Illustrating Morris: The Work of Jessie King and Maxwell Armfield

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William Morris is really only the starting point for this article, which discusses two early-twentieth-century illustrated editions of Morris’s poetry: Jessie King’s *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (John Lane & The Bodley Head, 1904) and Maxwell Armfield’s *The Life and Death of Jason* (Headley Bros., 1915). However, it might also be said that Morris is really the only starting point for this piece, as the aesthetics of the book he outlined in the 1890s is part of the backdrop to the careers of both featured artists.

MORRIS AND BOOK ILLUSTRATION

The topic of William Morris and book illustration may popularly be thought to start with Morris’s own Kelmscott Press of the 1890s. Sixteen out of a total of 53 Kelmscott publications were illustrated, most famously (and most lavishly) the *Chaucer* of 1896.¹ The Kelmscott Press itself was, of course, the realisation of Morris’s desire to effect nothing less than a radical transformation of what was meant by a ‘book’. However, Morris’s interest in the composite textuality of the production of his own works has been traced back as far as Bell & Daldy’s use of the Chiswick Press to print his first volume of poems, *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, in 1858.² By the mid-1860s Morris was attempting to produce his current poetic project, *The Earthly Paradise*, as an illustrated edition, but he failed due to the lack of an appropriately weighty typeface to match the solidity of the drawings he wished to include. If it was not possible to produce printed illustrated books of the quality Morris desired at this moment then he could at least make them by hand, and from 1869–75 he produced numerous calligraphic manuscripts, many of which are lavishly illustrated and decorated.³ By the 1890s Morris was designing his own typefaces and the Kelmscott Press started to print books in which it is impossible to separate out the works’ visual qualities from the verbal presentation of text.
What this brief account makes clear is that for Morris the book that lacks any consideration of its visual aesthetic is an impoverished book. In the period of the Kelmscott Press's existence Morris also gave numerous lectures on book design and production, always taking as his models medieval manuscripts (which integrated image and word) and early printed books. During a paper delivered to the Society of Arts in 1892, Morris showed 36 lantern slides which detailed early block books (where the illustration and text were cut into a woodblock) from 1430–60, and examples of early printed books with woodcut illustrations from Germany, France and Italy (1460s onwards). After presenting the slides Morris comments,

... these designs... while they perform their especial function—the office of telling a tale—never forget their other function of decorating the book of which they form a part; this is the essential difference between them and modern book illustrations, which I suppose make no pretence at decorating the pages of the book, but must be looked upon as black and white pictures which it is convenient to print and bind up along with the printed matter. The question, in fact, which I want to put to you is this, whether we are to have books which are beautiful as books...

What is clearly valued here is a unity of the whole, in which both image and word (and, we might add, the typeface, layout of the text upon the page and binding) combine to produce an artefact of beauty which offers a sensuous experience of reading. Morris strongly implies here that a book that is not illustrated in some way cannot be beautiful, and he then continues in his lecture to berate the audience for their lack of appreciation of reading images alongside words:

You may say that you don't care for this result, that you wish to read literature and to look at pictures; and that so long as the modern book gives you these pleasures you ask no more of it; well, I can understand that, but you must pardon me if I say that your interest in books in that case is literary only, and not artistic, and that implies, I think, a partial crippling of the faculties; a misfortune which no one should be proud of.

The visual book, in the words of the title of another of Morris's lectures, is his 'ideal book'. By the time of the Kelmscott Press Morris's conception of what it means to read has expanded beyond the mere taking in of a story through words alone. Reading means reading-and-viewing (and-touching); 'reading' is unashamedly to celebrate an anti-
utilitarian politics of pleasure, and it is the presence of the visual that makes this possible:

The picture-book is not, perhaps, absolutely necessary to man's life, but it gives us such endless pleasure, and is so intimately connected with the other absolutely necessary art of imaginative literature that it must remain one of the very worthiest things towards the production of which reasonable men should strive. 6

The recent publication of Robert Coupe's *Illustrated Editions of the Works of William Morris in English: A Descriptive Bibliography* (2002), reviewed elsewhere in this issue of the *JWMS*, makes us aware that Morris's works have lived a fascinating after-life through the response of illustrators to his texts. In the light of Morris's views on the necessity of the visual book, and the vast influence and reputation of the Kelmscott Press, it is perhaps not surprising that there have been numerous illustrated editions of Morris's works. However, there has been no critical attention given to these illustrated editions as a topic in their own right. Many of these illustrated works have been editions of, or selections from, Morris's poetry - my particular interest. Taken as a whole, these illustrated editions offer a partial history of how Morris's poetry has been interpreted, and indeed marketed, throughout the twentieth century. As Lorraine Janzen Kooistra has noted, 'publishers, editors, and artists design audiences when they design books'. 7 Morris's poetry has been produced for both children and adults through illustrated editions, in the form of gift books, school books, books aimed at a teenage market, small press limited editions and complete fine editions of major works. I intend in the remainder of this article to focus on two major illustrated editions of Morris's poetry, both of which belong to the last category: the Bodley Head edition of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* illustrated by Jessie King (1904), and Headley Brothers' edition of *The Life and Death of Jason*, with illustrations by Maxwell Armfield (1915).

I have chosen to focus on these two editions for several reasons. Firstly, King and Armfield are amongst the most well-known illustrators of Morris's poetry and are of interest as artists and illustrators in their own right. Secondly, both illustrators were trained at Art Schools which were founded upon Arts and Crafts principles – King in Glas-
gow and Armfield in Birmingham – and as such the influence and inspiration of Morris would have been everywhere felt. Thirdly, both of these works are very much composite responses to Morris’s poetry. It is not just that they offer illustrations in response to the text, but as King and Armfield both designed the binding for these works as well, the book as a whole offers a reading of the poetry. Thus the meanings that Morris’s poems have in these illustrated editions cannot be separated out from the very specificity of the textual products in which they are presented. My thinking here is indebted to the influential work of Jerome McGann, who has argued that ‘Literary works do not know themselves, and cannot be known, apart from their specific material modes of existence/resistance’.

In her recent book on Christina Rossetti and book illustration (also reviewed elsewhere in this issue), Kooistra discusses the question of illustrated reprints that are produced after an author’s death. Her comments are extremely germane to my project here, and I quote at length:

... works that are reillustrated establish new dialogues between image and text and generate new meanings along with their physical reformatations. Unlike first-edition illustrated books, the reprint is not a collaboration between an artist and a contemporary author and her [his] publisher, but rather a complex network of relationships and associations extending over time and space. Publishers who decide to reprint a text and commission illustrations for it have a particular marketing strategy in mind, a designated audience to target, and a host of economic concerns, not least of which is the obvious profit motive. At the same time, the artist who illustrates a ‘classic’ engages not only with the verbal text but also, often, with previous pictorial (and, sometimes, critical) interpretations of the text. Moreover, the reprint is, in all senses of the word, a reproduction. The relationship between the verbal and visual elements in an illustrated reprint establishes a dialogue between a work from the past and its new temporal and spatial environment.

So my interest is in how these two works reinterpret and reread Morris’s poetry in their own moment, primarily through the relationship of image to word, but also through considering each edition as a whole. A final reason for focussing on King’s Defence and Armfield’s Jason relates to their distinct difference from Kelmscott Press books. The Kelmscott Press spawned many imitations, and amongst them are illustrated responses to Morris’s poetry, but these interest me less than editions where the illustrator’s aesthetic is very different to the style of Kelmscott books.
Jessie Marion King was born in 1875 in Bearsden, outside Glasgow, and in 1892 entered the Glasgow School of Art 'at a time when ... orthodox Arts and Crafts principles had begun to be challenged by the heretical concepts of continental Art Nouveau'. Her contemporaries were Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Macdonald sisters, and studying under Francis Henry Newbury she was part of the group of artists whose work has come to represent the early-twentieth-century 'Glasgow Style'. As Jude Burkhauser has noted, King was one of the most successful Glasgow School designers of her era and her work in the 'decorative arts' covered many media: book illustration and design, ceramics, textiles, jewellery and interior design. However, it was as a book illustrator and designer that King started her career. From 1898 onwards her work was featured in Gleeson White's 'Magazine of the Applied Arts', The Studio, and in 1902 she was given a 12-page feature, copiously illustrated with her distinctive pen and ink drawings. In the same year King won a gold medal for book design at the Turin International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art and by now, as Colin White says, she 'was ... receiving recognition as the principal decorative illustrator within the Glasgow movement'. Her renown started to produce major commissions. The first of these was to produce illustrations and the cover design for Sebastian Evans's The High History of the Holy Graal (J. M. Dent & Co., 1903). The second was from John Lane.

The Bodley Head edition of The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems contains a total of 97 black and white drawings, 24 of which are full page and illustrate a line, or lines, from one of the poems. The other illustrations are headings or tailpieces to each poem, and some poems also have title page illustrations. The influence of Mackintosh's stylised Art Nouveau roses, and the Mackintosh sense of line and geometric proportion are very much in evidence [Fig. 1]. The female figures also bear some resemblance to the elongated women painted by Margaret MacDonald, Mackintosh's wife. King herself said her style was influenced by seeing Botticelli's pen and ink drawings in the Uffizi, Italy, and it also bears the mark of 1890s illustrator Aubrey Beardsley. Just as The Studio championed King, so too had it announced Beardsley's significance to the emerging world of Art Nouveau in its opening number in April 1893. White suggests that from Beardsley King 'learned how a line might be made more seductive by fragmentation, how a mere procession of dots could be brought to a crescendo or a
[Fig. 1]. Jessie King, frontispiece and title page to The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems (London: John Lane & The Bodley Head, 1904). Image reproduced courtesy of Dumfries and Galloway Council and the National Trust for Scotland.
ILLUSTRATING MORRIS

diminuendo, and how unmodelled and unpatterned shapes could be balanced by using only the weight of black and white masses'.

King’s manipulation of swathes of black and white space, coupled with exquisite use of line, is undeniably Beardsleyesque. Beardsley was, of course, intimately associated with John Lane and The Bodley Head in the early-mid 1890s, through his Art Editorship of such an iconic work of decadence as The Yellow Book and his illustrated covers for the ‘Keynotes’ series. By 1904 the decadence of the 1890s has passed, but I would argue that The Bodley Head Defence is still very much conceived in the spirit of the modern ‘aesthetic’ volume that is characteristic of Lane’s fin de siècle books. Commenting on the importance of how texts were presented as designed products at the end of the nineteenth century Nicholas Frankel writes,

... literary works typical of the 1890s... depended principally on their publication as books for whatever effects they produced in the eyes of their readers. So far as the fin de siècle imagination was concerned, the work’s physical appearance and manner of publication mattered at least as much as ‘the text itself’.

If the Bodley Head Defence isn’t quite Morris given a decadent, corporeal makeover (for that we have to look to Beardsley’s innuendo-laden illustrations which make the Dent Morte Dartur of 1893–94 such a pastiche of a Kelmscott book), none the less the volume as a whole is the most aesthetised edition of any Morris work. King’s art nouveau delicacy turns the volume into an almost other-worldly rendition of the often fragmented psychological landscapes of the characters that people The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems.

As mentioned above, King not only produced the illustrations for this volume but also designed the front, back and spine of the cover, and it is really this cover, in combination with the illustrations within, that make this edition so distinctive [Colour Fig. F]. Frankel has also argued that

In a world of objects, a book’s binding announces and grounds the text ‘within’ since it constitutes the face or front that the text presents to the world at large... Textually speaking, the binding is not just a sign of the social appearance or public nature of the text; it is the text’s appearance or public face, and to some extent is inseparable from the text it surrounds.

Here the deep maroon cover is decorated in gold leaf, and the front cover bears an image of a woman, similar in style to the woman illus-
trated on the title page in Fig. 1. She has her arms outstretched and her head is enshrined in an aureole of stars and roses. A trail of stars also drapes around her body. Flames flicker above elongated shields with crosses extending out of them, and stylised birds fly out of the hanging drapes of her sleeves. This cover image hints at a sensuous Christian iconography in the same way that Dante Gabriel Rossetti utilised Catholicism in poems such as 'The Blessed Damozel', where religion is exploited for its aesthetic effects, and in order to tell a tale about earthly love that approximates the divine.

The cover sets the tone for the reading of the poems within that King's illustrations suggest. With her arms outstretched this is Guenevere as Christa, the crucified Christ; and with her golden halo this is at the same time Guenevere the sanctified, pure Virgin Mary. The cover image also offers us 'Guenevere Enthroned', Guenevere the goddess, high queen of the heaven that is love. Guenevere presides over The Bodleian Head Defence, both suffering and glorious, and through this King offers her own vindication of Guenevere's love for Launcelot, just as Morris does. The cover conflates the passion of Guenevere with the passion of Christ, and one of Guenevere's 'problems', as it were, in the titular 'Defence of Guenevere' poem and 'King Arthur's Tomb' which follows it is that she refuses to, or cannot discriminate between the love of Christ and the love of Launcelot. The language she uses to talk about both is the same and there is a desperate eroticism in her prayers:

'... dost thou reck
That I am beautiful, Lord, even as you
And your dear Mother? why did I forget
You were so beautiful, and good, and true,
That you loved me so, Guenevere? O yet

If even I go to hell, I cannot choose
But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot keep
From losing Launcelot; O Christ! I must lose
My own heart's love? ...

Speak to me, Christ! I kiss, kiss, kiss your feet;'

('King Arthur's Tomb', p. 58)21

Returning to the title page [Fig. 1], the illustration on the left depicts the moment after which Guenevere has concluded her verbal defence:
'All I have said is truth, by Christ’s dear tears.'
She would not speak another word, but stood
Turn’d sideways; listening, like a man who hears

His brother’s trumpet sounding through the wood
Of his foes’ lances.

('The Defence of Guenevere', p. 43)

Guenevere is here caught in one of those awkward physical poses which characterise the descriptions of her body in 'The Defence', but as opposed to some of the earlier moments of constriction and containment this is the moment of salvation and impending release as Launcelot charges into view on his horse. Note how the whole design of this illustration focuses the eye towards Launcelot in the top left-hand corner: the stylised foliage on the left points up towards him, Guenevere and the two figures to her right all look towards him, and even the wind sweeps him into view. He is outside a wall, and walls appear frequently in King’s illustrations for the volume as a symbolic sign of enclosure – psychological and/or physical – within which many of the Defence characters are held. But in front of Launcelot there is a flurry of effervescent lines and dots. It is hard to tell what this represents – possibly a rose bush – but its very fizzy ephemerality seems an attempt to convey Launcelot’s ‘magic’. Guenevere’s speech has indeed conjured him up and the wall of enclosure is broken down.

I disagree with Coupe’s assessment that King’s Defence illustrations are ‘decorative and nothing more’. It is true that there is no overt representation of the violence that is implicit or explicit in many of the Defence poems, but whilst the illustrations often depict what seem like moments of repose or contemplation, they conceal a latent tension in relation to the drama of the poem’s narrative. For example, the illustration for ‘The Eve of Crecy’ shows a characteristic Kingwoman with lots of impossibly long, loose Pre-Raphaelite hair, sitting on an ornamental chair. White has commented that King’s art ‘spoke of stillness and privacy’ and this appears to be one such moment. The image has the line ‘Of Margaret sitting glorious there’ appended to it, taken from the following section:

Yet even now it is good to think,
While my few poor varlets grumble and drink
In my desolate hall, where the fires sink,–

    Ah! qu’elle est belle, La Marguerite.
Of Margaret sitting glorious there,
In glory of gold and glory of hair,
And glory of glorious face most fair; —

Ah! qu'elle est belle, La Marguerite.

('The Eve of Crecy', p. 221)

In one sense this image does picture a quiet moment, as our speaker, the French knight Sir Lambert du Bois, recalls the lover who will act as his emblem when he rides into battle the next day against the English in the Battle of Crecy (1346). Sir Lambert is a 'banneret', a low-ranking knight, and his comparatively lowly status explains why he is only in charge of a few 'poor varlets', and why, as we learn earlier in the poem, he has 'never touch'd [Margaret's] hand' (p. 221). He has hopes for the future that increased wealth will allow him access to the 'damsel of right noble blood' (p. 222) that he loves. But as the Battle of Crecy was the first decisive victory for the English in the Hundred Years War, the poem's irony lies in the likelihood of this also being the eve of Sir Lambert's death. King's illustration imagines the longed-for lover that Sir Lambert is unlikely ever to see again.

The question of which moment an artist chooses to illustrate from an ongoing narrative is also relevant to any consideration of illustrated editions of Morris's poetry as so much of it is narrative in content. J. Hillis Miller makes clear the impact of an image within an unfolding narrative:

The power of a picture is to detach a moment from its temporal sequence and make it hang there in a perpetual non-present representational present, without past or future. The power of presentation in an illustration is so strong that it suspends all memory and anticipation inscribed in words ... A picture, labelled or not, is a permanent parabasis, an eternal moment suspending, for the moment at least, any attempt to tell a story through time.  

Illustrations within narratives, then, will always have a significant power to arrest the desire of the reader — however momentarily — for the story. Put another way, illustrations have the capacity to divert the reader's desire away from the story in a kind of visual seduction. This is perhaps all the more the case in a work like King's edition (and indeed Armfield's) where the full-page illustrations are inserted as additional pages on glossy artist's paper. The text including the line that the illustration refers to is rarely opposite the image, and is usually a page before or after. So an encounter with the illustration must inevitably bring the
[Fig. 2]. Jessie King. He did not hear her coming as he lay, in The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems (London: John Lane & The Bodley Head, 1904), p. 59. Image reproduced courtesy of Dumfries and Galloway Council and the National Trust for Scotland.
reader to pause in their reading of the narrative, either to reflect on how the image interacts with what they have just read, or how the image acts to prefigure, in ways that may not be quite clear at the moment of encounter, what is to come. The reader of The Bodley Head Defence thus pauses on King's own still moments. The 'danger' of such striking illustrations in any narrative work is that the reader loses interest altogether in the story and becomes engrossed in a new relationship primarily with the illustrations. Word and image are therefore always in a potentially conflictual dialogical relationship, as they both compete for the continued attention of the reader.

Another example of the latent tension and eroticism in King's illustrations is seen in one of the images that accompanies 'King Arthur's Tomb' [Fig. 2]. As with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's watercolours of the same title in the 1850s, this illustration graphically depicts the intensity of the love triangle that exists between Arthur, Launcelot and Guenevere as the two lovers meet again over Arthur's tomb. Now a nun at Glastonbury, supposedly doing penance for her 'sin' of loving Launcelot, Guenevere is here dressed in black, with a large cross of thorns behind her. The prominence of this cross and its proximity to Guenevere again suggest it is an emblem of her suffering in being parted from the man she loved. She stands over Launcelot who sleeps on the effigy of Arthur on his tomb. Her hand reaches out — in benediction (she still clutches a crucifix) — but also in longing. The image also dramatises the triangulation of heterosexual desire which means that Guenevere must draw Launcelot away from the homosocial bond with Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. The viewer's eye is directed to this intense triangular section of the drawing bound by Arthur's torso, Guenevere's upright form and the direction of her right hand.

This edition of The Defence of Guenevere has undoubtedly been conceived as a composite artefact, in which illustrations, cover design and the rich sensuousness of gold leaf on deep red cloth combine to offer a very specific interpretation of the poems they surround. It is highly appropriate that it should be the Defence poems that are given this aestheticising treatment, as they were extremely influential on foundational figures associated with aestheticism such as Walter Pater. Pater's 1868 piece 'Poems by William Morris', first published in the Westminster Review, concluded with the famous dictum, 'Not the fruit of experience but experience itself is the end', and the call 'To burn always with this hard gem-like flame'; both of these phrases became rallying cries to the aesthetes and later decadents of the late nineteenth century. Pater's review considered The Defence of Guenevere volume in a way that no
other critic of the time did. As Earl Bargainnier has noted, Pater’s early criticism is impressionistic, a form of writing which ‘wishes to evoke the work of art, rather than explain it’.28 This is also what King’s illustrations do. Pater’s interpretation of Morris’s evocation of the Middle Ages focuses precisely on the ‘repressed sensuousness’ and ‘conjoining of fervour and religious sensation’29 which he reads as pervading the volume and he writes of it in his own poetic prose:

A passion of which the outlets are sealed, begets a tension of nerve, in which the sensible world comes to one with a reinforced brilliance and relief—all redness is turned into blood, all water into tears. Hence a wild, convulsed sensuousness in the poetry of the middle age, in which the things of nature begin to play a strange delirious part.30

If ever there was a visual rendition of Pater’s reading of the strange and ethereal landscape that Morris’s characters inhabit in The Defence then Jessie King’s volume is it. Walter R. Watson wrote of King in 1902 that

... there would seem to exist in her delicately balanced temperament a perpetual endeavour to express the spirit of the thing, to pass through and beyond the outward and merely physical limitations, and to search the essential life and reason which animate it.31

Through its illustrations and overall design The Bodley Head edition of The Defence of Guenevere does search out something of the ‘essential life’ of the poems within, in terms of the volume’s significance in relation to aestheticism and the charged and fraught eroticism in many of the poems. Whether or not Morris would have thought them just ‘black and white pictures which it is convenient to print and bind up along with the printed matter’, King’s designs offer an important reading of Morris’s first major volume.

MAXWELL ARMFIELD’S ‘THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON’ [N. D. (1915)]

Born in 1881 in Ringwood, Hampshire, Maxwell Ashby Armfield studied at the Birmingham School of Art under the influence of such figures as Henry Payne, Arthur Gaskin and Charles Gere. The Arts-and-Crafts-inspired school of book illustration which emerged from Birmingham in the 1890s was in full flow when Armfield entered in 1899.32 He was also influenced by Joseph Southall, who pioneered a revival in using tempera in the early twentieth century.33 In a later recollection of
his career Armfield acknowledged how much ‘under the Pre-Raphaelite spell’ he was during his Birmingham training and this appears to be as much a reference to the aesthetic influence of ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ poetry as to the obvious Arts and Crafts ideals of his tutors. In his own tempera self portrait of 1901 Armfield depicts himself as the young bohemian artist, looking not unlike Beardsley and sporting a large pink silk cravate. Behind him on a bookshelf are three volumes, bearing the names ‘Rossetti’, ‘Keats’ and ‘Maeterlinck’.

Constance Smedley, whom Armfield married in 1909, was also a student at Birmingham School of Art, and in her reminiscences she writes of the powerful impact of Morris through his literature and not just his design principles:

I shall never forget a studio evening to which I was invited ... when for the first time the poems of Rossetti and Morris were read aloud in a beautiful low voice; the studio was shadowy in candlelight and hung with Morris stuffs and furnished with old oak and brass and china. I received an amazing positive sense of beauty that swept over me and drenched me. I beheld a new world hitherto undreamed-of and unvisualised, in which the fairy-tales so dear to children suddenly became alive, lifted completely away from anything I had been able to imagine myself, and revealed, infused with colour, depth and mystery.

Armfield was also to cite several of the 1890s’ key artists – the Symbolist painters Puvis de Chavannes and Fernand Knopff, and illustrators Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon, Laurence Housman and Beardsley – as artists whose work he came to know via fin de siècle periodicals such as the Savoy and the Pageant. His earliest works were small watercolours but he also started experimenting with tempera. After trips to Paris and Italy in the early years of the twentieth century Armfield returned to London and set up his own studio in Glebe Place, Chelsea, where a regular visitor was the poster and advertising designer McKnight Kauffer, who encouraged his use of flat colours. This led to Armfield being commissioned by Headley Bros. to illustrate The Life and Death of Jason.

In another unpublished account of his life Armfield makes it clear how he thought the illustrations he did for Jason were distinctly new in kind:

One of the partners in Messrs Simpkin Marshall, the publishing distributors, was a keen Cotswold lover, and coming in some way I forget across some verses I had written ‘on Cotswold’, he offered to publish
them if I had enough for a book. Thus eventuated The Hanging Garden, my first book of poems. It was sumptuously done. I was given a free hand and let myself go in coloured line drawings. I believe these were the first of the kind to be produced in this country, though I followed up the idea in a subsequent publication of Morris’s The Life and Death of Jason (Headley Bros then), and I still feel this to be the best method today of using colour in connection with type. Though experimented with by a few others, it has never proved acceptable to the general public, who seem to want ‘pictures’—or did, when they wanted anything of the sort.

I believe my inspiration derived from that lovely drawing by Beardsley, in colour, entitled Salome—in black, grey and green. Or it may be Isolde ... Armfield’s distinctive illustrations offer a refreshingly quirky take on Morris’s first long narrative poem, and as with the Bodley Head Defence, the ‘reading’ that the volume makes of the content within its boards is offered not just through the relationship of word to image, but through the design and layout of the book as a whole. Armfield himself appears very aware of this, and the edition is unique amongst illustrated editions of Morris’s works because it contains its own prefatory ‘Note’ by the artist about his conception of the book he has illustrated:

To sneer at Morris and his medieval trapping of a Greek story is to-day easy enough; much easier than to approach anywhere near a method of transcription as individual or fresh ... If Morris were writing today he might very probably be setting his romances in ancient Peru or Guatemala and at any rate he would be the last person to wish them forever saddled with a Kelmscott mise-en-scène.

As Michael Felmingham says, the Kelmscott-inspired route taken by illustrators of the Birmingham School such as Gere and Gaskin, and students who were imitative of them, was ultimately ‘a cul-de-sac’. Armfield’s illustrations are distinctly modern and of his twentieth-century moment (as I will develop below), and, like King, he is yet another example of the all-pervading influence of Beardsley on so many illustrators of the generation to follow him, in his effective manipulation of blank space. His images in Jason are entirely free of the Victorian clutteredness of Kelmscott designs, and Felmingham suggests that they ‘speak ... of the Viennese Secession’ in their execution. But Armfield goes on in his preface to adumbrate the Kelmscott-influenced aesthetic of the importance of the harmony of parts and unity of the whole in book design when he says that whilst ‘no attempt has been made in the
drawings to convey an impression with line similar in hand to that conveyed by the words of the text, none the less 'the important quality of the décor should be unity not so much with the ideas of the text as with the book as book...'

It is notable that Armfield's prefatory comments, cited above, ally his illustrations with the Hellenic roots of the Jason stories, against the neo-medievalising tendency of the Kelmscott aesthetic. This understanding of The Life and Death of Jason as a medievalised version of Greek myth derives partly from Morris himself (the narrator of the poem invokes Chaucer as his 'Master' at the beginning of Book 17), and partly from some of the poem's most significant first reviews. It was Swinburne who first spoke of Morris as a new Chaucer in his review of July 1867, and Pater's already-mentioned 'Poems of William Morris' discusses Morris as the 'Hellenist of the middle age' at some length in his section on Jason. It is ironic that Armfield should be needing to reassert the 'Greekness' of Jason as a result of readings from two of the most well-known (if not notorious) proponents of the Hellenic in the mid-late Victorian period. Only the year before The Life and Death of Jason Swinburne's infamous Poems and Ballads, First Series, had been published (1866), and Pater's career-long adherence to the Hellenic ideal of culture and beauty was to be explored in many of his works, not least Studies in the History of The Renaissance (1873) and Greek Studies (1895). The Grecian influence is seen in the total conception of Armfield's edition, from the white repeating motif on the cover, through the image and design on front- and endpapers to the abstract designs used as chapter headings and tailpieces. Armfield's diary for 1914 also gives us a few details about his influences whilst he was working on the illustrations. He was offered the contract by Headley Bros. on 25 February 1914, and part of the entry for Monday 9 March reads, 'Got [James Blaikie's] "The Sea Kings of Crete" from Mudie's for Jason: v. interesting: also made studies at the Brit. Museum'. Blaikie's work is an account of recent excavations which greatly increased understandings of ancient Greek civilisation and it contains 32 photographs. The frontispiece image of 'The Throne of Minos' makes a direct reappearance in Armfield's illustration between pp. 284–85.

The reassertion of the Greek in Headley Bros. Jason is also part of the interrogation of masculinity which I would argue is part of both the original poem and Armfield's edition. Several critical works of the 1990s have discussed in some detail how the valorisation of Greek mas-
culinist culture and the beauty of the male body by such as Pater was read as a coded homosocial, if not more overtly homosexual, discourse in the latter part of the nineteenth century. There has yet to be any real discussion as to how Morris's classical poems of the 1860s are related to other works which explore the Hellenic at the same time, but my reading of Jason is that it is concerned with the question of what it means to become a man and how to perform that masculinity appropriately. In the 1880s and 1890s John Addington Symonds and Oscar Wilde would use the Greek ideal of male friendship as justification for (and vindication of) their own desire for men. Grace Brockington has also recently explored the understanding of manly love that was held by the pre-First World War Cambridge Apostles, 'a radical reform movement combining with a philosophy of friendship to form a Utopian vision of renewed civilisation'. Associated with such figures as E. M. Forster and his lifelong friend Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, the Apostles also used a Greek ideal of male friendship as their model. Thus the tradition of using the Hellenic as a means of exploring dissident male sexualities is well-established by the early twentieth century. Brockington has also done considerable biographical work on Armfield, and has suggested that he may well have been secretly homosexual. Whether he was or not, some of his Jason illustrations explore masculinity in interesting ways.

Armfield's frontispiece shows a profile head of Jason. He is dark-skinned and suitably regal, possibly contemplating the many seas he has crossed as part of his adventures. The sea appears in stylised form in the background. This image contrasts with the next colour image in the volume, the first to accompany the narrative, which takes us back to Jason's childhood. Jason's father, Aeson, has his son brought up by the centaur, Chiron, in the woods. One night Jason starts up at a clamour in the forest and is about to go and find out what has caused it when Chiron raised his arm and drew him back [Colour Fig. G]. Clothed in what can only be described as a frilly (night?) dress, Jason's pale skin and long hair (which becomes even longer as it merges with the hanging creepers) contrast with the dark and hairy arm of Chiron. His youthful vulnerability is represented through a certain feminisation of the male body, although we might also note that the muscle on his legs is still delineated. Although not as extreme as this, there is an androgyny in several other images of Jason in the volume which contrasts with some of the other male figures depicted. It could also be argued that there is a feminisation of the male figures in King's Defence and this is perhaps yet more evidence of the gender-b(l)ending influence of fin de siècle illus-
trators such as Beardsley and Ricketts on the generation that followed them.

There is a wonderful sense of movement in Armfield's illustrations for Jason. Frequently this sense of movement extends beyond the frame of the image, as in Into swift running did they break at last [Fig. 3] which depicts the various Greek heroes, and the odd heroine, eagerly making their way on to the Argo in order to embark on the quest for the Golden Fleece. The viewer's attention here seems to be directed towards the female figure (note the frilly dress again) and the man to her right who are checking that they don't trip over a rogue flying fish, but the energy of this drawing also takes us beyond the confines of the left and right borders, as we see a figure leaping down on to the ship on the right, and to the left we have just the toes of another figure about to join the gangplank. This sense of the 'offside' was also a feature of some of Beardsley's drawings, but Armfield is far more adept at exploiting its potential. Nowhere is this better seen than in another image which shows nymphs coming out of the water in order to take a look at the sleeping Hylas, whom they will then take back into the sea with them, Toward the bank they drew, / And landing, felt the grass and flowers blue / Against their unused feet [Fig. 4]. Just as the quotation marks the precise liminal moment when the nymphs move from water to land, so the illustration embodies that too. The nymphs' hair and bodies emerge out of the stylised pattern of the sea from the bottom right-hand side of the image, and then they head off out into the big wide world beyond the constraining frame from the top left-hand corner. This is the only illustration in the volume - out of a total of six colour and 20 black and white images - that has an incomplete or broken frame, and Armfield's attention to the harmony of design and content is here exemplified. The nymphs break out of their patterned sea, and then out of the image itself; so too does the design of the illustration enact its own 'border crossing' through the removal of the bottom frame. The distinction between the illustration and the blank space of the page that surrounds it is broken down. The drawing also evokes the late-nineteenth-century photographic stills of Eadweard Muybridge's bodies in motion. We are of course now in an era of moving images, and in many ways Armfield's illustrations are like film stills, suggesting an image that comes both directly before and after the one we see.

Armfield has a fine eye for what makes an effective captured scene, and this skill was also influenced by his love of the theatre. Armfield and Smedley wrote and produced many plays over a period of about 30 years, founding the Cotswold Players, the Greenleaf Theatre and the
[Fig. 3]. Maxwell Armsfield, Into swift running did they break at last, in The Life and Death of Jason (London: Headley Bros., [n. d.] 1915), between pp. 60–61. Courtesy of the Artist's Estate. www.bridgeman.co.uk
Toward the bank they drew, / And landing, felt the grass and flowers blue / Against their unused feet.

[Fig. 4]. Maxwell Armfield, Toward the bank they drew, / And landing, felt the grass and flowers blue / Against their unused feet, in The Life and Death of Jason (London: Headley Bros., [n. d.] 1915), between pp. 78–79. Courtesy of the Artist's Estate. www.bridgeman.co.uk
Grace Darling League. Armfield produced many costume studies and set designs as well as writing his own one-act plays which 'synthesis[ed] rhythm and colour' in a way that is evident in the coloured line illustrations of 1914–15.

Headley Bros. volume is a suggestive reassertion of the Hellenic roots of Morris’s retelling of *The Life and Death of Jason*. The Grecian influence serves as a context for the exploration of masculinity in some of Armfield’s illustrations as well as offering him the opportunity ‘to give the impression of a civilisation at once superficial and corrupt, yet redeemed to some extent by that wholesome life on and by the sea’. The title page tells us that *The Life and Death of Jason* is not just illustrated but ‘decorated’ by Armfield, emphasising the Arts-and-Crafts aesthetic of the total conception of the book as unity. Armfield produced similarly Greek-style illustrations for Vernon Lee’s anti-war work, *The Ballet of Nations* (Chatto & Windus, 1915), but other works he illustrated, both before and after the 1914–15 period, are more conventional in their style of representation. I am in enthusiastic agreement with Coupe over the ‘originality’ of Armfield’s illustrations for *Jason*, and I hope my discussion here will afford readers a greater awareness of this volume.

**CONCLUSION**

I stated earlier that my interest in illustrated editions of Morris’s poetry is mostly in those that clearly depart from any obvious Kelmscott Press influence. The Press had the potential to act as a barrier to the future illustrator of Morris’s works as it was associated with such a distinctive style of illustration. Whilst obviously both very aware of the Kelmscott influence on book design and illustration, both King and Armfield make their responses to Morris’s poetry very much their own. At first sight perhaps the reader perceives a disjunction between their images and the texts they illustrate, but as Kooistra has argued, ‘in the best illustrative works, such differences, far from producing paralysing contradiction, provide the creative tension that invites interpretation’. I have argued that both King’s and Armfield’s editions are convincing and compelling in the responses they make to Morris’s poetry. In both cases the reader these editions produce is a lover of fine books and fine art: the editions make a feature of the artist’s involvement and the full-page illustrations are produced on good-quality paper. In addition the reader knows they are in the presence of something special with
Armfield’s colour images, in that they have to draw back a protective veil of tissue paper to see the illustration clearly. We are encouraged to take care of these books, and to protect their visual content. These are both thoroughly Morrisian responses.

NOTES

1 My figures here are based on William Peterson’s Appendix A, ‘Checklist of the Kelmscott Press Books’, in The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris’s Typographical Adventure (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). I have regarded as illustrated any work which contains one or more images which could be said to relate to the narrative content of the text.


5 Peterson, p. 37.


8 Ibid., p. 11.
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10 As an example of a Kelmscott-influenced illustrated edition see Pro-Raphaelite Ballads (New York: A. Wessels Co., 1900) which contains a selection of poems from The Defence, with illustrations by Helen Marguerite O’Kane.


12 Francis Henry Newbury was responsible for establishing the Glasgow School on Morrisian and Ruskinian principles that did not regard handicraft and decorative work as lesser forms of art.


14 In this early period of her career, King was featured in The Studio on the following occasions: vol. 14 (1898): three designs for The Light of Asia, pp. 58-59; vol. 15 (1899): two illustrations for Eugene Field’s lullaby, ‘Wynken, Blynken and Nod’, pp. 278-80; vol. 17 (1899): in an article on the 1899 National Competition at South Kensington, King’s three designs illustrating Morris’s The Wood Beyond the World are featured. They won the Silver Medal (pp. 264-65); vol. 24 (1902): illustration for ‘The Dance of the White Rose’, p. 281; vol. 26 (1902): Walter R. Watson, ‘Miss Jessie King and her Work’, pp. 176-88; Christmas Supplement for 1903 featured illustrations for ‘Seven Happy Days’; vol. 30 (1904): an embroidered and appliqué curtain designed by King was featured on p. 115, and The Bodley Head The Defence of Guenevere was briefly reviewed on p. 271.

15 Ibid., p. 43.

16 The Bodley Head The Defence of Guenevere sold for 5s. Lane was always shrewd at exploiting future markets based on the success of a given title, and in 1905 the title poem from The Defence was issued as a stand-alone small gift book in his ‘Flowers of Parnassus’ Series, which featured ‘Famous Poems Illustrated’. This contained the same six full-page illustrations for ‘The Defence of Guenevere’ and the heading and tailpiece. It sold for 1/- or 50c in cloth and 1/6 or 75c in leather.

17 White, p. 13.


20 It is interesting that the other commission King received from John Lane at this time was to design the binding for an edition of The Life of Saint Mary Magdalen (1904). Mary Magdalen was and is popularly mythologised as another woman of dubious reputation, and King’s edition features another prominent female figure in gold on the green cover.

21 All references to the Defence poems are taken from William Morris, The Defence of
Genevieve and Other Poems (London & New York: John Lane & The Bodley Head, 1904).

Three of the six full-page illustrations that accompany 'The Defence of Guenevere', for example, feature Guenevere in relation to a wall.


23 White, p. 1.


29 Ibid., both p. 31.

30 Walter Pater, in Faulkner, ed., p. 83.


32 Gere and Gaskin both illustrated Kelmscott books: Gere was responsible for the famous frontispiece to the Kelmscott News from Nowhere (1892) and Gaskin produced 12 line-block illustrations for Spenser's The Shepheardes Calender (1896). For more on the Birmingham School see Alan Crawford, ed., By Hammer and Hand: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Birmingham (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, 1984), and Stephen Wildman, The Birmingham School (Birmingham: Birmingham City Museum & Art Gallery, 1990).

33 Maxwell Armfield, 'My World and I: Autobiographical Details by Maxwell Armfield c.1890–1915'. F. Section 6 – 'The Cotswolds & London in the War', pp. 10–11. Transcript photocopy 1970, Tate Archives: Armfield (TGA 976), Box 111: Manuscripts/Typescripts. As all of the illustrations for Wilde's Salome (1893) were in black and white, Armfield is probably thinking of Beardsley's Isolde which appeared in The Studio in October 1895, a colour lithograph using yellow, grey and black. The eight colour illustrations in The Hanging Garden, and Other Poems (London: Simpkin, 132
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Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1914) are very obviously the precursors of the Jason images in style.

38 Maxwell Armfield, *The Life and Death of Jason* (London: Headley Bros., n.d. [1915]), p. v. All future references taken from this edition. The book was also issued at the same time by the Swarthmore Press (London), the only difference being that the cover was light blue rather than pink.


40 *The Illustrated Gift Book*, p. 34.

41 *Jason*, p. vi.


46 See John Addington Symonds, ‘The Dantesque and Platonic Ideals of Love’, in *In the Key of Blue and Other Prose* (London: Mathews and Lane, 1893), and *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (private publication, 1883). Wilde famously defended the ‘love that dare not speak its name’, which ‘Plato made the very basis of his philosophy’ during his first criminal trial from 26 April – 1 May 1895. See *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (London: The Stationery Office, 2001), p. 148.


49 *Jason*, between pp. 8–9.

50 *Jason*, between pp. 60–61.

51 *Jason*, between pp. 78–79.


53 The Fine Art Society, *Homage to Maxwell Armfield* (London: The Fine Art Society, 1970), p. i. Armfield develops his principles of rhythmic design in a series of manuals. His discussion of what he calls ‘Symmetrical design’ is apposite to the images I have commented upon: ‘The Movement in Symmetrical design is not relative to the
character of the parts as is Centralised arrangement. It is a common motion which gathers up all the parts in its sweep and uses them to accentuate its character and directions. It is frequently expressed in the representation of forces, such as wind, gravitation, etc., and is not confined to the boundary of the field, but carries the eye outside it'. Maxwell Armfield, *The Syntax of Art. Book 4. Rhythmic Shape. A Text-Book of Design* (Berkeley, Cal: Greenleaf Press, 1920), pp. 45–46.

54 Jason, p. v.
55 Christina Rossetti and Illustration, p. 46.