Lyric Colour: Pre-Raphaelite Art and Morris’s
The Defence of Guenevere

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Intensity is a quality strongly associated in poetic criticism with lyric poetry, although it may be — at least in Western traditions — the particular legacy of romantic poetics. The short, first-person poem, where language and syntax, sound and imagery strive to convey an extreme excitement or tension (literally a stretching or straining under force or pressure) from the mind and feelings of the lyric speaker to those of an auditor or reader, remains central to much popular understanding of the specifically ‘lyric’. We think of Wordsworth’s ‘spontaneous overflow’ of strong emotion: powerful feelings impelled to expressive release from inner tension (forgetting, as always, his qualifying insistence on the importance of recollection in tranquillity, where thought, governed by habits of association and reflection, modifies the influxes and expressive overflows of feeling). Perhaps more tellingly, we may remember Keats’s assertion that ‘the excellence of every Art is its intensity’. Arthur Hallam, Tennyson’s friend and early defender, distinguished between Wordsworth’s emphasis on subsequent reflection and Keats’s praise of intensity, embracing the latter as closer to the ‘truth’ of poetry: poets of ‘sensation’, like Keats, Shelley, and the early Tennyson, recalled for Hallam heights not reached since the days of Shakespeare and Milton when ‘intense thoughts ... did not fail to awaken a proportionable intensity in the natures of numberless auditors’. True (and Hallam here equates ‘true’ with ‘lyric’) poets are those whose ‘whole being [is] absorbed in the energy of sense’ (87).

Colour, according to nineteenth-century commentators like Hazlitt, Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater, is a mode of such lyric intensity, of that ‘energy of sense’ that forms its own special province of the imagination. Thinking through colour is a trope for the reform of the senses through the arts, and of the arts through the senses raised to a higher power. These are the terms of what might be called a romantic exaltation of colour, which nineteenth-century critics found in such innovative romantic-era users of colour, in paint and in language, as Bonington, Turner, Delacroix, Keats, and (less directly) Scott and Byron.
Romantic uses of colour to achieve lyric intensity are, however, renewed and transformed under the changed circumstances of mid- and late-century perceptions of the challenges of modernity, particularly in the work of poets and critics closest to the visual arts in both England and France. For Ruskin, Baudelaire, and Pater, as in the fiction of Gautier, Huysmans, and Wilde, colour is a sign of that intensity which marks lyric art as distinctively modern, to be found in the poetry not only of Keats but of William Morris or Arthur Rimbaud, and in the paintings of artists from Delacroix and Turner to the English Pre-Raphaelites and Gustave Moreau. Colour is at once romantic and modern (the two terms are in fact used interchangeably); its prominence marks 'the most recent, the most current expression of beauty', Baudelaire wrote in 1846. 'He who says romanticism, says modern art, that is, intimacy, spirituality, colour, aspiration towards the infinite, expressed by all the means contained within the arts'. ('Qui dit romantisme, dit art moderne, c'est-a-dire intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l'infini, exprimées par tous les moyens que contiennent les arts'.)

This is not the view of nineteenth-century or late-romantic modernity with which we are most familiar. Why should colour be an aspect of a lyric intensity of expression for these influential writers on art and literature? At least equally important, one might object, in late nineteenth or early twentieth century arts (including some poetry), are the uses of colour to create decorative patterns, a conjunction that might be thought to defeat expressive or lyric intensity. Yet, as I want to suggest through one example here, lyric intensity in later nineteenth century arts is often achieved precisely through the conjunction of expressive and decorative, or highly patterned, uses of colour. There are many different local histories of painting, poetry, and the decorative arts (and of science, philosophy, and the politics of art) in Germany, France, and England which a fuller treatment of this subject would need to engage (some of which I take up in the longer work from which this essay is drawn). But one can say broadly that colour in the later nineteenth century remains an especially charged topic, where thinking takes place across the boundaries of media, disciplines, and nations. While its long associations with intense sensory experience rather than intellectualised form, and its accordingly subordinated status within Renaissance and neo-classical aesthetics, suggest one reason why both romantic and modern painters and poets embrace colour to challenge existing ideas of the beautiful, there is much more to the story.

My subject is England and the Pre-Raphaelites, and I shall put the
question of colour's special role for them by focusing not on paintings but on a book of poetry written under the immediate influence of visual as well as literary sources. William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858) was the earliest published book of Pre-Raphaelite poetry and in many ways remains the best poetic counterpart to the fresh and inventive spirit of Pre-Raphaelitism in its initial stages. Colour plays an unexpectedly large role in the effects of strange intensity achieved in its brief, mostly dramatic lyrics. Defining just what roles colour plays in this volume, as I shall try to do here, may provide a way of thinking more broadly about what was happening, in England and elsewhere, when poets and painters alike took up the visual, poetic, and philosophical possibilities of colour as part of their ambition to invent arts for a modern age. In what follows I examine two aspects of Morris's use of colour in constructing a poetic idiom: first, its expressive possibilities, where shifts in colour both stimulate and represent the torturous movements of emotion and memory, translating and extending a practice of Pre-Raphaelite painting; and second, what one might call its conceptual possibilities, where patterns of colour, some referring to a now archaic code (heraldry), suggest the possibility of an analogous method of encoding and ordering conceptual content (particularly that of spatial and temporal relationships) while aggressively redefining a modern relationship to the distant past. It is the combination of these two uses of colour, observable in Rossetti's contemporary painting and exploited and developed in Morris's poems, that generates, I shall argue, lyric intensity for these poets and painters of the later nineteenth century.

Morris's practical and scholarly engagements with manuscript illumination, stained glass, embroidery, and other forms of interior decoration, already extensive at the time he wrote the poems of *The Defence of Guenevere*, shape and illuminate the uses to which he puts colour in his poetry. I won't discuss these influences in detail here, but I do want to suggest that attention to them will begin to pose the issue of colour in his poetry differently. Other critics have pondered the possible symbolic meanings of particular colours in Morris's early poems. I am struck rather by the importance of colour relationships. It seems to me that Morris – like the romantic tradition he inherits and complicates – is most interested in the perceptual effects of juxtaposing different...
colours: the transition from relatively neutral tones to concentrations of intense colour combinations, or the use of one colour contrasted with or relieved against another in the construction of patterns. These are the concerns of someone just starting to paint under Rossetti's instruction in 1857–58, but they are even more, in Morris's case, the fruit of his study of stained glass and first efforts at manuscript illumination and embroidery. His delight in studying gothic churches in England and northern France and illuminated manuscripts (such as a fifteenth-century copy of Jean Froissart's *Chronicles* in the British Museum, the source of designs for several of his first patterned textiles), as we can see both in his prose accounts and in the work he produced under their influence, yielded just such striking combinations and unexpected transitions. The grey darkened stone or the columns of black gothic script on vellum pages enhanced the revelatory impact of concentrated combinations of deep and glowing reds and blues and touches of green, relieved with yellow or gold, encountered in both stained glass and the enamel-like brilliance of manuscript illuminations.

No less important for the formation of Morris's heightened sensitivity to pattern and relationship in colour was his exposure to Pre-Raphaelite art. To review briefly a familiar history, according to William Holman Hunt's later reconstruction he and John Everett Millais, at least in the early period of experimentation (from about 1849 to 1854 or 55), in their pursuit of visual 'truth' set aside the accepted rules and practices of contemporary academic instruction and spurned the palettes of their teachers. They made particular use of practices and pigments recovered from early Renaissance painting handbooks, translated and discussed by Charles Eastlake, Mary Merrifield, and others, publicised further by the paint-dealer George Field, and taken up by a few painters in England (e.g. William Mulready) to craft a practice of painting in bright colours applied in small unblended touches over a white or wet white ground, eschewing darkening varnishes. Moreover, following the example of early Flemish (rather than Italian) painters in oil, they achieved a concentrated presentation of minutely observed particularities of texture and colour in the depiction of clothing and household objects or of the densely foliated foregrounds that constituted the greater part of their non-figural settings. Like their Northern Renaissance examples, the Pre-Raphaelites effectively created flat patterns in colour out of arrangements of persons and objects presented without the focusing effects of chiaroscuro – the 'principal lights' and 'principal shadows' dear to academic instruction. (The same
Flemish pictures often portrayed prominently the oriental carpets that were to be especially instructive to Morris when he came to study flat patterns of colour for his own textile designs.

The Pre-Raphaelites' early advocate John Ruskin publicly applauded the painters' painstaking study of flowers and leaves and rocks in their natural settings as consistent with his insistence in *Modern Painters* on the primary value of direct observation, and he had already recognized (in his 1848 review of Eastlake's *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*) the value of returning to early Renaissance materials, methods, and attitudes. These emphases, as first brought to public attention through Ruskin's critical intervention, are at the centre of the usual art historical story of Pre-Raphaelitism's impact. But as the best critics have always noted, Pre-Raphaelite paintings also reveal an interest in conveying a more modern sense of psychological intensity, indeed of fraught situations, primarily in interpersonal relationships inflected by social tensions. Here they used strained gestures, contorted bodies, and, though this has been less explored by critics, heightened and unusual colours and colour combinations deployed for expressive purposes—all of which appeared to contemporary critics, including at times Ruskin, as harsh, even ugly.

Morris's use of colour in his early literary compositions can be linked to what one might call these expressionistic aspects of early 1850s Pre-Raphaelite art: the exaggeration and distortion of both colour and form (particularly the human figure) for expressive purposes which proved so unsettling to contemporary viewers. Morris as poet has learned from the paintings that he has seen, particularly oils by Millais, Hunt, and Ford Madox Brown and Rossetti's watercolours. Consider, for example, the strained postures and gestures of Lorenzo in Millais's *Lorenzo and Isabella*, or those of Mary and Christ in his *Christ in the House of His Parents*, or Claudio, in Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella*, fingering the chain that pulls his right leg up awkwardly beside him, while Isabella, in a similarly strained pose, pushes gently against his chest and leans slightly backward. These strained poses find their counterparts in the gestures of Jehane and Robert in Morris's 'The Haystack in the Floods' ('he tried once more to touch her lips; she reach'd out, sore / And vain desire so tortured them, / The poor grey lips' 132–35); of Guenevere in 'The Defence of Guenevere' ('She threw her wet hair backward from her brow, / Her hand close to her mouth touching her cheek ... like one lame / She walked away from Gauwaine, with her head / Still lifted up' 2–3, 7–9); and of Guenevere and Lancelot at their tense meeting over
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the tomb of King Arthur in Morris's 'King Arthur's Tomb'. In these poems an awkward or impossible situation is registered for us in moments of sudden focus on a lamed or twisted or awkward body, its 'passionate twisting' ('The Defence of Guenevere') brought viscerally to our attention by close focus on a moment when the character tries to register the state of her body (Guenevere's 'hand close to her mouth touching her cheek, / as though she had had there a shameful blow, / And feeling it shameful to feel ought but shame / All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burned so, / She must a little touch it', 3-7, or Jehane's: 'She laid her hand upon her brow, / Then gazed upon the palm, as though / She thought her forehead bled', 76-78). In both poems and paintings, the viewer or reader is made almost painfully aware of bodies through awkward or strained extensions or twists in moments of emotional discomfort and tension. Critics viewed the poses and gestures in the paintings as puzzling or offensive departures from expectations that art would be beautiful, violating the decorum for representing religious figures or even familiar Shakespearean characters. Yet they are not, despite accusations, the consequence of naïveté - certainly not in the case of the already prodigiously accomplished Millais - but rather of attempts to make the representations emotionally expressive through the physical discomfort of the spectator. The torques to which the painters subject the bodies of their figures may recall what appeared to nineteenth-century viewers as the 'grotesqueness' of the figures in, for example, the Lasinio engravings of the murals in the Campo Santo at Pisa (their grotesqueness was noted from Keats through Ruskin). In Pre-Raphaelite hands, however, such grotesqueness seems to be deliberately sought to express the fraught psychological tension between figures, reflecting a distinctly contemporary nineteenth-century sensibility - one closer to Browning than to Shakespeare. It is part of what makes these paintings successful as critique rather than reflection: the painters focus on the dis-ease of domestic relations. The startling modernity of their models - their recognisable resemblance to contemporary figures marked with the signs of (working) class, forces to consciousness the pictures' reflection on the wounds of labour (Christ in the House of His Parents), or the fraught relations between men and women introduced by the selfishness of desires for self-preservation and self-gratification (Claudio and Isabella), or the arrogant cruelty of greed (Lorenzo and Isabella), or the physical fear and confusion that sexual initiation could produce (Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Ecce Ancilla Domini). Indeed, it is worth noting that the Pre-Raphaelite readings of
the Lorenzo and Isabella story come not from Boccaccio but from Keats: the return to early Renaissance Italy is in the service of interpreting a specifically romantic, that is to say modern, art.

The painters’ striking use of colour works similarly, increasing the emotional or psychological tension that strains the poses of their subjects, producing visceral effects on the viewer. This is most startling in Millais’s *Christ in the House of His Parents* – against the shades of pale brown of the carpenter’s workshop, the bright coppery red hair of both Mary and Christ underline Millais’s efforts to convey the scene with a realism verging on harshness (the strong colours of the clothing worn by these laborers – a rich green and orange shawl on one, a red shirt and pink undershirt on another, likewise stand out against the relatively neutral ground of the workshop: nothing subtle or refined about these people or their clothing). But colour equally contributes to his portrayal of strained desire in *Mariana*: Millais’s Mariana adopts not the grey monotony of Tennyson’s best-known lyric of this title (again, the source is less Shakespeare than another modern poet of romance) but rather the Provencal or Italian setting of Tennyson’s less successful poem ‘Mariana in the South’, primarily, it would seem, for the possibilities for colour the latter offered. These are realised particularly in the juxtaposition of the bright royal blue velvet of the dress that clings to Mariana’s stretching body, set in vivid contrast with the orangish-red velvet-covered stool from which she has risen. The stained glass windows, the gold-leaf on green wallpaper, and, of course, the dull gold and flame of the dimly lit shrine in the background, as well as the bright yellow-brown of the floor boards in sunlight, help to assert through the strength of colour the intensity of the sensual longing and frustration that makes the picture’s emotional impact.19 (This association of the ‘South’ – like Byron’s of the ‘East’ or Scott’s of a still-feudal Highland Scotland – exploits the figurative association of colour with otherness of various sorts which was another frequent trope in earlier romantic art and poetry: striking colour in dress or decor or skin or hair is variously used to connote Catholicism, the South (Africa), the Asian East, highland Scotland, Ireland, or the gothic-feudal middle ages to white, protestant, middle-class nineteenth-century England; the figurative uses to which colour is put are somewhat different in content but constant in their exoticising intent across the Channel in France.) Millais’s richness of colour and exploitation of complementary or near-complementary opposition nonetheless stays within the tolerable range for viewers looking for ‘beauty’ or pleasure in pictures like *Mariana* or *Ophelia*, as do the rounded, English features and forms of his female
figures, though at the same time colour foregrounds emotional tone and suggests psychological disturbance (see also *The Bridesmaid*).

Hunt’s reds and oranges, especially when combined with his bright pinky reds or purples and greens (probably making use of Field’s pigments approximating bright early Renaissance colours or of newly discovered chemical pigments), have a shriller, deliberately harsh edge; while insisting on accuracy in transcription, he uses colours that jar in pictures that mean the viewer to recognize something disturbingly wrong in the scene portrayed. It is not just the red cheeks of the eponymous young man in *The Hireling Shepherd*, to which critics objected as signs of unwonted coarseness, but the pink-purple bandanna around his neck, relieved against the blue-green of his tunic and the orange-brown of his shirt, the white of the companion’s shirt and the red of her dress, that draw attention to their dalliance as out of place, a violation of pastoral duty. Messages in Hunt’s pictures tend to have this didactic character, reinforced with much anecdotal and typological symbolism—but colour first sets the jarring tone. In *Claudio and Isabella*, the riot of strong colours that mark his dress (green shoes, purple tights, red tunic with orange fur—and the bright pinky-red ribbon on his lute), contrasted with the subdued blue-green-grey of his sister’s nun’s garb, signal Claudio’s (and Antonio’s) destructive dedication to pleasure, Claudio’s self-absorbed panic at the prospect of his own death, and particularly his sexual aggressivity. Brown, too, uses a disturbingly bright pinkish red in his *Last of England*, where it is an obtrusive, incongruous element in the scene of grim departure, like the child hidden in the woman’s shawl a suggestion of the suppressed feelings—determination but also deep resentment—that lie behind the decision to emigrate. In Brown’s later *Pretty Baa-Lambs* the ribbon appears again, there emphasised by the purplish pink glow it contributes to the reflected sunlight on the mother’s face in a picture that, for all its focus on the ‘scientific’ registering of colour in sunlight and shadow, shares the stubborn, defiant refusal to be ‘pretty’, thrusting a harsh reality in the face of the viewer, that marks so many of Brown’s pictures with his blend of personal and social bitterness. Brown produced more pictures with features, including colour, that viewers found unlovely and grat-
liant green grass contribute to the insisting, assertive character of this painting).

Ruskin's advocacy of colour was surely an important stimulus to the Pre-Raphaelites and to Morris, and his refusal to join the general critical condemnation of Pre-Raphaelite 'harsh' colour was an important part of the public support he lent them. Their use of colour, however, differs from the brightness he praised in medieval and early Renaissance work in important ways. Ruskin associated the brilliance of medieval colour with medieval faith, the absence of an overpowering anticipation of mortality. He did not emphasise, though his prose may sometimes reflect, social disturbance or mental or emotional disorientation through colour. Ruskin's writing on colour thus goes out of its way to attempt to sever the connection between colour and sensuality and skirts the issue of colour's links with emotions, or rather restricts the range of those emotions, even while his prose testifies to his great sensitivity not only to the delights of gradated colour but to the power of colour to disturb and profoundly disconcert. In Pre-Raphaelite practice, colour often speaks less of serene faith than of social and sexual tensions and disturbed emotions in the scenes it depicts.

II

Morris develops Pre-Raphaelite explorations of colour's power to disturb in the Defence of Guenevere poems. Colour there is both vivid and expressive of psychological tensions, particularly in the way it often marks and gives involuntary access to troubling moments in a character's life. The moments in which colour appears repeatedly serve as hinges, fixing a striking image to some powerful emotion for characters and triggering the abrupt transition to a different state of consciousness. It signals (and, we understand, causes) the slide into memory or dream or vision. Colour appears as perceptual or lived experience: sensation with the power to evoke strong emotion and memory. Bright splashes of colour bring home the felt vividness, one might say the substantiality, of the apparently subjective world of feeling, memory, dream, or vision.

Colour in Morris's poems has the power to disorient the individual who is the psychological focus, but it is also, for the reader, the sign that such disturbance or disorientation has taken place, producing an abrupt and unannounced switch in time or place or level of consciousness. So, in 'The Gillyflower of Gold', for example, a knight boasting of
his success on the field of tournament recounts how, nonetheless, at one moment he almost failed:

But I felt weaker than a maid,
And my brain, dizzied and afraid,
Within my helm a fierce tune play'd,

_Hah! Hah! la belle jaune giroflée._ (37–40)

The tune is the refrain line of every stanza (we have already heard it nine times at this point), but here it triggers a memory that gives the knight renewed strength:

Until I thought of your dear head,
Bow'd to the gilliflower bed,
The yellow flowers stain'd with red;

_Hah! hah! la belle jaune giroflée._ (41–44)

The connection is not random: the gilliflower, or _giroflée_, is yellow with red streaks; the poem follows the speaker's association of the gilliflower with a particular loved woman's golden hair. Leaning over the gilliflower bed, her yellow hair mingles in his visual memory with the yellow flowers streaked with red, distilled into the 'fierce tune' that is his battle cry and plays inside his head, as it does in the body of the poem. But the stain of red? Perhaps he has simply transferred to this apparently idyllic memory the blood which is everywhere in his account of the tournament. He has already noted that blood sprinkles the golden gilliflower he wears on his helm ('Lord Miles's blood was dew on it'). But that innocent memory may conceal something more unsettling, as we slowly begin to realise. The staining of the yellow flower with blood may already be part of the memory to which he returns once more in closing:

I almost saw your quiet head
Bow'd o'er the gilliflower bed,
The yellow flowers stain'd with red.

_Hah! hah! la belle jaune giroflée._ (57–60)

With this final repetition of the doubled image and the refrain, the insistent association of love and violent death in the yellow flower _stain'd_ with red forces us to reconsider the tone of the whole poem. We are not told if the woman he recalls has been herself injured or killed, thus staining the flowers red as her head droops over them, nor do we know what his obscure relationship is to her and to this wounding, if it occurred. Rather, the insistent juxtaposition of the stained flower, the
bloodied golden gilliflower on the knight’s helmet, and the golden-haired woman leaning over the reddened yellow flowers, suggests an obsessive mental activity obscure to the speaker but nonetheless troubling, to him and to us. Colour’s structural role in the poem (in the refrain as well as the thematic repetitions) derives from its importance as emotional intensifier and trigger of shifts in time or consciousness. It is as an active agent both in the psychology of central characters and in the reader’s formal experience of the poem.

‘The Wind’ offers perhaps the most memorable use of colour to disrupt a grey present with a profoundly disturbing past. The poem is a monologue by an apparently elderly man (‘So I will sit, and think and think of the days gone by’, 7) sitting alone through the night with only the sound of the wind for company. Its stanzas are punctuated periodically by the three-line refrain which does not seem to belong to the monologue but rather to beat out a steady accompaniment to and commentary on it, addressing the wind and at the same time evoking its presence as a wandering and unhappy searcher after some lost innocence (‘the lily-seed’), whose kindness is in question. What prompts the reverie and releases the memory recounted in the body of the monologue is the speaker’s momentary vivid image of what appears almost as pure colour, or rather two colours whose intensity is enhanced by their juxtaposition: the green hanging behind his chair with an orange lying on its folds. The contrast of green and orange is unusual in the world of these poems. For the speaker the colours are, in fact, grotesquely alive: from the green hanging, its woven dragons ‘grin out in the gusts of the wind’, and the orange has ‘a deep gash cut in the rind’ (11, 12). The speaker fears that to disturb the orange would be to make it ‘scream’ and ‘ooze out like blood from a wizard’s jar’ (16, 17). Colours and image evidently lock up something immensely disturbing. The speaker falls into a dream or reverie recalling a walk with ‘Margaret’ on a hillside in early spring, the green of the grass dotted with daffodils—the primary colour replacing the secondary mixture of yellow and red in the image he desires to leave undisturbed. As the dream-memory unfolds, he recalls that he tried to kiss her, she ‘shuddered away from me’, but then ‘she tottered forward, so glad that I should prevail, / and her hair went over my robe, like a gold flag over a sail’ (46, 50–51). This brief scene of love or rape ends as Margaret lies down on the grass with arms stretched wide while the speaker ambiguously goes ‘down below’ (57). Later he piles daffodils over her, but when she does not respond he removes them one by one to uncover exactly the moment he has evidently avoided:
My dry hands shook and shook as the green gown show'd again,
Clear'd from the yellow flowers, and I grew hollow with pain,
And on to us both there fell from the sun-shower drops of rain.

Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?
Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

Alas! alas! there was blood on the very quiet breast,
Blood lay in the many folds of the loose ungirded vest,
Blood lay upon her arm where the flower had been prest.

I shriek'd and leapt from my chair, and the orange roll'd out afar,
The faint yellow juice oozed out like blood from a wizard's jar;
And then in march'd the ghosts of those that had gone
to the war.

The red of the blood, drained from the yellow flowers in the beginning of the dream, now reappears to return him to the gashed orange on folds of green in a piece of mental colour mixing. Or rather, the orange with its yellow juice was perhaps all along half-recognised, concealing and revealing the remembered blood momentarily covered under the deceptive innocence of the yellow flowers. Yellow, after all, is one of the constituents not only of orange but of green; subtract the red and its kinship to the green of spring grass and spring love (it is also the colour of Margaret's dress) may be more evident. But the mind will not allow such chromatic evasions for long. We do not know exactly what happened between the speaker and Margaret, or why, but that is not really the point. Morris imitates the mind's action through the succession of colour images with surprising economy and impact, following it as it tentatively touches, evades, and is finally overwhelmed by the rupture of an old wound and perhaps an old fear, long buried and not consciously acknowledged. Colour and sound (the wind's refrain) create a highly patterned, repetitive poem, vividly decorative, one might want to say - but colour also 'screams', says the unsayable, becomes, as in early Pre-Raphaelite paintings, a potent expressive vehicle for the poem's psychological burdens.
As we have already seen, in many of his poems Morris combines the disorienting and intensifying effect of touches of strong colour against neutral backgrounds with more prominent patterning, both structural (stanzas and refrains) and thematic, where repeated decorative motifs, patterns in sound and colour, draw attention to recurring memories and emotions. These formal patterns may suggest connections that remain unrecognised by the subjects of the poems, as they do in 'The Wind'. In short lyrics like 'The Gilliflower of Gold', however, the decorative aspects of colour patterns are much more prominent. The phrase which gives the poem its title and regularly returns to organise its verse into stanzas is already a visual pattern in colour. While this and related poems may remind the reader today that Morris was to become England's greatest pattern designer, when Morris published *The Defence of Guenevere* they spoke rather of his medieval sources: they are often inspired by medieval heraldry. 'La belle jaune giroflee' is not only battle cry, refrain, and recurrent image, it is also the device the knight wears on his helm and, presumably, bears on his pennon and perhaps other items of his and his horse's accoutrements, his coat of arms. The poems in this volume are littered with references to heraldic colours and coloured devices. Heraldry provides both the particular colour palette and much of the vocabulary of decorative patterns. Can a poem with such marked attention to surface artifice, and to an archaic form of such artifice, achieve lyric intensity? Does colour here create or defuse emotional tension?

Surprisingly, Morris discovers in heraldic colour patterns a new range of expressive resources, in part dependent on the odd status of heraldry for modern audiences. Using heraldic patterns in 1858 was a pointed anachronism: the heraldic code they evoked was no longer in general use and would be, for most readers, recognisable as a code (and a sign of the medieval) but inaccessible. Such references, found not only in Morris's poems but in many of Rossetti's contemporary watercolours, interpose a double distance between the reader or viewer and the strangely tormented persons represented in poem or painting. Yet by both arousing and frustrating expectations in those who read and view them, they construct effects of lyric intensity that exploit the anachronism's power to make readers and viewers aware of their own modernity, yet also suggest that the tortured distortions of perception that colour helps organise and represent in picture or poem, however marked with the sign of the past, also have a peculiar immediacy.
Heraldic devices were a common feature of the illuminated texts from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries that Morris loved and studied in this period, and they were frequently reproduced and illustrated in Morris's own time. Though its origins are more ancient, heraldry was a fully established code with an important role in social life and hence a place in literary and visual representation by the thirteenth century, and it remained important throughout England and Europe at least through the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century it had something of a revival with the renewed interest not just in things medieval more generally but in the medieval pageantry associated with the tournament and, more seriously, with the desire of a few would-be aristocrats to signal the achievement of social status in symbolic fashion in a period when other distinctions of dress were hard to maintain, especially between the middle and upper classes. Both technical and more popular books on heraldry appear throughout the century, along with staged recreations of medieval tournaments and amateur watercolourists' manuals for reproducing heraldic patterns and devices. While none of these restore heraldry to use as a living language, they do make its patterns familiar as a social code associated with a distant past.

Colour is an intrinsic feature of the coat of arms as recorded officially in verbal descriptions (though the conventions for representing it visually in black and white were not invented until the sixteenth century), but heraldic colour has several unusual features with relevance to the way colour is deployed in Morris's poems as a way of organising time and space. As in heraldry, the colours in Morris's poems are vivid presences, yet they are also abstract categories, limited in number and designated, as in the verbal blazon which can substitute for pictorial presentation of a coat of arms, by a constricted and more or less unvarying vocabulary. In codes of heraldry, developed and institutionalised across Europe over several centuries but by the nineteenth century relatively rigid, there are only five commonly used colours, each with its technical name. Heraldic colour must be specified for each device as well as for a field, and chosen so as to create visible contrast between juxtaposed colours. Permissible juxtapositions of colour are governed by a strictly applied rule. While neither Morris nor those Pre-Raphaelites who depicted medieval banners, shields, and other forms of coloured insignia in their paintings (Rossetti, Brown, Siddal, Burne-Jones) observed the strict heraldic rules for colour combinations or adopted the special vocabulary of heraldic colour, they do use a narrow range of contrasting colours drawn from the heraldic list, in many of the combinations most commonly found in heraldry, and in what might be
called heraldic ways. Heraldic colour categories are broad; the choice of specific tone or tint within each has no significance and can vary even with different realizations of the same personal emblem. ‘Pink’ or ‘crimson’ or ‘scarlet’, for example, or qualifications of basic colours such as ‘light blue’ or ‘deep green’, do not occur in the official verbal accounts and are accidental rather than defining in visual representations. Similarly, gradation within a colour field or on a device (from a dark to light shade, or between closely adjacent hues – yellowish green to bluish green) is not significant. So, too, with most of the colour in these poems and pictures: there are no subtle variations in hue or tint, such as one might find in an account which attempted to approximate the richness of actual colour observed on surfaces of different texture and reflectivity, seen under particular conditions of light and shadow. Only broad, clear hue differences count, and these are used to distinguish figure from field, or juxtaposed figures or fields from each other. In heraldic imagery, colours or colour combinations, like the marks or devices themselves, need to be kept few and easy to specify in order to fulfil their primary function, to be a readily described and replicated sign. In the world of Morris’s poems and tales, heraldic devices and colours function as an important part of the perceptual activities necessary for survival and are particularly important as marks of honour and identity around which considerable social and emotional value has accrued. Morris uses the coloured devices of heraldry for their imagistic vividness, as spots of colour punctuating (and often structuring) the texture of a poem, but also for their potential to focus loyalties and angers, love and hate, as these motivate actions. And he extends these social uses, as we have seen, to more specifically lyric ends, using his recurring colour patterns to signal and provoke the mind’s erratic but compelling movements in defiance of gradual temporal and spatial progression. Because heraldic patterning suggests the presence of a code, however, it can also suggest that those mental and emotional actions have their own logic—that there is a way to ‘read’ the relations of inside and outside, past and present, that make up subjective or lyric experience while they contradict ordinary perceptions of sequential temporal progression or continuous three-dimensional space.

The closest analogue—though it is hard to say who is influencing whom—to Morris’s early poems can be found in Rossetti’s small, intimate watercolours from the second half of the 1850s. Here colour is indeed lyric: possessed of an intensity and penetrating power that suggests heightened and disturbed emotional states. It certainly did so to Morris when he wrote poems for three of Rossetti’s watercolours (‘The
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Blue Closet', 'The Tune of the Seven Towers', and 'King Arthur's Tomb'). But Rossetti's colour works also to organise the picture into pattern and to order into rhythms both visual perception and psychological response in the spectator, and these aspects of his pictures may help us to understand better the extraordinary, strange experiments of Morris in his most insistently patterned poems such as 'The Gilliflower of Gold' and, especially, 'The Blue Closet'. In both poems and watercolours, colour bears a heavy burden of articulation in the absence of more usual indications from gesture, facial expression, significant objects, or narrative elaboration to gloss or open out the psychological terrain of the representation to viewers. The watercolours, seen alone, are not immediately dramatic through facial expression or gesture, as were the early PRB paintings, nor do they provide other narrative clues to the psychological tensions at work that viewers of Victorian genre paintings, trained as readers by fiction, had learned to look for and to interpret. While some of the watercolours can be glossed by readers who turn to the stories to which the titles allude — particularly the scenes from the life of the Virgin or from Dante which Rossetti made for Ruskin, or from a well-known story like The Wedding of St. George and the Princess Sabra — others, such as The Tune of the Seven Towers or The Blue Closet, refer in no obvious way to a known story, presenting what appear to be fraught situations in which characters in the same space are lost in abstraction. While united by some minimal activity, they do not look directly at each other. These images shut viewers out, forcing them to rely on the more abstract but also expressive languages of colour and patterned pictorial space.

The watercolours of 1856–59 particularly, with their predominantly red, gold, dark blue and green colours and highly patterned medieval settings, are close to Morris's poems and designs of the same years — not surprisingly, in this period of the two men's closest social and professional friendship (particularly 1856–57). While some of these pictures use intense colours in startling combinations, equally striking are the claustrophobic and curiously organised fictive, psychological, and pictorial spaces or surfaces across which they are arrayed. Geometrically complex furniture and interior spaces (increasingly filled with ingeniously designed, often patterned objects) proliferate. The inventive chairs and tables that incorporate musical instruments in The Tune of Seven Towers and The Blue Closet have no real historical counterparts (though Rossetti did collect strange musical instruments in the 1860s). An excess of exuberant design of both furniture and its patterned surfaces seemingly invites the viewer to delight in intricate and ingenious
patterns and constructions for their own sake. Yet such geometrical constructions are closely integrated to the picture's meanings. The exuberant patterning, filling the picture surface, contributes to the sense of emotional inwardness the pictures convey, while the geometric organisation of the compositions distinguish what one might call the levels of being on which figures are understood to exist. The pictures are full of sudden openings or views through to different levels, almost all interiors, and few allow glimpses of open sky. The 'space' in these small watercolours is indeed more like a superimposition of planes which cannot be read easily according to the usual devices of perspectival representation – there are seldom avenues to graded recession for the viewer, but instead abrupt juxtapositions, seen through various square or rectangular openings, of near and far, above and below, inside and outside, in areas which often lack strong points of orientation (such as a horizon line). This organisation of the picture surface relies rather on heraldic practices of dividing the armorial shield into geometric quadrants (especially visible in *The Blue Closet*), sometimes on the diagonal (*Tune of the Seven Towers*, *The Wedding of St. George and the Princess Sabra*). The abstract division of a bounded surface area in Rossetti's pictures is reinforced by the inside-out reversals of figure and ground colour combinations ('interchange' in heraldic terminology) that organise some pictures, as in the mirror-repeat of *The Blue Closet*, where interchange is translated into the organisational strategy for the entire picture surface, symmetrically split down the middle of the two-part instrument with the two women, again symmetrically arranged, but raising opposite arms to play, and dressed in contrasting colours; on the instrument there are heraldic painted as well as carved patterns.

Heraldic patterning in these small pictures seems to work as a powerful generating influence in the disposition of colour which articulates what is at once fictional space and pictorial surface. It recalls heraldic rules of reading by which complex coats of arms (with a series of devices, represented on different scales on the shield divided vertically or into quadrants) are considered as superimposed planes to be read from the most distant (the field) toward the top or surface image. (This understanding of heraldic space permits complex bearings incorporating family histories of marriages, second marriages, and so forth to be read: the order of superimposed planes is understood as temporal succession.) The crowding of figures and objects with and upon patterned surfaces in Rossetti's pictures is similarly 'readable' as a set of superimposed planes, structured into opposed but balanced halves or quadrants, where patterned objects and surfaces within the depicted 'space'
repeat, in miniature, the organising lines and colour contrasts of the pictorial plane. While the major figures in the scene occupy the same plane, auxiliary figures are understood to occupy different social and even metaphysical spaces through their placement on different planes – the servant thrusting a branch in through the back window over the bed, itself in an alcove off and behind the room in which the figures in *Tune of Seven Towers* sit, or the green-winged angels playing a set of bells, visible through a window opening behind a hedge from the enclosed garden in which St. George and the Princess Sabra gloomily embrace, in *The Wedding*.

Morris's poems obviously resemble Rossetti's pictures in their use of vivid golds and reds and blues to represent medieval scenes, but the more subtle connections are to be found in their common exploration of pattern and plane as bearers of the experiential shapes and relations of time, memory, and feeling. In both picture and poem, narrative or descriptive information that would allow the relations among characters to be understood psychologically or narratively is replaced by heraldic practices of displaying relationships through superimposed planes divided vertically or diagonally to indicate shifts in social, temporal, and spatial location. Thus the figures or characters in picture or poem do not interact dramatically, nor can their relations be reconstructed through narrative clues or references; rather, both forms of art are interested in displaying the disjunctions (and abrupt, involuntary shifts or recurrences) which are the often jarring, discontinuous mental experience of what narrative smooths into continuous connection.

The most interesting poem of this type retains a great expressive power to unsettle and provoke. 'The Blue Closet' is a highly patterned poem, a composite of a number of different forms and voices with passages that serve as refrains, though not through exact repetition – yet where colour is used in a lyric way, that is, to intensify sensory and emotional awareness of a moment of time. That moment is repeatable (as ritual re-enactment, here; in other poems, as involuntary memory) but is at first presented as apart from continuously changing history. The enclosed blue closet, where colours are definite and strong (the purple and green of Alice's and Louise's gowns, the blue tiles themselves, the gold strings of the singer's instrument) sets the duration of the song off from the flux and progress of time. In the closet time is evidently suspended, marked only by the women's annual permission to make music, though their singing and playing is rhythmically regulated by the tolling bell outside. But the closet exists against a backdrop of motion, aging, dulling, or erasure. That dulling or aging is at first
localised in the refrain – it regulates change and provides an accompanying reminder of it, through sound rather than colour (as the wind outside tolls the great bell, flaps the banner, tumbles the seas). As the poem unfolds, however, we realise that the blue closet, space constituted principally through colour and music, is actually rather porous:

But, alas! The sea-salt oozes through
The chinks of the tiles of the Closet Blue; (32–33)

The sea-salt will eventually cover the definite colours and patterns of the tiles. Louise’s lover Arthur on his long-ago visit brought ‘dusty snow’ to sprinkle over Louise’s white shoulders – and his blue eyes were already dimmed (‘they grow grey with time’) while his cheeks were pale, his lips grey (40, 47). Much as the central characters in ‘The Wind’ or ‘The Gilliflower of Gold’ seem to be caught in the mind’s will to exclude certain kinds of knowledge, yet unable to prevent the intrusion of memories whose connections they cannot consciously articulate, so the enclosed space of ‘The Blue Closet’ (or of Rossetti’s pictures, The Blue Closet, The Tune of Seven Towers, or The Wedding) are also porous, concealing strange openings that abruptly give on distant places. In Morris’s poem, it is not until Arthur returns at its conclusion to release the women, heralded by the ‘lily red’ that shoots up through a curious opening in the floor, and leads Louise into ‘the happy golden land’ that his eyes are restored to their ‘blue’ and colour is assured – but in ‘the land of the dead’ (60, 72, 69, 62). Colour in ‘The Blue Closet’ is subject to decay, as are the human senses that are our only way to know it as colour, but colour also has an afterlife where it is as vivid as ever, whereas sound is repetitive, embodying the rhythmic passage of time and ceasing with it. (And in truth the great bell overhead / Left off his pealing for the dead, / Perchance, because the wind was dead’ 49–51. By the end of the poem the bell tolls again but ‘their song ceased, and they were dead’, 79.) One might say that this afterlife of colour is the aesthetic artifact – the poem or picture that fixes mental space, with its willed exclusions and sudden openings, into an aesthetically satisfying pattern, imposing order and restoring the vivid, felt reality of colour to what will remain unintelligible and constantly threatened with dissolution in the flux of conscious experience. To put it another way, the hermetic Blue Closet, marked with all the signs of temporal difference, spatial otherness, and psychological strangeness, persists in vivid immediacy through its artifice, much as the now closed heraldic code survives in decorative patterns and anti-realist techniques of spatial and temporal organisation. Poem and picture focus on the disruption and potentially unsettling
force of such aesthetic survivals: the interpenetration of normative senses of time, space, form, and colour (or colourlessness) with these archaic but lastingly vivid alternatives to post-Renaissance, Enlightenment, and even romantic modes of thought and experience. The conjunction creates a peculiarly intense form of modern lyric, bringing home through the senses, though in a perhaps not wholly intentional fashion, the troubled relations to personal and historical time and the disturbed perceptions of place and space that constitute the experience of modernity for late-nineteenth-century readers and viewers.

Morris’s poem is perhaps as oddly effective as it is because it turns on a continuing philosophical puzzle: colour is a powerful sensory impression with a basis in physical stimulus but it is nonetheless not a property of any objects, physical or non-physical. Rather, it is always in excess of the things to which it appears to belong—about to lift off, as it were, and become something with a life of its own. Colour can’t be tied down. Colour makes the lived moment seem intensely present or ‘real’, yet as a property of things it is an illusion. A sense of colour’s elusiveness as well as its illusiveness—its impermanence (subject to fading through light or air or moisture) but also its resistance to efforts to fix it adequately in any language, verbal or mathematical—is always with us. No other sense can confirm it (as visual shape, for example, can be corroborated or altered through touch). Yet colour belongs perhaps all the more strongly for this ontological, epistemological, and perceptual elusiveness to the life and motions of the mind. It can readily lend itself to patterns or hierarchies or systems of almost any kind: continuous as hue or tint or shade, colour is also infinitely divisible; without necessary shape or determinate boundaries of its own, it combines easily with shape and form—indeed, in our psycho-neural systems, the same stimulus is analysed in several different ways, so that we may ‘see’ the relation of colour to shape in more than one way simultaneously. And it combines easily with feeling, memory, events in mental life, marks on the mind’s surface, learned neurological connections, depending on the language you prefer. Colour’s flexibility, as a sort of mental state (a ‘chromatic state’) which provides the illusion of ‘stuff’ that is at once insubstantial, impossible to locate, and infinitely malleable, does indeed make it good to think or feel or dream with, a resource for painters and poets that can take them very far from the description of a knowable world of firm object boundaries and fixed spatial location, of sharp dividing lines and knowable relations between the perceiving consciousness and what it thinks it perceives beyond itself. It can reawaken a sense of the strangeness and otherness of objects, of persons,
and of past historical moments. For mid- and late-nineteenth-century poets, painters, and critics restless within the constraints of realism, colour was the way forward – a determining sign of the modern.

NOTES

1 Intensity has, of course, a much longer critical history as a rhetorical and literary value, which can be traced in Western traditions at least back to Longinus' *On Sublimity* in the first century (A.D.). Sublimity is revived as an important critical concept in England in the eighteenth century, most influentially, for romantic and nineteenth-century Anglophone critics and poets, as reformulated in Edmund Burke's *On the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). In classical Chinese literary thought intensity in something like the romantic sense has an equally long but more central role in conceptions of poetry. See Stephen Owen's commentary on a passage from the *Book of Documents* (*Shu ching*) (probably first century) as 'the canonical statement of what poetry is': 'The poem (shih) articulates what is on the mind intently (chihs). Owen glosses the Chinese chihs as 'a subjective relation to some content [of the mind], a relation of a certain intensity... chihs is tensional, yearning for both resolution and for external manifestation'. Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 26, 28.

2 William Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802): 'For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts...'. See William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads and Related Writings*, ed. William Richey and Daniel Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), p. 392.


6 Patrick Noon's 'Colour and Effect: Anglo French Painting in London and Paris', in
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Constable to Delacroix: British Art and the French Romantics, ed. Patrick Noon (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), and the exhibition it accompanied, detail the networks of influence linking Bonington, Turner, and Delacroix and the central importance of colour to French borrowings from British art in the 1820s and 30s. The fascination Byron and Scott exercised over European artists (and composers), and the figurative uses they made of British colour, are likewise in evidence in the exhibition catalogue. Among Keats’s poems using colour-rich descriptive passages to represent the intense internal worlds of imagination and romance, especially in association with the middle ages, see ‘The Eve of St. Agnes’ especially, but also his ‘Ode to a Nightingale’.

7 In Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray (London: Ward, Lock: 1891), exploration of colour, as of other sensory pleasures, is represented as an important part of the eponymous protagonist’s efforts to turn his life into a continuous work of art without the necessity of writing poetry or painting a picture. Dorian’s finds particular inspiration in Theophile Gautier’s Mademoiselle du Maupin and Joris-Karl Huysmans’s À Rebours, enshrined as touchstones of romantic-turned-decadent exaltation of sensory refinement, including sensibility to colour with (and synesthetically through) scent, taste, and sound. Rimbaud’s ‘Voyelles’ famously posits an phonetic alphabet of colour — matching different hues with parallel intensities of sound — as a possible resource for the visionary modern poet (À noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O beau: voyelles, / Je dirai quelque jour vos naissance latentes...’). Moreau, who wrote in his studio notes ‘you must think through colour, have imagination in it ... Colour must be imagined, thought, dreamed’, was the teacher of such notable modern colourists as Rouault and Matisse (cited in David Batchelor, Chromophobia (London: Reaktion, 2001)).

8 ‘Salon de 1846’, Oeuvres Completes, p. 879.

9 Colour has a voluminous history in multiple disciplines, including philosophy, technology (pigments and dyes), perceptual psychology and neurophysiology, physics, and the histories of art and of the decorative arts. Works I have found particularly useful or provocative begin with the two invaluable books of John Gage on colour’s cultural history, Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993, and Colour and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999). Others include Manlio Brusatin’s idiosyncratic but suggestive A History of Colours, tr. Robert H. Hopcke and Paul Schwartz (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1991); David Batchelor, Chromophobia (cited above); C. L. Hardin, Colour for Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1998), which includes an excellent discussion of recent neurophysiological work on colour as well as a brief account of colour’s strange status within philosophy; and (as an example of a material-cultural history of one colour in particular), Michel Pastoureau, Blue: The History of a Colour (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also the stimulating comments on the problems of imagining colour from verbal accounts in Elaine Scarry, Dreaming by the Book (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999), especially the sections on ‘Imagining Flowers’ and ‘Floral Supposition’. On developments in the last 150 years in the tech

10 Richard Cronin, in the only book-length examination of colour’s importance for nineteenth-century poetry of which I am aware, studies the meanings and values attached to the dialectical pairing of white light and its refraction into the rainbow of colours; see his *Colour and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1988). Cronin reads individual poems by Coleridge, Keats, Browning, and Hopkins (but not Morris) in light of contemporary concerns about colour’s associations with the subjective or with fancy and the unreal (rather than the ‘pure’ truth (or reason’s fictions) of science or philosophy, as symbolised by white light), especially as these put tension on the poets’ desire to ground their poems firmly in the empirical ‘facts’ of human sensory experience (for which colour language serves as both index and symbol). While I find his readings sensitive and suggestive, my study of Pre-Raphaelite uses of colour in poetry, particularly in the case of Morris, suggests that the latter was less interested in the particular philosophical and moral problem that Cronin traces around colour for his poets than with certain expressive or structural possibilities that raise, in a different sense, the question of colour’s modernity.

11 For example, Carole Silver in *The Romance of William Morris* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1982), esp. pp. 13–15; Silver notes the effect of the contrast between colour and its absence, and acknowledges that while colour seems symbolic in intent, ‘precise meanings remain elusive’. J. M. S. Tompkins is closer to the spirit of nineteenth-century romantic ideas of colour when she describes it as part of ‘the territory of [Morris’s] imagination’, and a sign of the ‘intentness of the imagination which is directed both to visual detail and the movements of the poetic sensibility’ (in his early prose stories and poetry); see *William Morris: An Approach to Poetry* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1988), pp. 25, 63.


13 In Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London and New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905). While this is a very partial account designed to reinstate Hunt as the central figure in the Brotherhood against the claims of William Michael Rossetti for his brother Dante Gabriel, its version of PRB aims and practices is still invaluable, and has been very influential.

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15 See Ruskin's letters to the Times of London (1851 and 1854) defending the Pre-Raphaelites, and his pamphlet, Pre-Raphaelitism (1851) in Works, vol. 12; his 1848 review of Eastlake's History is reprinted in the same volume.

16 J. B. Bullen's otherwise fine chapter on the critical reception of early Pre-Raphaelite art focuses on the critics' visceral rejections of distorted bodies (and points out the anti-Catholicism and commitments to progressive models of history driving many of their responses), but does not comment on their often strong reactions to the unpleasant colours of these early works (although several of the passages he quotes criticise Pre-Raphaelite colour practices specifically). See his 'The Ugliness of Early Pre-Raphaelitism', in The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998): pp. 6–48. But see Elizabeth Prettejohn, The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); her chapter 'Technique' also pays close attention to materials, including Pre-Raphaelite interest in the pigments and practices of early Flemish oil painting and in newer chemical pigments (vivid yellows, greens, and purples especially) developed as modern analogues. In the interpretive chapters that follow, she also notes on occasion the expressive effect of the newer, often quite bright pigments as they are enhanced by particular colour combinations. Contemporary comments on the harshness of Pre-Raphaelite colour (echoed in some of the reviews of Morris's poetry) derive, as she points out, from the particular pigments as well as the combinations of them the painters employed. For examples of reviewers who criticised the colour in Morris's poems and associated it with the harshnesses of Pre-Raphaelite painting, see Delbert R. Gardner's survey of the reviews in An 'Idle Singer' and His Audience: A Study of William Morris's Poetic Reputation in England, 1858–1900 (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1975). He notes that three of the six reviewers of The Defence of Guenevere when it first appeared noted its strong colour, some praising the 'richness of colouring' and comparing it to Rossetti's watercolours, but others, like The Saturday Review, objecting that Morris had no knowledge of gradation of tints ('He works in the patient spirit of the illuminators, but then he is grotesque as well as minute and patient. All his thoughts and figures are represented on a solid plane: he has no notion of distance, or aerial perspective' (cited in Gardner, p. 23). Both comments are acute about Morris's sources.

17 Morris would have seen at least the following pictures by late 1857: Millais: Isabella, Mariana, The Bridesmaid, Ophelia, A Huguenot (all in the Windus collection which he saw over Easter Vacation in 1856), as well as The Return of the Dove to the Ark (in Thomas Combe's collection at Oxford, which Morris saw during the summer of 1856), The Order of Release (which he saw at the Paris Exposition of 1855), and, at the annual Royal Academy exhibitions, The Rescue (1855), L'Enfant du Regiment, Autumn Leaves, and The Blind Girl (1856). Among Hunt's pictures, he certainly saw his A Converted British Family Sheltering Christians from the Druids and The Light of the World in Combe's collection (the latter first seen at Royal Academy Exhibition), Claudio and Isabella (as well as The Light of the World) at the Paris 1855 Exposition, and The Scapegoat at the Royal Academy in 1856. Brown's Last of England Morris saw at the Royal Academy in 1855; Combe acquired both that and Brown's Wycliffe Reading...
in autumn, 1855, after Morris’s first visit to his collection. Brown’s Chaucer at the Court of Edward III and An English Fireside 1854–5 were in the Paris Exposition. Rossetti’s watercolour of Dante Drawing an Angel on the Annunciation of Beatrice’s Death and Charles Collins’s Convent Thoughts were also in Combe’s collection. At the Royal Academy Exhibitions of 1856 Morris saw Henry Wallis’s Chatterton and Arthur Hughes’s April Love (which he bought from the Exhibition). A few months later (August 1856) his second painting purchase was Brown’s The Hayfield, which he saw in Brown’s studio. From spring 1856 through most of 1857, Morris was particularly close to Rossetti and frequently in his Blackfriars rooms, where he would have seen the watercolours Rossetti was then making. Morris purchased six of these (and acquired a seventh from Ruskin, Paolo and Francesca, finished in November 1855): Fri Pace (1856), The Death of Breez e sans Pitie (1856–57), The Blue Closet, The Tune of the Seven Towers, The Daniel of the Sane Grael, and The Chapel Before the Lists (1857).

18 All quotations from Morris’s poems are taken from The Defence of Guenevere (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896 [and subsequent editions]), based on the Kelmscott Press Edition of 1892, revised by the author. Line numbers are given in the text.

19 Bullen discusses (but with respect to Rossetti’s Titianesque paintings of the late fifties and early sixties) colour’s long association with sensuality and sexuality and the continued importance of these associations in early and mid-nineteenth-century England. Viewers of Millais’s picture might well have found the lush colours in his Mariana appropriate to the material depicted—and objected the more strenuously to the strong colours in religious pictures like his Christ in the House of His Parents. See Bullen, The Pre-Raphaelite Body, esp. pp. 94–105.

20 See Pettejohn, Art of the Pre-Raphaelites, pp. 148–50.

21 See, for example, Works 5, pp. 281 and 320–28 (Modern Painters 111).


24 For insight into the special features of colour and its functions in heraldry, especially with respect to its role in expressing temporal succession spatially, I am indebted to Michel Pastoureau’s illuminating study, Traite d’Heraldique, 2nd edition (Paris: Picard, 1993).