



HAL
open science

D. G. Rossetti's Trip to Paris and Belgium: A Journey Between Past and Present

Raphaël Rigal

► **To cite this version:**

Raphaël Rigal. D. G. Rossetti's Trip to Paris and Belgium: A Journey Between Past and Present. Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens, 2024, 99 Printemps. hal-04572562

HAL Id: hal-04572562

<https://hal.science/hal-04572562v1>

Submitted on 11 May 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0
International License



Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens

99 Printemps | 2024

Hitting the Road : expériences et récits de voyage à l'époque victorienne et édouardienne (colloque SFEVE, Université de Tours, 2-3 février 2023) ; Transmission(s) (61^e congrès SAES, Université Rennes 2, 1^{er}-3 juin 2023)

D. G. Rossetti's Trip to Paris and Belgium: A Journey Between Past and Present

« *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* » de Dante Gabriel Rossetti : un voyage en mots et en images

Raphaël Rigal



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/cve/14245>

ISSN: 2271-6149

Publisher

Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée

Brought to you by Université Gustave Eiffel



Electronic reference

Raphaël Rigal, "D. G. Rossetti's Trip to Paris and Belgium: A Journey Between Past and Present", *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* [Online], 99 Printemps | 2024, Online since 01 March 2024, connection on 11 May 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cve/14245>

This text was automatically generated on May 7, 2024.



The text only may be used under licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

D. G. Rossetti's Trip to Paris and Belgium: A Journey Between Past and Present

« *A Trip to Paris and Belgium* » de Dante Gabriel Rossetti : un voyage en mots et en images

Raphaël Rigal

Introduction

- 1 The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood needs little introduction: in 1848, a group of Royal Academy students opposed to the artistic conventions imposed by Sir Joshua Reynolds and his successors rallied friends and families to found a new artistic movement, and extended their theoretical principles to poetry, sculpture, and the decorative arts while outlining them quickly in *The Germ* and other confidential texts,¹ rather than in a full-fledged manifesto. Despite this confidentiality, further reinforced by Rossetti's reticence to exhibit his works, some structural aspects of Pre-Raphaelitism are of particular interest as far as travel is concerned: the international fame gained by the artists, with Pre-Raphaelite works being shown in Belgium in 1852 (Baetens 1) and in France in 1855 (Kotzin 1); but also their international inspiration, drawn from the German Nazarenes or the Italians of the Quattrocento.
- 2 When applied to the Pre-Raphaelite corpus, the notion of travel—which I understand here as moving from one place to another—takes on several guises. Pre-Raphaelite poetry and art exhibit mental journeys brought about by visions of artistic works or painfully constructed new worlds; professional travels and exhibitions abroad—in the United States, in Australia—widened their scope. The lives of Pre-Raphaelite artists and their friends were also marked by different modes of displacement: forced exile (Simeon Solomon having to move to France after charges of sodomy), attempts at starting anew at the edge of the Empire (Thomas Woolner leaving for Australia),

temporary migrations (William Holman Hunt's months-long journeys to the Middle East and Italy, where he built studios), travels used to gather prime painting or writing inspiration (Hunt again, William Morris's travels to Iceland).

- 3 I will focus here on one specific, actual journey, taken by William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in France and Belgium between late September and late October 1849. Rossetti documented this expedition poetically, sending poems along the way to his birth-brother William Michael Rossetti, and to his Pre-Raphaelite art-brothers. But it also has an ideological weight: the poems, on works of art, on the new modalities of moving across Europe, on the traces and remnants of history, resonate, in one way or another, with the political crises of the late 1840s: revolutions in France, Austria-Hungary, Poland, the rise of republicanism throughout Europe, echoes of the Napoleonic war in the ongoing rise to power of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte.
- 4 Several poems can be read under the title 'A Trip to Paris and Belgium'. William Michael Rossetti published three different sets under this title, based on the texts he received; he included new poems with each new edition, the most expansive being the 1911 edition, with over twenty poems of variable lengths.² But Dante Gabriel also sent poems to John Lucas Tupper, a friend of the PRB; this group, called the 'Tupper set', is quite smaller—but mostly quite different; according to McGann, the Tupper set could be read as a 'précis of DGR's (Pre-Raphaelite) judgments about the journey' (McGann, 'Scholarly Commentary', 'Introduction'), and more specifically about art. As interesting as this set is in terms of art criticism, it does not include some aspects of the poetic imprint that this voyage left on Rossetti: namely, the political side, represented by the comments on history and on modernity that can be found in the WMR set. As it is more complete and more political, I will mostly follow McGann's set, which is more or less an expanded version of the WMR set, and from which all poetic quotations will be taken; I would argue that this set is far more relevant in terms of Dante Rossetti's judgment on the world than the Tupper set, and as relevant in aesthetic terms—the details 'compris[ing] a running index of an aesthetic program' (McGann 2003, 412). To show this aesthetic importance, I will also leave out the sonnets on paintings, which have already been studied extensively by McGann or Bentley; my focus will rather be on the construction of images and of an aesthetic program through more text-focused works, and the way in which the poems create visual impressions.
- 5 My point here is simple: there is in Rossetti's poetic diary of this trip an important political dimension, which sheds light on the Pre-Raphaelite way of perceiving and judging modernity—by which I mean the social, cultural, and technological changes of the 19th century, evidenced in the case of Rossetti's trip by the recently-developed trains, administrative processes, telegraph, and other discoveries and innovations. This dimension makes it a programmatic collection, exposing Pre-Raphaelite artistic and political ideas—as was shown by Bentley in 'A Pre-Raphaelite Abroad: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "A Trip to Paris and Belgium"' (Bentley). But the poems are not only the presentation of ideas; they serve as a realm of memory,³ crystallizing a specific relation to modernity—that is, the progress made in the Victorian era and its impact on the world—and were meant to be that way, in order for the trip to be invested by recipients of Rossetti's diary. Bentley reads in Rossetti's diary an anticipation of Stephens's 'Modern Giants' (published in the fourth issue of *The Germ*) and its call to a use of modern subjects to exemplify eternal qualities; I would argue that Rossetti's poems are

far more concerned with the present than with such qualities, and that their political dimension is quite different from Stephens's call.

- 6 What I intend to do is examine what is revealed by these poems, what mindset shines through this transcription of what was Rossetti's first major trip abroad (not that there were many others afterwards, actually, making this a prime example of his relation to the unknown and the foreign). If the poems themselves are quite telling, and sometimes quite explicit, what is truly informative is the way in which the act of writing reflects the advance of the trip. My first part will focus on the planning of the trip: Rossetti's attempt at controlling what he perceives and what he transcribes, his clear intention to give an order to the chaos of crossing over to the continent. Then, I will move on to what is generally the second aspect of anyone's trip: the experience, the imprint that is left by landscapes, cities, people, and so on—and what this imprint looks like on Rossetti's paper. I will end on the final result of the trip, that is to say how Rossetti's diary recreates the places and topics it focuses upon, and changes them into a realm of memory: a sometimes critical relation to symbolically important elements, which founds a specifically Pre-Raphaelite relation to past and present.

Planning the Trip

Confronting the Ideal

- 7 Hunt's and Rossetti's actual preparations for the trip might not be of the utmost interest; but its context and what can be assumed to be its goal are noteworthy. A letter from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to his brother William Michael, dated September 18, 1849, mentions the upcoming trip as one event among others, planned alongside the publication of the first issues of *The Germ*, although specific departure dates are not yet decided. Another letter from September 24 remains vague, mentioning a departure 'on Monday [October 1] at the latest' (Fredeman I, 99); the next (Fredeman I, 100) is more specific, and announces that the two friends departed two days later, on the 27th. Overall, the expedition seems almost improvised, its organization coming last after management of the budding *Germ*, poetic endeavours, and other trips and meetings.
- 8 There is a plan, though, and a goal. As can be seen through what Rossetti tells of his trip (in his poems and in the prose parts of his letters), the main goal was to enjoy art, either paintings by old masters or works that could not be transported to London: Rossetti and Hunt went to the Louvre, to museums in Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent, to monuments and churches in all cities. This goal seems fulfilled, although in a surprisingly expedited way sometimes: Rossetti and Hunt absorb the Louvre, going from room to room to take it all in; as they visit museums in Brussels and see paintings by Van Eyck, they already imagine what they can expect in Antwerp or Ghent. This haste is quite visible in the image of Hunt and Rossetti 'rac[ing] at full speed' in the Louvre and 'yawn[ing] from school to school', in 'To the P.R.B'. The origins of such an abundance of experiences and such a hurried reaction to the art that is seen can be considered as a transcription in the artists' bodies of the movement induced by the trains, boats, and cabs that took them from London to Paris; but it is also the more prosaic result of Rossetti's and Hunt's artistic expectations for their trip.
- 9 As for what these expectations might be, a comparison between the artists mentioned by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his Academy lectures, the artists listed by the Pre-Raphaelite

Brothers as 'Immortals', and those mentioned by Rossetti in his letters as deserving praise shows important differences. The list of Immortals does not rely as much as Reynolds's collection of role models on the Venetian school—some of its members being omitted by the Pre-Raphaelites, others being downplayed; the entire Flemish school disappears as well, a treatment which is confirmed by Rossetti's comments on works seen in the Louvre. This is to be expected, as differences in artistic appreciations played a huge part in the Pre-Raphaelites' rejection of the Academy.

- 10 But the Brotherhood's list of Immortals does not correspond exactly to what Rossetti and Hunt find agreeable either. Some artists they admire when seeing their works hold a prominent place on the list—Raphael for instance. Others are altogether absent: Van Eyck, Memling, Flandrin, Ingres for instance, and yet they are considered as 'wonderful' and 'tremendous'. The same observation goes for Early Italian painters, such as Fra Angelico or Mantegna, who are praised despite not being counted among the Immortals. It may be that these artists were not famous enough in England to have been included in the list—or not accessible enough; but this does not explain the absence of painters who were known in England, such as Van Eyck, through the *Arnolfini Portrait*, acquired by the National Gallery in 1842. Another reason could be found in what Hunt says of the List: that it did not include artists whose works seemed 'too profound for [them] to fathom' (Hunt 111); but Flandrin's paintings in the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés are not more profound than works by Michael Angelo and others.
- 11 A reason for this discrepancy might be found in the artists' reasons for going on this trip. Their expedition is far from being another occurrence of the fashionable Grand Tour: although Hunt and Rossetti went to Paris, their path turned north after two weeks—while travellers bent on following the steps of the Grand Tour usually chose from a selection that includes the Loire Valley, Italy, sometimes Greece, Austria, and Germany (Buzard). Despite the increased accessibility of such a trip, its cost might have been reason enough for Rossetti and Hunt to choose another way. But the Grand Tour had also become an increasingly codified journey in previous decades; as James Buzard reminds us, travelling in and of itself was less important than visiting 'the desirable or even quasi-mandatory destinations where the proper *kind* of experience was to be garnered' (Buzard 38).
- 12 The fact that Hunt and Rossetti avoided the Loire Valley and Italy (along with other desirable destinations) should then also be seen as evidence of specifically anti-conformist objective: to establish a new Pre-Raphaelite canon, replacing the dusty old masters of the Academy with fresh—albeit sometimes older—idols. Their trip leads to the establishment of what Béatrice Laurent calls a 'mental museum' (Laurent 19), which doubles as an actual collection. Indeed, if Rossetti and Hunt speed through some museums, they also buy sketches, paintings, and copies of different artists, and Rossetti's poems turn out to be, as McGann puts it, a 'précis' of art criticism, giving distant Brothers access to the perceptible essence of new masters.

Giving Order to the Expedition

- 13 One major characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry is the artists' attention to time and place; it is usually revealed by the use of whatever academic study was available at the time, by the collection of information and sketches provided by

documentary travels, or by their attention to practical and psychological details. 'A Trip to Paris and Belgium' is no exception, with most poems including specific mentions of time and place—such as hours of departure or arrival, and duration of pauses. Rossetti's poems constitute a 'journal', by his own account (Fredeman I, 125), and as such, it includes the names of the places visited—Boulogne, Paris, Waterloo, Ghent—and departure and arrival of trains—'Half past one to half past five', '3 to 11 p.m'.

- 14 This is a direct consequence of the documentary aspect of the texts, but also of their programmatic dimension. This use of details and precise references can be seen as the continuity of what the Brotherhood had already started in word and paint: the creation of art that is radically present and circumscribed in time and in space, and is produced by (to quote Bentley quoting Merleau-Ponty) a 'body and mind . . . "geared" into a particular place at a particular time' (Bentley 31). Poetic and artistic creation is not simply a matter of reaching ideal beauty; it is a search for the perfect expression of one body, at one time, and influenced by its circumstances, recreating the circumstances and time of another body.
- 15 But these poems are not localized simply as a matter of continuity and fidelity to Pre-Raphaelite principles; they organize the trip, and the names of places and times of day help keep track of an expedition whose every step is filled to the brim with experience. This is visible in the prosodic composition of the journal. As Bentley remarks (Bentley 33), there are two aspects to the organization of the trip. The journey itself—waiting for and boarding trains, moving from one place to the next—is generally depicted in blank verse. The episodes of the trip—visiting museums, monuments, the *Bal Valentino*⁴—are documented in sonnet form. This distinction in form is also a distinction in performance: the former are dynamic poems, focusing on movement, while the latter are more static and contemplative texts, trying to reach the essence of one moment. The association of the two forms is a way to draw a line between the journey and the destination—and is explicitly presented as a plan established before leaving England, in 'Between Ghent and Bruges': 'When a man . . . still has stuck to his first plan— | Blank verse or sonnets; and as he began | Would end...' (l. 1, 4-5; 360).

Antespection and Retrospection

- 16 All of this preparation has little to do with the usual planning of a trip—luggage, places to stay in, etc. But they are essential to understand Rossetti's approach to his first major trip abroad. Also essential is the ambiguity that this planning reveals: 'A Trip to Paris and Belgium' (as a textual collection) and the journey itself seem torn between antespection and retrospection. Although this might seem at odds with the idea of a poetry linked to time and space, this tearing apart of the mind draws attention to the particular circumstances in which it happens: the contemplation of a particularly boring painting or scene, a pause before reaching a desired destination, or the long train rides in which the mind tries to wander off the body's fatigue.
- 17 Throughout the set, whether one uses the WMR set or McGann's more recent and complete version, Rossetti's poems project the reader towards what is yet to come: the next city, the next painting, the next impression. The sonnet 'Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Antwerp)', for instance, ends with 'What time this evening is the train for Ghent?' (l. 14; 360), projecting the reader towards another step of the journey. The titles of several

poems specify the destination, thus shaping the texts themselves which become yearnings for something else, tensions towards an announced goal. Such is the case of the triad of poems on and towards Waterloo, 'On the road to Waterloo: 17 October', 'A Half-Way Pause', and 'On the Field of Waterloo'. The first two describe the landscape passing by, or halted by the pause, and bear the marks of both movement and wait—for instance in the beginning of the second half of 'Half-Way Pause', whose simplicity and preciseness weigh on the reader, its picturesque quality elongating time: 'Our horses' hoofs stir in the road, | Quiet and sharp. Light hath a song | Whose silence, being heard, seems long' (l. 8-10; 358).

- 18 But this insistence on details and sensations of the trip comes literally second to the tension towards the touristic realm of memory which Waterloo constitutes: the first sonnet is a rich, evocative depiction of the road between Brussels and Waterloo, but its title directs the reader towards the old battlefield; the second one is not simply a scene sketched in words, but the result of a pause in the trip, an interruption before the second half of the journey. In both cases, the reader is made to wait, the richly detailed scenery expanding upon the yearning distilled by the title. With its brusque opening, 'On the Field of Waterloo' marks the end of this tension: 'So then, the name which travels side by side | With English life from childhood—Waterloo— | Means this' (l. 1-3; 358).
- 19 The first two words, 'so then', establish a continuity with the other texts, by opening what should be the conclusion of this short trip; the delay created by the relative clause and by the insert 'Waterloo' reinforces this feeling, by stressing the distance between expectation and reality, between what has been imagined since London and what is finally witnessed—a distance which continues the yearning created by the two previous texts. This effect is also achieved by the metaphorical journey of the name, 'trave[ling] side by side' with the English imagination.
- 20 However, this tension demonstrated by the poetic form is negated by some metatextual remarks. Indeed, several of Rossetti's poems include a commentary on his own creative process during this trip—for instance the first poem of the series, 'London to Folkstone', ending on a direct address to William Michael:
- I did not scribble more,
Be certain, after this; but yawned, and read,
And nearly dozed a little, I believe;
Till, stretching up against the carriage-back,
I was roused altogether, and looked out
To where, upon the desolate verge of light,
Yearned, pale and vast, the iron-coloured sea. (l. 49-55; 347)
- 21 The use of the past tense and the contrast between the verb 'scribble' and the poem—with its well-crafted rhythm, sounds, images—might imply a retrospective alteration. This would make a fallacy of the professed immediacy of a text that could have been refurbished after the train ride.
- 22 Other instances of the immediacy fallacy include 'The Staircase of Notre-Dame, Paris', a poem which expands personal experience, exposed in the first three lines, into political and historical reflection on the atmosphere in France. This immediacy is claimed by Rossetti himself, in a letter written the day after the visit of the cathedral, where he presents the sonnet as having come 'whole into [his] head' (Fredeman I, 108). But the text itself is a reconstruction, Rossetti having lost the sonnet before being able to put pen to paper. Having been disturbed by the circumstances, he claims to have been

forced to dig in his mind for the impressions felt on the moment—the sonnet being thus sent to William Michael ‘[probably] with some deterioration’ (Fredeman I, 112). The journal is then revealed to be less of a direct transcription of what the eye saw and the mind conceived, and more of a reconstruction and ordering of experience, which tries to account *a posteriori* for the anticipation that was felt.

Experiencing the Trip

A Painter's Journey

- 23 Whether they are recorded on the spot or reconstructed from experience, these poems focus on impressions, just like typically Pre-Raphaelite poems like ‘My Sister’s Sleep’ sound like direct transcriptions of life without actually being so. Recording experience and simultaneously making sense of it is the key to this effect of immediacy, leading to poems which are written as if they were paintings or sketches on the fly; such is the case of some of the poems depicting the landscapes of England, France, and Belgium in ‘A Trip to Paris and Belgium’. As Bentley underlines (Bentley 32), the journal becomes the equivalent of a sketchbook, the poems being small drawings in words of what Rossetti sees. Western European countryside is not described as much as it is vaguely perceived, reduced to dabs of colour and shape juxtaposed in unstructured clauses. Such is the case of ‘London to Folkstone’, the first poem of the series, opening on this scene:

A constant keeping-past of shaken trees,
And a bewildered glitter of loose road;
Banks of bright growth, with single blades atop
Against white sky; and wires—a constant chain—
That seem to draw the clouds along with them
(Things which one stoops against the light to see
Through the low window; shaking by at rest,
Or fierce like water as the swiftness grows);
And, seen through fences or a bridge far off,
Trees that in moving keep their intervals
Still one ’twixt bar and bar; and then at times
Long reaches of green level, where one cow,
Feeding among her fellows that feed on,
Lifts her slow neck, and gazes for the sound. (l. 1-14; 345-46)

- 24 Grammatical structure has been abolished, the purity of impression being given priority; not even individual elements can be identified—trees, hedges, grass blending in a continuum, such as the ‘bright growth’ on line 3. The poet insists on this continuity of impression—‘constant’ being repeated twice in this stanza—and on the unidentifiable blur of the landscape—‘things’, nondescript ‘banks’ and ‘reaches’.
- 25 Some texts attempt to make sense of this visual mess, ‘Boulogne to Amiens and Paris’ for instance. The second stanza in this poem is built on a succession of short clauses, each introduced by the adverb ‘sometimes’ (l. 8, 9, sq), which is a way to extract specific snapshots of elements in the landscape and to identify them more precisely. The first of these presents the harvested fields in poetic language—‘the country spreads aloof in tracts | Smooth from the harvest’ (l. 9-10; 347), the vision being progressively reconstructed from the most obvious to the less visible elements. The detailed precision that could be expected from a painter following the Pre-Raphaelite program

disappears quickly as this experience in identification fails, the series climaxing in a quick-paced superposition of the different aspects of the ground: 'Sometimes | The ground has a deep greenness; sometimes brown | In stubble; and sometimes no ground at all, | For the close strength of crops that stand unrequited' (l. 14-16; 347).

- 26 The fragments here lose the consistency that the rest of the stanza had tried to establish, with the focus being first on the ground itself and its qualities, and then progressively losing sight of the ground, as if it had disappeared in the speedy blur of the train.

Making Sense of a New World

- 27 Art is also used as an interpretative grid to make sense of what Rossetti and Hunt experience. At Valentino's, Rossetti compares dancers to works by Buffon and to mythological figures, in order to cope with what he sees both on stage and in the hall—a vulgar display of flesh, at odds with the private eroticism presented in 'Jenny', and compounded by the 'slang idiocy' of the '*habitués*' (Fredeman I, 115). In the poem to 'From Paris to Brussels', which focuses more on the long wait for passports than on the actual journey, art is again used as a cognitive device, when imagining a murderer who would hide in the crowd gathered around his victim:

Now, very likely, he who did the job
Was standing among those who stood with us,
To look upon the corpse. You fancy him—
Smoking an early pipe, and watching, as
An artist, the effect of his last work. (l. 12-16; 354)

- 28 Art is a way to cope with situations that Rossetti sees as infuriating or disgusting. The only difference lies in the conception of art, 'From Paris to Brussels' using artistic activity rather than its result. This difference is significant, as it is elaborated by the way the poem is composed. The run-on line introduces a delay in the comparison; the narrative voice seems to be looking for the figure of the artist, being unsure of what to compare the murderer with, the eventual description being some hybrid between a pictorial composition and a way to pass the time.
- 29 Beyond a simple coping mechanism, art can also be used to escape the confrontation with reality, as is visible in 'At the Station of the Versailles Railway':

I waited for the train unto Versailles.
I hung with *bonnes* and *gamins* on the bridge
Watching the gravelled road where, ridge with ridge,
Under black arches gleam the iron rails
Clear in the darkness, till the darkness fails
And they press on to light again—again
To reach the dark. I waited for the train
Unto Versailles; I leaned over the bridge,
And wondered, cold and drowsy, why the knave
Claude is in worship; and why (sense apart)
Rubens preferred a mustard vehicle.
The wind veered short. I turned upon my heel
Saying, "Correggio was a toad"; then gave
Three dizzy yawns, and knew not of the Art. (351)

- 30 What this sonnet exhibits is hardly a confrontation between old masters and modern transportation. The painters, who are mentioned only in the sestet, after Rossetti's

thoughts veer away from reality ('and wondered'), are used to get away from the passivity of waiting for the train. But they are not completely isolated in this sestet: the octave uses architectural elements (bridge, ridge, road, tracks) to delineate the scenes and place the 'bonnes and gamins' in a specific setting, and relies on the *chiaroscuro* technique, transferred to words, to depict the railroad. The result is a crystallization of a moment through the use of an artistic framework, combining techniques and references.

Bons baisers de Bruges et Paris

Words and Images

- 31 As already noted previously, this journal is almost exclusively textual; almost no sketches by Rossetti are associated to this collection, nor does he explicitly mention any attempt at drawing. This might be explained by two dimensions of the journal.
- 32 One is connected to the goal of the voyage, as presented by William Michael Rossetti: a plan 'of sharply realizing an impression on the eye and through the eye on the mind' (Rossetti, 1895, II, 56). As counter-intuitive as it seems, text might be a better way of reproducing an impression made on the eye and on the mind than image—at least as far as Rossetti is concerned. Poetry and painting were quite intermingled in Rossetti's practice of art, as has often been studied, and his identification of perfection in painting with poetic construction is often quoted (Doughty; Johnson; Stein; Roussillon-Constanty). But in 1849, when Hunt and Rossetti go on their trip, Pre-Raphaelite paintings have almost exclusively been narrative paintings: Rossetti's *Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, Millais's *Isabella*, Hunt's *Rienzi* are images that do not simply show something but tell a story; a vast majority of Rossetti's drawing and sketches pre-dating the trip also fall in that general category.⁵ Rossetti's choice to document the trip through words rather than images might thus stem from a perceived inadequacy of the visual medium, relying on its narrative dimension too much to accurately transcribe the naked existence of what is seen.
- 33 Another medium-related explanation might be that most of what is represented in Rossetti's journal relies on movement and interaction. His travels by boat and train and cab through British, French, and Belgian landscapes and the jostling crowd in Paris are moving subjects; the sonnets for pictures are not simple ekphrases describing the works, but the result of an intimate interaction between one young painter and the work of old masters; reflections on the political past of either country are not static, but the result of a projection into the past. This is not incompatible with the idea of painting being a less efficient conduit for representation: the cognitive evolution of text, which forces a reader to stop and spend even a short time understanding the words and reconstructing the images they carry, can also beat the more immediate perception afforded by paintings.⁶
- 34 The other dimension of this journal which justifies its textual character is its use as the foundation of a 'realm of memory', to use Pierre Nora's concept: an actual or symbolic place which becomes suffused with an intimate personal and collective memory, in a fight against the sweeping march of rationalized history. In his definition of the '*lieux de mémoire*', Nora differentiates history and memory on the grounds that 'memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a

representation of the past' (Nora 3). Rossetti's journal comes from the other side of the Channel, but shows a similar division: most of the texts use present tenses, which serve both the effect of immediacy (genuine or artificial) and the construction of a memorial dimension, struggling against the threats of the historical. Even the poems that focus on the historical dimension of the places visited, such as 'Place de la Bastille, Paris', seemingly evacuate the past, and focus more on this bond between signs of history and the eternal present of an individual's perception.

- 35 This theory might seem contradicted by the presence in the journal of 'On the Field of Waterloo', a sonnet which turns the sacralisation and memorialisation of Waterloo on its head. As Demoor shows, the battlefield was very quickly transformed by British periodicals, tourist guides, and authors into a realm of memory—a place which exalted Britishness through the remembrance of the thousands who had died facing Napoleon's horde. But Rossetti's poem is far from participating in this glorification. The opening lines of the sonnets express disappointment in the scene offered by the battlefield: lines 1 and 2 build up a form of tension or yearning by recalling the omnipresence of the name Waterloo in the British imagination, only to see the sentence end abruptly, line 3, with 'means this'—the enjambment deflating the built-up glory. The matter-of-fact tone of the rest of the sonnet confirms this disappointment, from the opening of the sestet—'So much is very well' (l. 9)—to Rossetti's almost blasphemous (in the context of British patriotic memory) closing statement:

Am I to weep? Good sirs, the earth is old:
Of the whole earth there is no single spot
But hath among its dust the dust of man. (l. 12-14; 359)

- 36 But not all realms of memory are meant to be glorifications—this is something that Nora insists upon when discussing the darker pages of French history, from antisemitism to the Vichy government. So for Rossetti's Waterloo: despite being a disappointment, nothing more than a few acres of barren land that once were bathed in blood, Waterloo is part of British memory and of Rossetti's own individual memory of modern France and Belgium—a memory which the journal acknowledges and transmits to William Michael Rossetti, John Tupper, James Collinson, and other recipients of the letters.
- 37 The same remark can be applied to some of the sonnets on paintings, or to Rossetti's comments on the collection of various museums visited by Hunt and himself: the individual connection to history established through the works of the old masters is acknowledged, but the quality of what is remembered is denied. In Nora's theory, the element remembered is not necessarily more important than the remembrance itself: France's institutions and national anthems, for instance, are not realms of memory only because of their historical importance, but because they symbolize a connection. Rossetti's diary creates such a connection, both for himself and for the other members of the Brotherhood. His poems establish realms of memory by emptying their topics of at least part of their historical dimension, and by focusing on the sensations, feelings, images that such topics beget rather than on the topics themselves: rejection of the old masters and disgust at their works, dismissal of patriotic hype, feelings of entrapment and oppression.

Entrapment

- 38 This memory is first and foremost one of entrapment. Several of Rossetti's texts are almost claustrophobic, for instance the two 'staircase poems': 'The Staircase of Notre-Dame, Paris' and 'Antwerp to Bruges'. In both poems, Rossetti describes his ascension of bell-towers, and in both poems, traces of the building make their way into the text and assail the narrative voice: Notre-Dame becomes a place where, crushed by the weight of political turmoil, one feels the incoming storm of new revolutions; in the belfries of Antwerp and Bruges, the sound of the carillon relentlessly pursues the elements and the very flesh of the climber.
- 39 This is only a part of a whole network of attempted and difficult upward movements—a network which sometimes even contaminates other settings. The blind man seen in 'A Half-Way Pause' turns his head to the sky in a movement similar to the Bastille prisoner's in 'Place de la Bastille, Paris', one to 'have the sun' ('A Half-Way Pause', l. 7), the other 'with a painful prayer upon God's grace' ('Place de la Bastille', l. 4). Both reproduce the movement of 'one who, groping in a narrow stair' ('The Staircase of Notre-Dame, Paris', l. 1) can only hope that the ascension will be concluded by '[stepping] forth on the light in a still sky' (l. 14).
- 40 The train also echoes this network, and in particular the image of the Bastille prisoner: the bits and pieces of a fleeting world transcribed by the narrative voice work in the same way as the 'small treasures of this sky' seen 'through prison-bars from year to year'—it is a fragmented vision based on rare glimpses, vagueness, and repetition. This image of vision interrupted by bars, fences, bridges, pillars and other obstacles is omnipresent in the journal, and perpetuates the idea of a narrative voice trapped in the modern world, deprived of both bodily and visual agency and freedom either by the modern apparatus, in the case of the train poems, or by the machine of the state, in the case of static lyrics.
- 41 In the case of the train, the effect of entrapment is multiplied by the utmost promiscuity of the coaches; fellow travellers, reduced to social functions and performances, are stuck together, in 'London to Folkstone' for instance: 'Now nearly darkness; knees and arms and sides | Feel the least touch, and close about the face | A wind of noise that is along like God' (l. 40-42; 346). Even the elements are trapped, in 'On the Road': 'Among us in the coach | Packed heat on which the windows have been shut' (l. 2-3; 354).
- 42 The general feeling of claustrophobia and entrapment that permeates these poems is caused by people packed together, by the promiscuity of narrow buildings, by the weight of history, or by actual representation of imprisonment. In all cases, it creates a feeling of unease which lies at the core of Rossetti's realm of memory and leads to criticism of the causes of such entrapment: the weight of historical change and modernity.

The Ontological Impasse of Modernity

- 43 As often in Rossetti's poems, there is a political layer hidden beneath the picturesque descriptions and cheeky mockery. In this particular case, what is specifically the object of political thought is modernity.

- 44 The train is a machine that negates humanity. People in it are imprisoned, stuck together, but they also become passive creatures, who 'are relayed' and 'are stopped' while being transported, instead of transporting themselves. Worst of all, the train blurs the senses, as in 'Antwerp to Ghent':

The darkness is a tumult. We tear on,
The roll behind us and the cry before,
Constantly, in a lull of intense speed
And thunder. Any other sound is known
Merely by sight. The shrubs, the trees your eye
Scans for their growth, are far along in haze. (l. 15-20; 360)

- 45 Sight and hearing are mixed, with the narrative voice having to rely on all the senses in turn and in combination to try and make sense of the world. The very format of blank verses reinforces the impossibility for the poet to stay organized in his recording of the trip. It is only half an experience, as the train, with its 'extreme speed', is beyond human scale, a twisted and chaotic modification of the Sublime which affects even cognitive categories, with chronological elements becoming spatial in 'London to Folkestone': 'I now | Lie back and close my eyes *a space*' (l. 46-47; 346-47; emphasis mine).

- 46 What is at the core of and at stake in all of these poems is the body-itself twisted and modified by modernity. So great is the impact of the train that the body moves by itself, for instance in 'Boulogne to Amiens and Paris':

Most of them slept; I could not—held awake
By jolting clamour, with shut eyes; my head
Willing to nod and fancy itself vague.
Only at Stations I looked round me, when
Short silence paused among us, and I felt
A creeping in my feet from abrupt calm.
At such times Hunt would jerk himself, and then
Tumble uncouthly forward in his sleep. (l. 61-68; 348-49)

- 47 The self-awareness of the traveller, which Bentley showed, is paradoxically associated with a dissociation between the entity who writes, and records what happens, and the entity who experiences, and can do nothing but submit to the jolts and bolts of modernity.

- 48 Not even the textual body is safe. The division between dynamic blank verse and static sonnets fails near the end of the trip, in 'Between Ghent and Bruges':

Ah yes, exactly so; but when a man
Has trundled out of England into France
And half through Belgium, always in this prance
Of steam, and still has stuck to his first plan—
Blank verse or sonnets; and as he began
Would end;—why, even the blankest verse may chance
To falter in default of circumstance,
And even the sonnet miss its mystic span.
Trees will be trees, grass grass, pools merely pools,
Unto the end of time and Belgium—points
Of fact which Poets (very abject fools)
Get scent of—once their epithets grown tame
And scarce. Even to these foreign rails—my joints
Begin to find their jolting much the same. (360-61)

- 49 The pattern that had been adopted and followed until now is here reversed; Rossetti's disappointment with this world has reached the point of making him lose faith in even poetic capability to resist and use modernity. The repetition, l. 9, the inanity of epithets, mentioned l. 12, and the foolishness of poets, l. 11, reveal an abdication in front of the modern paradigm of representation. That this is a sonnet only makes it worse: the form has lost 'its mystic span', and its magic essence has been emptied by the brute force of modernity; its use here is a last spasm of resistance against a less ornate poetic form.
- 50 That the scenery itself is repetitive and can only produce a poor transcription, as Bentley analyses (Bentley 39), is true enough; but as the *in medias res* opening of 'Ah yes, exactly so' indicates, this poem is also a last, deliberate, and ultimately useless effort to resist the blur of modernity. It is not so much the imprint of a repetitive scenery and a dull trip as a reaction against such repetition and boredom, and against the modernity that made it so: what Rossetti perceives as a poor literary quality of this diary is still an essential part of it, as it constitutes an example of what is wrong with the new relation to the world created by modernity. The distinction is not so much between good and bad poems, as Bentley seems to suggest, but between good and bad ways of connecting to the outside world. By suggesting that the poem might answer a previous question, maybe a self-assessment of Rossetti's poetic effort, the opening of 'Between Ghent and Bruges' highlights the diary's quality as a programmatic reflection on the connection to the world induced by modernity.

Conclusion

- 51 It is quite accurate to focus on 'A Trip to Paris and Belgium's value as a compendium of artistic judgments; questions related to art—how to produce it, how to represent the world through it, how to comment on it and evaluate it—are omnipresent in this collection. However, it is not simply a 'précis of artistic judgments'—not even the Tupper set. The dubious immediacy of some poems also prevents any interpretation of the collection as being completely faithful to 'the Pre-Raphaelite commitment of painting *sur le motif*' (Bentley 32); the analysis of Rossetti's journal as a transcription of the effects of modernity on the body is more efficient and allows for an unveiling of the more political core of the collection.
- 52 More than one specific theme, or subjects, or image, what really dominates this ensemble is unease: the disagreeable impression of an utter abolition of the self, and of an attack on perception, both of these brought on by modern technology. The train is here the symbol of this attack, the spearhead of modernity, assaulting the body and the senses. The harsh judgments on Parisian life, on some of the great masters of yore, on touristic places and British glorified memorials ally to this uneasy transcription of modern travel, to create a specific, Pre-Raphaelite realm of memory. Rossetti first, recipients of his letters and readers later, invest this chronotope of 1849 France and Belgium to turn it into a component of Pre-Raphaelite paradoxical ideology: a reminder of how threatening and unsavoury modernity is, but expressed in a radically modern way.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BAETENS, Jan Dirk. 'The Pre-Raphaelites at the Antwerp Salon of 1852'. *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 31.1 (2022): 19–31.
- BENTLEY, D. M. R. 'A Pre-Raphaelite Abroad: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "A Trip to Paris and Belgium"'. *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 21.1 (2012): 31–62.
- BUZARD, James. 'The Grand Tour and after (1660–1840)'. *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Ed. Peter HULMES and Tim YOUNGS. Cambridge: CUP, 2002. 37–52.
- DEMOOR, Marysa. 'Waterloo as a Small "Realm of Memory": British Writers, Tourism, and the Periodical Press'. *Victorian Periodicals Review* 48.4 (2015): 453–68.
- DOUGHTY, Oswald. *A Victorian Romantic. Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. 1949. London: OUP, 1963.
- FREDEMAN, William E., Ed. *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002–2010 (ten volumes).
- HUNT, William Holman. *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. 1905. Boston: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1914.
- JOHNSON, Wendell Stacy. 'D. G. Rossetti as Painter and Poet'. *Victorian Poetry* 3.1 (1965): 9–18.
- KOTZIN, Michael. 'Pre-Raphaelitism, Ruskinism, and French Symbolism'. *Art Journal* 25.4 (1966): 347–50.
- LAURENT, Béatrice. 'An Inventory of the Pre-Raphaelite Mental Museum, October 1849'. *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism*. Ed. Thomas J. TOBIN. New York: SUNY Press, 2004.
- MCGANN, Jerome, Ed. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Collected Poetry and Prose*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2003.
- MCGANN, Jerome. 'Scholarly Commentary on A Trip to Paris and Belgium'. *Rossetti Archive* <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/54-1849.raw.html>, last visited November 20, 2023.
- NORA, Pierre, Ed. *Realms of Memory: rethinking the French past*. 1992. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.
- REYNOLDS, Sir Joshua. *Discourses*. London: Walter Scott, 1887.
- ROSSETTI, William Michael. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir*. London: F.S. Ellis, 1895.
- ROSSETTI, William M., ed. *The Germ. Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature and Art, Being a facsimile reprint of the literary organ of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, published in 1850*. London: Elliot Stock, 1901.
- ROUSSILLON-CONSTANTY, Laurence. 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti: "visible parlare" ou le pouvoir poétique des images'. *Études Anglaises* 57.1 (2004): 53–62.
- STEIN, Richard L. 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painting and the Problem of Poetic Form'. *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 10.4 (Autumn 1970): 775–92.

NOTES

1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's correspondence emphasizes this confidentiality, as several of his letters to William Michael insist that it is not necessary to advertise the review too much.
 2. I will call it henceforth the WMR set.
 3. The use of this phrase from Pierre Nora's seminal work on memory and history is borrowed here from Marysa Demoor's article on Waterloo as one such realm of memory (Demoor, 2015).
 4. Existing from the late 1830s to the early 1890s, the *Bal Valentino* was a famous dancing hall, a subsidiary of the *Bal Mabille*.
 5. There are some exceptions, as always: portraits of friends and families, studies for larger works that were never executed, exercises focusing on colour or costume; but most of Rossetti's earliest compositions include at least some measure of intertextuality (drawing inspiration from literary works or from satirical drawings such as Gavarni's works); landscapes are notably absent, still-lives rare, and a narrative dimension can be found even in the most innocuous sketches.
 6. The abundance of significant details in Pre-Raphaelite paintings hinders, of course, such an immediate perception; but the global meaning remains more quickly perceived through the image than through the text.
-

ABSTRACTS

In 1849, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt undertook a trip to France and Belgium, with the specific goal of visiting art collections in Paris, Brussels, Bruges, Antwerp and Ghent. Despite not being as exotic as the expeditions of Richard Burton or David Livingstone, this trip was particularly meaningful, not only because of the context (the early years of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, soon after the 1848 Revolutions) but also because it was related by Rossetti himself, who wrote a series of poems during the journey and sent them in letters to his brother William Michael and some other members of the Brotherhood. These poems, collectively gathered under the title 'A Trip to Paris and Belgium', focus on different aspects of the trip: some of them describe the journey itself, by boat, train, or coach, from London to Antwerp and back; some of them describe places and events, for instance their arrival and connection in Paris; some others let transpire historical and political commentary under a sheen of ekphrasis. Overall, there is in the collection a more formal contrast between travel poems properly speaking, that is to say the texts describing the journey, and what I would call 'static poems', that is to say the texts written in the places visited. This paper will focus on the potential political role of these poems, established through this contrast: the elaboration of a Pre-Raphaelite realm of memory through Rossetti's and Hunt's contact with modernity. This contact is transcribed through a hybridisation of words and images which builds on the Pre-Raphaelite program and crystallises the two artists' experience to transmit it to Pre-Raphaelite brothers waiting for them in Britain.

En 1849, Dante Gabriel Rossetti et William Holman Hunt se sont lancés dans un voyage en France et en Belgique, avec l'objectif avoué de visiter les collections artistiques de Paris, Bruxelles, Bruges, Anvers, et Gand. S'il n'avait pas l'exotisme des expéditions de Richard Burton ou David Livingstone, ce voyage est particulièrement signifiant, pas seulement à cause de son contexte (les débuts de la Confrérie Préraphaélite, juste après les Révolutions de 1848) mais parce qu'il a été documenté par Rossetti lui-même dans une série de poèmes écrits sur la route et envoyés à son

frère William Michael et à d'autres membres de la Confrérie. Ces poèmes, rassemblés sous le titre « A Trip to Paris and Belgium », couvrent différents aspects du voyage : certains décrivent le trajet lui-même, par bateau, train, ou voiture, de Londres à Anvers et retour ; d'autres décrivent des lieux et des événements, par exemple l'arrivée à Paris des deux voyageurs et leur départ ; d'autres enfin laissent percer un commentaire historique et politique sous le vernis de l'ekphrasis. Dans l'ensemble, le recueil comporte de façon plus formelle deux catégories : les poèmes de voyage à proprement parler, c'est-à-dire des textes qui décrivent les trajets, et ce que j'appellerais des « poèmes statiques », c'est-à-dire les textes écrits sur les lieux visités. Cet article se concentrera sur le rôle politique potentiel de ces poèmes, qui s'établit à travers ce contraste : l'élaboration d'un lieu de mémoire préraphaélite à travers le contact de Rossetti et Hunt avec la modernité. Ce contact est transcrit à travers une hybridation des mots et des images qui s'appuie sur le programme préraphaélite et cristallise l'expérience des deux artistes afin de la transmettre à leurs Confrères restés en Angleterre.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Rossetti (Dante Gabriel), Hunt (William Holman), Préraphaélisme, écrits de voyage, lieux de mémoire

Keywords: Rossetti (Dante Gabriel), Hunt (William Holman), Preraphaelitism, travel-writing, realms of memory

AUTHOR

RAPHAËL RIGAL

Raphaël Rigal graduated from the École Normale Supérieure de la rue d'Ulm in 2015, and defended a PhD thesis at Sorbonne Université in December 2020; his work, under the supervision of Pr. Pascal Aquien, focuses on 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Pre-Raphaelites, and modernity'. His research focuses on the political dimension of Pre-Raphaelite poetry and art, and on the way Victorian artists tackle modernity. He published articles such as "‘Ut Vita Poesis’: La représentation de la vie par Dante Gabriel Rossetti" (in *La Littérature et la Vie*, 2018), 'The Pre-Raphaelite City and the Trap of Modernity' (*Angles*, 2022) and 'Centralité de la marge: utilisation politique de la périphérie dans trois poèmes narratifs de Dante Gabriel Rossetti' (*Poli-Femo*, 2022). He teaches English at Gustave Eiffel University in Champs-sur-Marne.

*Agrégé d'anglais (2014) et diplômé de l'École Normale Supérieure de la rue d'Ulm (2015), Raphaël Rigal a soutenu en décembre 2020 une thèse intitulée « Comblant la Faille. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, les Préraphaélites, et la modernité », sous la direction du Professeur Pascal Aquien. Actuellement PRAG à l'Université Gustave Eiffel de Champs-sur-Marne, il concentre sa recherche sur la dimension politique de l'art et de la poésie préraphaélites, et sur le rapport des artistes victoriens à la modernité. Ses articles publiés incluent « ‘Ut Vita Poesis’: La représentation de la vie par Dante Gabriel Rossetti » (in *La Littérature et la Vie*, 2018), « The Pre-Raphaelite City and the Trap of Modernity » (*Angles*, 2022) et « Centralité de la marge: utilisation politique de la périphérie dans trois poèmes narratifs de Dante Gabriel Rossetti » (*Poli-Femo*, 2022).*