

PHILIP B. MARSTON'S "PRELUDE":
BLINDNESS, FORM, AND THE LONG PRE-RAPHAELITE
PERIOD

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Philip Bourke Marston was, in a sense, raised into Pre-Raphaelitism. Born in the year *The Germ* was launched, Marston grew up alongside the movement. His father, the playwright John Westland Marston, socialized with the major Pre-Raphaelite poets and artists, including Morris, Swinburne, Dante Rossetti, and Ford Madox Brown. As a young man, Marston's closest friend was Oliver Madox Brown, and together they pursued entrance to the literary and artistic circles inhabited by their parents. When the young poet expressed enthusiasm for Swinburne's 1866 *Poems and Ballads*, Westland Marston promptly took the boy to meet the poet, to receive Swinburne's advice on his own early works. At the age of twenty-one, Marston had the support of both Swinburne and Rossetti in the publication and promotion of his first volume of poetry, *Song-Tide, and Other Poems* (1871). In this article I look specifically at the "Prelude" of *Song-Tide* to argue that Marston attempted early on to demarcate his work from that of the major figures of Pre-Raphaelitism by staking claim to the aural/oral order, rather than the visual. Far from being imitative, his participation as a Pre-Raphaelite helped to popularize the formalism that would come to dominate the poetry of the aesthetic phase of the long Pre-Raphaelite movement.¹

Song-Tide was largely praised in many of the leading magazines when it was published. *The Fortnightly Review* critic appreciated Marston's "technical skill and sincerity of feeling" (Rev. 127); *The New Monthly Magazine* critic observed that "the songs are pervaded by a tender melancholy swept by gusts of memory, which are caught and portrayed with a skill so sure and exquisite that we sometimes forget the grief" ("Poems" 117); *The Spectator* critic praised the volume's "copiousness of fancy ... with which he treats his subject, the abundance of the imagery with which he adorns it, and the fluency of language at his command" (Rev. 1437); and *The Examiner* critic felt confident in proclaiming that "the youngest school of English poetry has received