, cockney-accented actors overlook the sea of Yankees caps and ear buds to treat us as if we were regular visitors to the Music Hall Royale. The both/and of such a mock tribute is consistent with the mixed attitude we seem to have towards the Victorians these days. Steampunk's tension between science and romance, between giant smokestacks and goth corsets, is both ironic and reverential. Guy Ritchie's steampunk Sherlock Holmes movies are equal parts send-up and tribute.

Such a combination of frivolity and seriousness is characteristic of "Camp," as famously described by Susan Sontag in her 1964 "Notes on 'Camp'," originally published in the *Partisan Review* and reprinted a few years later in *Against Interpretation*. Sontag suggests that "the essence of Camp is its love of . . . artifice and exaggeration" (275), its love "of things-being-what-they-are-not" (279). I don't know if Sontag's ideas about Camp were in the minds of either Rupert Holmes or Scott Ellis, but this sensibility explains much about the line that "Drood" the musical walks. Beyond the show-within-a-show and the joyous interchangeability of the multiple endings, this production has a woman, the terrific Stephanie J. Block, playing the role of Edwin (Figure 21). This is meant to be an unsettling if hilarious move. While Edwin is not a fantastically three-dimensional character in the novel, Dickens does make him all-guy, with an evident attraction to the exotic Helena Landless and a macho imperialist desire to "wake up Egypt a little" (54). This basic twist on the central character, as well as the fact that almost every character in the story could be a murderer – and, thanks to Dickens's untimely demise, remains under suspicion for eternity – illustrates that things are not what they seem, indeed.

That the musical is hyper-aware of the license it is taking with Dickens's fragment is illustrated when Edwin disappears. The actress playing him (Block as troupe-member Miss

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Figure 20. (Color online) The full Broadway Company embraces the oom-pah-pah of the Victorian music hall. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Roundabout Theatre Company at Studio 54. © Joan Marcus, 2012.

Alice Nutting) is, of course, now without a role, and she makes a big diva deal out of it, storming off with her little dog and coming back, desperate to get onstage, thinly disguised as Datchery, the tantalizing detective figure who shows up in the final installments of the novel. The character who plays Bazzard, Mr. Grewgious's clerk and a *very* minor character in the novel, makes a blatant grab for more theatrical power as the often overlooked troupe-member and struggling playwright, Mr. Phillip Bax. This exaggeration of character or exceeding of the characters' original boundaries jars against our sense of Dickens's intentions, and keeps sincere characterization at arm's length. Such self-consciousness about "character" is one of Sontag's requirements for Camp (285).

As is "an attitude which is neutral in respect to content" (277), a particularly fitting lens through which to view a partially-finished work. From *Jane Eyre*'s "Reader, I married him" to Henry James's quip in "The Art of Fiction" about the realist novel's "distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions," Victorian endings famously wrap things up for readers. To have the ending unknown – Dickens died after writing only six of twelve projected installments – keeps in play the kinds of questions that are usually answered. But not all content is played for laughs; the musical breaks its serious frivolity during Jasper's visit to the Princess Puffer's opium den (Figure 22). The scene ("Jasper's Vision/Smoke Ballet") is just straight-up gorgeous, enchantingly choreographed by Warren

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Figure 21. (Color online) Jasper (Will Chase) and his nephew Edwin (Stephanie J. Block) in happier times. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Roundabout Theatre Company at Studio 54. © Joan Marcus, 2012.

Carlyle. Souls tortured by secret desires – for drugs, sex (Jasper is menacingly obsessed with Rosa), murder – are a genuine concern of a culture that tried to keep those impulses in check, something Dickens knew about all too well. The opium den scene opens Dickens's novel, and Jasper hallucinates that a "horde of Turkish robbers" is impaled in front of the English Cathedral. There is nothing tongue-in-cheek about the fantasies of escape – and the suffering that generated such fantasies – in either "Drood" or *Drood*.

But the good-natured send-up of the Victorians returns in the musical's farcical treatment of Victorian imperialism. Helena Landless, played with a "strange semi-untraceable geographical accent" by Jessie Mueller, and her brother, Neville, played by Andrew Samonsky, both sport a kind of "tan-face" and perform a campy cross between a salaam and a belly dance every time they come on stage. Perhaps the single greatest example of the musical's Victorian Camp sensibility is the casting of Broadway legend Chita Rivera as the Princess Puffer. While she is a delight to behold, her Bronx cockney makes the Dick Van Dyke of "Mary Poppins" look like Meryl Streep. She could not be more artificial or more fabulous. Her big number, "The Wages of Sin," transports the audience, a combo of serious fans (apparently called "Droupies") and regular theatergoers, from Studio 54 back to the Music Hall Royale. Both performer and audience have accepted that "Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy" (Sontag 291). Part of the great fun of this show is perhaps just such a

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Figure 22. (Color online) Jasper (Will Chase, r) hallucinates Edwin (Stephanie J. Block, c) in the Princess Puffer's (Chita Rivera, l) opium den. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Roundabout Theatre Company at Studio 54. © Joan Marcus, 2012.

break from our contemporary more-satiric-than-thou attitude. "Camp is naïve," (283) argues Sontag, and while this show makes much of the show-within-a-show, the false leads, and the essential un-resolvability of the tale, they are all in plain sight, purely artificial, and all the more genuine for it. Sontag muses that there is something about Camp that we delight in when neither sincerity nor satire is enough, when they "seem feeble" (288). While Stephen Colbert does satire as a fine art, I think that one of the continuing appeals of the Victorians – as themselves or as their avatars in steampunk or theatrical revivals – is that there is love there. "Successful Camp," Sontag writes, "even when it reveals self-parody, reeks of self-love" (282–83). Ellis's "Drood" revival is successful Camp.

But his production also raises the broader question about whether Dickens's *Drood* itself is Camp. While it certainly is *not* reeking of self-love (see "stagnation" and "souls tortured" above), the novel's mysteriously moody tone can be a sign that "[o]ne is drawn to Camp when one realizes that 'sincerity' is not enough" (288). It was not enough for Dickens. At the start of his novelistic life, Dickens was more Colbert than Copperfield. The first chapters of *Oliver Twist* are written in a savagely satiric style. He famously abandons this tone in a rookie novel as erratically pitchy as any young singer on "American Idol." Dickens goes on to reach such levels of sincerity that he disturbed Charlotte Brontë, who found Esther Summerson intolerable. But sincerity is not enough for the darker, later Dickens. Sontag

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suggests that art becomes Camp when the goal "is not that of creating harmonies but of overstraining the medium and introducing more and more violent, and unresolvable, subject-matter" (287). While we have, obviously, an un-resolved ending in *Drood*, much of the interest surrounding the text is that is seems hard to imagine a resolution for a work with such randomly, mysteriously violent energies (even the philanthropy is of a "gunpowderous sort"). In addition to Jasper and Deputy, Neville is also set to go off (his tempter attributed to his "tigerish" blood) and the town itself – well, something is rotten in the state of Cloisterham, where "all things in it are of the past" (13). Despite some of the oft-remarked similarities between *Drood* and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, which Dickens serialized in his journal *All the Year Round* a few years before he wrote *Drood*, Dickens is far more interested in saying something serious about these dark passions than he is in carefully plotting a Collins-esque mystery.

Drood becomes Camp when such serious intentions fail. "In . . . pure, Camp," explains Sontag, "the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve" (283). These are the qualities, I gather, that Rupert Holmes was drawn to in the original text and that inspired his musical adaptation. One wonders if *Drood* the novel only failed because Dickens's heart failed. The ending he would have written would certainly have provided the *Who* in who done it, but could it have provided a way of reading the darkness of the first half? If Datchery, for example, functioned as a Cuff-like super-sleuth, offering the hope of a kind of social pastorship, we might have quieted our fears that England was a rotting grave. If Reverend Crisparkle were to show less of an infantilized attention to his "china shepherdess" of a mother and more attention to, say, the truly awesome Helena Landless, perhaps he could be a figure for a kind of forward-looking morality married with tolerance. But none of those things happens. And so what is left is Camp, "the sensibility of failed seriousness, of the theatricalization of experience" (287). This is, as it turns out, perfect source material for a musical.

In the novel, sincerity is not enough, for the reality, Dickens seems to be realizing, is too dark. To understand the sensibility that is Camp, Sontag explains, requires "a deep sympathy modified by revulsion" (276), and in Dickens's final work you see a sympathy for the kinds of serious-yet-frivolous books that he used to be able to write and a revulsion at a corpse-like England consumed by its violent, predatory, secret desires. But to use "Drood" as a way of seeing *Drood* as Victorian Camp offers a kind of Dickensian happy ending that he could not have written or did not live to write. "Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature" (291). It is certainly nicer to imagine that Dickens, rather than exhausting himself to death with one-man shows and the wages of his domestic sins, went "off to the races" arm in arm in a kick-line with his beloved fellow performers.

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WORKS CONSIDERED

"The Mystery of Edwin Drood" (book, music and lyrics) is by Rupert Holmes. The Roundabout Theatre Company staged this performance of Holmes's musical in Studio 54, New York City from November 13, 2012 – March 10, 2013. The director was Scott Ellis, and the cast included Chita Rivera (The Princess

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Puffer), Stephanie J. Block (Drood), Will Chase (Jasper), Gregg Edelman (Reverend Mr. Crisparkle), Jessie Mueller (Helena Landless), Jim Norton (Chairman), and Andrew Samonsky (Neville Landless).
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A STRANGE MAGIC: GUSTAVE MOREAU'S SALOME

By Richard L. Stein

A Strange Magic: Gustave Moreau's Salome was an exhibit one had to seek out or happen upon. This was no blockbuster, not housed in a major museum, not celebrated by press notices or, as far as I knew, word of mouth. It was, nevertheless, *vaut le détour*, an intimate gathering of precious works, less monumental than jewel-like, a carefully chosen treasury for devotées of Gustave Moreau, nineteenth-century visual culture, or (VLC readers take note) Oscar Wilde.

The "strange magic" of the title begins – to shift to the spectatorial present tense – with the exhibition space. The midcentury rectilinear banded design of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles seems more closely related to the office building above it, although it was conceived to display the collection of the original patron, Armand Hammer, an oil executive who died in 1990, just weeks after the museum opened to the public. Four years later, the museum entered a "partnership" with UCLA, about a mile north, that produced a more eclectic collection. Visitors now encounter a discontinuous mix of contemporary arts, the more academic holdings of UCLA's Grunwald Center for Graphic Arts, and the European masterpieces Hammer purchased for himself.

Moreau's *Salome Dancing before Herod* (Figure 23; usually dated 1874–76), part of that last group, is "one of the most remarkable and best-known paintings in the museum's collection." The quotation comes from the online description of the exhibit, which adds that *A Strange Magic* is "devoted" to the painting. The term seems right for the almost religious atmosphere of the small room in which it is displayed, less like an exhibition space than a chapel. The Hammer Moreau, at the center of the apse, becomes the room's focal point, surrounded by related works that Moreau either created or drew upon in his decades-long reworking of the Salome theme.

The exhibit includes a number of oil sketches flanking the Hammer Salome: *Sketch for "Salome*," *Salome Dancing Before Herod*, several simply titled *Salome*, and the remarkable painting known as *Salome Tattooed* (1874, about which more later). It also contains preparatory materials of several kinds, including small pencil sketches of figures and

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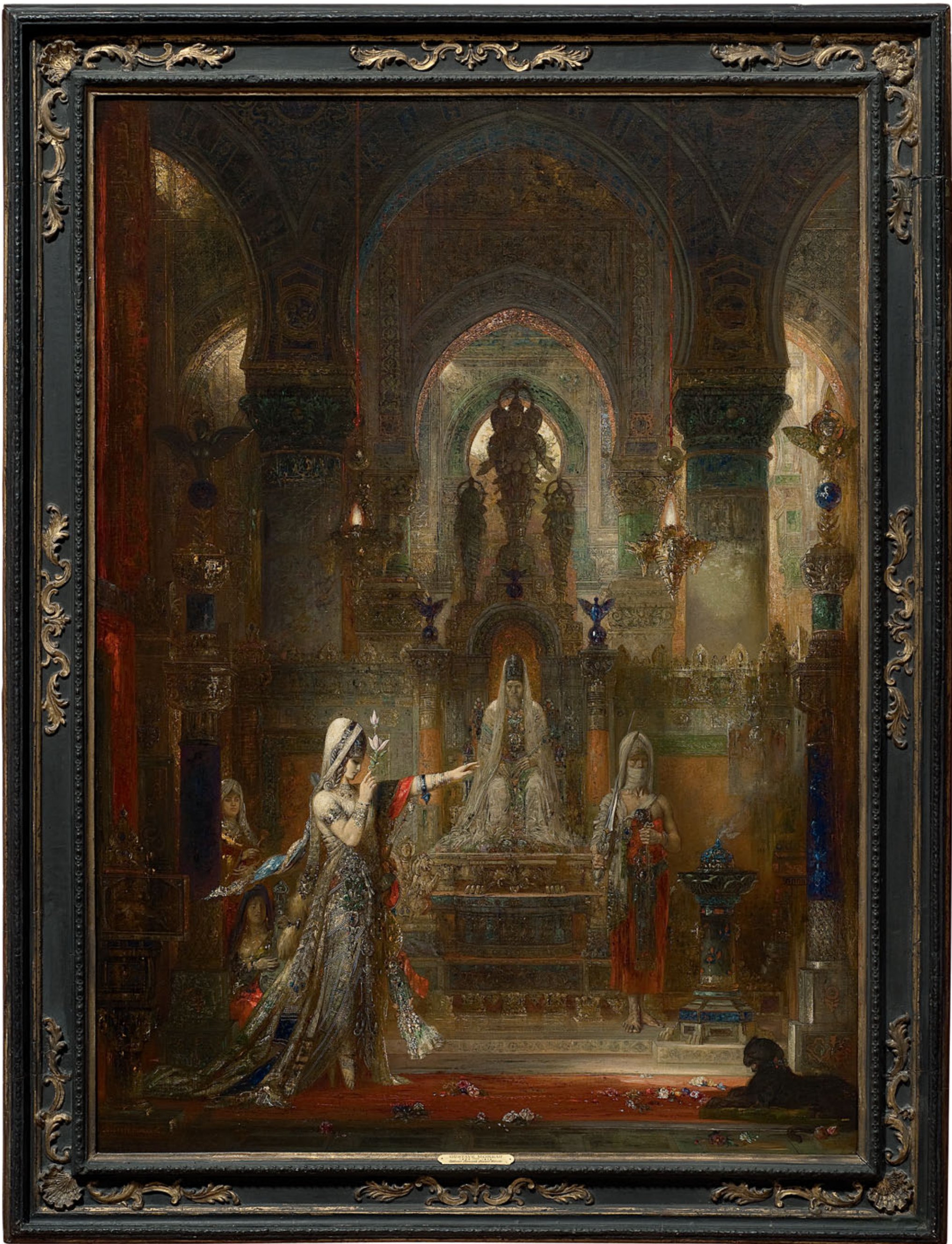

Figure 23. (Color online) Gustave Moreau, *Salome Dancing Before Herod*, 1876. Oil on canvas. 56 1/2 × 41 1/16 in. (143.5 × 104.3 cm). The Armand Hammer Collection, Gift of the Armand Hammer Foundation. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

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details incorporated into the final work, contemporary images from "Moreau's Photographic Archive" depicting architecture and women from North Africa, and examples of the sorts of illustrated works in his library that he used in treating this theme – contemporary magazines with details of Islamic architecture and even a page from Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* (1856). The whole comprises a mini-history of Moreau and Salome: influences, preparatory sketches, parallel images, versions that came before and after the Hammer painting.

It is important to add that this history is long and dense; simple terms like "before" and "after" often prove elusive. Moreau (with help from what Cynthia Burlingham, Director of the Grunwald Center and Curator of the exhibit, in her catalogue essay terms "collaborators") produced thousands of preparatory drawings for his famous finished paintings (16). The process could occupy years. He worked on *Salome Dancing Before Herod* from 1869 to 1876, and the eighty or more drawings related specifically to the Hammer painting or the subject of Salome more generally comprise "the largest group related to any composition" with the exception of one contemporary work (Burlingham 16). All this is to suggest that many drawings or oil sketches are difficult to date precisely. In this sense, the Hammer exhibit concerns a long pictorial moment, a universe of images that circulated in the wide orbit of *Salome Dancing Before Herod*.

But to say that this exhibit is "about" that central work is to miss at least half of its point and much of its power. Burlingham explained in conversation that the idea came to her after her first visit to the Paris Musée Gustave Moreau, which has the largest collection of his works in the world: over 14,000 paintings, drawings, and watercolors. This amazing repository reveals a Moreau both prolific and obsessed. Salome was the focus of that obsession, for the museum contains thousands – if not tens of thousands – of related visual materials, produced over several decades before and after the Hammer *Salome* was completed. Most are sketches: arms and legs, decorative details, figures drawn for particular sections of the larger-scale Salome paintings. Such material provides the bulk of *A Strange Magic*, which becomes a tribute not just to Moreau or the Hammer *Salome* but to the Moreau Museum itself, the sort of "house museum," as Burlingham put it, that only an artist's personal collection – assembled as a museum over the last years of his life – can generate.

The triumph of *A Strange Magic* is to capture that personal quality, the obsessive fascination that makes Moreau's Salomes more than simply so many variations on a theme. Obsession, needless to say, is a hallmark of British aestheticism as well and of Wilde in particular. But in Moreau it achieves a special intensity, a special power. It is more like an exploration, an excavation, a fascinated return to different aspects of the same scene – Salome herself, background figures (like Herod or guards), decorative motifs that seem to bleed from architecture to clothing and most powerfully (in *Salome Tattooed*) onto the dancer's body. Moreau created a world in which Salome's presence – as a woman, a dancer, a figure for a certain form of mysterious beauty – aestheticizes everything around her. Whether or not Wilde ever saw *Salome Tattooed*, it is this above all that he seems to have absorbed from Moreau: Salome herself as a symbol of aesthetic transformation.

That aestheticism encompasses the Biblical story, as Wilde also recognized. To emphasize this, the room (originally designed to display Armand Hammer's most celebrated

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purchase, the Leonardo Codex – subsequently sold to Bill Gates) is painted a rich crimson ("I've never painted an exhibition room red before," Burlingham remarked), banded at its upper edge by a gilded quotation from Matthew 14.6-10 on which the Salome story as Moreau knew it was based:

> [6]But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.
> [7]Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.
> [8]And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.
> [9]And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.
> [10]And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. (King James Version)

In spite of this text (or textual adaptations by Wilde and Huysmans), all the paintings depict wordless moments: Salome dancing, or else poised at the moment just before or just after she begins to dance. One arm is dramatically extended, all her weight seeming to rest on the toes of one foot – or else to hover just above the ground, in an instant before or after her toes touch. Several of the sketches and *Salome Tattooed* depict her in the same posture, at a moment of weightlessness, physical and moral. Her presence seems to transgress the laws of space and time (Herod's law, religious law, the law of gravity). She doesn't so much dance as float.

But that material weightlessness coexists with a kind of symbolic or historic gravity, a density of significance that makes the figure of Salome both control and transcend the context in which she is pictured. One is reminded of Pater's Mona Lisa, somehow expressing "the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle ages with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias" (98-99). The French art historian Georges Lafenestre may have been reminded of the same passage in a poetic response to the suite of Salome images and the world they bring to life: "It is not a half-Judaic, half-Roman Palestine that M. Moreau has seen in his glittering vision; it is the Orient as a whole, with all its architectural splendours, all its luxurious stones, fabrics, metals, its bloody voluptuousness and its grave atrocities" (Lacambre 18–19).

Two features distinguish the Hammer *Salome*, some echoed in the other works. The first is the original frame (black wood with floral motifs, perhaps designed by Moreau; *Salome Tattooed* has an even more ornate frame), which emphasizes the archaic details of the painting. The second is the paradoxical immobility of this scene of motion – evoking what Burlingham's catalog essay, quoting Ary Renan's study of 1900, terms "Moreau's principle of 'beautiful inertia'" (17). This isn't just a way to describe Salome herself. All the figures are fixed rigidly in place, and the architecture (based, as the sources help confirm, on pictures Moreau had seen of the mosque in Cordoba) weighs heavily on the dark interior space.

There are two signs of Salome's movement, which counterbalance her own poised stance. Although her weight is on her left foot – more properly her left toes, on which she stands in a classic dancer's posture – the right foot is pointed, hanging barely above the floor, mid-stride. This detail appears in a few of the studies, and Moreau seems to have been fascinated with problems of balance, in both the physical space where she dances and on the surface of his

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painting. The second trace of motion appears in the floating end of her veil, extended to Salome's left as if whipped back by the motion of her body, its length visually balancing her extended arm. The frozen arm and the flying veil encapsulate Moreau's exploration of motion and rest, the physical antithesis at the heart of his exploration of so many other antitheses. The flying veil also appears in two of the preparatory studies – another effect in which Moreau took great interest.

The last – perhaps most – powerful aspect of these images is the emphasis on design, the Aztec-like rectangles that appear (depending on which picture one chooses) on architectural surfaces, clothing, or etched across a whole painting, running from background to foreground, stone to cloth, architecture to human bodies. The eerie power of *Salome Tattooed* results not so much from the marks of these designs on her clothing or even flesh as from the seamless extension of the artist's patterning across different parts of the painting, as if tattooing is part of the scene, the event, the emotions associated with and generated by the famous dance. Burlingham acknowledged that, given a limited selection from the Musée Moreau, she chose this painting rather than the more famous *Apparition* (1874–76 and 1897, where the glowing head of John the Baptist appears) because it is less well known and equally suggestive. This is the painting where it is clearest that the Salome story evokes the artist's passion: art inspired by art (a motif that surfaces throughout the British aesthetic movement as well), a kind of nineteenth-century action painting driven by the performance art of Salome herself.

I visited *A Strange Magic* three times, spending at least that many hours in a tiny room with only a few dozen artifacts. It was not an exhibit for everyone. For anyone whose interests echo those of nineteenth-century aesthetic culture, it easily could become a kind of pilgrimage.

University of Oregon

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VICTORIAN SENTIMENTALITY AT TATE BRITAIN

By Carolyn Burdett

TATE BRITAIN HAS RECENTLY UNDERGONE substantial renovation, including the provision of a set of new rooms for "BP Displays," a series sponsored by one of the Tate's major funders, British Petroleum. They house "Focus" events – mini exhibitions that change every six to nine months, with the aim of showcasing an artist or particular work, exploring new research or under-represented materials, and displaying rarely seen material from the Tate archive. The rooms are visually striking, their walls painted in intense, deep colours. In 2012, one of them gave space to twenty paintings and two sculptures on the theme of *Victorian Sentimentality*. Its rich raspberry walls made both paintings and the pristinely white statues look glorious (Figure 24).

Up close, however, there were challenges to greet the room's visitors. The items were arranged in categories that have become deeply unfashionable: there were pictures of winsome pets and anthropomorphized animals, pretty women and angelic babes, large-eyed children in states of poverty and need, and harrowing domestic scenes of betrayed love or bereavement. It was an unabashed display of sentimentalism, rarely seen gathered together in a gallery context. According to the description provided by the Tate, the exhibition aimed "to bring Victorian sentimentality into the spotlight and consider a much maligned and misunderstood phenomenon."

A substantial handful of these pictures were unlikely to have been viewed before. Joseph Clark's *Mother's Darling* (1884), Andrew MacCallum's *Silvery Moments (Burnham Beeches)* (1885), Briton Riviere's *Sympathy* (c. 1878), Dorothy Stanley (*née* Tennant)'s *His First Offence* (1896), Frank Holl's *Hush!* and *Hushed* (1877), and Thomas Benjamin Kennington's *Orphans* (1885) have rarely – and certainly not recently – been on show; their appearance fulfilled one of the aims of the new displays in using archived works (an image of these paintings, as well as all others mentioned, can be viewed via the "Find art and artists" link of Tate Britain's website: http://www.tate.org.uk/art). Other pictures were more familiar. Luke Fildes's *The Doctor*, first shown in 1891, is a favourite with Tate audiences, and some of the most significant names in nineteenth-century art were there, including Sir Edwin Landseer's *Dignity and Impudence* (1839), and John Everett Millais's *The Order of Release, 1746* (1852–53) and *The Yeoman of the Guard* (1876). Sir Joshua Reynolds's *The Age of Innocence* (1788) and George Frederick Watts's *Death Crowning Innocence* (1886–87) sat alongside works by lesser known artists like Philip Hermogenes Calderon (*Broken Vows*, 1856), Walter Deverell (*A Pet*, 1853), and John Philip (*The Prison Window*, 1857). The two sculptures, Robert William Colton's *The Springtide of Life* (1903) and Sir Hamo Thornycroft's *The Kiss* (1916), are chronologically the latest pieces. Both artists were associated with the "New Sculpture" movement of the late nineteenth century with its emphasis on naturalism and dynamism and a more expressive and personal style of work.

Sentimental images are part of Tate Britain's history. A number of the included items – Fildes's *The Doctor*, Millais's *The Order of Release, 1746*, Riviere's *Sympathy*, Holl's *Hush!* and *Hushed*, Stanley's *His First Offence*, and Kennington's *Orphans* – were in the

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Figure 24. (Color online) Photograph showing the installation of *Victorian Sentimentality* at Tate Britain. Author's own photograph.

founding bequest by Henry Tate. The curators could have chosen others, for Tate admired sentimental pictures and purchased many of them with the wealth he made from sugar refining. Although just a boy when Parliament abolished slavery across the British empire, Tate entered an industry formed and shaped by traded and exploited human lives, and the critics of sentimentality might well see this as proving their point. For the most outspoken of such critics in the twentieth century and beyond, Tate's taste in pictures and his involvement in an industry with its roots in slavery provides one more piece of evidence that sentimentality is a type of ethical defect. In the 1970s, the philosopher Michael Tanner asserted that "to be sentimental is to be shallow in a specially noteworthy way" ("Sentimentality"128), while Mary Midgley deemed sentimentality tantamount to violence, a form of emotional "flight from, and contempt for, real people" ("Brutality and Sentimentality" 386).

Tanner and Midgley are among many who have made the moral case against sentimentality. It has been seen as a type of dishonesty, involving excessive or immature emotions; it manipulates emotions or fakes them; it trades in cheap and superficial feeling, permitting unearned moral satisfaction; and it is self-indulgent. It was the modernists in the early twentieth century who soldered these judgments to the critique of nineteenth-century art and literature in their twin demolition of Victorian moralism and aesthetics. Commenting scathingly in 1929 on "the sentimental appeal" of popular painting, Roger Fry indicted Fildes's *The Doctor* along with "only too many other works in the Tate gallery and our

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provincial museums" (qtd. Bown, "Tender Beauty" 216). Standing before the canvas, Fry could experience only "a certain nausea and disgust," visceral reactions he is confident must be shared by any viewer who cares for great art (*Roger Fry* 398). For Fry and many other critics of sentimentality, the enduring popularity of pictures like Fildes's is evidence only of degraded taste, cultural vapidity, and a toxic mix of populism and commercialism. The fact that *The Doctor* has been widely reproduced (appearing in 1947 on a postage stamp issued for the centennial anniversary of the American Medical Association and in the *Lancet*'s special issue of 1998 celebrating fifty years of the British National Health Service, for instance) is just further evidence that sentimentality is a symptom of the evils of mass culture, endemically commercial, vulgar, and cheap. Disgust for provincialism, popular taste, and new money were key components of the modernist attack on sentimentality.

The recovery of Victorian art more generally from the devastation of modernist critique was well in evidence in the Tate's other 2012 Victorian exhibition, the blockbuster *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (see Sussman, "Pre-Raphaelites in London and Washington," in this instalment of "Victorians Live"). Part-way through *Victorian Sentimentality*, three of its pictures – Millais's *Order of Release 1746*, Arthur Hughes's *April Love* (1855–56), and Anna Lea Merritt's *Love Locked Out* (1890) – were transferred to the bigger show. The kinship this suggests between Pre-Raphaelitism and sentimentality, however, belies the fact that sentimentality has mostly been an obdurate limit point in the process of recovery and revaluing of Victorian art. Sentimentality still bothers us – as it bothered many Victorians, and for similar reasons. Indeed, almost all of sentimentality's pejorative associations were established and discussed in the Victorian period. Commentators worried about the ease with which certain groups – especially women – could be manipulated and led astray by their feelings, often citing sentimentalism as evidence against further political and cultural enfranchisement.

But *Victorian Sentimentality*'s main aim was not to unearth the history of contention about sentimentality, but rather seriously to reconsider why and how Victorians valued art that provoked tender emotions. The reasons they did so can seem familiar, almost axiomatic. The Victorians inherited from the eighteenth-century a belief in the moral value of sentiments. Emotional responses to art and literature were highly regarded by them as forms of aesthetic enjoyment that also prompted moral reflection. The wall labels accompanying the images in the exhibit gave details of contemporary responses that praise a picture's ability to tell a story "touching in its pathos" (the *Illustrated London News* on Holl's *Hush!* and *Hushed*) or, as in the example of Millais's *The Order of Release, 1746*, make "us think with glistening tears." The portrait of John Charles Montagu, a retired Yeoman of the Guard, in Millais's second canvas, provokes a commentator to reflect on the way "the most energetic and bravest of men have generally a great deal of tenderness in them."

So, in this context, how are we to understand Tate Britain's motives in holding a show dedicated to the topic of Victorian sentimentality, and what are the implications for twenty-first-century viewers? The value of sentimental art and its fitness for a national collection proved to be a contentious issue for the gallery almost from its origin. The label for Clark's *Mother's Darling*, for instance, informed us that the picture was purchased under the Chantrey Bequest that formed the Tate's main purchase grant until the 1920s. The gallery's Keeper from 1906–11, D. S. MacColl, objected strongly to its acquisition, comparing it unfavourably with works by Whistler he considered more "advanced." The argument "was about the values embodied in the national art collection, and whether it should be shaped by the avant-garde

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choices of an educated elite, or whether it should reflect the popularity of commercially successful artists such as Clark." The fact that Clark's painting has rarely if ever been shown since is evidence of how this argument played out over the following hundred years, when the viewpoint of the "educated elite" clearly prevailed. To admit to liking – or to find moving – sentimental images remains an egregious lapse in taste, as the exhibition commentary acknowledged when it asked why sentimentality has come to seem so unforgiveable. It invited us to reflect on this, asking whether it is the familiarity and recurrence of the emotive themes that is at fault, or the too-apparent symbolic or narrative devices that invite, or manipulate, emotional response.

These are questions that are being addressed in a small but significant body of scholarship that has begun to probe the topic of sentimentality. There have been several strands feeding this interest. They include the debate initiated by Ann Douglas and Jane Tompkins in the US on slavery and race, the focus on melodrama and affect in Dickens studies (by William Cohen, Sally Ledger, and Juliet John, for example), and work on sentimental visual culture by British scholars Caroline Arscott and Nicola Bown, amongst others. In 2006, Bown held a symposium at Birkbeck, University of London, on *Rethinking Victorian Sentimentality*, and the resulting work caught the attention of Alison Smith, one of the Tate's curators and a co-organiser of this exhibit, who was intrigued by the challenge of putting sentimentality on show.

The wall labels and exhibition descriptions did not apologise or present special pleading for the works displayed. None of the images was defended against the charge of sentimentality. Instead, visitors were encouraged to look in a number of different ways. One way – familiar to both scholars and a general audience – is to see sentiment in its relation to the social issues that moved and agitated the Victorians. Urban poverty, criminality, family breakdown, illness, and death are all represented. Narrative predominates in moments of implied story, such as that of Calderon's betrayed young woman in *Broken Vows*, or in "before and after" scenarios (Abraham Solomon's *Waiting for the Verdict* (1857), and *Not Guilty* (1859), or Holl's *Hush!* and *Hushed*), and invites analysis. Solomon's hugely popular *Waiting for the Verdict*, for instance, dramatizes issues of class, family relations, gender, and the legal system in its depiction of a despairing working-class family awaiting the dispensation of justice that could tip them from working respectability into disgrace and indigence. John Ruskin was not alone in finding the topic "too painful to be invested with the charm of colour," though some reviewers praised its power of pathos, and the "unvarnished plainness and manly power" of its harrowing emotions ("Academy Notes" 114; "Exhibition of the Royal Academy"). The twenty-first-century viewer might focus on the picture's organization of space, which places the distraught family in the foreground, as the receding perspective takes the eye upwards, through liminal space occupied by servants of the law, into the courtroom itself. This spatial treatment of social distinction and hierarchy calls for interpretation of social, domestic, and legal power relations, but it risks leaving unaddressed the emotional impact that preoccupied Victorian commentators.

Victorian Sentimentality also wanted us to set aside our anti-sentimental conventions, together with customary analytic and interpretative habits, however. We were invited instead to look carefully at these pictures as the Victorians did, as images eliciting emotional responses. The accompanying labels reminded us of the way in which emotions were an accepted aspect of the aesthetic judgments Victorian viewers made. Nicola Brown, the

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exhibition's co-curator, has elsewhere provocatively questioned dominant scholarly practices in relation to Victorian sentimental art. She is interested in how aesthetic values provoke emotional effects and are inextricable from them. Scholarly methods, she argues, can function as forms of displacement in this respect, establishing distance from and a consequent eschewal of emotional involvement. Fully to see these pictures, Bown contends, is to risk asking how "our own affective responses . . . shape our thinking and looking" when released from the distancing apparatus of historicism, ideological critique, or social constructivism: "what is it that we do not see, if we do not also feel?" she asks ("Tender Beauty" 221).

What of the moments of looking and feeling that can occur, for instance, when narrative is allowed to pause? Fabric might arrest the eye for a moment, its colours and folds, its implied softness or its gently-ordered patterns contributing to a picture's emotional tone. Clark's *Mother's Darling*, so disliked by the Tate Keeper, rewards attention to the colours and textures of its various bed linens, especially when paired with the similar colour palette of MacCallum's *Silvery Moments*, a snowy landscape warmed with pink and gold. The soft, melting quality of the latter made me more aware of the contrasting textural effects of similar-coloured passages in Clark's painting – especially the regular, almost geometric patterns of the bed cover. The patterns hold the child, but also suggest containment of the mother's emotion, as if she might have feelings quite distinct from those of maternal devotion. The rich blue and purple and the entrancing drape of the young woman's dress in Hughes's *April Love* are gloriously lovely. Rich and dense, they work to counterpoint the fragile and tremulous quality of the face, intensifying the picture's emotional effect.

In inviting us not just to look, but also to feel carefully, the exhibition implicitly refused the prevalent notion that sentimentality is emotion unearned, and therefore untrue – the "easily obtainable pathos" for which a contemporary criticised Fildes's *The Doctor*. In a recent paper, one of the exhibition's co-curators, Victoria Mills, discusses Fildes's picture of a doctor treating a sick child. She speculates about whether it is the universality of the sadness of a child's struggle to stay alive that is at stake in critical distaste for the image. Are emotions felt in common seen as "somehow lesser"? she asks – and is this part of what makes them "easy" and therefore fraudulent in some way? The mingled pleasure and pain evoked by an image of a child suffering and the possibility of death in fact demands considerable critical effort in relation to both painting and self, according to Mills. Such effort was what Roger Fry thought the picture precluded. In being invited to identify with the doctor, and thus made to feel that we are capable of devotion like his, "we get moral satisfaction we have done nothing to earn" (*Roger Fry* 398). But Fry's comments leave us stranded, able only to recycle anxieties about the canons and hierarchies of taste.

Instead, more interesting is Fry's blithe confidence about how and with whom identification happens. I watched a party of school children cluster around the canvas and wondered about their identifications as they looked at the thoughtful doctor and the sick child laid across two chairs and the shadowy parents in the picture's dimmer half. Much reproduced, especially in medical settings, the painting is looked at by doctors and also by grieving parents, parents with sick children, and those with healthy ones. Children and childless adults also look, and in their various (perhaps multiple) identifications they may feel many different things. Some may feel, and then move with that feeling, beyond the picture itself to broader, even universal, concerns. Fry's inability to imagine any possible identification except with a representative of the white, male, professional

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elite is surely telling, as is his repulsion at the idea of feelings that can be shared. This small exhibition confronted us instead with the ideal of a democracy of feeling and aims to convince us that Victorian art still has power to make us think and feel about the world we inhabit.

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WORKS CONSIDERED

Victorian Sentimentality was devised and curated by Nicola Bown, Senior Lecturer in Victorian Studies at Birkbeck, University of London; Victoria Mills, Research Fellow, Darwin College, University of Cambridge; and Tate Britain curator Alison Smith. It showed as a "BP Focus Display" at Tate Britain, 21 May – 2 December 2012.

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PRE-RAPHAELITES IN LONDON AND WASHINGTON

By Herbert Sussman

THE SHOW IS A STUNNER. As *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* at Tate Britain and in slightly reduced and altered form at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., as *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design, 1848–1900* the exhibition curated by Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, and Alison Smith provides a powerful validation of British artistic creation in the later nineteenth century and, as such, deserves the gratitude and respect of all Victorianists. Strikingly, the very success of the exhibition in demonstrating artistic achievement that had been excluded from the dominant French-oriented model of art history generated a vitriolic attack on the Pre-Raphaelites not seen since Charles Dickens gazed upon *The Carpenter's Shop*.

At Tate Britain, the show achieved a truly Victorian multitudinousness. The attempt of two intrepid Victorianists (myself and a companion) to grasp the array of easel paintings, photographs, tapestries, painted furniture, and embroidery from the 1850s to the 1890s left us as visually overwhelmed as the visitors to the Great Exhibition. This historical range, from the Brotherhood to Burne-Jones, and the inclusiveness, particularly of crafted objects

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for domestic interiors, raised several questions for the modeling of Victorian visual culture, notably the need for a new nomenclature for this period and the applicability of the term "avant-garde" to the British accomplishment. (It is my understanding that the National Gallery's dropping of "avant-garde" from the title was not a repudiation, but simply done to avoid confusion with a contemporaneous show using that term in its title.)

But first a general description. In London and in Washington, the compendium of Victorian art-making was ordered with a fusion of the chronological and thematic. (I should note that the description here applies to both venues with significant divergences indicated.) The rooms followed the conventional timeline of a first and second generation of Pre-Raphaelites with thematic titles for each section. Some of these titles were traditional, some opaque; some revealed new connections that productively disrupted our received visual categories.

The first two sections, "Origins" and "Manifesto," set out the curators' argument for the Pre-Raphaelites, or more specifically the Brotherhood, as an avant-garde. Here it would be useful to clarify the show's underlying definition of "avant-garde," which has generated such confusion and such fire in the critical response. For the curators, and here I would agree, "avant-garde" refers not to a specific group, such as the French Impressionists, nor to a constellation of stylistic practices, such as scenes of modern urban life, but rather describes a model of artistic practice that emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century: "an organized grouping with a self-conscious, radical, collective project of overturning current orthodoxies in art and replacing them with new, critical practices often directly engaged with the contemporary world" (Barringer and Rosenfeld 9). Thus, there were not one, but many avant-gardes in the nineteenth century with differing stylistic practices. This "self-conscious" sense of being in a vanguard with a shared project usually articulated in a manifesto can apply not only to the Impressionists, but to the Nazarenes, and to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Whether all the artists and designers in the show work within this mode is a question to be discussed below.

The opening sections, however, persuasively demonstrate how the Brotherhood follows the avant-garde model. The first room at the Tate, "Origins," quite usefully sets out the art that the Brothers were rejecting. In seeing John Rogers Herbert's *Our Saviour, Subject to His Parents at Nazareth* (1847–56) and *King Joash Shooting the "Arrow of Deliverance"* (1844), one can understand how radical to the mid-Victorians was this avant-garde rupture in applying a rigorous historicist naturalism to the representation of biblical scenes. "Manifesto," records the initial appearance of the PRB: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848–49), the first Pre-Raphaelite picture to appear in public; William Holman Hunt's *Rienzi* (1848–49) hung at the Royal Academy two months later; and John Millais's *Isabella* (1848–49), his first painting done as a Brother. The first issue of *The Germ* is presented as a manifesto demonstrating the avant-garde self-consciousness and communal quality of the Brotherhood.

"Origins" also includes a daguerreotype of 1839, "View of the National Gallery." Here, as throughout, the curators are to be praised for integrating photography within the exhibition to show the complex place of this new technology in late Victorian visual culture rather than displaying photographic images in a separate section or treating these images as individual aesthetic objects. The contemporaneous image of the National Gallery usefully raises the complex connection of early Pre-Raphaelite detailing to this new technology: "the unprecedented clarity and sharpness of the daguerreotype profoundly influenced perception and had a powerful impact on Pre-Raphaelite style" (Barringer 41).

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If the opening sections on the founding of the Brotherhood follow rather straight art history, the succeeding rooms in their often puzzling and often vague titles indicate the intractability of the art and design in regard to conventional art historical categories and the variousness that cannot easily be reduced to any unitary category.

"History" breaks with the orthodox definition of the genre by the absence of history painting defined as the depiction of actual events. Instead the Pre-Raphaelite redefinition of the genre depicts imagined personal events set within specific historical contexts, such as Millais's *A Huguenot on St. Bartholomew's Day* (1851–52) and *The Order of Release, 1746* (1852–53). There are also purely illustrative literary paintings such as Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella* (1850–53) and Elizabeth Siddall's *The Lady of Shalott* (1853). This revisionist organization nicely shows how the PRB as an avant-garde broke with genre convention in its democratic turn from kings and princes and admirals to ordinary people, such as the doomed lovers in *A Huguenot*, caught in world historical events. The inclusion of scenes from literature, from Shakespeare and Tennyson, represents the drive of this new art to treat fictions as events in material history. As this grouping indicates, the governing terms for the PRB might not be history, but historicity.

I particularly liked the equally startling grouping under the title "Salvation." This section juxtaposed historicist biblical paintings and symbolic religious works with representations of modern life: Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849–50) and Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1851–52) with Ford Madox Brown's *Work* (1852–63), Rossetti's *Found* (begun 1859), and Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853–54). Such juxtaposition shows the Pre-Raphaelites reconciling religious feeling with that "engagement with contemporary life" that the curators see as a mark of the avant-garde in the nineteenth century. These paintings show the sacred informing the quotidian. The transcendent pattern of salvation is played out in daily life as the fallen woman is raised from the pavement, the kept woman rises from the rake's lap. Furthermore, this typological mix of salvation in the sacred and the secular points to the particularly British, shall we say Victorian, religiosity of this avant-garde in contrast to the wholly secular French innovators.

The section "Nature" nicely sets the early Pre-Raphaelite style within the context of scientific naturalism, especially in geology, at mid-century. Here are the geological sketches of John Ruskin of the later 1840s; an 1843 photograph by William Henry Fox Talbot of "The Geologists" examining a rock face; a photo by Roger Fenton of rocks and rushing water in Wales (1857); and the evocation of geological time in the cliffs of William Dyce's *Pegwell Bay, Kent* (1858–60). Juxtaposing Millais's *Ruskin* of 1853–54 with Ruskin's own daguerreotype "Cascade du Dard, Chamonix" of 1854, another productive integration of photography, provided a sense of the complexity of the Pre-Raphaelite context, especially the relation of photography to painting in the capturing of nature's detail The catalog points to the blurring of water in each as the means to capture the flow, speculating that Millais actually saw Ruskin's images and that they influenced his work (Barringer 100). I also delighted in seeing in the original paintings the vividness of color and the radiance of outdoor light achieved through *plein-air* practice, especially in the sunlight of Brown's *"The Pretty Baa-Lambs"* (1851–59) and Millais's *The Blind Girl* (1854–56).

As the exhibition moves into the latter decades of the century, it tracks the well-known transformation of the original Brotherhood program of scientific naturalism into what the curators argue is a second avant-garde, working in an aesthetic and symbolist style and often portraying a mildly queer erotics. The section "Beauty," in its very lack of coherence, registers

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a dissolution of shared purpose and the variousness of visual culture in the later decades of the century. There are erotic stunners by the Pre-Raphaelites and others of the circle: Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* (1860–68), Hunt's *Il Dolce far Niente* (1859–66), and Edward Burne-Jones's *Maria Zambaco* (1870). Hunt's *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1866–68), in its lush Orientalist manner, evokes what the sexologists would later read as fetishistic necrophiliac desire. The emergent homoerotic feelings of these decades appear in the sexy young *Bacchus* (1867) by Simeon Solomon. Julia Margaret Cameron's images *Hypatia* (1868) and *Mariana* (1874–75) bring photography from the detailed accuracy of the early Pre-Raphaelite mode to the soft focus treatment of imagined historical and literary women. The enigmatic *Autumn Leaves* (1844–46) shows the important turn of Millais from early narrative to his evocative symboliste manner.

It is in the rooms at Tate Britain under the rather enigmatic title "Paradise" that, to my mind, the exhibit most fully reshapes our own sense of the vitality, significance, and uniqueness of the Victorian artistic endeavor by shifting the emphasis from painting to making. From small galleries, from country houses, and from museum storage rooms, the curators have assembled objects made for use and display in the home that have previously been exiled to the periphery of Victorian visual culture. In so doing, the curators have achieved Morris's goal of deconstructing the hierarchy of high and low, of painter over designer and workman. Here the most dazzling ensemble, surrounded by admiring crowds at Tate Britain, was Morris's seventeenth-century oak four-poster curtained bed from Kelmscott Manor (Figure 25). The bed is adorned with a pelmet (valence) (1891–93) designed by May Morris with embroidered words beginning "The wind's on the wold/ And the night is a-cold"; bed curtains of 1891–93 and a bedspread designed by May Morris and crafted by May Morris and assistants; and a bedspread (1910) embroidered by May Morris and Jane Morris.

Equally enchanting is the tapestry *The Arming and Departure of the Knights of the Round Table on the Quest for the Holy Grail* (1890–94) designed by Burne-Jones, Morris, and John Henry Dearle, executed by Morris & Co. In the vividly colored silk and wool dyed at Merton Abbey, a line of knights with Burne-Jones faces looks down at a row of maidens bidding them farewell, all suspended on a ground of medievalized grass and flowers. The catalog accurately describes this tapestry as a "crowning achievement combining Morris's rich colours, dense patterning on the fabrics and profusion of botanical detail with Burne-Jones's masterful litheness of line and expressive massing of figures" (Barringer 199).

The wealth of lovely made things in this "Paradise" of crafted objects brings out the occupation of the Brotherhood and the later Pre-Raphaelite circle with domestic design for personal, commercial, and religious use. The curators' wise decision to mix this crafted work with painting illustrates that these Victorians saw no hierarchical separation between domestic design and so-called high art. A short list of these objects and the diverse media would include Brown's "Washstand"(c. 1860) and "Towel Horse" (n. d.), designed for Morris & Co.; an "Egyptian Chair" commissioned by Hunt in 1857; "Cray," a printed fabric of Morris & Co.; the Sussex chair designed by Philip Webb; the *Peacock and Bird* carpet (1885–90) designed by Morris with its sinuous birds and flowers in brilliant two-dimensional forms akin to Whistler's Peacock Room; pages from Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1892); and the early "Arming of the Knight" chair painted in medievalist style by Rossetti and Morris (1856–57) for their living quarters. In their brilliant and deep color, the two stained-glass panels *Angel with Instrument* and *Angel with Lute* (1890) designed by Burne-Jones for Morris & Co. illustrate the high artistic quality of the work for religious institutions.

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Figure 25 (Color online) May Morris and assistants, Bed Pelmet, 1891–93. May Morris assisted by Lily (Susan) Yeats, Maude Deacon, and Ellen Wright, Bed Curtains, 1891–93. May Morris and Jane Morris, Bedspread, 1910. Kelmscott Manor Collection. By permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

In bringing together these crafted works often hidden from public view, the curators have quite brilliantly shown that the value of British artistic achievement in the late nineteenth century lies as much in design, often domestic design, as in easel painting. The turn from shocking the bourgeoisie to decorating their homes and their churches, in my own view, does not diminish the British work so much as exhibit its uniqueness and its difference from the contemporaneous French art so centered on painting. Insularity may not be a vice but a virtue.

Given the evident artistic delight in crafting objects and the visual delight of the crowds at Tate Britain, it was unfortunate that, due to the difficulty of loans and logistics, the National Gallery had fewer made pieces, such as the Morris bed, the painted chairs, the carpets. Indeed, rather than Tate's echt-Victorian jumble of paintings, photographs, tapestries, and decorated furniture – so true to the Pre-Raphaelites, who easily turned from painting the canvas to painting the cabinet – the exhibition at the National Gallery, with its smaller spaces, discreet lighting, and walls painted in museum turquoise, plum, and deep blue, became more a decorous display of high art. These now fashionable, rather retro colors gave the feel of a reconstructed Royal Academy exhibiting a few pieces for veneration, rather than showing the

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loose and messy efforts of these British artists and designers. The paintings were transformed into isolated exemplars of high art removed from the life of a vigorous creative moment.

Throughout, the curators have been attentive to the creative activity of women. I've noted the careful curating revealing the role of May Morris as designer rather than merely worker in the making of the Grail tapestries. Also on display were Elizabeth Siddall's richly colored watercolors *Lady Clare* (1854–57), *Lady Affixing Pennant to a Knight's Spear* (c 1856) and *The Ladies' Lament from "Sir Patrick Spens"* (1856), all indications of her unfulfilled talent. Most notable to me was the sketch of "The Lady of Shallot." In contrast to Hunt's orientalist rendering of the voluptuous female body displayed in the "Mythologies" section, Siddall's drawing shows a demure maiden of notably non-sexual body in simple gown and spare surroundings calmly gazing out the window as her weaving flies in pieces from the loom. This rendition could arguably be seen as an illustration of Tennyson from a female perspective rather than through a sexualized male gaze. The highly detailed satirical watercolor by Florence Claxton, *The Choice of Paris: An Idyll* (1860), of the Pre-Raphaelites at play, work, and in the Royal Academy, provides a debunking female view of the distinctly patriarchal and homosocial Pre-Raphaelite high seriousness.

The final section, "Mythologies," illustrates the diversity of the artistic scene at the end of the century. Here are examples of the turns taken by the founding Brothers in the later decades of the century: Rossetti's highly erotic *Astarte Syriaca* (1870), used as the icon for the exhibition; Millais's moody non-narrative landscape, *Chill October* (1870); Hunt's *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1883–84) and his well-known *Lady of Shallot* (1888–1905). Works also show the move to, for want of a better term, the decadent mood, most notably in Burne-Jones's vivid yet languid treatment in *Laus Veneris* (1873–78) of that favorite decadent subject, the Tannhauser myth. His Perseus series, especially *The Doom Fulfilled* (1885–88), with Perseus entangled in the endless dark coils of the dragon, surely evokes private if inchoate sexual fantasies.

With its mix of Rossetti's hetero Victorian sexiness, Burne-Jones's queer late Victorian sexiness, and Hunt's continued historicist biblical narrative, "Mythologies" exemplifies several of the general art-historical issues raised by this exhibition. For one, the use of the term "Pre-Raphaelite" as the exhibition title raises the perpetually vexed question of the meaning and the usefulness of this term. The curators (and this writer) have employed the received timeline of two generations as the only art-historical language available, but still how can the category "Pre-Raphaelite," even if divided into first and second generations, subsume Brown's *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* (1852–56); the homoerotic Bacchus of Simeon Solomon (1891); Walter Crane's allegorical socialist lithograph *The Triumph of Labour*; and the embroidery of May Morris.

Given the diversity of art and design in England from 1848 to 1900 presented here, it might be best to abandon the quest for a stable meaning of the term "Pre-Raphaelite" used in the title and instead turn to a very Victorian modeling (as suggested by Julian Bell in his review of the exhibition) – the Darwinian evolutionary tree. Here the Brotherhood becomes the originary life form from which new artistic species branched off, some of which flourished while others died off, but with all shaped by some elements of the original Brotherhood artistic DNA. It was indeed prescient and prophetic for the Brothers to title their avant-garde manifesto of this originary energy *The Germ*. The title of the National Gallery exhibition, *Victorian Art and Design, 1848–1900* might more accurately point to the evolved diversity of the period.

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To continue the evolutionary model – just as Darwin envisioned organic evolution as non-teleological, thus challenging the notion of evolutionary change as leading providentially to the human species, so the exhibition in its exhaustive and dazzling exuberance challenges the teleological Franco-centric model of nineteenth-century art history that sees art as progressive in ineluctably moving to French Impressionists, then French Post-Impressionism, then abstraction, a paradigm that still has a powerful influence on art critics and museum goers. Setting later Victorian art and design under the sign of "avant-garde" then challenges this Franco-centric paradigm by refusing the exclusive identification of "avant-garde" with the Impressionists. This magisterial exhibition of painting, photography, and design validates this vital oppositional artistic movement shaped by a distinctly English culture and working within the paradigm of an avant-garde.

The project, and to my mind the success, of validating the contemporaneous art and design of England, and thereby displacing the received French-centered model of artistic modernism, touched off a fevered defensiveness. Strikingly, the Pre-Raphaelites have once again called up a hysterical response, this time from a new academy. Roberta Smith, the chief art critic for the *New York Times*, responded to the show in Washington in a pitch that out-Dickenses Dickens. Smith is worth quoting at length to exemplify the resistance to the overthrow of the Franco-centric discourse of modernity. Her touchstone, to adopt another Victorian term, is the French Impressionists, even if that means some neglect of fact in excluding the bold attention to contemporary life in the work of Hunt, Brown, Millais, and others on view in the exhibition:

That the Pre-Raphaelites rebelled against their own time and introduced a hyper-realistic style does not necessarily make them avant-garde. They didn't radically rethink painting as Manet, Cézanne, or van Gogh did; inspired by photography, they just made it more precise, often extraordinarily so. And they had only a minor interest in being "painters of modern life," to use Baudelaire's phrase. Rather than embracing the people, fashions and activities of their time, as their French contemporaries did, they escaped into fantasy.

In her effort to distinguish the escapist British from the serious French, she identifies the late Victorians with the kitsch that modernism defines itself as opposing. The Brotherhood becomes the germ not of the revivification, but of the degeneration of Western art:

> The Pre-Raphaelites are everywhere. That's why this show is so hypnotic. The badness at its core is completely familiar. . . . You can see it all coming . . . the visual platitudes of Norman Rockwell and Walt Disney; the hallucinatory brightness of psychedelic posters. . . . The Pre-Raphaelites built one of the cornerstones of popular culture. Like kitsch itself their art is radioactive; for better or worse its influence never goes away, it only spreads.

To this screed, we can only juxtapose the exhibition itself with its admirable capaciousness and visual delight that enhances our respect for the creative energy of late nineteenth-century art and design. If you wish to validate late Victorian creative achievement, look about you.

Finally, great praise is due to the catalog, as magisterial as the exhibition itself. The entries for each item, done by the curators with contributions by Diane Waggoner and Elizabeth Prettejohn, are definitive in providing factual matters, such as date(s) of composition, provenance, and accounts of the original reception. The entries also provide what was evident to the Victorians yet lost to modern viewers, such as the literary, historical, and

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biblical sources, especially the typological mode. There is some, but not too much, curatorial commentary. The essay "Medium and Method in Pre-Raphaelite Painting" by Alison Smith is especially useful, as is Prettejohn's "The Pre-Raphaelite Legacy" on the afterlife of the Pre-Raphaelites. This volume is encyclopedic in the best sense of providing in one place information necessary for any student of these artists and designers, a fitting monument to this quite wonderful exhibition.

The New School

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Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde. Curated by Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, Alison Smith. Tate Britain, 12 September 2012–13 January 2013; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 17 February-19 May, 2013 as *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design, 1848–1900*; State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 10 June-30 September, 2013.

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