

A SECOND BOOK COVER DESIGN BY FREDERIC SHIELDS

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SINCE HIS DEATH IN 1911 Frederic James Shields, Pre-Raphaelite painter, watercolourist, mural decorator, and book illustrator, has received surprisingly little critical or other attention. W.E. Fredeman's 1965 *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study* lists no separate publication devoted to him subsequent to Ernestine Mills' *Life and Letters* volume of 1912. In the period since 1965, Martin Hardie has praised his 'high proficiency as draughtsman and water-colourist' (*Water-Colour Painting in Britain* (1968), 3. 129),¹ and in 1983 the Gray Art Gallery and Museum, Hartlepool mounted a small, thirty-two piece exhibition of his work, mostly watercolours and drawings, to mark the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth in Hartlepool in 1833. Also, his name turns up in a couple of recent accounts of Victorian book illustration, Simon Houfe, *Dictionary of British Book Illustrators and Caricaturists 1800-1914* (1978) and Edward Hodnett, *Five Centuries of English Book Illustration* (1988), Houfe calling him 'a very strong illustrator' (452) on the basis of his two volumes, *The History of the Plague of London* (1863) and *Pilgrim's Progress* (1864). However, his name is strangely absent from such standard works as Percy Muir, *Victorian Illustrated Books* (1971), Gordon Ray, *The Illustrator and the Book in England from 1700 to 1914* (1976), Charles Baker, *Bibliography of British Book Illustrators 1860-1900* (1978), and Eric de Maré, *The Victorian Woodblock Illustrators* (1980).²

As a book cover artist, Shields has been associated with only one volume, the second edition of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1880). Although some difference of opinion exists about what exactly his part in this binding was, with Douglas Barber proposing that it was a collaborative design with Dante Gabriel Rossetti,³ Alastair Grieve is probably correct in countering that Shields 'certainly deserves the credit for the *Blake* and that Rossetti was responsible only for suggesting to Shields that a drawing from the Blake *Notebook*⁴ should be adapted'.⁵ Since Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti substantially assisted Anne Gilchrist in preparing both the first (1863) edition of the *Life*, following the death of her husband, and the second edition, it is unlikely that William would have failed in his numerous writings on his brother to attribute the binding to him had his involvement in it gone beyond what Grieve claims. It is also suggestive that, encouraged by the success of the *Blake* cover, Shields shortly afterwards undertook a second cover design, previously unrecorded, for Hall Caine's *Sonnets of Three Centuries* (Elliot Stock, 1882) (Figure I).

Again, it is highly probable that Dante Rossetti was involved in the choice of Shields to do the Caine cover. Throughout the last phase of Rossetti's life Shields was one of his few old friends from the 1860s to keep in close touch, visiting him at Cheyne Walk and staying with the Rossetti family at Birchington during his

final days. Since Caine was in constant attendance on Rossetti during this period, when he was also preparing the *Sonnets* volume, there would have been ample opportunity for all three to discuss the binding. Significantly, the only piece of documentary evidence to support assigning the binding to Shields is an account of Rossetti presenting a copy of the book to his mother. An entry in Frances Rossetti's diary for 31 January 1882 reads:

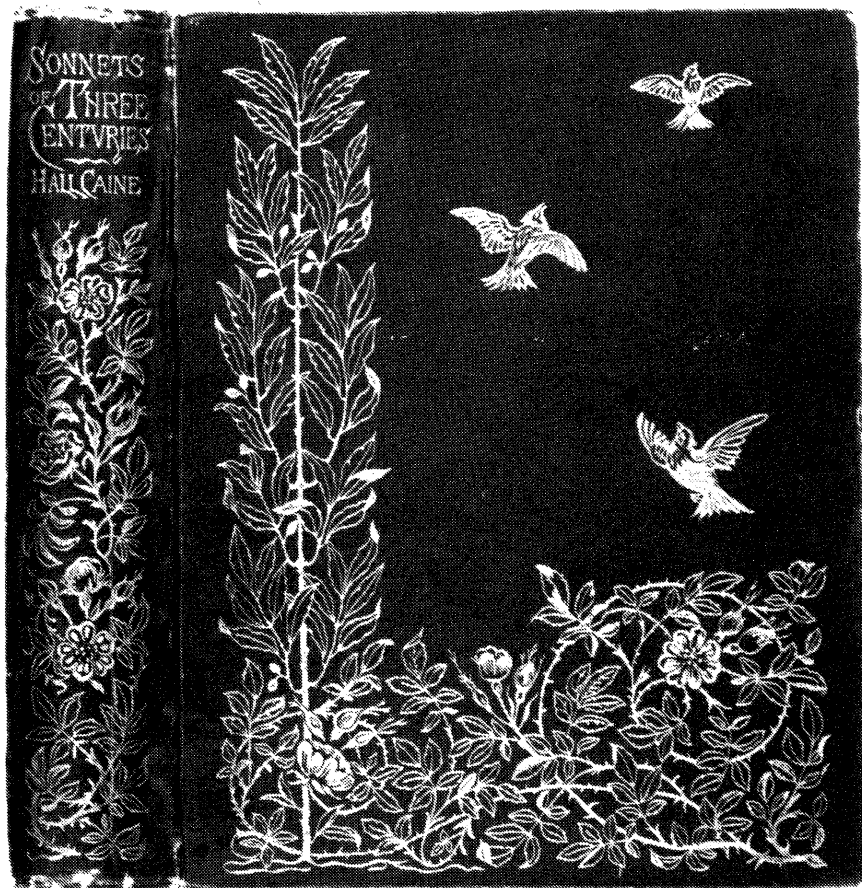
Gabriel sent me a present of oranges, a bottle of Burgundy, the 2000th volume of Tauchnitz, and Mr Hall Caine's 'Sonnets of three Centuries' of which the binding is designed by Mr Shields.⁶

Even though on stylistic grounds alone it might be difficult to identify the binding as Shields', similar flying birds and floral detail can be found in several of his illustrations and other designs, and the lettering on the spine bears some resemblance to lettering in the *Plague of London* and *Pilgrim's Progress* illustrations.⁷

Calgary

NOTES

1. Shields' most appreciative Victorian reviewer, W.M. Rossetti, stressed his 'absolute and extreme literalism' and his 'remarkably compact' designs, claiming on occasion that one of his contributions to the Old Water-Colour Society was 'the finest design' in the exhibition (quoted in *Selected Letters of W. M. Rossetti*, ed. R.W. Peattie (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1990), 122, n.2).
2. Although Gleeson White, *English Illustration: 'The Sixties'* (1897), Joseph Pennell, *The Illustration of Books* (1896), and Malcolm Salaman, *British Book Illustration Yesterday and Today* (1923), among earlier studies of Victorian book illustration, lavishly praised Shields' designs, Forrest Reid, *Illustrators of the Sixties* (1928), was a dissenting voice which appears to have remained influential.
3. 'Rossetti, Ricketts, and Some English Publishers' Bindings of the Nineties' *Library* 25 (1970), 321, 322.
4. The so-called Rossetti Manuscript, jointly owned by Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti. The drawing, a 'full page water-colour . . . of two fairies reclining in a rose-like flower . . . [is] probably by Robert Blake' (*The Note-Book of William Blake*, ed. G. Keynes (London: Nonesuch Press, 1935), 150).
5. 'Rossetti's Applied Art Designs — 2: Book-Bindings', *Burlington Magazine* 115 (1973), 79. Grieve could also have cited Mrs. Gilchrist's acknowledgement, in her 'Preface to the Second Edition', that, among Shields' several contributions to the volume, 'he has adapted a fairy design of Blake's own to the cover' (vi).
6. Angeli-Dennis Papers, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver.
7. See, for example, 'The Robber Saint', *Once a Week* 5 (1861), 378; 'Initial letter [C]', *Pilgrim's Progress*; and the decorative head- and tail-pieces used in Shields' *The Chapel of the Ascension: Its Story and Scheme* (London: Elliot Stock, 10th ed., 1911). See also the lettering in the *Pilgrim's Progress* designs, 'Faithful and Wanton', 'The River of Death', 'The Muck-rake', and 'Mercy Making Garments'; and 'The Decision of Faith' in *The History of the Plague of London*.



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