

“ ... not only a genius, he was a man”: William Morris and Manliness

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Abstract: *William Morris valued the idea of Manliness and strove to emulate a Victorian “manly” ideal. His friends saw him as exhibiting “manly” qualities during his lifetime. However, in the intervening years, succeeding biographers have moved away from the notion of Morris’s “manliness”, instead discovering psychological and neurological problems in him. As a result of modern biographies, Morris has latterly been caricatured as a comic, ridiculous figure in contrast to the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti who is portrayed as romantic and virile – the modern version of “manliness”. I argue this revision has come about from preconceptions about Morris’s relationship with his wife and his friend Rossetti. Further, I argue that Morris believed in “free love”, and was himself in love with another woman, and that this has not been adequately investigated by biographers. The overriding idea that Morris was a “cuckolded” husband has caused him to be portrayed recently as weak and effeminate, skewing public perceptions erroneously.*