

A VICTORIAN IDEALIST:
WILLIAM NORTH AND HIS “LOST” MAGAZINE

Allan Life

In his edition of the *Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, William E. Fredeman discusses one of the most intriguing men of letters associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. After identifying William North (1825-1854) as the “author of four novels, poet, translator, and editor of several ephemeral ... magazines,” Fredeman calls this “political radical and atheist” “one of the great literary puzzles of the 19th century” (1:69n9). Earlier, in his edition of William Michael Rossetti’s *P.R.B. Journal*, Fredeman had already expressed surprise that so copious and versatile a writer “has virtually escaped the notice of literary historians” (196n13.15). This was not the fault of William Rossetti, who has a good deal to say in print about North. In *Some Reminiscences*, Rossetti recalls North as “a strange character,” a prolific author, and “a ‘clever fellow,’ who might even be credited with a spark of genius.” And, though Rossetti apologizes for his inability to recollect “the faces of people I meet,” he provides this vignette of William North: “a pale, rather fleshy young man, with bright eyes, a slightly high clear voice, and very pallid straight hair of a yellowish tinge” (xii; 166-68). As for Dante Rossetti, he saw North regularly from August 1848 until March 1852, when North sailed for New York. From America, North wrote occasionally to his friend in London, enclosing his poetry and claiming to have invented “an unequalled rotary engine” (Christina Rossetti 1:89). In December 1854, Rossetti discovered a notice in the *Daily News*: “Suicide of an Englishman at New York.” On 14 November, North had swallowed Prussic acid in a Bond Street lodging house. After reading the inquest report, Dante Rossetti walked through Red Lion Square, where he and Walter Deverell (who died the previous February) had rented a studio in 1851 from the father of William North. Writing to William Bell Scott on 7 December, Rossetti reflects how “of that trio I am the only one whose fate remains involved in a double perplexity, one here & one hereafter.” At the end of the following month, Rossetti sent Holman Hunt his final extant comments on North – and his suicide: “It is a subject one cannot talk of, and too hopelessly sad even to dwell much on the mind, however sincerely one regrets and pities