

## “THAT UNFORTUNATE YOUNG MAN MORTEN”

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IN September 1866, a young artist named Thomas Morten committed suicide near Langham Place. His death terminated intense psychological and financial distress, reflected in his work by stylistic inconsistency and recurrent plagiarisms. Without assistance from Arthur Boyd Houghton, William Michael Rossetti, and the other sponsors of a subscription for her benefit, his impoverished widow would probably have died. It was a desolate exit for an artist who exhibited at the Royal Academy at 19, who had one of his canvases featured in the *Illustrated London News* three years later, and who produced illustrations that rank among the significant works of the “sixties”.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morten appears in the *DNB* and other biographical reference works. Four of his illustrations are reproduced in Gleeson White's *English Illustration: "The Sixties": 1855-70* (London, 1897—abbrev. GW), and he occupies half a chapter of Forrest Reid's *Illustrators of the Sixties* (London, 1928—abbrev. FR). Mary Bennett's "Thomas Morten, an Illustrator of the 1860's", in the *Art Association of Indianapolis Bulletin* (June 1966, pp. 46-50), refutes the claim in the same publication (March 1964, pp. 2-3) that a small oil in the Herron Museum of Art is by Millais. Painted by Morten from an illustration of 1862, this canvas is reproduced in catalogues of two recent exhibitions: *The Victorian Rebellion: A Loan Exhibition of Works by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their Contemporaries* (Peoria, Illinois: Lakeview Centre for the Arts and Sciences, 12 September to 26 October 1971); and *The Revolt of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Coral Gables, Florida: Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, 5 March to 9 April 1972). Except for the spelling of Morten's surname, which is standardized, literal transcriptions are given of manuscript material. The following abbreviations for collections are employed: AP and PP (Angeli Papers and Penkill Papers, respectively, University of British Columbia); FGS (Frederick George Stephens Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford); V & A (Victoria and Albert Museum). Dates of birth and death are not provided for figures listed in the *DNB*, and citations are not given for information from the General Register Office, census records, and directories, and from the Registers of R.A. Students and Probationers at Burlington House. For works to which further reference is made, abbreviations are provided in initial entries; subsequent citations appear internally in the text. Among those who have kindly made original materials available, I would like to thank Mr. Alan Wykes, of the Savage Club, and Miss Dorothy P. Laidman, who, on behalf of the Artists' General Benevolent Institution, has provided me with the information relating to the Institution embodied in this paper. My principal debt in researching this article has been

Despite these accomplishments, Morten's career is more remarkable for promise than achievement. In this, he resembles most Victorian painters, who were unable or unwilling to sustain, let alone transcend, their early proficiency. What William E. Fredeman calls "Millais' giant failure" coincided with the prematurely declining standards of many lesser contemporaries, and D. G. Rossetti's psychosomatic deterioration, which the same scholar dates from "about 1866",<sup>1</sup> was shared by less articulate painters and writers. By the time Morten died, "The Age of Equipoise"—as W. L. Burn designates the period from 1852 to 1867—had virtually ended, along with the widespread prosperity and superficial placidity of the mid-Victorian generation. During the following two decades, some of Morten's most gifted colleagues succumbed to diverse physical and creative afflictions.

The most accessible life cannot explain the vicissitudes of a generation, and Morten's career is only sporadically documented. Yet, from the available evidence, he emerges as a talented but impressionable man, exceptionally vulnerable to pressures felt by most English artists during the eighteen-fifties and sixties. To record the historically significant aspects of Morten's life and its aftermath is the principal object of this paper, which is divided into three sections. The first describes Morten's career, and the biographical implications of his work; the second, the subscription for his widow; the third, some of the insights provided by his small, but genuine, tragedy.

## I

Morten was born in Uxbridge, Middlesex, where his father, also named Thomas, was a middle-class equivalent of the disinherited eldest son.<sup>2</sup> In 1830, the family building business

to Dr. William E. Fredeman; others who have assisted me include Miss Mary Bennett, Mrs. Imogen Dennis, Mr. Henry Ford, Mr. J. D. Lee, Mr. Jeremy Maas, Mrs. Leonée Ormond, Dr. Gordon N. Ray, Mr. Graham Reynolds, and Dr. William B. Todd.

<sup>1</sup> William E. Fredeman, *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 139; *Prelude to the Last Decade: Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the Summer of 1872* (BULLETIN, liii. 18).

<sup>2</sup> This account of Morten's family is largely based on these sources: Register of Providence Chapel, Uxbridge (Uxbridge Reference Library); Register of

descended to his brother Henry—18 years old, and sixteen years his junior. His other brother, Charles, seems to have acquired the residual property of their father, who died in 1848. Both men enjoyed long and successful lives in Uxbridge: Henry, as an *entrepreneur* and public servant; Charles, as a leading town eccentric who rode to hounds in old age. Until he was past 40, Thomas also remained in Hillingdon, where he practiced cabinet-making and auctioneering. He and his wife Ann had three daughters when their only son was born on 27 March 1836. Young Thomas was baptized at the Independent Providence Chapel, where all his relatives attended “penance like” services, with “long almost interminable prayer and a sermon which took an hour or more to deliver . . .”.

Between 1841, when he appears with his wife and children in the Hillingdon Census, and his death twenty years later, Thomas’s life is totally undocumented. He is absent from the 1845 *Directory* and the 1851 Census of Uxbridge, and from the London directories of the forties and fifties. The first evidence of the family’s whereabouts comes on 28 June 1853, when young Thomas entered the Royal Academy Schools as a Probationer. He was then living in Cumberland Place, New Road, Islington, and was still there when he qualified as a student in December. In 1855, when he first exhibited at the Royal Academy, his address was 30 Liverpool (now Birkenhead) Street, King’s Cross, where, according to the *Post Office Directory*, “Mrs. Morton” and “Thomas Morton, artist” (both *sic*) resided during the two following years. As this evidence suggests, and the 1861 Census confirms, Thomas, Sr. was living apart from his wife. In 1858, Thomas, Jr. sent two paintings to the Academy from 30 St. John’s Wood Terrace, and though he had moved by 1861, his mother and two of his sisters, Ann and Ellen, appear in the Census at this address. Mrs. Morten, who shared this small residence with another family, is listed as a “mar[ried]”

Births and Baptisms, Old Meeting Congregational Church, Uxbridge (Public Record Office); obituary of Henry Morten, *Middlesex and Buckinghamshire Advertiser; Uxbridge, Harrow and Watford Journal* (9 April 1898), p. 4c. The description of Providence Chapel services is from G. Hutson, “Recollections of Uxbridge” (unpublished MS. in Uxbridge Reference Library, c. 1884), pp. 48, 51.

“ proprietor of houses ”, and the “ head ” of her household. The titular head was then living about a mile away, in a public house called the “ Portman Arms ”. Either the census taker who visited him there or the elder Thomas himself was inaccurate, for his surname is misspelt, a year has been subtracted from his age, and his marital condition is given as “ wid[owe]r ”. The Census was taken in April, and within three months Henry Morten arrived at the “ Portman Arms ” to draw up his brother’s will, which authorized him “ to stand possessed of the surplus of my estate upon trust for my wife and children ”. Two days later, Thomas succumbed to “ chronic disease of the stomach ”; he left less than £100.

By the time his father died, young Thomas had exhibited several paintings in London, and was rapidly establishing himself as an illustrator. He obtained his preliminary training in James Mathews Leigh’s “ General Practical School of Art ”, held after 1849 at 79 Newman Street. Like its more expensive rival, Cary’s, Leigh’s officially prepared candidates for the Royal Academy Antique School; in reality, its curriculum included life-drawing, perspective, and sketching evenings in which the master joined his pupils in impromptu illustrations of literature. As vociferously pugnacious as Thackeray’s “ Barker ”, whom he doubtless suggested, Leigh was nevertheless a generous and enlightened teacher, whose protégés attended his classes after entering the R.A. Schools and brought their contributions to the annual exhibitions for his inspection. James Hitchman, who frequented Leigh’s during the fifties, includes Morten among its principal *habitués*<sup>1</sup>; he was also among its most precocious, for only two of his fellow pupils entered the R.A. at an earlier age.

Few of Morten’s contemporaries in the Academy Schools give favourable accounts of them. H. S. Marks, who joined the Antique classes in 1851 and soon deserted them for half a year in a Parisian *atelier*, witnessed frequent “ quarrels ending in stand-up fights ” among R.A. students, who “ were left entirely without control or supervision during the absence of the keeper . . .

<sup>1</sup> William Tinsley, *Random Recollections of an Old Publisher* (London, 1900—abbrev. WT), i. 194.

for hours at a stretch”.<sup>1</sup> Systematic instruction was also neglected in the Life School, which, because of its “inconvenient position and . . . limited accommodation”,<sup>2</sup> was made as inaccessible as possible. Having satisfactorily drawn the figure, a few pupils were allowed to paint from it; but the official “Painting School”, for all its exclusiveness, was chiefly devoted to copying Old Masters.

By 1854, Academy students were “entering the Schools late in the Evening, to place their names on the lists of attendance, without studying . . .” (RAM, 11 November 1854). For some of the truants, the Antique classes offered less satisfactory training than such private associations as the Artists’ Society in Langham Chambers. Besides “nude and draped models, lectures and conversaciones, library and lending wardrobe of historical costumes”,<sup>3</sup> “the Langham” provided a weekly sketching evening, in which members and “outside artists of ability” prepared two-hour drawings of given subjects. “But for the absence of teachers”, declares J. G. Marks, the Langham “stood in something the same relation to Leigh’s that the universities do to the schools; and study there formed a regular part of the curriculum of many of Leigh’s old students”.<sup>4</sup> According to Thomas Armstrong, Morten was “one of the ablest sketchers” at the Langham.<sup>5</sup>

The Artists’ Society was a great boon to Morten; for though the 1861 Census lists him as an “artist (Student R.A.)”, there is no evidence in the Council Minutes that he ever graduated beyond the Antique classes. His knowledge of oil painting was acquired at Leigh’s, and assimilated piecemeal from more experienced colleagues. Despite this inadequate training,

<sup>1</sup> Henry Stacy Marks, *Pen and Pencil Sketches* (London, 1894—abbrev. HSM), i. 225.

<sup>2</sup> “Royal Academy Council Minutes” (MSS. in R.A. Library, Burlington House—abbrev. RAM), 21 November 1856.

<sup>3</sup> A. Paul Oppé, “Art”, *Early Victorian England: 1830-1865*, ed. G. M. Young (London, 1934), ii. 135.

<sup>4</sup> J. G. Marks, *Life and Letters of Frederick Walker, A.R.A.* (London, 1896), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> [L. M. Lamont, ed.] *Thomas Armstrong, C.B. A Memoir, 1832-1911* (London, 1912—abbrev. TA), p. 200.

Morten exhibited early, and diligently sought public recognition. Increasing state commissions and multiplying Art Unions, enterprising dealers and the enthusiasm of industrialists for modern pictures, assured successful artists of the commensurate wealth and respectability that many novices conspicuously lacked. "If I had been quite dependent on my profession for my bread I must have starved",<sup>1</sup> observes Frith of his early career, and a generation later H. S. Marks, who like Frith enjoyed parental support, lived "from hand to mouth" as he painted his first pictures (HSM, i. 52). In 1855, the R.A. Council learned that "cases of urgent distress occur to Students of the Royal Academy"—a situation that "The Student's Distress Fund", limited to £25 per year and £5 per applicant, did little to ameliorate (RAM, 27 June 1855, 4 August 1855). Since the Academy actively opposed the students' efforts to sell their elaborated classroom studies, many of them devoted the months when the schools were closed to the premature production of marketable works.

The cheap portraits through which Frith had simultaneously acquired an income, technical facility, and familiarity with "nature and character" (WPF, i. 69) had been supplanted by photography; and the most lucrative alternatives were small oils of contemporary, literary, or historical subjects, portrayed from what one critic, speaking of the third category, termed "the domestic and incidental, or anecdotic, point of view" (*The Times*, 22 May 1866, p. 12c). By 1858, Morten belonged to a "small knot" of young artists, including Henry Stacy Marks, Frederick Smallfield, and Charles Rossiter,<sup>2</sup> who depicted such themes

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (London, 1887-8—abbrev. WPF), i. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Marks, Smallfield (1829-1915) and Rossiter (1827-?) all studied at Leigh's; the first two entered the R.A. Schools in 1851 and 1848, respectively. Though, unlike Marks, Smallfield graduated into the Life classes, he was also a denizen of Leigh's and the Langham during the fifties (RAM, 25 March 1856; HSM, i. 62; WT, i. 194). Smallfield, Rossiter, and Morten showed pictures of fishing villages at the 1858 Portland Gallery; in 1861, Smallfield, one Lundgoer, and Morten contributed a single work, *Heads of Soldier, Lady, and Sailor*, to the Liverpool Academy. Another sketcher at Leigh's was the architect William Burges, whose library bookcase (c. 1859-c. 1862; Ashmolean Museum, on loan to V & A) bears paintings by Morten, Marks, Smallfield, Rossiter and E. J. Poynter,

with the intricate realism and bright colours of the Pre-Raphaelites. Though he censured most of these men for derivativeness, the *Saturday Review*'s critic entertained “strong hopes” for “one among them, Mr. Morten. . . . He has both quickness and originality of perception, and puts down his notions upon canvas with a corresponding vivacity of style, which it only depends upon himself to elevate by consistent finish” (15 May 1858, p. 505). This encouraging prediction was based on a small Morten canvas at the Portland Gallery, which the *Illustrated London News* engraved as a full-page “Supplement” (8 May 1858, p. 469), and which the *Athenaeum* reviewer hailed as “the best picture in the rooms”: a welcome departure for an artist who “has hitherto . . . restricted himself too much to sketching his quick-coming fancies . . .” (20 March 1858, p. 375). Entitled *Painting from Nature out of Doors*, this picture (which is only known from the engraving) depicts an artist in a fishing village before a local audience. The title is ironic, for though the artist paints with Pre-Raphaelite exactitude, employing a mahlstick and a diminutive brush, his view of the “natural” scene is totally obstructed by spectators. He looks directly at his canvas, which, with his easel, serves as a barrier to intrusion. By depicting a painter's indifference to humble critics, Morten may be advocating that aloofness from obtrusive non-professionals which few of his colleagues managed to sustain. In the next year's Portland Gallery, he exhibited a domestic sequel to this picture, called *The Family Idol*.<sup>1</sup> Here, the chief distraction afflicting an artist occupies the foreground, where his wife dandles his impish baby son. Other claims upon his attention fill the room, including an invitation to a social “event” and a . . . among others; the best of Morten's three contributions (all unsigned) shows Fra Angelico depicting a Pre-Raphaelite Virgin (see C. Handley-Read, “Notes on William Burges's Painted Furniture”, *Burlington Magazine* [November 1963], pp. 502-4). Writing to W. M. Rossetti after Morten's death, G. P. Boyce reports that “Burges & Smallfield are the only men whom I can recal [sic] . . . as having known Morten very well”; oddly enough, Boyce, who hardly knew Morten, then promises to tell Burges about the subscription for his widow (unpublished letter in AP [25 October 1866]).

<sup>1</sup> Oil on canvas, in the collection of Mr. Jeremy Maas. The picture, also shown at the 1859 Liverpool Academy, was favourably reviewed in the *Athenaeum* (26 March 1859), pp. 425-6.

large canvas turned to the wall, labelled "The Great Work". Presumably, the subject of this progressing *magnum opus* is historical, for at the left of the composition is a lay figure in Tudor costume; a probable specimen of High Art, entitled "The Age . . .", hangs unsold nearby. Even Frith considered "nearly all my larger pictures . . . speculations as regarded purchasers" (WPF, i. 251), and ambitious projects were financed with smaller canvases. Morten's artist, whose easel could accommodate one of Gandish's "'igh art" creations, is squinting over his mahlstick at a picture smaller than *The Family Idol* (12½ in. × 10¼ in.), as he colours it with a tiny brush. As technically scrupulous as his colleague in *Painting from Nature*, he only differs from him physically in having a beard: the figure in the earlier work is seen from the back, and that in the later, in profile; but both have dark, curly hair, are fairly short and thickset, and seem in their early twenties. Perhaps Morten, with pardonable immodesty, has based these diligent artists' features on his own. Once again, the painter's canvas and its support appear to protect him from interference, though here the effect is achieved through the composition, divided vertically in its upper portion by the edge of the easel. The other structuring forms of the picture reinforce a predominant effect of domestic harmony, from which an artist requires less detachment than from obstreperous onlookers. Besides suggesting Morten's view of his profession, the iconography of the work demonstrates his susceptibility to advanced influences: a Japanese fan and sword hang on the wall, an oriental figurine sits on the mantel, and a canvas rests on the easel that is vaguely Pre-Raphaelite—it even momentarily and improbably suggests "The Blessed Damozel".<sup>1</sup> Near the figurine is a copy of *Jane Eyre*: an exhortation to duty from which its owner has implicitly profited.

In its geometrical disposition of domestic imagery, and its realistic portrayal of character, *The Family Idol* resembles the early work of Morten's executor, Arthur Boyd Houghton, whose

<sup>1</sup> Another Morten oil at the 1859 Portland Gallery, *The Blind Boy*, was disparaged as an unsuccessful sequel to Millais's *Blind Girl*. Morten's rather derivative canvas in the Herron Museum of Art was formerly identified as a posthumous likeness of Elizabeth Siddal.



first exhibited canvas, a crowded street scene, also appeared at the Portland Gallery in 1859. Though the chronology of Houghton's paintings is uncertain, most of his domestic interiors followed his marriage in early 1861, and they have some affinities with Morten's picture of two years before. Houghton's design "My Treasure" in *Good Words* (1862), a subject which he also painted, represents a baby who, like Morten's "idol", is pulling his mother's tresses; both pictures include a cat beneath a chair, and, among assorted toys, a polka-dotted wooden horse on wheels. While not constituting "indebtedness", these parallels indicate that Morten could anticipate the iconography of a brilliant contemporary.

Morten's style is clearly derived from those of the leading Pre-Raphaelites, with whom he had only brief and discordant personal contact. This came in 1858, when he joined the Hogarth Club, along with Ford Madox Brown, William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and five of the original Pre-Raphaelite "Brothers". Morten's contribution to a private view of members' work "was not generally liked", and though William Michael Rossetti "saw no serious objection" to the picture, Morten was "persuaded to withdraw it". Considerable persuasion was evidently required, for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, writing to Madox Brown on Christmas Day, 1858, unfestively alludes to the "laborious removal of Morten" from the exhibition. "It is now", he declares, "that the mistakes in elections turn up most lamentably."<sup>1</sup> If Morten's election was a mistake, it remained uncorrected as late as March 1860, when his name appeared in the Club's "List of Members". But by that time the Hogarth was practically moribund, and survived the publication of its *Rules . . . and . . . Membership* by less than two years.

Rebuffed by the Pre-Raphaelites, Morten was better received by the "Paris Gang"—James McNeill Whistler, George Du Maurier, E. J. Poynter, Thomas Armstrong, and others—after it settled in London around 1860. He probably met the circle through Poynter, an assiduous sketcher at the Langham and a fellow student at the R.A. Schools, which he entered in 1855 on

<sup>1</sup> Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford, 1965-7—abbrev. DW), i. 343, n. 2, 344.

Leigh's recommendation. It was at Poynter's Grafton Street studio that Whistler instructed his friends in his personal approach to still-life painting, which Thomas Armstrong supposes he "had learnt . . . from Courbet". Armstrong recalls that "one clever young fellow, Tom Morten [*sic*], . . . who had never been under such influence before, did some of these studies, which were accounted by the others as good as some done by their leader himself" (TA, p. 200). Though Armstrong adds that "it is not so very difficult to do a second- or third-rate Whistler", Morten's performance clearly impressed him and his associates, who began to encounter him socially. In September 1861, Du Maurier informed his fiancée that "Morten and I are getting very thick; he is a very stunning fellow"; and in subsequent letters to her, and to Armstrong, Morten is included among his "doooid fine" acquaintances. Du Maurier usually met his "chummes" at Pamphilon's restaurant in Argyle Street, where, he informed his mother, "it is quite a club every evening at the smoking room after dinner, Morten, Marks, Keene, Smallfield, Poynter etc. This sort of society spoils one for any other".<sup>1</sup>

Du Maurier's letters also refer to a small circle of predominantly literary Bohemians to which Morten belonged. It included Henry Sambrooke Leigh, the son of Morten's teacher, and two other writers who had frequented the school. Though one of these, Dutton Cook, was a frustrated artist, it is uncertain whether he studied at Leigh's, where Hitchman met him (WT, i. 194-5), or only visited there. The other, George Walter Thornbury, was one of Morten's fellow students, and though he never qualified for the Academy, he formed lasting friendships with more successful classmates. Seven of Morten's *Once a Week* designs appear in Thornbury's *Historical & Legendary Ballads & Songs* (London [1875]), including three engravings that originally adorned other poets. This circumstance is characteristic of both the book and its author, "an excitable, impulsive, careless man" (HSM, i. 28) then on the brink of insanity, who nevertheless

<sup>1</sup> Daphne Du Maurier, ed., *The Young George Du Maurier: A Selection of His Letters, 1860-1867* (London, 1951—abbrev. YGDM), pp. 72, 74, 94, 96. Charles Samuel Keene was a confirmed sketcher at the Artists' Society, which he joined in 1848-50.

prefaces his volume with tributes to the “ eminent young artists ” of the sixties, including “ Mr. T. MORTEN, an attached friend of the author’s, . . . who died suddenly, a few years since, in the early daybreak of success ” (p. viii). By 1875, another “ attached friend ”, “ Harry ” Leigh, had renounced orthodox literary ambitions for the “ Laureateship ” of the Strand, whose Bohemians prized his lively repartee and facile versifying. When Morten introduced him to Du Maurier in September 1861, Leigh was living in Furnival’s Inn on a small inheritance from his father, and was beginning to devote himself, in Hitchman’s words, “ to literature and Bohemianism—rather more of the latter than the former, I fear ” (WT, i. 197). “ Rather a demned cad ”, Du Maurier thought him ; but, attracted by the “ very nice fellows ” among Leigh’s associates, he accepted his invitation to join “ Morten, Thornbury, Dutton Cook and some others ” at a “ supper party ”. As he later reported, Du Maurier “ stayed till 4 o’clock ; it was pretty jolly until they all got very drunk ; Marks would insist on putting the gloves on with me, and I was victimized by my own heroic kindness in not hitting an unscientific man, for he made a most terrific onslaught on me when my head was jammed in the corner, and reduced my nose to such a jelly that I daren’t blow it ” (YGDM, pp. 72, 76). There are no further references to Leigh in Du Maurier’s published correspondence.

A few months after this boxing-match, Du Maurier discovered that his opponent had commended his *Punch* work in a pseudonymous *Spectator* review, and in a letter presumably written in March 1862, he repays the compliment by dubbing Marks “ a very stunning fellow, with a very big brain ”. Du Maurier adds that Morten, who in the previous September had also been “ very stunning ”, “ has somehow conciliated all our dislikes, and we see very much less of him ” (YGDM, p. 121 ; see p. 106). Morten soon reconciled himself with the circle ; for in August of the same year Du Maurier told his fiancée that “ Morten & I went to Henley’s whom I have just left ”.<sup>1</sup> Two months later,

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter—brought to my attention by Mrs. Leonée Ormond—in the collection of Lady Browning, who has kindly permitted me to quote from it. Lionel Charles Henley (1833-93), painter and illustrator, entered the R.A.

Du Maurier reported that he and Keene had been “to Poynters’; Morten was also there, and we spent a very philosophical and musical evening” (*YGDM*, p. 174). However, Du Maurier’s enthusiasm for Morten had clearly waned, and he only met him with such mutual friends as Poynter—among Morten’s “great pals” by January 1862 (*YGDM*, p. 101)—and Henley. This personal disenchantment was intensified by the desultoriness already evinced by Morten’s illustrations; amid Du Maurier’s account of his colleagues’ accomplishments in May 1862 is the observation: “Morten pottering about in his old way” (*YGDM*, p. 139).

In fairness to Morten, one should add that Du Maurier frequently censured his companions at this time, when his impatience to marry affected his physical and mental health and even “tempted [him] to suicide”.<sup>1</sup> This was also a critical period for Morten, who married several months before Du Maurier. Apart from an entry at the General Register Office, nothing is known about this wedding; but it must have been as welcome to Morten as Du Maurier’s was to him. By 1859, Morten had moved to lodgings in Holborn; within two years, he was living near Regent’s Park at 12 Mornington Place, which he shared with an “Army & Navy Merchant’s Clerk” and his wife, a young “fundholder”, and a fellow artist, Magdalene Dalton. During 1861, he lost both his father and his sister Ellen, who died of phthisis on 3 September. Du Maurier, writing to his fiancée in that month, reported that “Morten . . . has just lost his favourite sister, poor fellow, and is very blue about it . . .” (*YGDM*, p. 72). Almost a year later, on 23 August 1862, Morten married Henrietta Heaton at the St. Pancras Register Office. His bride was 20, unemployed, resident in St. Pancras, and the daughter of Edward Heaton. Morten (who described himself as a “Historical Painter”) recorded his father’s profession as “Gentleman”, and Henrietta followed suit. Heaton is in fact a completely elusive figure, without either a known residence before 1867 or a verified Schools in 1855 on Cary’s recommendation, and eventually studied art in Dusseldorf, where Du Maurier met him in 1859.

<sup>1</sup> Leonée Ormond, *George Du Maurier* (London, 1969), p. 132.

occupation at any period. Though an entry of marriage customarily includes a representative of each party, the Mortens' wedding is witnessed by Edward and Elizabeth Heaton. The young couple settled in Morten's lodgings at Mornington Place, from which he sent a picture to the R.A. Exhibition the following spring.

Morten was already a fairly successful illustrator, a profession for which sketching evenings at Leigh's and the Langham, and the exacting discipline of small cabinet pictures, had thoroughly prepared him. His first known published designs are pictorial initials in *Everybody's Journal* (1859); humorous and grotesque, they resemble a group of small drawings he probably made somewhat earlier.<sup>1</sup> Humour appears rarely in Morten's illustrations of the next three years, which nevertheless retain a grotesque element, sometimes reinforced with dramatic chiaroscuro. Though he brilliantly parodied his early style in some unsigned contributions to *Fun*,<sup>2</sup> he retained its salient characteristics after graduating beyond melodramatic serials in *The Welcome Guest* (1860-1) and *Entertaining Things* (1861-2). By 1863, he had abandoned a Millais-like monogram for a more personal “T. Morten”, and had evolved a distinctive and expressive synthesis of Pre-Raphaelite and continental influences. Yet, just as he never repeated his early success as a painter, and exhibited at the Academy only twice after 1858, so, as an illustrator, Morten never achieved great professional stature. He is represented only sporadically in *Once a Week* and the Dalziels' gift books, and

<sup>1</sup> These are a “Frontispiece” for an unidentified work, two sheets of grotesque figures, and a masquerade ball scene in the V & A; and five smaller drawings (average size 3 in. × 2½ in.), listed in Elkin Mathews's *Catalogue 187* (1969), and now in the collections of Dr. Gordon N. Ray, Mr. Robin de Beaumont, and the author. Two of these drawings—the masquerade scene and Dr. Ray's—are signed “T.M.”; Morten's earliest published drawing bears a monogram. The subjects include a huge elongated head, encircled by a halo in the “Frontispiece” and venerated by three figures in another design; a skeleton in Napoleonic garb; and a back view of a man urinating.

<sup>2</sup> These unrecorded designs accompany “Philip Dombey: The Scalp-Hunter's Round-About Secret Legacy”, by “Every Eminent Writer of the Day”, an imitation of F. C. Burnand's “Mokeanna . . .” that ran in *Fun* from 19 September to 5 December 1863. Eight of the eleven drawings are evidently by Morten, who alternately ridicules his own stylistic repertoire and John Gilbert's.

when he showed *Reading the "Cornhill Magazine"* at the Liverpool Academy in 1861, Thackeray did not reciprocate with a request for contributions. After 1862, Morten's more elaborate drawings are frequently inchoate, with careful figures superimposed upon slovenly backdrops; and his illustrations for a serial in *London Society* (July-September 1863) are conspicuously deficient in stylistic and thematic unity. One of his most coherent designs, "Ruth Grey's Trial" (*London Society*, January 1863, p. 59), has a composition resembling Millais's *The Order of Release*—an innocuous anticipation of forthcoming plagiarisms.

Despite its growing inconsistency, Morten's work attracted Cassell, Petter & Galpin, who included it in their *Goldsmith* [1864], Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* [1865-6], and *History of England* (vol. i [1865-6]). Their *Gulliver's Travels*, issued in weekly numbers from 26 October 1864, in eleven monthly parts from 29 November, and in book form the following October, is illustrated entirely by Morten. Favourably reviewed in the *Art Journal* (1 June 1866, pp. 184-5), this series of designs has been highly esteemed for its "really convincing imagination" (GW, p. 133), and for "an occasionally almost eerie originality" that tempts Percy Muir "to describe it as the best of all attempts to interpret the strange stories in that very extraordinary work".<sup>1</sup> "Once or twice", concedes Forrest Reid, "we find the artist at his old trick of imitation; . . . but on the whole the illustrations are strikingly original . . ." (FR, p. 215). Since all the other derivative designs he cites followed the commencement of the *Gulliver*, Reid's allusion to Morten's "old trick of imitation" is unfortunate; and his opinion of the originality of these drawings is fallacious.

Morten's Lilliputian scenes abound with imagery culled from Doré's interpretations of *Les Contes Drolatiques*<sup>2</sup> and, to a

<sup>1</sup> *Victorian Illustrated Books* (London, 1971), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> When a student in Paris, Poynter did an etching "in the style of the illustrations to Balzac's *Contes Drolatiques* by Doré, his best work, with which", recalls Thomas Armstrong, "we were all much impressed at that time" (TA, p. 146). Engravings in the Balzac (pp. 381, 144) provided Morten with the background for "Macdhonuil's Coronach" (*Once a Week*, 28 January 1865, p. 161),

lesser extent, of Rabelais; and the entire series is heavily indebted to an edition of *Gulliver's Travels* illustrated by John Gordon Thomson, a young Civil Servant who eventually became *Fun's* cartoonist. One of S. O. Beeton's "Penny Books", it was issued in six monthly parts before appearing in book form in early December 1864. Of Morten's 159 illustrations for Cassell's edition, fifty-four contain plagiarisms from Thomson's designs, and twenty-two—twelve pictorial initials (almost a third of the total), nine tailpieces, and one headpiece—are virtually facsimiles of Thomson illustrations. Sometimes, details plagiarized from other artists are grafted upon Thomson's compositions: the Brobdingnagians scrutinize Gulliver with Doré countenances (p. 117); and their queen, holding her diminutive visitor before a mirror (p. 125), displays the face and hair of Princess Badoura, as portrayed in Houghton's *Arabian Nights* illustrations issued in August and September 1864. Except for these Brobdingnagians, and the Lilliputians, who are expropriated from Doré, Morten's conception of every character in the book is derived from Thomson. That Thomson's designs often function as studies for Morten's far more elaborate and accomplished works does not diminish the tragic implications of a mature artist's reliance upon an amateur's imagination. In his last two years, Morten produced a few successful and original designs, along with copious hack work and more ambitious drawings—chiefly for *Once a Week* and prestigious gift books—betraying a wide gamut of influences and plagiarisms. His lowest level came in 1865, when he slavishly copied an illustration for Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* from an engraving after J. D. Watson, one of the most esteemed "Langhamites" (see FR, p. 216).

Morten's frequent contributions to *Fun* in 1863 suggest a continuing friendship with Henry S. Leigh and his widening circle, who were the mainstays of that periodical, and it was probably on Leigh's recommendation that he entered the Savage Club on 26 August 1865. Composed of "working men in literature and art", the Savage had increased in membership, but not in wealth, since its formation eight years before; on the reproduced in FR, and the entire composition of "Against Pride of Clothes", in Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs* (London, 1867).

day Morten joined, the Club Committee learned that the rent on their fourth residence would soon exceed their limited resources.<sup>1</sup> The Savages of Morten's day were accomplished but somewhat Bohemian professionals, less inclined than *habitués* of the Langham to censure an occasional plagiarism. To some of them, the Club was both a weekly sanctuary from exhausting journalistic and theatrical labour, and a source of generous goodwill, such as it would soon bestow on Morten's widow.

Profitable and sometimes creatively stimulating, illustration brought little official recognition, and by 1866 several leading draughtsmen had abandoned it for painting. Early that year, Morten contributed four small canvases to the Society of British Artists Exhibition, and a more ambitious work to the Royal Academy. Two of his exhibits at Suffolk Street were companion pictures, which "have", observed one critic, "by the excellent arrangement of the society, been divorced most effectually" (*Illustrated Times*, 31 March 1866, p. 206). "We are glad to see Mr. Morten assuming the brush again", continued this ally; his enthusiasm was not shared by the R.A. Hanging Committee, which "skied" Morten's *Pleading to see the Prisoner*, or by the principal reviewers, who ignored the work.<sup>2</sup> In the summer, Morten left the Notting Hill address he had occupied in the spring, and moved near the place where, in happier times, he had ranked among "the ablest sketchers".

On the afternoon of Sunday, 23 September 1866, the Coroner for the Western District learned that "the dead body of a Man Thomas Morten now lies at No. 18 Langham St. Portland Place to await an Inquest".<sup>3</sup> The house cited stood around the corner

<sup>1</sup> "Savage Club Minute Books" (MSS. in the Savage Club, London—abbrev. SCM), 26 August 1865.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Illustrated Times* (2 June 1866, p. 347), this picture showed the wife of an imprisoned Loyalist, assisted by her maid, "entreating the young Puritan sentry to allow her an interview with his charge".

<sup>3</sup> Besides this formal notification, the documents relating to Morten's death in the Greater London Record Office include a letter to the Coroner from Edward Heaton, and notes of the depositions of witnesses, presumably taken by the Deputy Coroner, Dr. Hardwicke, who conducted the inquest on 25 September. This testimony will be considered in the next section. Between 26 and 30 September, brief and almost identical accounts of the inquest appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Evening Star*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Morning Post*, the



from All Souls' Church, and immediately behind Langham Chambers. It was owned by Jonathan Soden, a retired undertaker, whose daughter was the first witness at the inquest into their lodger's death. She deposed that Morten

had been with us 6 weeks—he had the second floor—he had no family. He was a stranger to us. About 10 m. to one on Sunday morning the servt. had been up to Mr. Morten's Room had knocked twice & no one answered. I went up and the door was opened & then he was found lying down at the foot of the bed. I got some assistance—Mr. Steel the porter of Langham & Mr. Mason a surgeon—the porter took down the body. His wife was away since Saturday. The Body seen by Jurors is that of Mr. Morten.

*Eliza Wolmer* living at 18 Langham Street as servt. On Sunday morning I went up to Mr. Morten's Room and finding no answer I went to tel [sic] my mistress. I saw Decd. about 10 m. past 12 at night, he was in his usual state of health he said, I hope I have not kept you up and asked to be called in the morning : I did not see him worse for liquor.

*Thomas Steel* living at 1 Langham Chambers. I knew Decd. I have attended upon him for two months. I considered him labouring under mental depression in spirits. On Sunday morning about 10 to 1 I was fetched to his Room and I found Decd. lying with his face on the floor—a tight chord, placed round the neck. I saw he was quite dead. I cut the chord. I placed him on his back and went for a surgeon.

*John Wallis Mason* living at 45 Upper Marylebone Street. reg: as M.R.C.Sc. I was called on Sunday a few m. after 1 to 18 Langham Street by last witness. I found the Decd. Mr. Morten lying on his back on the floor—apparently many hours—the marks of a chord round the neck—it was deeply indented from pressure. I had no doubt his death was from strangulation by the chord—no trace of any poisoning that I saw.

*Alfred Tourrier* living at 13 Leonard St.[?] Maida Hill. Artist. I have known Decd. for 12 or 13 years—we were students together—he was a man of variable temperament—he was subject to epileptic attack—he took stimulants occasionally—about 3 week [sic] ago he said in a vacant manner “ that I feel as I am going out of my mind——” he seemed very peculiar.

“ I believe from that ”, concluded Tourrier, “ he committed the act of strangulation in a fit of temporary insanit[y].” After some deliberation, the jury concurred.

Though they supposedly embody all the significant evidence given at the inquest, these notes of the depositions omit information

*Marylebone Mercury*, and the *Sunday Times*. Except for the *Mercury*, which reports that Morten was “ in his usual health and spirits ”, these papers describe him as “ quite cheerful ” before his death, and all but one state that “ he had always shown symptoms of an overwrought brain ”. The verdict in every published account includes the “ state of temporary insanity ” qualification ; this was, as usual, omitted from the various official records.

included in newspaper accounts of the hearing. The published reports specify the object from which Morten hung himself as "the bedpost", and place his wife "in the country" at the time. They also state that "he was in considerable embarrassment" financially, and that "his wife . . . was so shocked when the news [of his death] was conveyed to her that her life is despaired of". The immediate motive for Morten's suicide, and his wife's reaction to his loss were revealed in an extant letter to the Coroner from Edward Heaton, Morten's father-in-law. Written the day before the Inquest, it commences with an apology for not giving oral testimony :

I had it in mind to appear at the Inquest over my lamented Son in Law but as the hour approaches I find myself unfit to attend, and having already suffered from paralysis I might risk a seizure of this kind— . . .

He had pressing embarrassments of no common order and having borrowed a Sum of my. of some Loan Society—had policies to keep up both on his own and his wife's life. Altogether, there is not the least doubt about his having been highly worked upon in this way for more than a year past, and with his sensitive nature, he was just the man to commit so terrible an act under a sudden impulse but the very last to do such a thg. under any other disturbing agency than that of the brain. It may be called insanity because with the *faculty of self command* gone the others succumb.

This is all that his unhappy Father in Law can say to account for an act so otherwise unaccountable.

Heaton was more certain about the effect of "this melancholy affair" on his daughter. He declares that Morten's

Love for his wife was very equated by her Love for him and I must doubt if she will survive this shock his sudden death has caused. This too witht. knowing the *dread reality*—

## II

"Do you see that that unfortunate young man Morten, who used to be a thorn in the side of the Hogarth Club, has committed suicide by hanging?" William Michael Rossetti asked F. G. Stephens nine days after the event.

It is a pity, for he had plenty of talent, & it seems cd. not (or *shd.* not) have been absolutely hard up, as Dickinson was paying him a good annual allowance for some work done. I suppose it was worry at petty plagues, & exasperation at never having produced himself as he felt conscious of being qualified to do.

Rossetti's comments are fairly sympathetic ; but he ignores Mrs. Morten's plight, and reports her husband's suicide in the post-script to a vigorous defence of Swinburne.<sup>1</sup>

The author of *Poems and Ballads* dominated Rossetti's thoughts throughout October, when his *Criticism* of the book was about to be issued, along with the poet's own *Notes* and Hotten's edition of the volume itself. Despite these preoccupations, his interest in Morten increased, and on 18 October he unsuccessfully attempted to contact him at a “ spiritual séance ”.<sup>2</sup> The next day, Rossetti noted in his diary :

Called on Inchbold by appointment, with regard to a proposed subscription for the widow of Tho. Morten, & went on with him to A. Houghton, M.'s executor. He seems a man of superior quality: has had one eye taken out in consequence of an accident, & the other has of late plagued him much with a sort of neuralgia, frequently preventing him from working during 1 week or so out of 3. He says M. was subject to epileptic fits. He was found hung by the string of a blind fr. the end of a French bedstead, & lay doubled up along the floor, tongue between his teeth & bitten into. H. thinks it hardly like a case of real suicide: he fancies M. must have been nervously & half-heartedly trying some experiments in that line, & gone off in an epileptic fit, to wh. he was very subject. H. says M. was a particularly timid man, not likely to show the continuous resolution needed for such a species of hanging. The widow is practically destitute, & her family appear to be a lot of harpies & semi-blacklegs—herself *not* included. They have already started the subscription with tolerable promise. H. is willing to undertake the general management of the subscription, but wd. wish to have a committee or so to fall back upon : I offered to be on such comm., & to do anything else I can—writing myself to 15 people or so. It seems they don't want to draw up a printed circular setting forth the precise facts, as Mrs. M. does not yet know that her husband committed suicide. She has been half distracted, & is still shaky. I saw the paintings & sketches left by M.: he was engaged upon a picture of the council before the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, with the incident of the nobleman breaking his sword—a very clever piece of work, tho' somewhat deficient in backbone & solid study.<sup>3</sup>

Designed to evoke Rossetti's sympathy for Mrs. Morten,

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 2 October [1866], in FGS. Lowes Dickinson, portrait painter and dealer, had a studio in Langham Chambers ; the “ work done ” by Morten is unknown.

<sup>2</sup> William Michael Rossetti, ed. *Rossetti Papers: 1862 to 1870* (London, 1903—abbrev. *RP*), pp. 210, 211.

<sup>3</sup> Rossetti's MS. diary in AP (abbrev.—WMR ; citations of published portions of Rossetti's diary will refer to *RP*). This passage is partly published in *RP* (p. 195), without the descriptions of Morten's death, of his widow and her family, and of Rossetti's offer to assist the subscription. Inchbold is John William Inchbold, the Pre-Raphaelite landscape painter.

Houghton's account of her husband was communicated when suicides were buried between nine and twelve at night, without religious rites, and some years before Robert Browning's disgust at Beddoes' "unnatural" demise. Rossetti's sister-in-law had died under circumstances well known in art circles, and Houghton probably wished to diminish the amount of volition in Morten's death—even if it meant emphasizing his friend's cowardice. This entry remains, nevertheless, the principal evidence concerning Morten; for Rossetti, an accurate and objective diarist, gives details that both confirm and amplify other sources. Besides assessing Morten's widow and her family, the passage corroborates Tourrier's statement that Morten was an epileptic, and specifies "the chord" around his neck as "the string of a blind", and "the bedpost" as "the end of a French bedstead". Yet these observations and identifications, however credible, are less striking than the disparities between Houghton's description of Morten's body, and those provided by the two men who examined it.

Since the inquest record is selective, one is tempted to assume that its author omitted the observation that Morten's tongue was "bitten into", and mistook "lying with his face on the floor" for "doubled up along [it]". The second piece of incompetence might strain the capacities of a Dickensian coroner, and would be unworthy of the deputy of Edwin Lankester, whose insistence on full medical evidence of death is commended in the *DNB*. Even if the inaccuracy of at least one of Houghton's statements is conceded, however, his reconstruction of Morten's death remains probable. Though Edward Heaton's muddled allusions to the "disturbing agency . . . of the brain" and a loss of "the *faculty of self command*" may be intended to discourage a verdict of *felonia de se*, they seem to imply more than a simple "fit of temporarity insanity". And Houghton's theory considers, as the inquest record does not, why Morten selected an agonizingly prolonged "species of hanging". As a "trained medical man"<sup>1</sup> who knew Morten, Houghton was a good judge of the case, which he could have discussed with the porter after the inquest;

<sup>1</sup> George C. Williamson, *George J. Pinwell and His Works* (London, 1900), p. 72.

resident in Langham Chambers, Steel must have known members of the Artists' Society and their associates.

The third section of this paper will briefly examine the implications of Morten's lack of creative and personal “backbone”, which ensured that the subscription for his widow would emphasize her destitution. Except when pictorial gifts were allied to piety, industry, and an altruistic aesthetic, philanthropic Victorians were more anxious to succour unmerited poverty than to commemorate artistic talent. All three virtues were ascribed to Thomas Seddon, whose *magnum opus* was purchased from his widow for the National Gallery, by a committee ostensibly formed by Ruskin and other notables to “testify their respect for his memory, and their admiration of his works”. Far more typical were the efforts to relieve the family of William Davis, the landscape painter. “Sad as it may seem,” declared Charles Augustus Howell, “by private effort all should be done for ‘charity’ and in the name of the poor. This cannot hurt poor dead broken Davis and will help his little ones.”<sup>1</sup>

Besides “the general management of the subscription”, Houghton also shouldered the usual duties of an executor, which Morten had increased by dying intestate and leaving even fewer assets than his father. Houghton's acceptance of this responsibility is characteristic of a generous man, and proves a friendship between him and Morten that is otherwise undocumented. Presumably, they met at Leigh's, where Houghton also studied, or at the R.A. Schools, which he entered half a year after Morten. Alfred Holst Tourrier (1836-92), another of Leigh's protégés, followed in January 1855; like Morten, both he and Houghton remained in the Antique classes. Tourrier rented a studio with Houghton from 1870, lodged in his house in 1871, and witnessed a codicil to his will two days before his death. He also assisted with the subscription for Mrs. Morten; on 20 October 1866, Rossetti noted that “Houghton & Tourrier (whom I see for the first time) called on this affair” (WMR). Unfortunately, Tourrier's personal life before this date is almost undocumented,

<sup>1</sup> [John P. Seddon], *Memoir and Letters of the Late Thomas Seddon, Artist* (London, 1858), p. 170; Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Pre-Raphaelite Twilight: The Story of Charles Augustus Howell* (London, 1954—abbrev. PRT), p. 125.

and virtually nothing is known about Houghton's association with two other friends he shared with Morten—Walter Thornbury and L. C. Henley.<sup>1</sup>

However he came to manage the subscription, Houghton undertook the task at a crucial juncture in his own life. By the next decade, he had become chronically intemperate and reckless, perpetrating elaborate practical jokes (one of which ended in a brief jail sentence), and disregarding the cirrhosis that killed him at 39. Edmund J. Sullivan attributes his behaviour to the “irreparable loss” of his wife two years before Morten's death (EJS, p. 104); more likely, this bereavement exacerbated his anxiety about his eyesight. “Houghton . . . is suffering much worry from his one eye”, noted Du Maurier in 1867<sup>2</sup>; as Rossetti eventually learned, his defective vision involved partial colour-blindness (see *RP*, p. 381). This handicap was especially distressing to an artist with “three kids, no wife, and uphill work to succeed” (EVL, p. 406), and whose dependants would soon include an infirm father and a domineering mother. Despite these pressures and commitments, Houghton diligently superintended the fund for Henrietta Morten; and though the contributions took various forms, there were none that he failed to encourage.

The fund's “tolerable promise” was better than might have been expected, for 1866 was a year of expensive national crises. In May, records Asa Briggs,

the great London financial house of Overend and Gurney had crashed and after a disastrous ‘Black Friday’ (11 May) on the Stock Exchange, there were ripples of economic disorder in all parts of the country. For three months the bank rate rose to 10 per cent and there was widespread unemployment. In July 1866 there were riots and disturbances in London, one of the worst-hit cities. . . . Winter brought no relief. The harvest had been ruined by heavy rains and meat prices were high as the result of an epidemic of rinderpest which had begun in 1865. To add to the distress, cholera . . . made another of its dramatic re-

<sup>1</sup> In the Preface to *Historical & Legendary Ballads* . . . [1875], Thornbury describes Houghton as an “old friend” (p. viii). An anecdote concerning Houghton and the Henleys is recorded by Edmund J. Sullivan in “Arthur Boyd Houghton—I: An Artists' Artist”, *The Print Collector's Quarterly* (February 1923—abbrev. EJS), p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> E. V. Lucas, “George Du Maurier at Thirty-three”, *The Cornhill Magazine* (October 1934—abbrev. EVL), pp. 405-6.

appearances, and Fenian disturbances . . . created additional alarm. The deteriorating social and economic situation favoured a sharp spasm of political radicalism. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In February 1866, the *Fifty-first Annual Report* of the Artists' General Benevolent Institution noted that “ the prices of many of the necessities of life have considerably increased : this reacts with double force on the necessitous Artist, who not only finds himself obliged to provide more, but is at the same time liable to find the sale of his works diminished by the pressure acting on others ”. This circumstance reacted in turn on subscriptions for artists' widows, adrift in a nation which, according to a commentator of 1865, was “ in an extraordinary state of social disorganization ” :

Women are more and more left to provide for themselves, and society takes hardly any trouble to enable them to do so, either by education or by opening the doors to salaried employment. The great overplus of the female sex in England, caused chiefly by the wholesale emigration of men to the colonies, increases the difficulty tenfold ; and except in the mere mechanical trades, . . . it is exceedingly difficult for them to find anything to do.<sup>2</sup>

As a Civil Servant, William Michael Rossetti was less affected by economic fluctuation than some of his artist friends ; but he was the principal support of his mother and his two sisters, and could spare only £2 for the Morten fund (WMR, 26 October 1866). He was, notwithstanding, a valuable ally of the subscription ; for as the Secretary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848-53), of the American Exhibition of British Art (1857), and of the Seddon Subscription (1857), as well as a member of the Hogarth Club's Committee of Management (1858-61), he had simultaneously gained administrative experience and many noted acquaintances. At the commencement of the Seddon Subscription, Rossetti had “ looked right through the *Court Guide*, name by name, so as not to miss thinking of any persons who might be addressed with presumable advantage ”.<sup>3</sup> When he “ wrote various letters on the Morten affair ” (WMR, 22 October 1866), he had to select friends who both could be

<sup>1</sup> Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement: 1783-1867*, 2nd imp. (London, 1960), p. 504.

<sup>2</sup> Bessie Rayner Parkes, *Essays on Woman's Work* (London, 1865), pp. 37-38.

<sup>3</sup> William Michael Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences* (London, 1906), i. 143.

entrusted with the sensational details of the case, and could afford to contribute. Though none of Rossetti's letters concerning the fund are known, extant replies and his subsequent diary entries reveal that few of his intimates met the second prerequisite. Whistler was then "said to be on board a man-of-war on his return voyage [from South America], having adopted that mode of conveyance . . . as it saves him passage-money". Early the next year, Rossetti noted that Frederick Sandys "is persecuted with writs. He scarcely stays in [16] Cheyne Walk any part of the day, & has only done some 6 weeks' steady work since he has been staying there, now about  $\frac{3}{4}$  year" (WMR, 23 October 1866; 30 January 1867).

Most of the responses to Rossetti's appeals for contributions contain admissions of financial trouble.<sup>1</sup> F. G. Stephens hastens to contradict John Lucas Tupper's notion that he is prosperous, which "was rather more fallacious than his ideas on business usually are". In an oblique reference to his forthcoming marriage, Stephens informs Rossetti that "I have larger duties to perform than you are sworn of and with means that are not always adequate to the occasion", and concludes: "I may refer the landlord of a house for which I am in treaty to you for my character". Stephens adds a postscript concerning the "fuss" Holman Hunt, who was on the continent, was making "about his wife and probable baby"; within two months, Mrs. Hunt was dead. George Price Boyce, returned from a prolonged sketching expedition, reports "a most disastrous Season so far as painting has been concerned. In the first 7 weeks, I had but 5 or 6 dry, quiet days. This was on the Western Coast of Scotland—& since that—in the Durham Coal district—it has been almost incessantly very foggy or wet." Worse off than either Stephens or Boyce was Ford Madox Brown, who wrote on 23 October:

I ought to have answered such an important letter as yours about poor Mrs. M. at once, & shd. have done so had I not been so full of cares & business of my own & beside quite embarrassed to know what to say.

<sup>1</sup> The following replies to Rossetti's letters on the subscription, all dated 1866, are known; all, except the first, are unpublished: C. A. Howell, 22 October (PRT, p. 54); F. G. Stephens, 22 October (AP); F. M. Brown, 23 October (AP); W. B. Scott [23 October] (Durham University Library); G. P. Boyce [25 October] and [29 October] (AP); Thomas Woolner, 30 October (AP).



These sort of calls come so frequently that to those who are quite unprovided with superfluous cash like myself it is very difficult to know what to do. To refuse to notice such an appeal seems impossible & yet to give any money seems equally impossible.

Brown adds that any assistance from his fellow painter Arthur Hughes “seems of doubtful kind”, for he “it seems rashly had subscribed 5 Gnes. to the Cruikshank business, which he has not yet paid & wants I believe more than Cruiky . . .”. Diverse projects to assist George Cruikshank had recently coalesced into a “subscription testimonial”, with John Ruskin as President, Ruskin’s philanthropic agent, Charles Augustus Howell, as Honorary Secretary, and a voluminous “Committee” that included Brown himself and many other private contributors to the Morten fund. On 4 December 1866, Howell informed Rossetti that Ruskin “has given Cruikshank altogether about £600 since the subscription-plan was started” (*RP*, p. 198); a month earlier, Ruskin had announced his retirement “for the present . . . from the position necessarily now occupied by a publicly recognised benevolent—or simple—person”. “Is imply have at present no more money”, he had confided; six days before, he had more candidly attributed his obliviousness to “Cruikshank or anything” to the “complicated and acute worry I’ve been living in the last two months”.<sup>1</sup> Writing to Rossetti on 22 October, Howell apologizes for not telling Ruskin about Mrs. Morten’s case at once: “Just now he is most nervous, and depressed, and the idea of a pretty girl being hunted down, by misery, madness and suicide, is sure to haunt him for days.” It was not until two weeks later that Howell told Rossetti “in confidence that the melancholy which now besets Ruskin . . . is partly based on the fact that R[uskin] is in love . . .” (*RP*, p. 196).

Besides revealing the difficulties of Rossetti’s friends, some of these letters also emphasize what slight personal contact most artists of Morten’s generation had with the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle. Boyce and Thomas Woolner were Hogarth Club members; yet the former “knew but little of poor Morten &

<sup>1</sup> “Letters of John Ruskin to His Secretary”, *The New Review* (March 1892), pp. 283-4.

nothing of his widow", while the latter not only "did not know him", but "never saw but, I think, one of his pictures". "Leathart has a couple of his best works in oil," reports Boyce, "but I do not think he purchased either of them of him, or ever came in contact with him."<sup>1</sup> None of the correspondents expresses any personal loss from Morten's demise; and though most of them, like Boyce, must have originally "heard of [his] death & the manner of it . . . without any details", Woolner's "Poor fellow, what a horrid thing!" is the most sympathetic response to their friend's revelations.

When it came to assisting Mrs. Morten, however, Rossetti's friends showed that what Du Maurier termed the "help-each-other hand-in-glove with brother artist feeling among them" (*YGDM*, p. 114) could be extended to a stranger. "I'm glad you wrote to me," declares Boyce, "for most willingly will I join in any subscription, for the benefit of [Morten's] widow, who I'm sorry to learn is left at such low ebb. Will £5 in any way meet the exigency of the occasion? If not, you are quite at liberty to put my name down for double that amount." Four days later, Boyce seemingly balked at Rossetti's acceptance of his offer: "I would rather my subscription should remain at £5 unless there should be several others—from artists—of the higher amount." He hastens to add, however, that he is only concerned not "to take a peculiar position on the list" of subscribers for a woman he does not know. "Should something more be wanted at the winding-up of the subscription, I will gladly furnish it, but nameless." Though Woolner was being inadequately paid for some of his sculptures (he informed Stephens the following June that "a few such Government commissions would lodge [me] in goal [*sic*] or Bankruptcy Court"<sup>2</sup>), he states that "I shall be glad to subscribe some moderate amount—you can please put me down for about what the other 'moderates' are at". Howell sends Rossetti his sympathy "for the poor young lady", his "many thanks" for being told of her distress, and

<sup>1</sup> No Mortens appear in the catalogues of the exhibition of James Leathart's collection at the Goupil Gallery (1896), and the sale of his pictures at Christie's (1897).

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 30 June 1867, in FGS.

“ my small mite ” to help her relieve it. He also promises to “ speak to Ruskin as soon as he is better able to hear about ” the case. “ Just now ”, reports Madox Brown, “ I am so engaged as to make it impossible for me to take any active part in the matter, with wh. however I sympathize deeply ” ; yet he precedes this declaration with instructions to “ tell Haughton [sic] that my name & guinea is [sic] very much at his service ”, and the assurance “ that I will mention it to any one I can think of . . . ”. After citing Burne-Jones as “ the only man I can just now think of who ought to be appealed to ”, Brown adds in a postscript : “ Leathart ought to be written to.” The Newcastle collector also occurred to his friend William Bell Scott, who promised Rossetti : “ I shall write with my subscription to Houghton and perhaps give him Leathart’s name.” Instead, Scott contacted him personally ; on 1 November he informed Alice Boyd that “ this morning I have a letter from Leathart to whom I had applied for a subscription for the widow of poor Morten . . . ”.<sup>1</sup> Unable “ to give more than a trifle ”, and only “ if Fraser pays this year for an article which is gone to press ”, F. G. Stephens offers to use his influence as the *Athenaeum*’s art critic on Mrs. Morten’s behalf. He advises Rossetti to

get Mr. Houghton to send to the Editor of the *Athenaeum* a moving but *very brief* account of the case and what is to be done. It is against the rules to publish such things, rules I did not make and can . . . generally justify ; yet, as this case is *very* peculiar, probably the acting Editor will be disposed to publish an appeal, especially if it can be shown that he did not commit suicide. If this is practicable, the letter I suggest might take the form of a justification for his memory. At any rate I will prepare the way for such a letter, and if, as often happens, the decision is left with me it shall be published.<sup>2</sup>

Stephens was not alone in extending more than monetary assistance. On 6 November, Rossetti noted : “ Houghton thinks that [Mrs. Morten] wd. not wish to accept either Gambart’s

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in PP. Professor Fredeman informs me that Scott’s letter concerning the subscription is not among the correspondence owned by Dr. Gilbert Leathart.

<sup>2</sup> On 28 October, Rossetti sent Stephens an “ enclosure ” that may have described the subscription (unpublished letter in FGS). Nothing relevant appeared in the *Athenaeum* before a laudatory review of *The Savage Club Papers* (29 December 1866, p. 876).

offer as to some such place as childtaker at an exhibn., nor what Howell speaks of—a 'Home' promoted by Ruskin, where widows (with no imputation on their character) & spinsters who have committed a faux pas are received" (WMR). More welcome was another proposal of Ernest Gambart's, "to support an applicn. to the Artists' Benev. Institn." (WMR, 29 October 1866). A prominent art dealer, who soon commenced a prolonged correspondence with D. G. Rossetti over his *Fiammetta*, Gambart was one of the twenty-four Directors of this Institution. This position accords with his high repute in art circles; for the Artists' General Benevolent Institution was and is managed almost entirely by leading artists. Established in 1814, it granted £27,662 during its first half century, and in 1866 alone it assisted sixty-seven applicants with £1,324. On 9 November 1866, the Directors of the A.G.B.I. considered the "urgent case" of Henrietta Elizabeth Morten, aged 23 (if her marriage certificate is accurate, she was actually a year older), and the "Widow of an Historical Painter &c.". They heard this appeal on her behalf, "attested and recommended, by J. E. Hodgson, J. R. Clayton, G. Dalziel, A. B. Houghton, W. M. Rossetti, A. H. Tourrier &c.:"<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Morten's works have been exhibited in the Royal Academy[,] British Institution, Liverpool, &c. *He committed suicide* on September 22 [sic], 1866. There are no children. Mrs. Morten has no income, and in consequence of the self inflicted death of her husband the policies effected on his life are invalidated. She is penniless and but for a subscription started among his brother artists which defrayed the funeral expenses, and medical attendance on her while she was very ill she would have had only the clothes she had on as her few boxes were detained for rent due. Mrs. Morten is now too ill to attend to any business—

"It can be claimed", declared Martin Hardie eighty years after this application, "that no artist of any real merit, whose case has come before the A.G.B.I., has been allowed to endure poverty, distress or illness, or has been left in his later years to struggle on

<sup>1</sup> John Evan Hodgson, a member of the St. John's Wood Clique, and one of the Directors of the A.G.B.I., attended Leigh's and the R.A. Schools, where John Richard Clayton (1827-1913), a partner in a leading firm of glass painters and a friend of the Clique and the Pre-Raphaelites, also studied. George Dalziel was the eldest of the "Brothers Dalziel", the engravers.

and die, unhelped and unbefriended”.<sup>1</sup> He might have said as much of the widows of such artists; after the Directors had heard the petition for Mrs. Morten, they voted her the then considerable sum of £50.

Soon after this grant was made, the Savage Club and their friends published a volume for Mrs. Morten’s benefit. It was formally inaugurated a week after the death of Morten, who, according to the book’s preface, had spent the previous Saturday—the last night of his life—at the Club. Heralded by advance publicity and enthusiastically reviewed,<sup>2</sup> *The Savage Club Papers* include contributions from Morten’s associates—Houghton, Leigh, Thornbury, Du Maurier, and Henley—as well as drawings by Gustave Doré, John Gordon Thomson, and J. D. Watson. The book’s illustrators also include Paul Gray, a promising artist and “dear friend” of Morten’s, who completed his design shortly before dying at 24. Though the beneficiary of the Club’s efforts is identified in the *Art Journal* (1 December 1866, p. 364) and *Fun* (22 December 1866, p. 150), neither Mrs. Morten nor her husband is mentioned in the volume itself. Among the few contributions relevant to Morten’s death is Thornbury’s pseudo-Tennysonian poem, “The Falling of the Leaves”, which elegiacally prescribes “the merry song” and “the children’s laugh” to palliate the loss of friends, and refresh the aspirant to “Fortune’s glacier peak”. Also appropriate to the volume’s origins is J. D. Watson’s design, entitled “Bereaved” in the list of engravings, depicting a classically posed and clad woman, scrutinizing the ambiguous margin of a dark sky and a turbulent sea. Presumably, this picture was inserted near the end of the *Papers* to recall the Club’s object in preparing the

<sup>1</sup> Martin Hardie, “The Artists’ General Benevolent Institution”, *The Studio* (May 1946), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> The advance notices appeared chiefly in *Fun* (from 3 November); and the Liverpool *Porcupine*’s weekly “London Letter” (from 6 October), a Club production “edited” by Charles Millward (see Aaron Watson, *The Savage Club* . . . [London, 1907], pp. 58-59). On 15 December, the *Porcupine* announced that the *Papers* would appear the following day (p. 435). Though he is unrepresented in the volume, Dutton Cook is on the list of contributors compiled during its preparation (SCM, 29 September 1866). Some of the contributors who were not Club members, including Houghton, eventually joined the Savage.

book, which concludes with the exhortation: "Forget me not."

For some months after the *Papers* appeared, the exact profits from them remained unknown outside the Club; Woolner even heard that they had realized £1,300 for Mrs. Morten (WMR, 5 November 1867). The actual amount was a welcome but less spectacular £100, which the Club resolved to "pay over to Mrs. Morten . . . at the rate of one pound per week; and that in the case of Mrs. Morten's death, any balance in hand shall be applied in such manner as the committee of the club shall deem expedient & direct" (SCM, 26 January 1867). Seemingly parsimonious, this resolution evinces the increasing claims upon the Club's generosity as it entered a troubled phase of its history, marred by the deaths of several members and their friends. Early in 1867, the Savages arranged a theatrical benefit at the Haymarket for Paul Gray's mother, and they also assisted Mrs. Charles Henry Bennett, who was expecting her ninth child when she lost her husband in April. In May, Bennett's fellow illustrator William McConnell died of consumption; for well over a year, his colleagues—including Morten, Gray, and Bennett—had tried to send him to a healthier climate, by selling a portfolio of their works.<sup>1</sup> Of the forty-three contributors to *The Savage Club Papers* whose death-dates are known, twenty-three had died by 1886, only five beyond the age of 50. William Tinsley, who published the volume, recalled in 1900:

About twenty-five or thirty years ago old Death seemed to make London literary and artistic Bohemia a dreadful slaughterhouse of clever young men. It seemed for a time that anyone in Bohemia might have looked round and said, "Is it my turn next?" (WT, ii.98)

While *The Savage Club Papers* were in preparation, and for several months after the book's appearance, William Michael Rossetti continued his work on Mrs. Morten's behalf. His diary records the arrival of contributions: £5 from Gambart on 29 October, and from Boyce on 8 December 1866, and unspecified

<sup>1</sup> See the Liverpool *Porcupine* (31 March 1866), p. 521, where this portfolio is described, and the advertisements for it in the same publication, 7 April to 12 May 1866. Morten contributed "some sketches displaying all his usual rough power".

amounts from Woolner and Lowes Dickinson on 3 November of the following year (WMR).<sup>1</sup> He contacted more potential subscribers ; on 6 November 1866, he “ wrote to Ruskin in Mrs. Morten’s case ” (WMR). And he continued to confer with Houghton, whom he selected to illustrate his poem “ Mrs. Holmes Gray ” in the *Broadway Annual*. On 3 December 1867, Houghton (who spelled Rossetti’s surname with one “ s ”) thanked him for his approval of this drawing, and enclosed a “ receipt for your brother’s subscription ”, made out for £5 and signed on behalf of H. E. Morten. Houghton adds his gratitude for Rossetti’s laudatory notice in the *Chronicle* of one of his pictures<sup>2</sup> ; his exhibits at the 1868 R.A. Exhibition are commended by both Rossetti and Swinburne in their *Academy Notes*, and D. G. Rossetti also praised his work.<sup>3</sup>

Houghton’s growing prestige among the Pre-Raphaelites indirectly benefited the subscription for Mrs. Morten. On 4 May 1867, she sent Rossetti this letter on black-bordered paper :

Mrs. Morten having heard through her friend Mr. Houghton of the kind part which Mr. Rosetti, took on her behalf of the exertions he has so generally put forth to alleviate the sad position in which she had become placed, can no longer withhold the expression of gratitude towards Mr. R. for his touching conduct, and which she begs to assure that Gentleman will ever be feelingly remembered.

3. Beach Terrace  
Southsea Hants.<sup>4</sup>

According to the 1867 *Post Office Directory*, this residence was occupied by “ Capt. Edward Heaton, R[oyal] M[arine] A[rtilery] ”. The Southsea Rate Books for the same year omit the military rank of the “ Captain ”, who is absent from the official Army and Navy Lists.

In his letter of December 1867, Houghton speaks of issuing “ the printed list ” of subscribers ; but it was not until 26 January 1869 that he brought Rossetti “ the final circulars in

<sup>1</sup> Ford Madox Brown, evidently, also contributed. On 7 January 1867 he informed Rossetti : “ I did give Gabriel that £1/1/—! & he put it in his pocket . . . ” (unpublished letter in AP).

<sup>2</sup> Letter in AP, partly published in *RP*, pp. 284-5, where both the receipt and the reference to it are omitted.

<sup>3</sup> See *RP*, p. 223, and *DW*, ii. 879.

<sup>4</sup> This unpublished letter in AP is given here verbatim.

Mrs. Morten's case, for [him] to send to those who subscribed at [his] instance" (*RP*, pp. 380-1).<sup>1</sup> On 1 July of the same year, Henrietta Morten married Charles William Lundy, a telegraph engineer. Her father, who did not sign the marriage register, is described in it as a "Captain in the Polish Army"—a hazardous profession for a gentleman menaced by paralysis. The ceremony was performed in All Souls', Langham Place.

Though Rossetti continued to promote Houghton's work, their last known meeting is that devoted to subscription circulars. Almost seven years later, on 26 November 1875, Christina Rossetti sent William an obituary of Houghton :

Mamma has just in today's *Daily News* observed the paragraph I send you : & lest you should not have seen it (& in case you would wish to see it) I cut it out for you. Poor man, I thought him older than he seems to have been : I hope the dreaded trial of blindness never overtook him. Gabriel was mentioning him this very time down at Aldwick.<sup>2</sup>

Rossetti was more interested in Houghton's death than his sister had anticipated ; for his own obituary tribute to him appeared in the *Academy* on 4 December (p. 586). If Rossetti's account of Houghton reveals the casualness of their friendship—he gives his first name as "Alfred" (an error he repeats elsewhere), and describes him, incorrectly, as "twice married"—it also records his sincere admiration for his work, and for his "kindly, frank, energetic character".

### III

Despite his acknowledged "cleverness" and "talent", Thomas Morten required external supplements to his deficient creative and personal "backbone". Afflicted with chronic epilepsy that intensified a "variable temperament", he seems to have found little stability among either his family or his in-laws. His wife's collapse after his death denotes a "nature" as acutely "sensitive" as his own, while her ungrammatical letter to Rossetti, and Houghton's opinion of her family, suggest that Morten, like some of the Pre-Raphaelites, married "beneath" himself.

<sup>1</sup> No copy of this circular has been found.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter in AP.



Isolated by a misunderstood disorder, Morten chose a profession disdained by the acquisitive, and censured by the righteous. Moral suspicion of artists increased during Morten's lifetime, but the opinion expressed by Frith's uncle, that even Academicians were “poor as rats” (WPF, i. 22), became untenable amid expanding state patronage and the affluence of successful painters. The Pre-Raphaelites had propounded theories that their gifted younger colleagues freely criticized, but which turned many novices' thoughts towards nature, and their aspirations towards a fecund and profitable Renaissance. When such visions began to fade amid dusty casts and rowdy classmates at the R.A. Schools, they were speedily revived at Leigh's, where a haphazard curriculum was ennobled by a determined and energetic personality, and at the Langham. Jeffrey Prowse's “The City of Prague” (“... if hope be the wealth of beginners,/ By Jove we were all millionaires!”) conveys the predominant optimism and commitment of many young artists of the late fifties, which Morten embodies, along with a realistic acceptance of professional exigences, in his two principal canvases of this period.

By the early sixties, Leigh was dead, state patronage was waning, and most of the Pre-Raphaelites had either renounced their early ideals, or isolated themselves from their more independent “disciples”, who contemplated them with alternate awe and resentment. As they relinquished small cabinet pictures for the “great works” which brought professional distinction, many artists of Morten's background were hindered by inadequately “solid study”. Frequently, Morten's contemporaries identify him as a “sketcher”; though sometimes used descriptively, this term was also pejorative, as in Alfred Stevens's famous rebuke to a student: “Sir, we don't sketch here, we draw!” Morten's creation of a passable Whistler demonstrates that, under proper influence, he could muster sufficient “continuous resolution” to produce coherent work; but his growing instability alienated most of the “Paris Gang”, and he reverted to the Bohemian companions whom Du Maurier had prudently shunned.

Though the plagiarisms of Morten's last two years recall

Defoe's association of poverty with theft, they denote psychological and creative, as well as financial, maladies. Instead of utilizing borrowed elements in his lesser commissions, and marshalling his unaided abilities for prestigious ones, Morten adopted the reverse procedure. Increasingly unable to sustain his imagination and dexterity throughout a series of drawings, or even a single elaborate design, he resorted to the iconography of other artists. After Morten's death, not even his friends could lament him as a significant loss to British art. Without the facility of Millais, the erudition of Leighton, or the industry of Poynter, he was temperamentally incapable of that hostility to the artistic establishment from which artists as diverse as Madox Brown and Whistler derived personal and creative strength.

Thanks to the men who abetted it, the subscription for Morten's widow presents the Victorian age in a generally creditable light. Yet it is ironic that the period which readily assisted artists and their dependants, provided only the semblance of both art training and a milieu in which painting could flourish. "We are not, never have been, and never shall be an artistic nation", declared H. S. Marks, and even Frith scorned "the many-headed, whose likings and dislikings are equally incomprehensible" (HSM, ii. 87; WPF, i. 218). By the *fin de siècle*, many painters had ceased to court this fickle source of approval. But to most artists of Morten's generation, "popular acclaim"—when endorsed by dealers and affluent clients—sanctioned their choice of an unorthodox profession. Struggling to erect a reputation on his inadequately buttressed talent, Morten soon collapsed into plagiarism and bankruptcy. With his suicide, his degeneration from a clever beginner into an unfortunate failure was complete.