

Acknowledgements

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Paul Goldman

Introduction

This book is intended to provide a new approach to the book and periodical illustrations of Millais. The title 'Beyond Decoration' is chosen not just for mellifluousness, but to signify my belief that the contribution he made to this branch of art elevated its status to a higher intellectual level than it had been accorded hitherto. While not primarily a bibliographical study, certain significant details are provided in the two sections devoted to listings. More detailed references will be found in a previous study.¹ However, provided here are the literary contexts for each design, and it is the relationship between the image and the text which forms the central theme of the present work. Hence my assertion that the current essay is somewhat novel and reasonably comprehensive, notwithstanding the existence of two noteworthy predecessors.² While the emphasis on Millais and Trollope is understandable on account of the undeniable interest and quality of the work, it is by no means the entire story. My aim, while duly acknowledging what has been previously written, is to try to reveal both a more profound and a wider-ranging artist than perhaps has been earlier perceived.

Millais was not just the most prolific of the Pre-Raphaelite illustrators but he was also the more varied, both in his themes and in his styles. For example, he could draw with equal facility for children or for adults and was as much at home with the historical novel as with those of Trollope, which were set in the contemporary world.³ However, in one further respect I believe I see an additional aspect to the interest in Millais's work as an illustrator. By isolating and identifying the particular 'moment' in a poem or story which the artist chooses to illustrate, I trust it may be possible to understand, in a more complete way, what he is doing or attempting to achieve.

The debt Millais owed to his engravers was immense and he worked closely with them, especially the Dalziel Brothers. Another entire book would be required to examine in detail the extent of their involvement and the process and industrial practice of nineteenth century wood-engraving. Some relevant issues have been dealt with in my two previous studies (see Select Bibliography) but for more information I refer the reader to the work of Rodney Engen.⁴

The scheme in the listings in this volume is as follows. For the books, which are organised chronologically, the order is: author, title, publisher, British Library or other collection reference, description of design including

¹ *Victorian Illustration: The Pre-Raphaelites, The Idyllic School and the High Victorians*, London: Lund Humphries, 2004.

² Mason 1978, pp.309-40; Hall 1980.

³ For examples of the former see [Jean Ingelow], *Studies for Stories from Girls' Lives*, 1866. For the latter see the designs in *Once a Week* for the tales of Harriet Martineau.

⁴ See especially Rodney Engen, *Dictionary of Victorian Wood Engravers*, Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1985, which also contains an extensive bibliography.

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medium and engraver, measurements (height before width), position in text and literary context. For the periodicals (which appear in alphabetical order), the designs are listed chronologically within each periodical, with the title of the design (where identified), date, position in text, engraver, measurements and author (and on occasion title of work).

Editions referred to are the first that contain relevant illustrations. Square brackets around dates denote that the item is undated but the date is known from an external source. British Library and other press-marks and location references are similarly enclosed in square brackets. BM denotes British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings. In the listings, the two bookplates designed by Millais are omitted.⁵ Initial letter vignette designs are mentioned but not measured. In certain instances, notably for the periodical *Good Words*, it has not always proved possible to give the month of publication of a particular design. This is because dates only appeared on the wrappers of the periodical and these were almost invariably discarded when it was bound up. Sadly, copies in libraries only rarely retain these fascinating and informative sheets of paper. Millais's small oeuvre in etching is listed with the book illustrations, but I make no attempt to catalogue the different states. Similarly I omit details of the prints made after Millais's paintings, chiefly because I do not regard them as being part of his illustrated work; Rodney Engen in his *Pre-Raphaelite Prints* (1995) lists over sixty examples. Works referred to in the footnotes by author's name only are listed in the bibliography, pp. 65-6.

Exact page references in the periodicals are given where the design is untitled, and where I have been able to ascertain, often with difficulty, just which event is being illustrated. The illustrations themselves are regularly placed nowhere near the relevant text and, in certain instances, I have erred on the side of caution and perhaps with cowardice opted to remain uncertain. Sometimes, in the case perhaps of a frontispiece, no context is evident or clear and there are also occasions where it seems the artist has made a drawing suggested by the text rather than one directly influenced by it. In all such cases this uncertainty is shamelessly admitted. By discussing the relationship of image to text, and with the designs to hand, I hope it will prove possible to perceive more clearly the sense and meaning of the illustrations. It is a mistake to see them divorced from their settings, for, without the relevant poem or novel alongside, an entire element is obscured or even lost. It is essential to attempt to identify and analyse exactly what Millais does with a text and the special manner of his accomplishment.

⁵ For details of Millais's bookplates see Suriano 2000, pp.161ff.



IN 1855 GEORGE ROUTLEDGE PUBLISHED A small book of poems by William Allingham entitled *The Music Master, A Love Song, and Two Series of Day and Night Songs*. This apparently unremarkable event was to prove of immense interest and influence in the story and development of British book illustration, for this tiny volume contained wood-engravings by three leading artists of a Pre-Raphaelite nature – Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Arthur Hughes and Millais. While the designs by Hughes are relatively slight and even unconfident, the 'Maids of Elfen-mere' by Rossetti was to prove probably the most influential on the other Pre-Raphaelites. Burne-Jones, writing anonymously the following year reacted to it with passion:

... it is I think the most beautiful drawing for an illustration I have ever seen, the weird faces of the maids of Elfinmere [*sic*], the musical timed movement of their arms together as they sing, the face of the man, above all, are such as only a great artist could conceive.¹

It is from this design that an entirely new approach to book illustration was soon to emerge. Rossetti's drawing is both mysterious yet also disquietingly realistic, and it contains several quintessential Pre-Raphaelite features. The lines are sharply delineated and the figures are not cyphers but redolent of feeling and powerful emotion. The design has a border and is richly and darkly printed. The figure of the man, which so impressed Burne-Jones, is contorted and viewed boldly from behind. Perhaps more than any other feature is the feeling that the image is presented on an equal footing with the text. The artist brings a potent intellect to bear on the task of illustration.

The background from which this image sprang so suddenly was a very contrasting one. The books of the 1830s and 1840s were illustrated by numerous distinguished artists, yet the appearance of their designs was utterly different. The style of George Cruikshank, Robert Seymour and Hablot Knight Browne (Phiz), to name but three, for the works of authors such as Dickens, Charles Lever and William Harrison Ainsworth is essentially, to my mind, more subservient and deferential to the text. For example, the influence of the single-sheet satires of the period 1790-1830 is frequently apparent with an emphasis on wiry lines, stereotyped facial

¹ Unsigned essay on 'The Newcomes', *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, no.6, 1856.

expressions and somewhat static and conventional poses and stances. This style may perhaps, with caution, be termed 'Theatrical' and examples are numerous. In 'Mrs. Bardell faints in Mr. Pickwick's Arms' by Browne, for which the artist made two versions, several of these elements are to the fore. First is a delicate and delightfully airy etched line; second is a somewhat generalised handling of emotion. There is fear, consternation, concern and anger to be sure, but the atmosphere is regularly one of exaggeration and even caricature. Similarly the poses are conventional and studied: the feeling has much to do with the stage, where movements of hands, legs and bodies must be clear to allow the spectator direct access to the action and to the mood. In the second version the details of the room are more strongly defined by Browne. The clock, picture and bookshelves have been rendered with telling detail.² Yet there are still further points of difference. Many of these designs appear as vignettes and the printing, with notable exceptions, is frequently light.³ It was against a background of much admirable work by the artists just mentioned and many others, including William Mulready and Daniel Maclise, that the Pre-Raphaelites appeared as illustrators.⁴

The grandeur of 'The Maids of Elfen-mere' and its undoubted influence have, to some extent, inevitably overshadowed Millais's single drawing for the same book.

70 This was 'The Fireside Story' which accompanied a poem entitled 'Frost in the Holidays' and, in its own way, is as remarkable as Rossetti's more celebrated design.⁵ Here also is a powerful composition, strongly delineated and with a similarly absorbing atmosphere of emotion and deep feeling. Yet, despite the importance of these two images being printed in the same outstanding volume, Millais's first published illustration had already
69 appeared some three years earlier.⁶ This is an etched frontispiece vignette, perhaps with more than a glance back at Browne and Cruikshank, but here in contrast many genuine Pre-Raphaelite characteristics are already noticeable. There is the sharply defined realism, the sense of emotional interaction and also a typically Millaisian feature: a mastery and understanding of contemporary dress. The stylistic changes wrought by Millais and the other Pre-Raphaelite illustrators had begun to emerge even at this early date.

How then does Millais really differ from Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Ford Madox Brown and Burne-Jones, the leading artists who were at the centre of Pre-Raphaelitism? First, he was far more prolific than they were in produc-

2 Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, 1836-7, issued in monthly parts, illustrated by Robert Seymour, R.W. Buss and Hablor Knight Browne. For a masterly discussion of this period of illustration see John Harvey, *Victorian Novelists and their Illustrators*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1970.

3 There are several notable exceptions to this assertion. For example in *Bleak House*, issued in monthly parts during 1852-3 and illustrated by H. K. Browne, there appear several of Browne's so-called 'dark' plates. One of the finest is 'The Morning' and it is very different in feeling, mood and emphasis from the large majority of this artist's illustrations.

4 See Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, London: John Van Voorst, 1843, illustrated by Mulready, and Thomas Moore, *Irish Melodies*, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1846, illustrated by Maclise, for arguably these artists' masterpieces in book-illustration.

5 Book Illustrations 3 (1855).

6 W. Wilkie Collins, *Mr. Wray's Cash-Box*, London: Richard Bentley, 1852 (Book Illustrations 2).

ing over three hundred designs for books and periodicals. Secondly, he made illustrations over a longer period – from 1850 until the mid-1880s, although it must be admitted that some of the late designs are likely to have been first drawn at an earlier period.⁷ Rossetti and the others made far fewer illustrations than Millais and they also abandoned the task considerably earlier.⁸ Nevertheless, it should be stressed also that Millais can only be considered a prolific illustrator when compared to the other Pre-Raphaelites: from the period before him, both Browne and George Cruikshank produced more designs, and in later years artists such as William Heath Robinson and Gordon Browne made a greater quantity of drawings both for books and for periodicals. There are, however, still further features that mark out Millais from his Pre-Raphaelite fellows. While they were chiefly restricted, by and large, to poetry, usually of a Tennysonian kind, both temperamentally and stylistically, so Millais drew for a larger variety of literature and in a number of styles.⁹

The categories of literature for which he drew include adult poetry, with examples such as 'The Moxon Tennyson' and other anthologies.¹⁰ He made many designs for adult prose, notably for several of the novels of Trollope and for the so-called 'Historiettes' of Harriet Martineau.¹¹ He also produced drawings for children's books, and for works intended specifically for girls.¹² In addition there are the religious texts which prompted him to produce arguably some of his greatest illustrations: *The Parables of Our Lord*. Twelve images were published in *Good Words* of 1863 and all twenty were published in book form and printed on better paper the following year.

Some other subdivisions of activity might be usefully defined, for example the unjustly neglected steel-engraved frontispieces he made for Hurst and Blackett's *Standard Library Series*, and the series of drawings for poems translated from the Breton by Tom Taylor.¹³

However, it is also important to stress once again the fact pinpointed acutely by a previous critic that Millais's relationship with Trollope was 'the only instance where the resources of this rich activity in illustration were put at the service of an important working novelist in a sustained way.'¹⁴ This is

7 See especially Book Illustrations 63 in this connection.

8 Rossetti, for example, made just ten designs for four books between 1855 and 1866, while Burne-Jones produced only eight during the period of the 1860s. I do not include for this purpose, the latter's drawings made for William Morris in the 1890s.

9 There are, however, some interesting exceptions. For Burne-Jones see the extraordinary and uncharacteristic designs he made for [Archibald Maclaren], *The Fairy Family*, London: Longman and Co., 1857. Holman Hunt made a moving drawing in a book for children, 'A Morning Song of Praise', in Isaac Watts, *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*, London: James Nisbet and Co., 1867.

10 See Book Illustrations 6 (1857). Another important anthology of this kind is R.A. Willmott (ed.), *The Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (Book Illustrations 7).

11 The details of the latter will be found under the entries for *Once a Week* (Periodical Illustrations 9).

12 See Book Illustrations 32: Henry Leslie, *Little Songs for Me to Sing* (1865) and no. 19: Sarah Tytler, *Papers for Thoughtful Girls* (1863).

13 For an example of the former see Book Illustrations 13: Dinah Mulock (Mrs Craik), *Nothing New* (1861). The latter, which first appeared in the pages of *Once a Week*, were reprinted to advantage in 1865 (Book Illustrations 30).

14 Mason 1978, p.309. He continues: 'In all other cases where an artist illustrated several works by a novelist these were wholly or in part reissues (as with Du Maurier's illustrations to Mrs Gaskell).'

a significant observation, and it goes some way towards explaining the continuing (and entirely valid) interest in Trollope and Millais's work for his novels. Yet Millais had so much to offer both intellectually and stylistically when called upon to draw for other contemporary writers such as Harriet Martineau, Mrs Craik (Dinah Mulock), Tennyson and others, as well as for texts where the authors were long dead. An example of the latter can be found in the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* of 1865.

So Millais could draw both for new and reprinted literature, and for a number of literary genres. He was immensely versatile in that he could alter his style in order to do justice to the text before him. Is it possible then to attempt to define and examine some of these various styles and identify and isolate his use of motifs, poses, and expressions within these various modes?

74 First, for texts based on history or antiquity he drew with deep feeling in an 'antiquarian' style: for poems from Norse mythology, several of which appeared in the first years of *Once a Week*, as well as for the stories of Harriet Martineau in the same organ, which were set, for example at the time of Monmouth's Rebellion.¹⁵ In each case Millais took care to render the costume of the period in a manner that is accurate, appropriate and invariably sensitive. Similarly, in the Moxon Tennyson of 1857 it is possible to see him using both this style and a contrasting 'modern' one in the same volume. For example, 'A Dream of Fair Women' (page 161) is a crowded scene where we read:

Or her, who knew that Love can vanquish Death,
Who kneeling, with one arm about her king,
Drew forth the poison with her balmy breath,
Sweet as new buds in Spring.

77 Here the atmosphere is one of a suffocating mediaeval interior and undeniable melodrama, and yet many pages later comes 'Edward Gray' where on page 340 are figures in contemporary dress and, more significantly still, rendered in a deliberately modern manner.

74 The Pre-Raphaelites favoured the device of two figures turned uncomfortably and seen from behind to suggest inner conflict. Millais, though, also uses the single figure on numerous occasions to depict emotion; examples of this can be detected throughout his work. In 'A Dream of Fair Women', on page 149 of the Moxon Tennyson, is a single figure (Cleopatra) tearing open her clothing to reveal the snake bite; on page seven in 'Mariana', a poem set somewhat later, the isolated figure bent double with despair becomes almost an abstract shape. Hence Millais, with texts set in almost any period, can draw in a manner which is direct and often disconcertingly up-to-date. Moreover, stylistically there are yet further refinements to be mentioned. While the 'Dream of Fair Women' design just mentioned is a dark and richly worked image, he also frequently employed a more summary, even sketchy style. A typical example is 'Maude Clare', a poem by Christina Rossetti

¹⁵ 'Son Christopher', *Once a Week*, 24 October – 12 December 1863. See *Periodical Illustrations* 9:lx–lxvii.