




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Mutability and Deformity: Models of the Body and the Art of Edward Burne-Jones

Caroline Arscott

Abstract

*This essay discusses the alternatives that emerged in the Victorian period to a perfect and regular neoclassical conception of the heroic male body. It charts the evolving fascination with mutable forms, whether heroic or monstrous, imagined first of all in the 1850s in terms of a body conceived of as bolted together or modified by the fusion of organic and inorganic substances. The early work of Burne-Jones is discussed in relation to investigations of cell structure and mechanical inventions in the Great Exhibition of 1851 such as the 'Expanding Model of a Man' invented by Count Dunin. Arscott also discusses the cybernetic implications of Burne-Jones's gouache, *The Merciful Knight* (1863). Later works of Burne-Jones, in particular *Perseus and the Graiae* (1878) and the reworked composition *Love Among the Ruins* (1894), are discussed in terms of a turn towards a sense of the spread and mutation of organic being through and beyond the self. Arscott considers this alongside contemporary investigations of the role of bacilli in disease, looking at leprosy and the heroisation of the Leper Priest of Molokai, Father Damien in the 1880s and 1890s. In the late-Victorian period, Arscott concludes, monstrous distortion was imagined as the unpredictable and unruly proliferation of the organic by the organism in both its vital and morbid states.*

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