

The Tripartite Life of Whitley Stokes (1830–1909)

Elizabeth Boyle & Paul Russell

EDITORS



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Contents

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	x
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	xii
Introduction	i
<i>Elizabeth Boyle & Paul Russell</i>	
1. Whitley Stokes senior (1763–1845) and his political, religious and cultural milieux	14
<i>Jacqueline Hill</i>	
2. ‘A shadowy but important figure’: Rudolf Thomas Siegfried	29
<i>Pól Ó Dochartaigh</i>	
3. ‘The impiety of the intellect’: Whitley Stokes and the Pre-Raphaelites	44
<i>Elizabeth Boyle</i>	
4. ‘Patriot hare or colonial hound?’ Whitley Stokes and Irish identity in British India, 1862–81	59
<i>Nigel Chancellor</i>	
5. Reading between the lines: Whitley Stokes, scribbles and the scholarly apparatus	78
<i>Ananya Jahanara Kabir</i>	
6. The Sanskrit legacy of Whitley Stokes	98
<i>Maxim Fomin</i>	
7. Whitley Stokes and the <i>Rubáiyát</i> of ‘Omar Khayyám	111
<i>John Drew</i>	
8. Comparative philology and mythology: the letters of Whitley Stokes to Adalbert Kuhn	119
<i>Bernhard Maier</i>	
9. Whitley Stokes and the study of Continental Celtic	134
<i>Alderik H. Blom</i>	

	<i>Contents</i>
10. Grilling in Calcutta: Whitley Stokes, Henry Bradshaw and Old Welsh in Cambridge <i>Paul Russell</i>	144
11. Whitley Stokes and early Irish law <i>Thomas Charles-Edwards</i>	161
12. ‘Their harmless calling’: Whitley Stokes and the Irish linguistic tradition <i>Pádraic Moran</i>	175
13. Whitley Stokes, Standish Hayes O’Grady and <i>Acallam na Senórach</i> <i>Geraldine Parsons</i>	185
14. Whitley Stokes and Modern Irish <i>Nollaig Ó Muraíle</i>	196
BIBLIOGRAPHY	218
INDEX OF ARCHIVAL SOURCES	241
GENERAL INDEX	246

‘The impiety of the intellect’: Whitley Stokes and the Pre-Raphaelites¹

ELIZABETH BOYLE

It has long been known that Whitley Stokes associated with many of the artists and poets who loosely but collectively comprised the movement known as Pre-Raphaelitism,² but he has always been accorded a marginal position in studies and biographies of the members of that circle.³ Their influence on Stokes and indeed Stokes’ influence on them have not been explored in any detail. The purpose of the present chapter is to provide a preliminary assessment of Stokes’ involvement with the Pre-Raphaelites during his first period of residence in London (1852–62), before his departure for India.⁴ Focusing on Stokes’ early translations of medieval Danish ballads, I argue that Stokes was heavily influenced for a time by the aesthetics of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, and by the interaction of literary and visual forms which was so central to that movement.

Simply put, the self-declared purpose of Pre-Raphaelitism was to create art

1 I am indebted to Dr Philip McEvansoneya (TCD) for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to Aisling Lockhart, Manuscripts and Archives Research Library, TCD, for her thoughtful assistance. F.W. Burton, *Hillemel and Hildebrand, or the meeting on the turret stairs* (1864) is reproduced courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Leverhulme Trust and the Isaac Newton Trust in funding my research. 2 In using the term ‘Pre-Raphaelite’, I refer not only to the members of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (the Rossetti brothers, Millais, Holman Hunt et al.), but also to those from among the Brotherhood’s wider intellectual network whose paintings and poetry encapsulate a more diffuse Pre-Raphaelite ideology; thus I include William Allingham and F.W. Burton (both Irishmen), Ford Madox Brown, William Morris, A.C. Swinburne and others who inhabited that social and cultural milieu which centred on mid-nineteenth-century London. Dante Rossetti himself in later life minimized the significance of the ‘Brotherhood’ (‘the visionary vanities of half a dozen boys’) and stressed the significance of the ‘movement’ it inspired: Derek Stanford (ed.), *Pre-Raphaelite writing: an anthology* (London, 1973), p. 13. 3 So, for example, Jan Marsh’s monumental *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: painter and poet* (London, 1999), in which Stokes receives only a handful of brief references: pp 224–6, 248, 414. 4 Stokes continued his acquaintance with members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle after his departure for India, but only sporadically; friendships were renewed once Stokes moved back to London in the 1880s. See, for example, William E. Fredeman (ed.), *The correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: the formative years, 1835–1862*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2002), ii, p. 346 n. 2. Stokes also brought FitzGerald’s translation of the *Rubáiyát* to the attention of the Pre-Raphaelites, on which see John Drew, ch. 7, this volume.

and poetry which possessed, at its core, fidelity to nature. As John Ruskin observed in his *Lectures on architecture and painting* (1854), 'Pre-Raphaelitism has but one principle, that of absolute, uncompromising truth in all that it does, obtained by working everything, down to the most minute detail, from nature, and from nature only'.⁵ Or, as William Holman Hunt wrote in a 1905 essay, 'the work that we were bent on producing [was] to be more persistently derived from Nature than any having a dramatic significance yet done in the world'.⁶ The Pre-Raphaelites reached across temporal and geographical boundaries, to draw inspiration from medieval European traditions. In the visual arts, the result was bold use of colour, the detailed replication of flora, fauna, hair and draperies, in works whose subject matter was often drawn from biblical, medieval or early modern literature.⁷ In poetry, Pre-Raphaelitism manifested itself in a return to older European poetic forms: the popular ballad, heroic saga, courtly love poems, and so on. The translation and importation of non-English texts influenced not only the subject matter of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, but also its metrical forms, its rhymes and its vocabulary. Representative of the Pre-Raphaelite technique was 'meticulous composition' in point of metre, rhyme, number of stanzas, the deliberate use of archaisms, and precision in detail.⁸ In the words of Lionel Stevenson, the Pre-Raphaelite 'preoccupation with foreign literatures put an end to the parochialism that was stultifying English authorship'.⁹ Throughout the period in which the Pre-Raphaelites were producing their work, there was a constant interaction between their visual art and their poetic output. Some, such as Rossetti (in Stokes' words), 'labour[ed] with the pen as well as the brush';¹⁰ others were either artists or poets but drew literary inspiration from visual art and *vice versa*.

At the heart of the Pre-Raphaelite movement was the gifted and charismatic Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82). Stokes first met Rossetti at the end of 1855 or beginning of 1856, but it is apparent that he was already aware of Rossetti, and others in the Pre-Raphaelite circle, before they became acquainted. Stokes was clearly struck by the young artist, and wrote to his sister Margaret:

You would like Rossetti immensely – so full of freshness and vigour as he is, and his dogmatism passes for the beautiful enthusiasm of a young artist who feels instinctively what is true and *must* say it.¹¹

In addition to Dante Rossetti, and his brother William, Stokes' social circle, from the mid-1850s onward, included the sculptor Alexander Munro (1825–71), the

⁵ *Pre-Raphaelite writing*, ed. Stanford, pp 35–7 at p. 35. ⁶ 'Pre-Raphaelitism is not Pre-Raphaelism' in *Pre-Raphaelite writing*, ed. Stanford, pp 23–5 at p. 23. ⁷ Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (London, 1998), pp 7–8. ⁸ Lionel Stevenson, *The Pre-Raphaelite poets* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1972), p. 26. ⁹ Stevenson, *The Pre-Raphaelite poets*, p. 5. ¹⁰ Whitley Stokes to Margaret Stokes, 7 Dec. [1855?], TCD MS 7389/29. ¹¹ Whitley Stokes to Margaret Stokes, [undated], TCD MS 7389/75b.

poet A.C. Swinburne (1837–1909), William Morris (1834–96) and Ford Madox Brown (1821–93); Stokes also met the poets Browning and Tennyson. Around this time, Stokes began to publish – in *Fraser's Magazine*, the *Saturday Review* and other popular publications – reviews and translations of the literature of various different languages and cultures, from Serbia to Native America, Finland to Tuscany, Catalonia to Denmark. For the purposes of this study, I intend to focus on two articles which Stokes published, in 1852 and 1855, both of which contained his translations of Danish ballads. I have chosen these, not because I have any particular insight into the Danish ballad tradition¹² – indeed, in this context it matters less from where the ballads originate, so much as how they were presented to the readers of *Fraser's Magazine* – but rather, because they date from the time when Stokes was still establishing himself in London, before he was fully welcomed into the Pre-Raphaelite circle. As far as I am aware, the Danish ballads published in 1852 were Stokes' first publication, and the 'second batch' published in 1855 also rank among his earliest published work.¹³ My purpose then, is to look at Stokes' very earliest thinking on medieval literature, and to examine it in the light of his Pre-Raphaelite contemporaries.

DANISH BALLADS

I have noted that it was characteristic of Pre-Raphaelitism to draw on the past and on other cultures for inspiration, and Stokes engaged in this by publishing his translations of later medieval Danish ballads. His introductions to both sets of translations offer us striking insights into the mind of the twenty-two-year-old Stokes. He writes:

Though we are hardly vain enough to believe with Göthe that every translator is *ein Prophet in seinem Volke*, we have yet most religiously abstained from taming the ruggedness, retrenching the superfluties, or supplying the deficiencies that exist in the originals of the following ballads ... We believe that these ballads will command attention from their own simplicity and force, from their originality, picturesqueness, and truth to the national feelings of the people among whom they were produced.

He supplements these thoughts with a footnote:

¹² On the generic tradition see David Colbert, *The birth of the ballad: the Scandinavian medieval genre* (Stockholm, 1989). ¹³ R.I. Best, 'Bibliography of the publications of Whitley Stokes', *ZCP*, 8 (1912), 351–406, repr. in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Whitley Stokes (1830–1909): the lost Celtic notebooks rediscovered* (Dublin, 2011), pp 93–135.

Indeed when a poet is *compelled* to derive his inspiration solely from nature and life, and the wild mournful traditions that may be current among his people, how can his productions avoid originality? When his object is solely to give delight to an audience of bold and hearty peasants, unfamiliar with books, unpolished by intercourse with society, his songs must necessarily be simple and fresh, full of force, vividness and reality.¹⁴

The poet who is '*compelled* to derive his inspiration solely from nature and life' explicitly recalls the Pre-Raphaelite article of faith, that 'an artist, whether painter or writer, ought to be bent upon defining and expressing his own personal thoughts, and that these ought to be based upon a direct study of Nature'.¹⁵ In the same article, Stokes goes on to say:

It has been said that the poets of England were rescued from the vices of feebleness and artificiality by the publication of Bishop Percy's fresh and vigorous ballads. We cannot help believing that a familiarity with the popular songs of Denmark would go far to make us weary of the obscure and sickly sentimentalism of so much of our present poetry.¹⁶

In his second publication on Danish ballads, Stokes discusses the appearance of common motifs in different national literatures. He compares those common themes to wild-flowers, influenced by various soils and climates, but essentially the same. He continues:

Even so the artless popular songs, ballads and legends of many lands agree with considerable frequency; while the polished and artificial productions of the versifiers who wrought for the upper classes of society, are found (like rare and delicate hot-house plants) to vary widely according to the caprice of fashion and the plenitude of wealth.¹⁷

Thus Stokes explicitly places the utmost value on inspiration derived solely from nature and life, an attitude consonant with Pre-Raphaelite ideology. He repeatedly contrasts the 'vigour', 'freshness', 'authenticity', 'simplicity' and 'reality' of popular literature, with the 'feebleness', 'sentimentalism', 'artificiality' and

¹⁴ [Whitley Stokes], 'Danish ballads', *Fraser's Magazine*, 45 (1852), 649–59 at 651. ¹⁵ William Michael Rossetti, cited in *Pre-Raphaelite writing*, ed. Stanford, p. 58. ¹⁶ [Stokes], 'Danish ballads', p. 659. The 'fresh and vigorous ballads' of Bishop Percy are his *Reliques of ancient English poetry* (1765). ¹⁷ [Whitley Stokes], 'A second batch of Danish ballads', *Fraser's Magazine*, 51 (1855), 86–95 at 86–7.

'polished' nature of cultivated, upper class poetry. However, the qualities that Stokes admired are not to be limited to specimens of 'genuine' medieval poetry. As did the Pre-Raphaelites, Stokes sought to introduce the same qualities into the contemporary poetry of his own age, as we can see in the cases of his literary interactions with William Allingham and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

STOKES, ALLINGHAM, ROSSETTI

Stokes had a longstanding friendship with the Donegal-born poet William Allingham (1824–89), whom we might characterize as an associate member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle – he was a devotee of Tennyson, he exchanged extensive correspondence with Dante Rossetti and spent much time in London. Stokes seems to have first met Allingham in Dublin; by the mid-1850s they were corresponding regularly.¹⁸ In 1857, Allingham sent Stokes some poems he had written, including one entitled 'Among the heather'. It draws strongly from the ballad tradition, in its metre and rhyme, and in its subject matter: a man walking along the mountainside meets a girl and asks to 'walk with her', which results – we are led to assume – in a sexual encounter, leaving the poet to muse cheerfully on the prospect of future assignations. The poem meets with Stokes' hearty approval:

I cannot sufficiently extol the manliness and freshness and healthiness of 'Among the heather' – it made me feel indeed, as if I were there, in the cool wind, and with mountains and rocks and furze-blossom about me once again. In the metrical point of view nothing can be better than the swing of it; and the rhymes in the fourth line of each stanza please my ear greatly. Don't you think that the last line would be bettered by omitting the w in 'will'? Read 'Love'll warm me' &c – the two w's, in the adjacent monosyllables interfere, I think, with the flow of the line; and you have Tennyson's authority (in the 'Queen of the May') for the change I venture to suggest.¹⁹

Stokes admires the 'freshness' and 'manliness' of Allingham's poetry, exactly as he did with the medieval ballads. Furthermore, evidence of Stokes' influence among his associates can be seen in the fact that the published version of 'Among the heather' incorporated Stokes' emendation:

The sun goes down in haste, and the night falls thick and stormy;
Yet I'd travel twenty miles to the welcome that's before me;

¹⁸ See also Elizabeth Boyle & Paul Russell, 'Introduction', this volume, p. 6. ¹⁹ H. Allingham & E. Baumer Williams (eds), *Letters to William Allingham* (London, 1911), pp 269–70.

Singing hi for Eskydun, in the teeth of wind and weather!
Love'll warm me as I go through the snow, among the heather.²⁰

It would seem that Stokes' opinion was similarly respected by Rossetti, who wrote to his sister, Christina, that he had shown some of her poems to Stokes, 'a very good judge and conversant with publishers – who thought them so unusually excellent that there could be little doubt ever of their finding a publisher not to speak of a public'.²¹ Stokes also offered his poetic judgments to Dante Rossetti himself:

By the bye, do you remember the little Franche-Comté chanson in one of my books? Rossetti here last Sunday, rummaging through my non-legal volumes, lit upon it, copied it out with numerous expressions of admiration and said he'd make a picture of it and sent me a translation of it next day. I took the liberty of suggesting two or three alterations which he magnanimously admitted were improvements.²²

In 1859, Allingham's publishers sent Stokes an advance copy of the collection *Nightingale valley*, which was edited by a 'Giraldus', that is, William Allingham. *Nightingale valley* contained a broad range of poems by numerous authors, including Allingham's 'Down on the shore', another poem drawing on ballad motifs and metre, observing children on the shore, the fisherman's wife, the nets and the waves. Again, the poem was derived from observation of 'life and nature', as Stokes and the Pre-Raphaelites put it. Stokes responded to the collection thus:

What an admirable thing that 'Northern star' is (page 51); do you think it's by a woman? This was quite new to me – also M. Milnes' song and Barham's poem, 89: and Browning's 'May and death' – delicious in metre: and your own 'Down on the shore' which is excellent. Who did that terrible poem, 'Mea culpa'?²³

It is impossible to say whether or not Stokes knew that the author of 'Mea culpa' was, of course, none other than William Allingham himself. But 'Mea culpa',

²⁰ John Hewitt (ed.), *The poems of William Allingham* (Dublin, 1967), pp 33–4. ²¹ *The correspondence*, ed. Fredeman, ii, p. 346. ²² TCD MS 7389/37. Note also the interaction between the literary and the visual – Rossetti 'said he'd make a picture of' the text – something which I shall address in more detail below. It is possible that the volume to which Stokes refers may be the copy of Leroux de Lincy, *Recueil de chants historiques français* (Paris, n.d.), which is now preserved in the Whitley Stokes Collection at UCL (shelfmark 116.e.24). This contains a poem called 'Les trois princesses' from Franche-Comté on pp viii–x. I am grateful to Paul Russell for this reference. ²³ Whitley Stokes to William Allingham, 20 Dec. 1859, *Letters*, ed. Allingham & Baumer Williams, p. 271.

which Stokes describes as ‘terrible’ (and it is unclear to me whether he means ‘very bad’, or ‘inspiring dread’, or both, in this context) is perhaps one of Allingham’s most interesting poems. Departing entirely from the musicality and so-called ‘freshness’ and ‘vigour’ of Allingham’s usual work, ‘Mea culpa’ is sacramental, metaphysical and eschatological in nature:

We sinn’d – we sin – is that a dream?
 We wake – there is no voice nor stir;
 Sin and repent from day to day,
 As though some reeking murderer
 Should dip his hand in a running stream,
 And lightly go his way.

Embrace me friends and wicked men,
 For I am of your crew. Draw back,
 Pure women, children with clear eyes.
 Let scorn confess me on his rack, –
 Stretch’d down by force, uplooking then
 Into the solemn skies ...²⁴

It was not only Stokes who was discomfited by Allingham’s departure from Pre-Raphaelite methods. Dante Rossetti also failed to identify Allingham as the author of ‘Mea culpa’ and commented critically on it; however, perhaps being a little less forthright than Stokes, he later tried to back-pedal rather unconvincingly:

‘Mea culpa’ I described as a queer poem, in my last, lest by any possibility it should be written by anyone I hated. The fact, as I thought then and think now, is that it is an extremely fine one – I think one of your very finest.²⁵

As Stevenson has noted, ‘some of the most effective poems that [Rossetti] wrote during the 1850s were modelled upon the folk-ballad’,²⁶ so it is unsurprising that Rossetti was as disconcerted as Stokes by Allingham’s uncharacteristically metaphysical composition. Indeed, serious criticism has long been directed at

²⁴ [William Allingham], ‘Giraldus’, *Nightingale valley* (London, 1860), pp 93–4. It perhaps tells us something of Allingham’s view of his own composition that he placed it between a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and one by Tennyson. ²⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, [Dec. 1859], *The correspondence*, ed. Fredeman, ii, pp 282–3; see Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, [22 Dec. 1859], *The correspondence*, ed. Fredeman, ii, p. 279, in which Rossetti calls it ‘a queer little poem – evidently modern’. ²⁶ Stevenson, *The Pre-Raphaelite poets*, p. 40.

Rossetti on account of the perceived disjunction between his excessive concern with 'overwrought form' and what is characterized as a lack of 'significant content'.²⁷ Harold Weatherby has, in an influential essay, condemned Rossetti's poetry for 'the failure of content, the failure of meaning, the failure of traditional symbols to function properly when they were cut loose from the belief in spiritual realities'.²⁸ In other words, the failing of Pre-Raphaelite poetry was to divorce relatively superficial, formal aspects of medieval literary culture from the metaphysical *Weltanschauung* which underpinned that culture.

HELLALYLE AND HILDEBRAND

To return to Stokes' Danish ballad translations, we have seen how his introductions to the translations articulate his views on the purpose and value of poetry, and how those views were consonant with, and had an influence on, the poetry of other members of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. What of the translations themselves? Let us focus on one of Stokes' translations, namely that of 'Hellalyle and Hildebrand',²⁹ which recounts a story that is also told in a slightly different Swedish version as 'Ribold and Guldborg', and again in a British version as 'The Douglas tragedy'. The poem tells of a princess, Hellalyle, whose father keeps her surrounded by a guard of twelve knights. She has a sexual liaison with one of the knights: Hildebrand, prince of England. Her father sends his champions, including Hellalyle's brothers, to kill Hildebrand, who leaves Hellalyle with the injunction not to speak his name. She sees seven of her brothers lying dead, by Hildebrand's hand, but her youngest brother is still engaged in combat with him. She screams Hildebrand's name, and her brother kills him. The brother then takes the disgraced Hellalyle – he on horseback, she being dragged behind, increasingly bloodied and battered – to a tower, where she is condemned to live, her flesh pierced by the thorn-strewn floor, until she is sold by her brother and mother in exchange for a bell. At the moment the bell rings out, Hellalyle's mother dies, as does Hellalyle herself once she has recounted her tale. The subject matter of the poem resonates with the Pre-Raphaelite fascination with

²⁷ David G. Riede (ed.), *Critical essays on Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York, 1992), p. 9. ²⁸ H.L. Weatherby, 'Problems of form and content in the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti' in *Critical essays*, ed. Riede, pp 67–75 at p. 67. See also David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the limits of Victorian vision* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), pp 21–2, on the lack of real religiosity in Rossetti's biblically inspired paintings: 'the expression of faith seems quaint rather than impassioned'. ²⁹ [Stokes], 'A second batch', p. 89. Stokes used the edition in A.S. Vedel & P. Syv (eds), *Udvalgte Danske Viser fra Middelalderen*, 5 vols (Copenhagen, 1812–4), iii, pp 353–7, and an alternative translation (based on the same version of the ballad) can be found in E.M. Smith-Dampier (trans.), *A book of Danish ballads* (New York, 1939), pp 124–7, under the title 'The griefs of Hillelille'. A slightly different Danish version of the ballad can be found in E. von der Recke (ed.), *Danmarks Fornviser* (Copenhagen, 1928), pp 355–8.

the fallen woman, whose sexual drive, exercise of free will, and resulting emotional conflict are the instruments, not only of her own destruction, but also that of the object of her affection.³⁰ Indeed, Hellalyle's agency is extremely ambiguous: despite the constrictive imprisonment of her life, surrounded by her bodyguard, and undoubtedly knowing the consequences of her actions, she assents to a sexual encounter with Hildebrand. Similarly, conflicted by the tension between erotic and familial love, she calls out Hildebrand's name to save her brother, despite the inevitability that this action will lead to both her and Hildebrand's demise. Aside from the complicated, sexually driven and ultimately tragic figure of Hellalyle, there are other aspects of the poem which, in Stokes' translation, encapsulate the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, not the least of which is the interaction between the visual and the textual.

The recurrent images of red and gold, colours which are so prominent in much of Pre-Raphaelite art, are particularly striking: 'She sat in her bower, with eyes of flame' ... 'And where the red gold ought to shine' ... 'She lays the golden broiderie' ... 'In gore they soon were lying there,/ My seven brothers with golden hair' ... 'The deep ice-rivers were red with gore' ... 'Their piercing daggers were dyed with blood'.³¹ That the beauty of the brothers' golden hair is contrasted with the horror of their bloodied bodies, and that both colours are evoked in the threads of Hellalyle's embroidery, points to a sophisticated visual element in Stokes' textual rendering. Furthermore, in addition to the thematic and textual/visual adherence to Pre-Raphaelite poetic technique, the poem's structural elements are entirely consonant with those used by Pre-Raphaelite poets. The structure, retained from the original Danish versions of the ballad (particularly its rhymed couplets with burden and interior refrain),³² is evocative of other Pre-Raphaelite poetic compositions:

She sat in her bower, with eyes of flame,
(*My sorrow is known to God alone*)

Bending over the broiderie frame,
(*And oh there liveth none to whom my story may be told*)

³⁰ J.B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite body: fear and desire in painting, poetry and criticism* (Oxford, 1998), pp 49–74, on Rossetti and 'sexualized women'. The observations of Andrew Wilton are also pertinent: 'Towards the end of the 1850s the isolation of a particular woman ... as the vehicle or object of a desire repeatedly expressed began to focus itself in Rossetti's work into a characteristic image: the head of an individual young woman presented as an object of ambiguous attraction, part temptress, part priestess, both corrupting and innocent': Andrew Wilton, 'Symbolism in Britain' in Andrew Wilton & Robert Upstone (eds), *The age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860–1910* (London, 1997), pp 11–33 at p. 18. The character of Hellalyle, as presented by Stokes, is equally ambiguous – she is portrayed both as sexual being and as martyr. 31 [Stokes], 'A second batch', p. 89: §§ 1, 3, 18, 26, 31. 32 Colbert, *The birth*, p. 14.

The significant structural feature is the burden or refrain which operates throughout the poem, a device which is a common archaism in Pre-Raphaelite poetry. We might compare this with William Morris' 1858 poem, 'The tune of seven towers', in which we see the same device, alongside the characteristic close visual description:

No one walks there now;
 Except in the white moonlight
 The white ghosts walk in a row;
 If one could see it, an awful sight,
*Listen! said fair Yoland of the flowers,
 This is the tune of seven towers*

But none can see them now,
 Though they sit by the side of the moat
 Feet half in the water, there in a row,
 Long hair in the wind afloat.
*Therefore, said fair Yoland of the flowers,
 This is the tune of seven towers ...*

William Morris had commissioned a watercolour from Dante Gabriel Rossetti, also called 'The tune of seven towers' (1857, Tate collection), and it was after seeing the painting that Morris was moved to compose his poem. This exemplifies the close and continuous interaction of the visual and literary arts which we have already observed. Stokes also played a part in this symbiotic process, but, where Morris' poem had drawn on Rossetti's painting, in this case it was Stokes' poem 'Hellalyle and Hildebrand', which inspired F.W. Burton's painting *Hillel and Hildebrand, or the meeting on the turret stairs* (1864, National Gallery of Ireland; see figure 3). The painting's debt to 'the medievalizing works of Rossetti' has already been noted,³³ but the strong creative interplay between text and image is also a Pre-Raphaelite feature. Interestingly, the painting was eventually bought, in 1898, by Stokes' sister, Margaret, the art historian, and subsequently bequeathed to the National Gallery of Ireland. The tantalizing hints of a sexual tension between Frederic Burton and Margaret Stokes³⁴ add a further emotional resonance to the complex connections between his painting and her brother's poetic translation.

Critics have noted of the Pre-Raphaelites that 'jointly they achieved a literary eminence that none of them could have gained alone'.³⁵ They were first and foremost a movement, a collective, perhaps greater than the sum of their parts.

33 Philip McEvansoneya, 'The Pre-Raphaelites in Ireland', *Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society*, 5:2 (summer 1997), 9–15 at 9. 34 Janette Stokes, 'Poetic encounters', *Irish Arts Review*, 26:3 (autumn 2009), 89–91 at 90–1. 35 Stevenson, *The Pre-Raphaelite poets*, p. 4.



3 F.W. Burton, *Hillel and Hildebrand, or the meeting on the turret stairs* (1864) (reproduced courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland).

As their paintings and poems show implicitly, and their diaries and correspondence show explicitly, they inspired each other, criticized each other, corresponded with each other, and they ate together, drank together and exchanged ideas informally.³⁶ Stokes was a part of that circle, and his early views on poetry need to be understood within that context. It will be important to know whether and how his views changed over time, and how they may have influenced his mature scholarly output. Certainly it would seem that, in literary terms, Stokes moved away from his youthful Pre-Raphaelitism: in a later reworking of his translation of 'Hellalyle and Hildebrand', which he included in a letter to his sister Margaret in 1864, Stokes removed almost all traces of the striking visual elements that characterized his 1855 translation.³⁷ There is also the *desideratum* of further investigation of an 'Irish Pre-Raphaelite movement', looking at the work of Stokes, Burton, Allingham, Samuel Ferguson³⁸ and others, to see if and how their Irish identity and their views of Irish culture made particular contributions to Pre-Raphaelitism, and what impact this had on later Irish literary developments.³⁹

The young Stokes was clearly influenced by the ideologies of his talented, charismatic friends. Even before he was brought into the Pre-Raphaelite circle, Stokes was producing poetic translations whose underlying ideology was totally consonant with Pre-Raphaelite ideals. It is not enough simply to view Stokes as part of a wider movement which sought to recover medieval European literatures; Stokes' vocabulary too explicitly evokes the manifesto of Pre-Raphaelitism. We see how Stokes was, or at least claimed to be, suspicious of the intellect, disillusioned with the artifice of polished society and the sickly sentimentalism of cultivated poetry. However, we must remember that the reality, artlessness and authenticity of which Stokes approved, was in fact mediated through the voices of cultivated, polished and artful members of the educated classes, the 'rare and delicate hot-house plants', such as Browning, Rossetti and Tennyson. In fact, both elements were required to produce the new poetic mode

³⁶ For example, Whitley Stokes to Margaret Stokes, [undated], TCD 7389/75b: 'Rossetti I had dined with the evening before at a strange place in a little court off Fleet St. where we often go on Saturday evening and where a huge pudding composed of beefsteaks, kidney and oysters ... is dispensed (with the proper stout, bread and potatoes) to visitors commanding the sum of 2/-. He and I strolled up afterwards to Charles Cayley's, and we made him read us some of his psalms, a translation of which, from Hebrew, he is now engaged upon'. Charles Cayley (1823–83) had a close relationship with Christina Rossetti. ³⁷ Whitley Stokes to Margaret Stokes, 31 July 1864, TCD 7389/101. See appendix below. ³⁸ Stokes remarked in an 1857 letter that Ferguson had 'fallen in love with [Dante] Rossetti, whom Burton also likes and greatly admires': TCD MS 7389/47. ³⁹ McEvansoneya, 'The Pre-Raphaelites', has shown that 'the paucity of Pre-Raphaelite works exhibited in Dublin, allied to the almost non-existent journalistic reaction to the paintings, help account for the absence of any local influence' of Pre-Raphaelitism on Irish visual art (p. 11), noting further that those Irish artists who were influenced by Pre-Raphaelitism spent their careers in England. However, a study of the literary influence of Pre-Raphaelite poetry in Ireland, and on Irish writers, may yield greater results.

that Stokes desired.⁴⁰ Stokes' professed belief in the 'impiety of the intellect' was in many ways simply the 'beautiful enthusiasm of a young artist'.⁴¹ It is perhaps useful to see Stokes' output from the 1850s as a bridge between his youthful literary aspirations and his mature philological achievements; it lies somewhere between the work of the poets and artists of the Pre-Raphaelite movement on the one hand, and that of scholarly editors and translators on the other. Although mindful of the need for further investigation, it is to be hoped that the present study has begun to show the extent to which Stokes was an active and important member of that group of intellectuals who so transformed the landscape of mid-nineteenth-century art and poetry.

APPENDIX: WHITLEY STOKES, 'HELLALYLE AND
HILDEBRAND', 1855 AND 1864 VERSIONS⁴²

It would seem that Stokes moved away from his youthful fascination with Pre-Raphaelite poetic modes. If we compare the translation of 'Hellalyle and Hildebrand' that Stokes published in *Fraser's* in 1855, with the version he sent to his sister Margaret in 1864, we can observe some striking differences. Most notably, much of the visual imagery, so evocative of Pre-Raphaelite painting, has been toned down. For example, 'Where the *red gold* ought to *shine*' has become 'Where she should work with *gold so red*' (§1); 'In *gore* they soon were lying there' has become 'And first of all he slayeth there' (§18); and 'Their piercing daggers were *dyled* with blood' has become 'The piercing points with blood grew wet' (§31). Perhaps mercifully, many of the rather forced archaisms have also been removed: the Middle English 'neeld' has become 'needles' (§6, 7), and 'brast' has become 'burst' (§34). Furthermore, if we compare the dramatic episode in which Hellalyle's brother drags his shamed sister back to their mother, the extravagant violence of the earlier version has been scaled back considerably: rather than the boughs tearing away pieces of Hellalyle's 'bosom', they tear at her 'leg'; the 'deep ice-rivers' which were 'red with gore' disappear entirely and we are left with 'there never was so deep a dam' (§23–6). Stokes described his later translation as 'very literal',⁴³ which in itself represents a move away from his earlier approach

⁴⁰ Ironically, one of the recurrent themes in early, hostile reviews of Pre-Raphaelite poetry was that its excessive concern with metrical forms and archaisms derived from medieval literary traditions rendered it 'unmanly', and that its perceived aestheticism was by definition 'artificial': Riede, *Critical essays*, p. 5. ⁴¹ Stokes, in a letter to his sister Margaret, on Robert Browning's 'An epistle containing the strange medical experience of Karshish' writes 'How exquisitely too is suggested the impiety of the intellect to seize every little circumstance that may serve to excuse half-belief!': Whitley Stokes to Margaret Stokes, 29 March 1856, TCD MS 7389/37. I would suggest that Stokes only half-believed in his own disillusionment with cultivated poetry, and thus his description of Rossetti's dogmatism being the 'beautiful enthusiasm of a young artist' might equally be applied to Stokes himself (TCD MS 7389/75b).

to poetic translation and toward the more 'philological' style which characterizes his later work. It can be no coincidence that Stokes sent the reworked version of 'Hellalyle and Hildebrand' to his sister Margaret, apparently at her request, in 1864, the very same year in which F.W. Burton completed his *Hillel and Hildebrand*, the painting inspired by Stokes' translation. Margaret's asking for the translation may have been the result of seeing Burton's painting, or indeed she may have passed Stokes' reworked version to Burton himself, but it is perhaps ironic that Stokes appears to distance himself from Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics at precisely the moment when his flirtation with Pre-Raphaelitism was to have its greatest influence on Irish cultural life.

<i>1855 version</i>	<i>1864 version</i>
1 She sat in her bower, with eyes of flame, (My sorrow is known to God alone) Bending over her broidery frame. (And oh there liveth none to whom my sorrow may be told).	She sat in her bower, with eyes of flame, (My sorrow is known to God alone) Bending over her broidery frame. (And oh there liveth none to whom my sorrow may be told).
2 And where the red gold ought to shine, She broiders there wi' the silken twine.	Where she should work with gold so red She broiders there with silken thread.
3 And where the silken twine should be, She lays the golden broiderie.	And where the silken thread should be She lays the golden broiderie.
4 In they come to the Queen so fair:- 'Proud Hella so wildly is broidering there'.	Word was brought to our Lady mild – 'Proud Hella's sewing is wrong and wild'
5 The Queen she wrapt her furs around: Strode on till Hellalyle she found.	The Queen she wrapt her mantle round, Moved on till Hellalyle she found.
6 'Hearken, Hella, with speed you sew, But all astray your neeld doth go.'	'Hearken, Hella, with speed you sew, But all astray your needles go.'
7 'Ah well my neeld may go astray, For I am lost in woe and aye.	'My needles well may go astray, My doom has been so dark for aye.
8 My father was lord of the land by his sword, And knights of renown were the slaves at his board.	My father was a king so good: Knights fifteen at his table stood.
9 My father gave me a glorious guard: Twelve noble knights were my watch and my ward.	He gave me a seemly and glorious guard, Twelve knights of renown were my watch and ward.
10 Eleven daily served me well, But oh, I loved the last – I fell.	Eleven kept their honour whole: The last loved me; I loved him too. ⁴²
11 My true-love's name was Hildebrand, And he was prince of Engelland.	My lover's name was Hildebrand A King's-son, he, of Engle-land.
12 Scarce came to my bower that knight so bold, When all was to my father told.	We both were scarce in my bower alone When all was to my father known.
13 Oh if you heard my father's shout – "Champions! On with your armour stout!	My father shouted through the hall "Up men! – on with your armour all!

⁴² The '1855 version' is the original translation which Stokes published in *Fraser's*; the '1864 version' Stokes included in a letter to his sister, seemingly in response to a request from her: Whitley Stokes to Margaret Stokes, 31 July 1864, TCD MS 7389/101. ⁴³ TCD MS 7389/101.

⁴⁴ Stokes has erased something here; it would appear that he originally sought to rhyme 'whole' with 'soul'.

- 14 See that your swords and shields be right,
Hildebrand, he is a lord of might.”
- 15 They stood at the door with spear and shield:
“Up, Lord Hildebrand!, Out and yield!”
- 16 He kissed me then mine eyes above:-
“Say never my name, thou darling love.”
- 17 Out of the door Lord Hildebrand sprang:
Around the head the sword he swang.
18 In gore they soon were lying there,
My seven brothers with golden hair.
19 My youngest brother was battling near,
And O in my heart I held him dear.
20 And so I screamed, “Lord Hildebrand,
For God’s dear love now hold thy hand!
21 O let him live – my youngest brother,
He’ll bear the tidings to my mother.”
22 And, while I spake Lord Hildebrand,
With *eight* wounds sunk upon the sand.
23 My brother bound me by the hair:
I hung at the heels of his frantic mare.
24 There was not a stone, there was not a root,
But I left it a piece of my shattered foot.
25 There was not a bough we passed that day,
But it tore a piece of my bosom away.
26 The deep ice-rivers were red with gore,
As over them we and the wild horse tore.
27 And when to the castle we came anigh,
My mother stood in misery.
28 My brother he built a tower strong,
Sharp thorns he laid on the floor along.
29 He stript me to my silken sark,
He cast me on thorns so keen and stark.
30 And, oh, wherever my hands were thrown
The horrible thorns empierced the bone.
31 And, oh, wherever I screaming stood,
Their piercing daggers were dyed with blood.
32 My brother wished me in the grave,
My mother would sell me for a slave.
33 And soon they sold me for a bell:
In Mary’s tower they hung it well.
34 The bell rang out, and rang again:
My mother’s bosom brast in twain.’
35 Or ever she told of all her teen
(My sorrow is known to God alone)
Dead she fell before the Queen.
(And oh there liveth none to whom my
sorrow may be told).
- Buckle your armour on aright –
Hildebrand, he is so hard a knight.”
They stood at the door with spear and shield:
“Up, Sir Hildebrand, out and yield!”
He patted me then on my cheek so white –
“Dear Love, say never my name tonight.
Though red with blood you see me lie,
Name not my name until I die.”
Then from the door my warrior sprang
His shearing swordblade flashed and swang.
And first of all he slayeth there
My seven brothers with golden hair.
My youngest brother was fighting near
And in my heart I held him dear.
And so I cried “Sir Hildebrand,
In Jesu’s name hold back thy hand.
O let him live – my youngest brother,
He’ll take the tidings to my mother.”
I scarce had spoke when Hildebrand,
With eight wounds sank upon the sand.
My brother took me by the hair:
He bound me to his saddle bare.
There was not a stone, there was not a root,
But I left it a piece of my shattered foot.
There was not a bough we passed that day,
But it tore a piece of my leg away.
And O there was never so deep a dam
But over it he and his wild horse swam.
He dragged me up to the castle door:
There stood my mother, grieving sore.
My brother built a tower strong,
Sharp thorns he laid the floor along.
He took me in my silken sark,
He cast me into that tower stark.
And O wherever my legs were thrown
The keen keen thorns empierced the bone.
And O wherever my feet were set
The piercing points with blood grew wet.
My brother fain would quell me:
My mother fain would sell me.
They sold me for a new church-bell –
From Mary’s tower you hear it knell.
The bell rang out and rang again
Then burst my mother’s heart in twain.’
Ere Hella had told her woe and dread
(My sorrow is known to God alone)
On the Queen’s bosom she fell dead.
(And O there liveth none to whom my
sorrow may be told!)