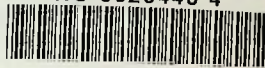


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THE PRE-RAPHAELITES RE-EXAMINED:
THE ROLE OF WOMEN WITHIN THE MOVEMENT

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Synopsis

The traditional nature of the art historical discourse on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, is first examined. Suitable methods of analyses are suggested through the examination of subjects like prostitution, a body of Rossetti's work and E.Siddall's treatment in history. The Pre-Raphaelite's handling of prostitution is placed in it's context of production, thus within the fabric of Victorian ideology. The emergence of female `types` is cited within the movement, especially in a body of work by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the 1860's. In the case of the historical character Elizabeth Siddall, the biographical method is examined and a history is pointed to outside that as Pre- Raphaelite muse. The terrain of her artistic production and that of other women artists is mapped out, thus exposing the `other meanings` that they produced within Pre-Raphaelite imagery. New terrains for the artistic discourse are uncovered by contrasting aspects of the women's contribution to movements like post-modernism. Deconstruction of myths, connected with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and generally in the past, is a necessary discourse in order to construct a less-oppressive present.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in the Pre Raphaelites was initiated by the lushness of the paintings and a curiosity about the type of woman constantly portrayed. This in turn led to an attempted investigation of these women's role as models muses and artists. Through this investigatory discourse a host of questions were raised on the place women were allocated in art history and on the nature of patriarchy itself. In discussing the Victorian women's question I hope to address how history, especially art history, has been constructed. As Griselda Pollock and Rozika Parker point out, 'To discover the history of women and art is in

part to account for the way art history is written. To expose it's underlying values, it's assumptions, its silences and it's prejudices is also to understand that the way women's artist's are recorded is crucial to the definition of art and artist in our society. (Parker and Pollock 1981, p. 15)

Traditional art history is a masculine discourse party to the social construction of sexual difference. It is based on the notion of the personality, that of the male genius whose work will be cherished and admired by art lovers expressing the universal human capacity for valuing beautiful objects. These and other such narratives have been challenged. The so-called 'New Art History', sets out to change and to improve our understanding of the present through critical analysis of the representation of the past. The hegemony of modernist theories and practices have been questioned from marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, structuralist, and post- structuralist perspectives. Loosely coincident with this new approach is a resurgence of interest in the Pre -Raphaelite movement. The framework for this new interest is 1961 to 1984. *1 1961 marks the date when Pre Raphaelite paintings were beginning to be appreciated as commodities in the art market and 1984 marking the rising standards of work in academic practice, shown by the 1984 Tate exhibition. Unfortunately, in the majority of cases Pre Raphaelite art dictates a traditional and romantic discourse.

One of the reasons for the amount for the-amount of research done is the fact that the Pre Raphaelites and their associates were avid letter- writers, poets, memoir-keepers and diarists. This wealth of information has been hard to ignore. This evidence has fuelled the predominantly biographic impulse of art history, which has structured the ways in which Pre Raphaelitism is constituted and studied. William Holman Hunt's two autobiographies were deeply implicated in the 19th century ideologies of class and gender.

The purpose of art is in love of guileless beauty
 to lead men to distinguish between that which
 being clean of spirit is productive of virtue
 and that which is flaunting and meretricious and
 productive of the ruin of the nation (Hunt, 1870, p. 493).

His strategies are mobilized to guard against damage to the nation's image, to self image and to history. Another key figure who wrote on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and experienced it was William Michael Rossetti. His work is not as obviously biased as Hunt's and adheres more to the transcription of the written materials of diary, memoir and journal in his self appointed role as scribe and recorder. They were however, written several decades after the events, a fact that should put us on the alert for any reading of them as providing some absolute and accurate account. Moreover it should not be forgotten that 'no one writes without inscribing a point of view on that which is written: language is an ideological practice of representation' *2 This autobiographic material has been referred to accompanied by some authentic works, thus offering a superficial coherence. Diana Holman Hunt's 'My grandfather his wives and loves' (1969, is an example of such).

It is a problematic situation.

It is this literature of partisan apologies and self
 justification which is now mistreated by modern art
 historians as if it were an historical archive.

(Cherry and Pollock, Art history 1984)

So should this material be ignored? I think not, the nature of the relationship between history, biography and art has to be examined closely, thus loosening the bond between the history of art and the lives of artists. It is exactly this easy relationship between art and life, that has kept this movement shrouded in myth, avoiding analyses in the process. Indulgent tales are constantly rehashed, as if offering insight, but this merely succeeds in increasing the unreal quality surrounding the movement. Susan P. Castera's Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art is a prime example.

Jan Marsh's extensive biographical research, in book, exhibition, and film form has been useful in terms of information on the lives of the muses, models and artists, associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Her recently organized exhibition in the Ruskin Gallery of Sheffield February 1991, of E. Siddall's work has provided new research for this thesis. Her work remains within the boundaries of biographical art history. I would not agree that this is an adequately challenging approach. Marsh scrapes together 'an oeuvre' for women in art history; they become honorary male artists but it is necessary to

examine art history 'as a discourse actively producing it's meanings by exclusion, repression and subordination of its other'. *3

So what are the correct methods of analysis to undertake? Firstly pitfalls may be avoided, by building up knowledge of the interface between social regulation and pictorial regulation. More insight is gained by limiting the range of topics, as it is not feasible to examine all the varied and sometimes complex aspects in one thesis. For example when I deal with prostitution, I first do so in a social context in order to expose the mechanisms of the patriarchal legal system. Next citing the emergence of the narrative of the stereotypical prostitute and looking at how some Pre Raphaelite artists dealt with the topic. Thus switching the focus away from the celebrated artists and towards the context of production. Investigation of the individual work is a radical act, breaking down homogeneous notions of the group, by looking at individual artists and their particular work. By suggesting psychoanalyses in the context of Rossetti's work, the dominating pleasures of the patriarchal field of vision are deciphered and questioned. With the aid of feminist historical research, I intend to point to a history, outside of that of Pre Raphaelite muse. Concentrating less on the bourgeois cult of individualism and more on the social conditions for women in London during the nineteenth century. I examine the life of Siddall in a linear fashion, from birth to death, thus it may appear that I am contradicting my earlier criticism of the biographical impulse characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite literature. This method is not applied but examined, precisely to question the traditional biography of Siddall, question it's limitations and suggest wider alternatives. By mapping the terrain of artistic production for E. Siddall and other women within the fabric of Victorian ideology, I hope to incite a wider appreciation of Pre Raphaelite art and disrupt the romantic aura surrounding much of traditional Pre Raphaelite art historical discourse.

Chapter one.

Before continuing I should firstly define what I mean by the phrase Pre-Raphaelite. The idea of a movement to be taken seriously does not mean to endorse a monolithic and unifying

linking of style and purpose. The group notion functions powerfully within history, the movement is certainly a diverse oeuvre. I use the term broadly, as British based art from 1840-1920, which adopted one or many of the Pre Raphaelite approaches in terms of subject matter or style. Ranging from the primary archaic naturalism, to later highly formalized work. I do not restrict the work to paintings but include all forms, such as architecture, stained glass etc. Although I deal mainly with the representation of women in painting that is not to deny the existence of a large body of landscape painting. Art history often implies that work straying from certain conditions is not valid or of lower standard to that of 'true Pre-Raphaelitism'. The standards being the oil paintings of the seven original boys, (work made from 1848-1851) and their manifesto of rules for production.

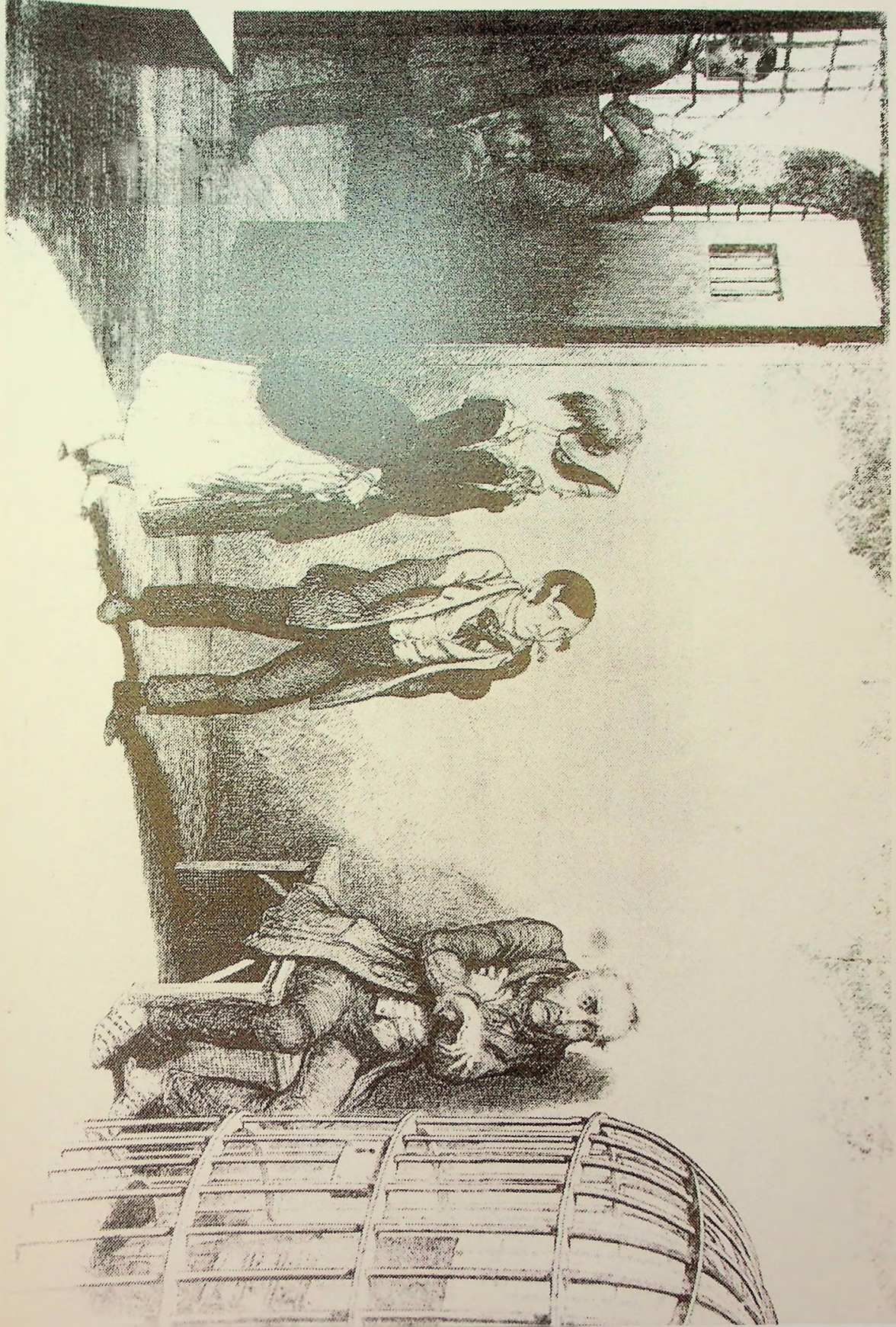
The original Pre-Raphaelites were bourgeois boys, for in 1848, the three most celebrated members, Holman Hunt, Dante G. Rossetti, and John E. Millais were a mere 21 20 and 19 years of age respectively. It was at this period that prudery and gender difference reached crisis situation, marked by the beginning of feminist agitation in Britain. Double standards existed in the laws and attitudes to contraception, prostitution, marriage, etc. High moral stances were maintained specifically by the middle classes, as opposed to the lower and aristocratic or landowning classes. Given the moral backgrounds, educations and age group of the three, the amount of optimistic images of young attractive women central in their work is understandable. Double standards existed in the legal system. For example, a man could disinherit his wife from all her worldly goods, while women were unable to choose domicile, own property, sign papers, or bear witness. *4 In the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, while the man could be granted divorce on the grounds of the women's adulterous behavior, the woman however could not be granted divorce unless she could prove not only adultery but cruelty and desertion as well. Education exclusively for girls, in most cases, was one so that she could learn to complement and care for men. As regards the prostitute's legal stance, The Contagious Diseases Act of 1860 legalized and regularized prostitution, the age for young girls being twelve years of age and were subject to arrest by police or agents and subjected to involuntary medical examination, or imprisonment if they refused.

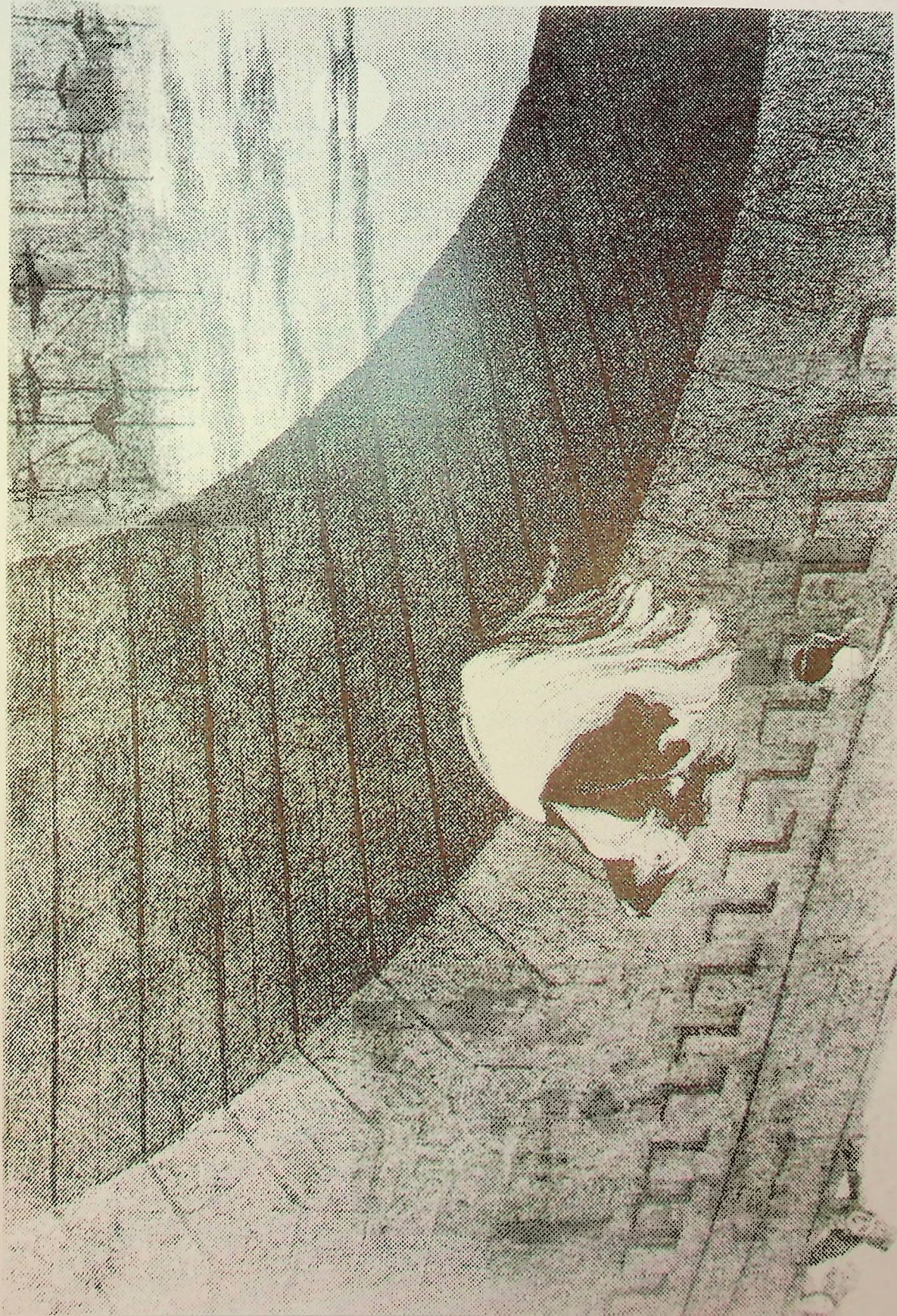
Prostitution is as much a social institution as

all others. It continues the old sexual freedom for the benefit of man. In reality not only permitted, but also assiduously practised by the ruling class. It is denounced only nominally. Still in practice, this denunciation strikes by no means the men who indulge in it, but only the women. These are ostracized and cast out of society, in order to proclaim once more the fundamental law of unconditional male supremacy over the female sex. (Fredrich Engels, The Origin of the State 1884)

Here Engels exposes one of the many sexual hypocrisies in Victorian ideology. He was indeed a Victorian with the gift of long-sight. Unfortunately the majority of Victorians were not socialists and saw prostitution, solely in terms of the `fallen-women` and her guilt. Another aspect of double standards was the notion that `by nature` men were polygamous and women monogamous. This meant that women were forced to choose between social standing and sexual activity. Though guilt in sexual liaisons and prostitution were allocated to women, she had no control over the laws which determined contraception, abortion etc. The situation succeeded in setting women against each other, forcing a choice between whore or matron, (the contemporary analogy being career woman versus house wife). Although prostitution has always existed in various forms, in the Victorian period she came to symbolize all the morally reprehensible aspects of rapid urbanization and the displacement of people from the country to the cities. As such, representations of prostitution form part of the broader discourse of conservative romanticism. Hatred fear and guilt lay behind middle class attitudes towards prostitution.

Who can tell the pestiferous influence exercised in society by the single fallen woman?...woman waylaid, tempted, deceived becomes in terms the terrible anger of her sex..qualified to act her part in the reorganization of society. The weight of influence is untold: view it in the dissolution of domestic ties, in the sacrifice of the family peace, in the cold desolation of promising homes; but above all, in the growth of practical atheism, and in the downward trend of all that is pure and holy in life. (Henry Mathew's London Labour and the London Poor 1862)





The concept of chivalry was applied in order to face the situation. This involves emphasizing heart, home and happy marriage, in a desperate rallying to the defense of the status-quo. A narrative emerged that was evident in medieval and evangelical texts, parliamentary reports, novels, poems, paintings, and plays. The progression of the 'fall' was usually represented pictorially in separate stages. Two of the stages are shown in Cruikshank's prints in fig.i and ii. The 'tale' reduced the threatening whore's potential danger to society, through the medium of pity, and inevitably ended in the woman's death. *5 In this the popular stereotype functioned to contain or dispel psychic and social unease.

Much attention has been given to the Pre-Raphaelites treatment of the narrative. One reason being that is the most obvious work of a 'social commentary' nature to be cited. The most 'realistic' work, when applying John Ellis's definition of realism. *6 The most celebrated works are 'Found' by D.G.Rossetti, 'the Awakening Conscience' by W.H.Hunt and 'Take Your Son Sir' by F.M.Brown. I shall discuss Rossetti's 'Found' begun in 1854 and remained unfinished. My reason for this choice, is that Rossetti, in this instance, managed to compress the conventional narrative into a single pregnant image, substituting evocative spatial expansion in depth for brisk narrative sequence in time. This piece specifically mobilizes 'middle class values, concerning the morality of work; the health of the countryside versus the corruption of the city, and the physical signs of sexual deviancy'. *7 In the image, the fallen-woman has literally fallen on her knees.

The career of these women is a brief one;
their downward path a marked and inevitable one
...They are almost never rescued.

The pure rural origins of the harlot are suggested by the calf, bridge and the pale colored smock and garment of the male. The stages of the fall are expressed symbolically by the expression of shame and anguish on the woman's face. The inevitable death is represented by the 'Bridge of Sighs' *8 and a graveyard which contains a tomb. The lamb innocent and pathetically netted, could be seen as a metaphor for the prostitute now drained of her threatening power, an object of pity and compassion but nevertheless a sacrificed victim. The gaudiness of city life is signified by the whore's clothing. The bonnet fluted, pleated, ribboned and feathered is thrown back in shame. The dress is rose patterned, gathered at the sleeve and neck and she also sports an earring. The shawl is a patterned mantle with bedraggled silk fringing, dirty from roaming the streets. Placing this prime piece of Pre-Raphaelite social commentary in a broader context, shows that ideas do not simply coalesce, but are generated within specific cultural and political conditions and are instated across textual representation. Of course, not all of the

texts produced were of a conservative nature, other meanings were explored, the meanings of the oppressed, as is evident in E. Siddall's work, which I shall deal with later.

Chapter two.

In the Victorian period the distinction between Madonna and magdalen, which had previously been seen as residing in all women, was reworked as a distinction between women. *9

Behind every crouched figure of a fallen woman, there stands the eminently upright figure of the angel of the house. Jan Marsh has enumerated other Pre-Raphaelite types such as; bohemians and stunners, holy virgins, nubile maidens, doves and mothers, fallen magdalens, medieval damsels, sorceresses, allegories and icons and pale ladies of death. The common approach to the 'ladies' in the majority of Pre-Raphaelite cases being one of glamorization, in optimistic chivalrous representations of attractive young women. The 'keepsake' beauties, of the earlier part of the century, were of a very specific visual type. Some 'smiling deliah' painters were David Wilkie, H.N.O'Neill and William Gush. That different facial-types were glamorized in Pre-Raphaelite painting did not go unnoticed at the time. Anna Howeis for example, suggests that Pre-Raphaelite artists were freedom-fighters for plain women.

Those dear and much abused painters..are the
plain girls best friends. They have taken all the neglected ones by the hand. All the
ugly flowers
all the ugly buildings, all the ugly faces have
shown us a certain beauty of their own..red hair
.. once a social assassination is the rage. A
pallid face with protruding upper lip is highly
esteemed- only dress after the Pre-Raphaelite style
and you will be astonished that instead of being
an ugly duck you are a fully fledged swan, etc.

(Anna Howeis, the Art of Beauty, pg 273-274, London, 1878) *10. However, the allocation of new sets of visual signifieds, by men, for women to live up to, in my opinion is not a positive liberatory activity. It is these 'essentially decorative pieces aesthetically composed and expressive of the beautiful glory of the feminine, of physical loveliness as perceives by the Pre-Raphaelite mind' *11 which are essentially so oppressive. These images represent creativity as masculine and circulate women as the beautiful image for the desiring male gaze. It is precisely 'naturalisms' such as this, that must be cited and re-examined, today.

The bourgeois ideal of femininity was not a static unchanging category, but was in a state of constant flux by different factions of the middle classes, in accordance with their



religious and moral beliefs. One new type is evident in a body of work by Rossetti, depicting female figures in half and three-quarter length poses surrounded by flowers and finery and executed with a very rich handling of the paint. Showing a marked difference from the medieval narratives in water colour to single figure paintings of sensuous women` *12. These works including like Venus Verticordia 1863, Bocca Caciata 1859, the Blue Bower 1865, and Monna Vanna 1866.

Paintings and art criticisms are separate, although inter-related, sites for production of definitions of bourgeois femininity. Art criticism concerning this particular body of work, tended to be of a confused and inarticulate nature. On seeing the work Swinburne commented `it is more stunning than can be decently expressed` *13. H. Hunt commenting on the new type of work maintained, `it is of a gross sensuality of a revolting kind, peculiar to foreign prints, that would not pass the our customs house on the way from France` *14. E. Waugh commented that `the work of this period was a less happy achievement for Rossetti, producing lamentable results. *15 Ruskin was especially upset by Venus Verticordia (1866), fig. iii, complaining to his associate about the coarseness of the flowers, with classic Victorian prudery. A similar situation existed between critics and Manet's Olympia of 1865

Olympia was not given a meaning that was stabilized long enough to provide the framework for any further investigation, for some kind of knowledge or criticism. (Screen 1980, Tim Clark p. 35)

What was new about these paintings ? Exposed female flesh was not a new concept to painting in 1866. Paintings such as Titian's Venus of Urbino `contrived meanings on and against the privileged schema of sex, that had no meanings in 1865`. Since the shock value of the pieces was due to their lack of all narrative, their abstracted nature which was fetish like, thus signifying and underlying the degree of anxiety generated by looking. The end result a stalemate was often stalemate, unerotic and unsentimental. Balked imitation in which the spectator is given no established plane for viewing and identification, nor offered the tokens of expulsion and resistance. These women with their `lips that have been kissed` (Bocca Baciata), are portrayed as actively desiring, they have a bold direct gaze and obviously flaunt their physical charms. Man as sovereign, possessing subject of the gaze, redefined women as the active seductress. *16 Passion without love was another shock. Love managing to obscure the patriarchal character of Western society and in that general tendency attributes impossible virtues to women, that end up by restricting her to narrow spheres of behavior. Western patriarchy has been much softened by concepts of courtly and romantic love, as opposed to the machismo of oriental behavior. No love speaks of an

autonomous female sexuality in a social system in which love signifies women's submission to legal and moral control and definition of sexuality by men. Negative attitudes to coitus had for so long been associated with ideal femininity that the true character of women's sexuality was long distorted and unknown. *16.5 The reattribution of autonomous sexuality to women, by Rossetti, could be seen as a small step forward for women's emancipation.

Linda Nead has suggested in her Woman as Temptress that these new images of the femme fatale incorporate a response to feminism *17. As such these images may be seen as socially determined rather than privately motivated. There is perhaps some element of private motivation on Rossetti's part. In a suggestive comment, he wrote,

That to be an artist is just the same thing as
to be a whore as far as dependence on the whims
and fancies of individuals are concerned.

(Rossetti's letters 1873)

Here he identifies with the dependant position of the whore, coupled with the painting's failure to find ready buyers, may form part of the motivation behind his representation of women as defiant and strong.

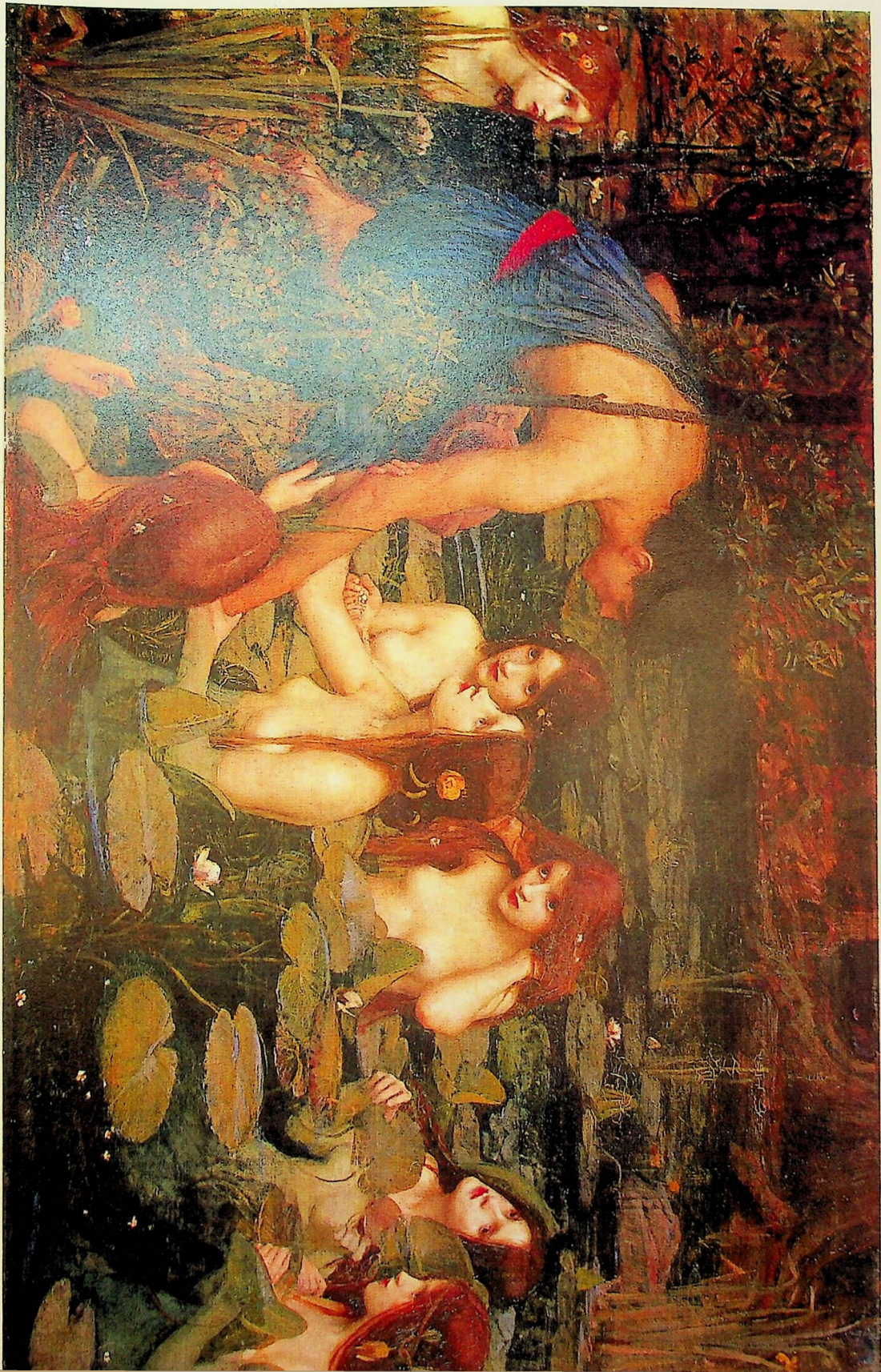
Psychoanalysis has been used to examine what is being done in this type of picture, and what it does for its users. Pollock's refreshing approach in 'Woman as sign, psychoanalytic readings' uses the method 'to identify the process of psychic formation under a specific social and ideological order'. *18 She cites John Ellis's book 'Photography/pornography' *19 the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and Freud's theories of fetishism. She cites the importance of the mother's gaze at the child prior/post the discovery of the fetish itself. A double realization occurs at the instigation of the fetish itself, that of the phallic mother and castrated mother. I would suggest that this frozen moment of realization is replayed for the viewer in Rossetti's 'Venus Verticordia'.

The gaze becomes an image of castration which
speaks desire, not lust, but compulsive pursuit
of the parent, lost primary object, the pre

Oedipal mother. (Pollock, Vision and Difference, p. 104)

Thus helping to explain the overt handling of the paint in the works. The- over- the- top worked style, appropriately satisfying the hankering after the forever- lost object.

Through the psychoanalytic discourse, it is suggested that Rossetti's work has little to do with the celebratory representation of beautiful women, that is so often associated with



the work. Recognition should be given to two more obscure Pre-Raphaelite artists, John W. Waterhouse and Arthur Hughes, fig. ix. Their work does not produce the same stalemate as Rossetti's and E. B. Jones', and suggests less formalizing of the models, and a more celebratory and investigatory approach to the portrayal of women. This does not necessarily place their work on a higher moral plane to Rossetti's. In this thesis, I do not concentrate on the paintings as material objects, in terms of style and technique, but it must be noted that the work of these two artists shows a unique sense of pattern making and a sensitive and rich approach to colour. The fact that Waterhouse lived a secluded existence in the country, away from the artistic centre of London, has much to do with his exclusion from art history. Artists such as Waterhouse have much in common with women artists, both were oppressed by a historical discourse, which is vulnerable to circumstance ie. location gender etc. Thus raising the question of how reliable is history as a representation of the past.

Chapter three.

`High culture systematically denies knowledge of women as producers of culture and meaning' *20. This being precisely the case of the historical character Elizabeth Elanor Siddall (1829-1882), who is traditionally known exclusively in terms of her role as Pre-Raphaelite muse. A fanciful romantic legend have shrouded the specifics of the relationship between E. Siddall and D.G.Rossetti. I cite this particular example as one for analysis as she was in the singular situation of encompassing roles of artist, model, and muse in the Pre-Raphaelite circle. In this chapter I will examine why and how an order of knowledge of specific `facts` came to be recirculated constantly within art history.

Despite retaining her own name in the histories,
she (E.Siddall) has been seen and described almost exclusively in her relation to her
role as

Pre-Raphaelite muse. (J.Marsh Women Pre-Raphaelites, 1987, p. 39)

The quote is ironic as E.Siddall did not retain her name `Siddal` was assigned to her by D.G.Rossetti, as his spelling preference. Other nicknames include Lizzie, Liz, Guggums, Gug, The Sid, Miss Sid and Ida. These terms create a gap between the real woman and the `Siddal` of art history with its set of signifieds. It has been suggested that `Siddal` functions in and for the discourse of art history, which concerns the establishment of masculine dominance and female passivity. The concept of dominant male runs parallel to that of creative genius, which was certainly ascribed to Rossetti.

Rossetti is perhaps, among modern artists the
one man in whom genius so called manifested itself
in the most striking manner. As a painter and a
poet, he was distinctively creative. (The Times, 1882)

E. Siddall's background was a working class one, her occupation being that of a seamstress. *22 William Michael Rossetti had the interests of his brother in mind when recording the specifics of the relationships. The economically and socially disastrous match was obscured through exploitation of the notion of `romance`. Narratives of heterosexual romance function powerfully within Pre- Raphaelite history, as it was a romantic movement. It reenforces the myth of great artist inspired to produce through thwarted love for beautiful woman.

In most reports Siddall is presented only in relation to male artists, as fulfilling relative and has inspirational and complementary functions only. This love story also slots in with the popular myth of Pre Raphaelite as escapist, visionary dreamers fleeing from the newly urbanized industrialized Britain. This is evident in John Week's the Dream Weavers, and an 1984 German study Like a Golden Dream to cite only a few examples.



Little or contradictory reports are given to her other history, outside of muse. Watchmaker, cutler and optician have been ascribed as her fathers occupations in varying reports. The text of `Siddal's` history comes alive with the instigation of the romance. Many versions exist of the discovery in hat shop series.

Rossetti was painting in Hunt's studio one day
when Walter Deverell bursts in saying, `you
fellows what a stupendously beautiful creature
I have found. By Jove!, she's like a queen,
magnificent, tall, lovely figure etc. *23

With the emphasis on discovery and beauty, these narratives echo those of the fallen woman, rescued by Christ, rural husband of Pre-Raphaelite male artist? One obituary does exist recently discovered in the Sheffield Telegraph, outside of Pre-Raphaelite influence, which appears to be derived in part from her own testimony. In this account she was introduced at twenty years old to the family of Mr. Deverell, principal of the government School of Design in London, due to her dress-making skills. She showed him some designs 'of her own leisure hours' and 'he was much pleased with them' and encouraged Siddall to draw. He introduced her to his son Walter Deverell jnr., who was assistant master of the School of Design, honorary member of the P.R.B. and contributor to 'the Germ' the Pre-Raphaelite magazine. This hithero lost version of the introduction shifts the emphasis from 'the discovery' to careerist decision making on Siddall's part.

Not long after Miss Siddal had begun to sit for
Deverell, Dante Rossetti saw her, admired her
enormously and was soon in love with her. *24

Specifics of the situation are obscured by the usage of 'love at first sight'. Potentially disagreeable specifics for W. M. Rossetti, such as the fact that Siddall was an economically independent working class hired model posing as a free-lance model for a host of artists. In 1850 Siddall posed as Viola in the Twelfth Night for Deverell. As can be seen from the illustration she is represented as an awkward, isolated, male figure on the left wearing a red tunic as can be seen in fig. v. Ruskin commented that the Viola was 'of common regular features' and another model should be used. W. Rossetti noted that her face was not physically beautiful enough to represent Viola. In 1851 she posed for Hunt as Sylvia in a difficult kneeling pose, where Ruskin commented that the features of the model were too common for Sylvia. The first 'true Siddal', is usually dated in 1851 in a work by Rossetti, with Siddall as Delia from the story of Tibbulus.



This image shows a woman, with lips parted and tongue caressing a strand of her loose long hair, while wearing a nightgown. The process of elevation had begun.

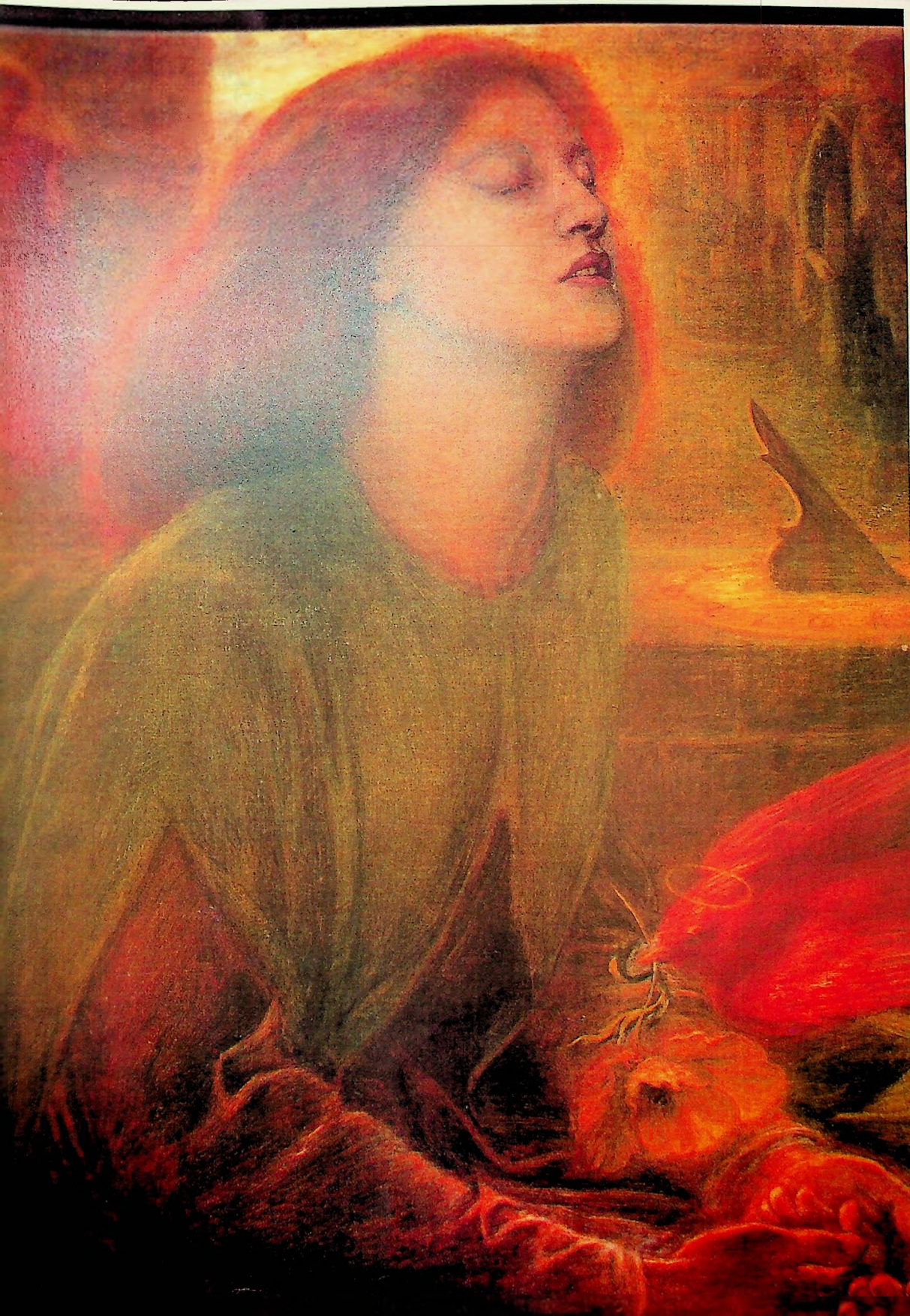
She was a beautiful creature, with an air
of dignity and sweetness, mixed with something
which exceeded modest self-respect and partook
in disdainfull reserve; tall finely formed,
lofty neck, regular and singular features,
greenish bluish unsparkling eyes large perfect
eyelids, brilliant complexion and a lavish
wealth of golden coppery hair. (W.Rossetti)

W. Rossetti had the benefit of hindsight when writing this description of her physical and mental attributes, I would suggest that this information was manipulated. Firstly in order to suit the pictures of the 'Siddal type', of which this was the first. Secondly to redefine her attributes in terms of middle class descriptions of ideal femininity, thus obscuring her working class origins. Accounts do exist of Siddall, such as those given by A.C.Swinburne, where she is described as witty charming intelligent and courageous. W. Rossetti discounts this by stating 'when one wants chivalrous generosity one goes to Swinburne for it. *24

Rossetti's career is organized into distinct periods classified according to the artists romantic or sexual interests. The 'Siddal' type was soon superseded by the Annie Miller type in 1856. Indeed the movement could sometimes be viewed as a fickle and superficial one, indeed Siddall was acutely aware of this when she said 'I am not just a clotheshorse with interesting hair, you do not credit me with a soul!'. So how was this 'Siddal type' signified? The 'Siddal' pictures are ones with a resting pose, sad drooping head, downcast averted eyes, which were/are read as signs of fragility, lassitude and sickness. (fig. vi) Exposing a tendency for easy linkage between the drawings and person, art and life.

She had an unworldly simplicity and purity of
aspect which Rossetti had recorded faithfully
in the pencil drawings of her face. (O. Doughty 1949)

Complete trust is placed with the artist and the 'process of representation' deemed irrelevant. Drawing is a conscious decision making process, an act of representing without colour, which is historically and socially formed. It is a point of production of meanings which are produced and re- negotiated. It is the deconstruction of such 'naturalisms' that writers such as Linda Nochlin concentrate upon. In her book Feminism and Art History she cites the formation of the notion of the possession and control of the image on 2-D, to Italian origins. *26 Similarly in Whitney Chadwick's



book Women Art and Society (1990,) she pinpoints the period in history when the notion of the individual male creative genius originates. *27

In most art historical literature on Siddall she is stated to have been a mere 17 years old when discovered, therefore making her some six years Rossetti's minor. Emphasis being placed on her youth by the likes of W. Rossetti. Recent research on her baptismal cert show that she was in fact only one year younger than Rossetti.

Elizabeth Siddal was Rossetti's Beatrice, an ideal
love, in whose beauty past and present, fact and
symbol, death and life are reconciled. Unlike Dante's Beatrice however, Lizzie does
not stand as a symbol of theology but as a symbol of art. (A. Rose 1977, p.56)

The text above is typical of that written of that written about the picture Beata Beatrix (fig. vii.) of 1862, with all easy, hazy and romantic assumptions. In true Shakespearian style, young death fuels the tragedy of the story, for art historians and supports the constant references to her lifelong` sickness`

All this fine development, and this brilliancy
of hue, was only too consistent with the consumptive
taint on her constitution. (W.Rosseti *29) References to Siddall's poor physical health have strong gender and class implications. Sickness, weakness and fragility emphasizing passivity and the ultimate in respectable femininity. There was no medical evidence of any such sickness. Vague sickness is a privilege of `the arty middle classes`, to which she now belonged, thus by asserting her ill health W. Rossetti is denying her class origins. Evidence exists that Siddall partook in the cult of the romantic artist. The concept of sickness and youthful death was a popular one with Victorian artists. A classic example of one of the gaunt bohemians is Henry Wallis's Chatterton 1855-1856. Much of her poetry deals with the notion of death and sickness.

Oh grieve not with thy bitter tears
The life that passes fast;
The gates of heaven will open wide
And take me in at last. (Early Death E. Siddal)

In my opinion the knowledge of the cult of sickness in bohemian Victorian society, gives us a clue to the origin of the sickness. Through her illness she gained validation and access to artist circles, the sympathy of her peers such as Ruskin and Anna Mary Howwits and it was also her illness that finally prompted Rossetti to marriage, when death was almost certain in 1860. An excuse was readily available to avoid uncomfortable social situations with the Rossetti family, as were excursions abroad financed by Ruskin and Rossetti. In 1854 she befriended Anna M.Howwitt *28.5,

Barbara.L.Smith and Bessie Parkes. Parkes actively encouraged the sickness, to raise Siddal from shop girl to lady, in order that Rossetti would propose.

D.G.R. is an honorable friend to her and no
doubt would marry her if their circumstances
were favorable. She is of course under a ban
having been a model. (Parker papers, Cambridge)

Ruskin, her patron, sent her to an eminent physician, who found no traces of the disease but pronounced her symptoms to be the product of `mental powers long pent up and overtaxed`. This being an archetypal instance in the way male medical practice worked to prevent unsanctioned female activity and it is encouraging to record that this diagnosis was rejected and her work continued. The `realness` of the sickness is peripheral; but the situation reveals much about Victorian ideas regarding class, physicality and art. The illness could have been an expression of the restricted spheres allocated to her. She was acutely aware that she was an embarrassment to the Rossetti family and was forced to keep the engagement a secret until 1853. Contrasting to her image as weak and fragile, Siddall had determination and confidence in order to overcome all the obvious and silent psychological obstructions and succeeded to produce a large body of work. It is ironic to note that her work obviously benefitted from the oppression and is less complacent and more questioning as a result. Her hurdles included lack of familial support, poverty and society's reaction to her unconventional and insecure relationship with Rossetti.

Conducting affairs with working class women and attempting to remould them into bourgeois femininity was something of a fad with the Pre-Raphaelite boys. Their own personal fallen women included F.M.Brown's Emma Hill, W. Morris's Jane Burden, Holman Hunt's Annie Miller, Rossetti's E. Siddall and Fanny Cornforth and John Millais's Effie Ruskin. The women in these situations were not totally passive as some art historical research might suggest. Annie Miller managed to exploit Hunt's faddish tendencies. After gaining refinement with Hunt's financial aid, she thereby deserted him and found herself a rich bourgeois husband elsewhere.

As was the case with many female Pre-Raphaelite artists her career ended abruptly after the problems of childbirth, (her daughter was stillborn in May 1861). She then became disturbed as was the case also of Anna Howwitt's who `broke down under the strain of her naturally delicate frame`. These breakdowns are most understandable when placed in a broad social context. Siddall was one of the many women addicted to laudanum or `the drops` which were used as painkillers, sedatives and tranquilizers, or maybe in Siddall's case to induce sickness. In February 1862 she died of a massive overdose of the drug.

The family of Rossetti were thankful for the death as` it was a blessed release for Gabriel from his honorary marriage to that sick and disturbed woman`. *29

As a consequence of W. Rossetti's active denial of her existence outside of`the great romance`, Siddall's work has been further obscured in art history. The majority of historians who do mention her role as producer, do so in a patronizing and destructive manner.

Under Rossetti's influence, she made drawings
and wrote verses, it seems she has no original
creative power, she was the moon to his sun,
merely reflecting his light. (G.Gore P.R.Papers 1973)

A more subtle approach is taken by Tim Hilton in the Guardian, 6 February 1991, in his review of Marsh's Siddall exhibition in Sheffield. This genre of criticism is wholly reserved for female artists. As his indepth analysis explains`he thinks her work is done by Hunt`, because Siddall modelled for him in 1849 (incorrect dates). He uses those Pre-Raphaelite anecdotes, such as Rossetti's grave digging antics, to avoid a logical discourse. `In the life of the sick wife of the poet, ill health despair pessimism and death pervaded. 'Alas, Lizzie as he`insists` never went on to work in oils, had she done it might have led her to truly unprecedented art`. Siddall started working in oils in 1853. He cites`her want of technique and not knowing art beyond the confines of Pre-Raphaelitism`, thus denying her self- enrolment to Sheffield Art School to study drawing painting and modelling, as did W.M.Rossetti. Hilton speaks indulgently of`Marsh's grudging attitude to the sexist half of the human race`. This recent article illustrates how the specifics of this woman's life have been obscured, and the hazy nature of the writing that seems to be exclusive to the Pre- Raphaelites. The art historical discourse is highly susceptible to changing ideologies. For example during the`liberated` 60's the emphasis was placed upon Rossetti's bohemian unconventional virility *30..

It can not be denied that Rossetti had an influence over Siddall's work, as she actively chose him as her tutor. In the same manner, of course, F.M.Brown exerted an influence over Rossetti's work as tutor. Rossetti's influence was one of a an overall approach as opposed to one of specifics. His approach of non-approach was to give expression to the ideas of the unique imagination. Rossetti was the closest to the working process of Siddall and he constantly praises her seriousness of intent and the originality of the work,`art was the only thing for which she felt seriously` *31 . I could continue to cite examples of her influence on Rossetti`s work, but it would just prove as pointless and tit-for-tat exercise. Siddall as artist offers a potentially interesting situation. The Pre-





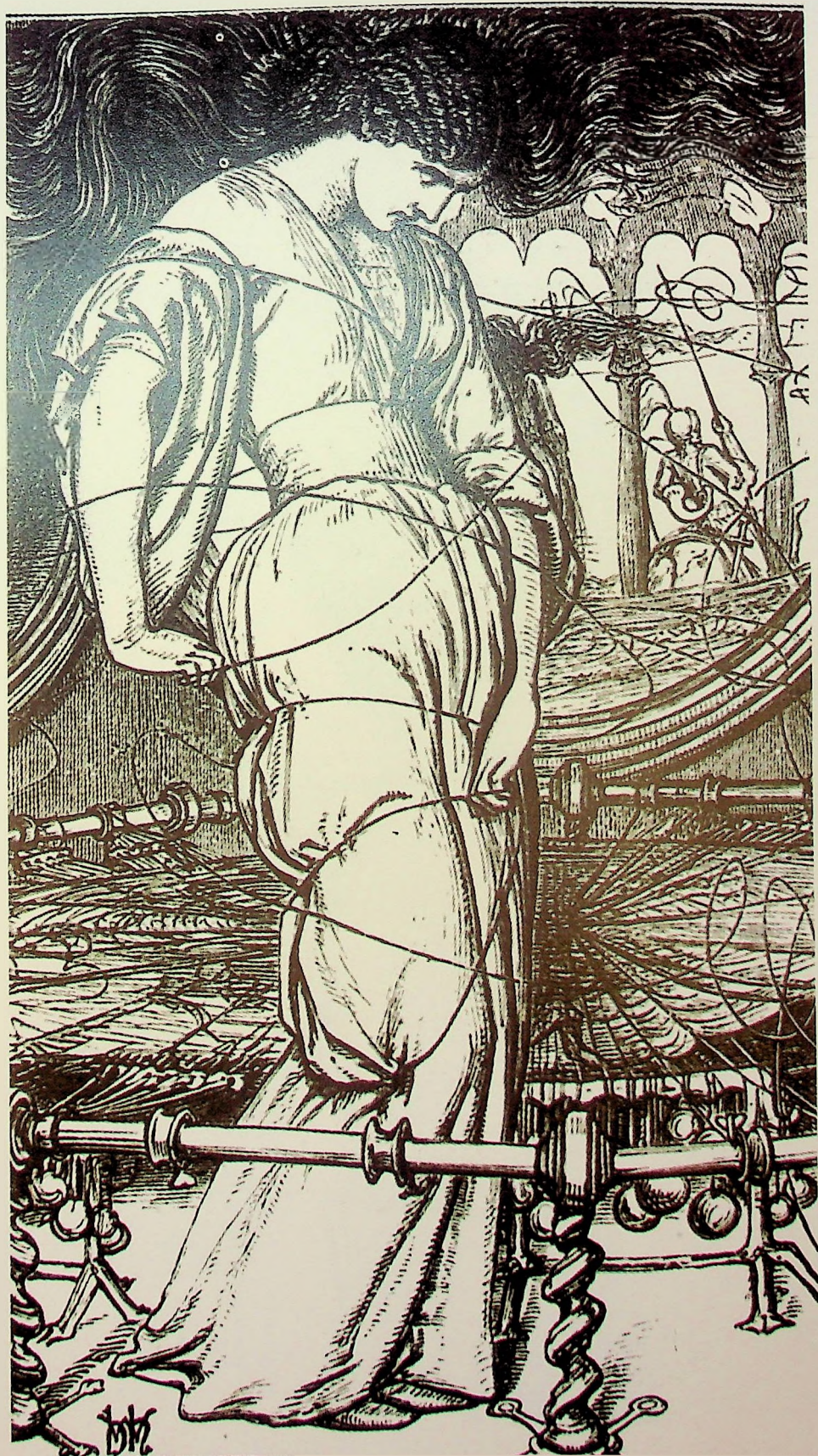
Raphaelite creative process being essentially masculine, which helped to re-negotiate gender differences in which she herself was being oppressed. In this chapter I shall address the question of how she approached being the producer/viewer simultaneously with the produced/viewed. Her role as the viewed elevated/oppressed her to heights of 'the Pre-Raphaelite stunner'. Historians of courtly love stress the fact that the raptures of poets and painters has no effect on the legal and economic status of women and little on the social status. *32

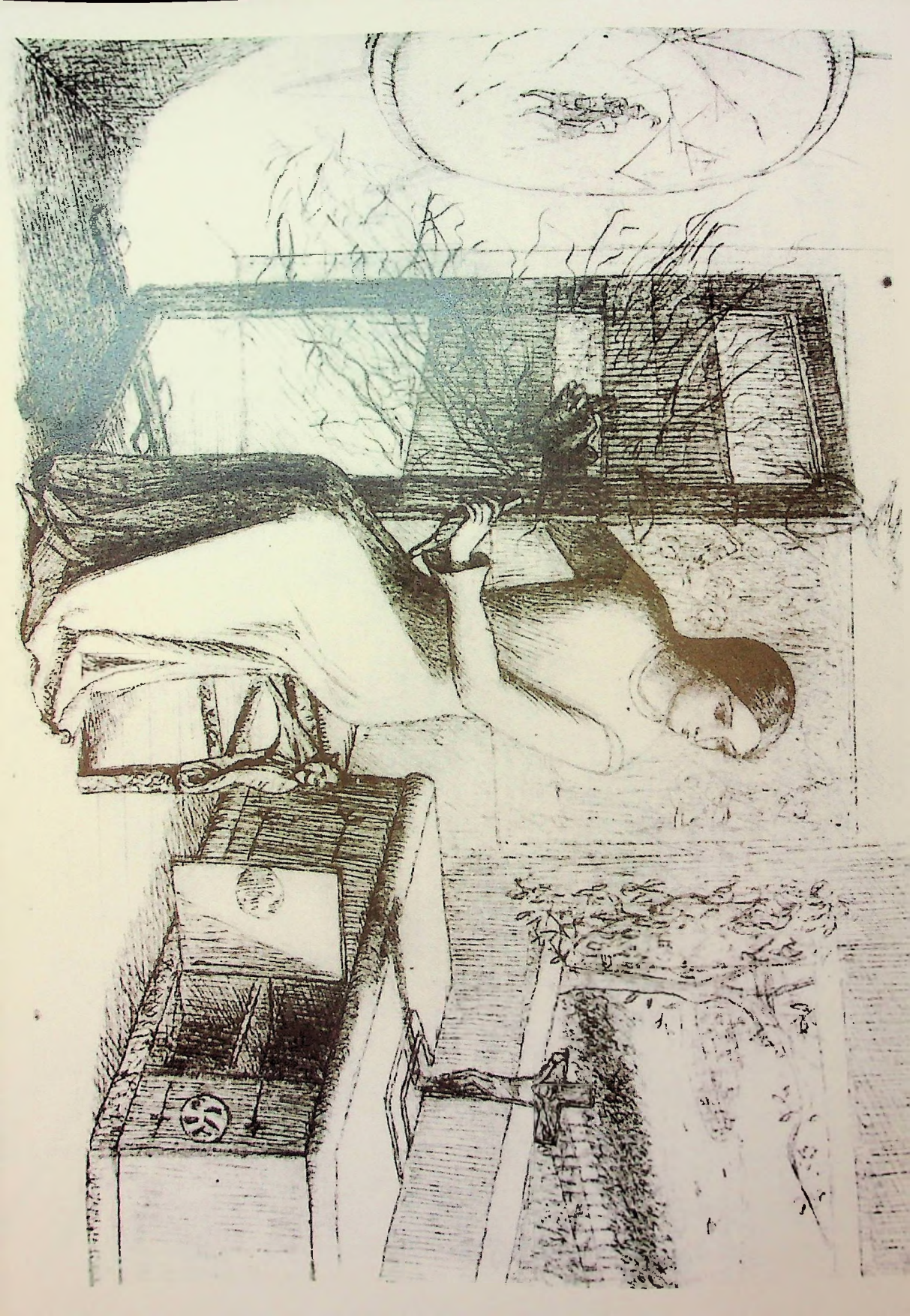
Her Self-Portrait, fig. viii, in oils 1853 is material evidence of the viewer self viewing. It contrasts sharply with Rossetti's types from 1852 onwards. These dolls are essentialized to eyes lips and hair floating freely without connection. Rossetti's disfigured handling of women is obvious in his Alexia Wilding series such as Regina Cordium 1866, fig. ix. Here the cap of the skull has slipped forward towards the eyes, this delivers an overview of the crown simultaneously with the front of the face. The nose to chin area is elongated, while she looks dreamily out of the frame and not directly at the viewer. Short foreheads were associated with empty vessels, this representation was 'no brains and all looks'. These plays were for pleasurable consumption, of an artistically imposed order, and not a realistic depiction of the women themselves *32.1. Siddall's self-portrait is half in shadow with sharp tonal contrasts describing the form of the bone structure. The use of colour is bold and exciting using large areas of complementary greens and reds. The head is erect gazing directly at the viewer, hair tied practically behind and mouth pursed in concentration.

By examining Siddall's approach to Pre-Raphaelite imagery, I do not wish to simply annex her work on to the existing canon of work by male artists. But hope to question how much gender difference is connected to approach. The women Pre-Raphaelites turned inwards as images of attractive young knights are rare. In the 1984 Tate exhibition 'the Pre-Raphaelites' Siddall's two pieces were the only female work included in all 250 items. One of these is a pen and ink drawing the Lady of Shallott 1853. Tennyson's masculine fantasy of 1842 was a familiar Pre-Raphaelite theme. The poem illustrates a woman's punishment by death because of her voyeurism. The poem has a cruel narrative where the Lady is imprisoned inside with her domestic chores.

Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror cracked from side to side;
The curse has come upon me cried
The Lady of Shalott

Tennyson was no feminist, his poem the Princess deals with the issue of education for women. He concludes with the smug confirmation of gender difference.







Man for the field woman for the hearth;
 Man for the sword and for the needle she;
 Man with the head and woman with the heart;
 Man to command and woman to obey;
 All else is confusion.

Ironically Ruskin's pet name for Siddall was that of the heroine, who was called Ida. Ruskin's views on art and emancipation were perennially popular at this period, he called for a return to nature for art and for women. His destructive lectures Sesamies and Lillies and specifically of Queen's Garden's, 1871, directly opposed the logical 'Subjection of Women' by J.S. Mills, 1869 *32.5. The Shallot poem and Siddall's drawing have to be recognized as totally separate texts. Siddall's drawing re-negotiates gender differences in this piece. Lady inside, domestic, weaving, long hair, straight white dress, knight outside and physically active. The separate sphere ideology is evident here. The woman's body is refused as a sight of visual pleasure. The bird perched on the loom being a common symbol for females trapped in their domestic environment *33. In Hunt (fig.x), Millais, and Rossetti's interpretations the decorative woman is shown mad, trapped, helpless, struggling and dying. In contrast Siddall's image is cool and calm (fig. xi). The woman is shown voyeuristically gazing at the knight, and denies punishment, thus exploring other meanings.

How did Rossetti's fallen woman approach the hot topic? In 1854 A.M. Howitt's was the first to deal with the subject in her Margeret Returning from the Fountain, followed by Hunt's Awakening Conscious and Rossetti's Found. In 1854 Siddall executed Poppa and the House of Love from Browning's poem Fallen Woman, now known as Lover's Listening to Music, (fig. xii). A couple sit together surrounded by the countryside, reminiscent of Hastings where Rossetti and Siddall spent the Summer of 1854. According to W. Rossetti the man's face was worked from Gabriel. Two oriental girls are playing the Song of Love and love itself is the Cupid girl-child at the couple's side. In Siddall's work women are central like the men's work but she deploys them across a much more varied spectrum of female possibilities, which is not restricted to white women. This work stresses every aspect of love. Love being a sporting kind of reparation which allows women to save face. In love the female is pardoned unsanctioned sexual activity.

O god, forgive me that I ranged
 My life into a dream of love!
 Will tears of anguish never wash
 The passion from my blood?
 (E. Siddall, the Passing of Love)







In Lovers Listening to Music the couple are peaceful and meditative, body language being affectionate and intimate. This image of `unrespectable love` is a celebratory and positive one and free from uptight Victorian moralizing.

Siddall dealt with the pre battle scene in 1858 with a Lady Fixing a Pennon to a Knights Spear, (fig. xiii). The approach is an unpompous one to the medieval scene in both title and execution. Once again the contrast between the quiet almost bare interior and the green landscape outside, where the knight will go, as his horse is at the door constructs the opposition between the separate spheres. She uses the medium of watercolour in a bold and broad way, with colour usage as vibrant as in all her work. the couple are crouched together taking up equal space, joined by the red flag, the lady's arm is placed assertively around the knights shoulders, a unique gesture in Pre-Raphaelite art. They are engaged in the practical problem of nailing the pennon to the shaft, which is obviously giving the knight problems. This treatment contrasts sharply with the Knight's Farewell (E.B.Jones 1858), Chapel Before the Lists (D.G.R 1864) and Before Battle (D.G.R. 1864). The latter shows the lady central, lovely and literally pedestaled above the knight, while placing the pennon upon the shaft, as seen in fig. xiv. The composition is cluttered and complicated while Siddall's is simple and intensive.

Single and double figure treatment is evident in a lot of the Pre-Raphaelite women artists work, a fact which could be due to lack of access or funding for models. Siddall has equal understanding of her sources as her contemporaries but her emphasis is different. Thus escaping the monotony of work derived from desires or ideals transfixed by one or two actual images, as is practised in some of Rossetti, B. Jones's and Freidrich Sandy's work. Her female figures show a more empathetic attitude to women and include repeated use of her own personal heroines eg. Lady Macbeth. Of all the different characters and sources used by her there is one constant; a woman with red long hair in plain rectangular clothing who is usually contained in interior box-like structures. When other figures are introduced their costumes are more elaborate. It has been suggested that the reason for the box dress was an inability to describe anatomy, I would disagree, and suggest that the box-dress was an expression of frustration at her confinement in her socially complex predicament. In Pippa Passes, 1855, fig. xv., a group of prostitutes are portrayed on the right in elaborate garb, in contrast the long haired pure box-girl is in opposition on the left. Hence she ascribes sexuality to the women by describing their bodies, thus no body no sexuality.

From 1852-1861 she worked as artist and poet producing over a hundred works including oils watercolours prints and sketches

. A collection of her poems were published for the first time in 1978. Her poetry is never referred to in any Pre- Raphaelite literature, suggesting the private nature of the work or alternately indicating the active denial of her role as poet/producer by the art historical discourse. I do not see the poetry as autobiographical information, but as indicative to the different creeds of religion, death and romantic love in which she was involved. My account of the work is by no means a thorough one, but has more of an indicative function of the amount of dedication necessary for one woman to produce, by reconstructing a history outside of the Pre-Raphaelite circle.

This discourse would not exist if it were not for the Pre- Raphaelite belief that attitude superseded ability, thus proving it a more accessible and ultimately democratic movement.* 33.1 Lofty notions of deliberate primitivism were encouraged by the Pre-Raphaelites, ironically Siddall's unselfconscious approach was deemed incompetent. Of all the Pre-Raphaelite work Siddall's strikes one, as the most sincere and moving.

Chapter four.

Pre-Raphaelite art as an ideological practice is basically an oppressive one, but as I have said earlier it is also a democratic one. In some ways it can be seen as a precursor to post-modernism, which insists on the newness and originality of approach. Neither terms can be used simplistically, their names merely acting as defining and controlling term for the often conflicting concepts and personalities they take upon themselves creating a unified and stereotypical front for public consumption. Each movement being firmly rooted in the ethos of the age. Both movements try and merge the high and low art forms. In Post-Modernism the artist has come down from the garret and her/his activities include literary texts, performance art, music, video, architecture, all encouraging mass accessibility. In the instance of the Pre- Raphaelites women did much to eliminate artistic boundaries, as they pushed Traditionally domestic activities such as needlework and embroidery. The art of quilt-making in America reached its peak in 1848, coinciding with the first ever feminist meeting in Seneca Falls, *33.5. May Morris worked in her `Palace of Art` specifically with the aim of making the boundries between fine and applied art more flexible. The Royal School of Needlework opened in 1872. The Arts and Crafts movement first exhibited in 1888 and included stained glass, painting and illustration in the show. Of course women have always produced art, though not for the art world, with the likes of needlework, embroidery, etc. *34 By existing outside of the art world the work is free from male high art notions, thus being less self-conscious. It is generally recognized that 19th century symbolism, which is included in the work of later Pre-Raphaelites were important catalysts for the work of H.Matisse and W. Kandinsky. The Pre- Raphaelites presaged this work which seeks to convey meaning through abstract and non-objective forms. Both artist manipulated the `decorative arts` aspect of symbolism and `transformed` it into `high art`. They stole from traditionally women's art in order to among many other things, to further women's oppression, by their exclusion and subjection. Kandinsky's work being derived from his designs of dresses, handbags, jewelry, furniture and embroidered wall hangings. It is precisely this derogatory aspect of `mere decorative art` that M. Morris, post-modernists and feminists (the terms sometimes overlap), such as Miriam Schapiro are trying to undermine.

In the 19th century the relaxed atmosphere was encouraged by the likes of O.Wilde in his Critic as Artist 1891.

Mere colour unspoiled by meaning and allied
with definite form, can speak to the soul in
a thousand different ways.



In the 1850's and 60's Julia Cameron pioneered the use of photography in connection with the Pre-Raphaelite imagery. She being an example of a 'feminine artist' who was in the rare position of having wealth, connections and power, hence she did not question the imagery, but merely accepted the main-stream, male artistic process. (fig. xvi) The Mc Donald sisters from Glasgow's work being semi-symbolist using mixed-media to design, paint and embroider. Mary Newill's work included book-binding, metalwork and stained-glass. The Pre-Raphaelite reaction against the stagnant limited norms of historical paintings, also spread to architecture. A Gothic style replaced the cold logic of classical buildings which were constructed with mathematical logic that denied human creativity. Medieval craftsmen could plan and decorate a building according to their creative impulse, thus including active thought to their labour. The resulted 'imperfections' were seen by the likes of Ruskin as symbol of liberty. Similarly post-modernism has reacted against the sterility of high modernist architecture, opposing its purity of form, with a play of forms that plunders from history for reference the use of archaism as a reaction against stagnant art forms, be it Reynold's historical paintings or New York high modernism, with a reliance on 'gut-feeling' for approval and validation.

*35

NOTES

1. D. Cherry and G. Pollock Patriarchal Power and the Pre- Raphaelites, Art History 1984, 7 (4), 481.
2. Vision and Difference, 1988, G. Pollock, pg 100
3. Vision and Difference, pg 91.
4. K. Millet deals with the plight of Victorian women thoroughly in Sexual Politics 7 pg 85-230, 1977.
5. Looking On, Rosemary Betterton, 1987, pg
6. Ellis identifies realism both as a question of artistic construction and audience expectation and outlines the general requirements of a realistic representation.
7. Looking On, p.87.
8. Poem by Thomas Hood on the prostitutes suicide.
9. Vision and Difference, pg 113
10. S. Casteras, Images of Victorian Femininity
11. J. Marsh, Pre-Raphaelite Women, pg 126.
12. G. A. Fleming, That Neer Shall Meet Again, 1971, 161
13. A. C. Swinburne to W. Bell Scott, 16 Dec 1859, Swinburne letters, ed CY Lang 1859 1. pg 27.
14. W. H. Hunt to Thomas Covue, 12 Feb 1860, Bodleim Library, Eng lett, 296
15. E. Waugh, D. G. Rossetti, 1928, p. 135.
16. D. Cherry and G. Pollock Patriarchy and the Pre- Raphaelites, Art History, 1984, 7 pg 490.
- 16.5 . K. Millett, Sexual Politics,:Digression of the Evidence of Sexuality, 162-169, 1977.
17. L.Nead Woman as Temptress: The Siren and the Mermaid in Victorian Painting, Leeds art calendar, 1982, no 91.
18. Vision and Difference, pg 149.
19. Photography/pornography, art/pornography, Screen, 1980, 20, (1), 101.
20. Vision and Difference pg 150.
21. Needlewomen of this period were one of the most exploited factions of the working class. J. Curling and Sue Clayton's film the Song of the Shirt, 1979, examine the construction of the `distressed needle woman`, through different means of representation. In doing so the film not only questions it's own process of construction, but also offers an investigation into historical modes of representation and the process of writing history itself.
23. Hunt, Pre- Raphaelitism, vol 1, 1918.
24. D. G. R.: His family letters with a memoir (1, 173).

25. D. G. R.: His family letters with a memoir, comment on 24 December 1892, letter to the academy.
26. Feminism and Art History, N. Broude, M. Gerrard, 1982, pg 185.
27. Women Art and Society, Whitney Chadwick, 1990, pg 15
28. William Rossetti, Spectator, Study of Head, 1857.
- 28.5 Howwitt's, Artist in Munich exposed much of the struggles for female artists.
29. Catalogue of E. Siddall, J. Marsh, 1991, pg 17.
30. Steven Marcus, The Other Victorians, 1966. Ronald Pearsall, the Worm in the Bud: the world of Victorian sexuality, 1969.
31. Catalogue of E. Siddall, J. Marsh, 1991, pg 25.
32. K. Millett, Sexual Politics, 1977, pg 45.
- 32.1 Woman as Sign, Elizabeth Cowie, 1978, pg 60,
It is possible to see women not as a given
biologically or psychologically but as a
category produced in a signifying practice.
- 32.5 Ruskin's ethnocentric, masculinist and essentially bourgeois attitudes to art are consistently called upon in order to assert traditional English values in art. Such a quarterly is Modern Painters, pioneered by the recent Peter Fuller, who refers constantly to Ruskin and artists influenced by him such as the Pre-Paphaelites, the St. Ives school, and Paul Nash.
33. Slavery, women's rights and animal rights were all highly controversial issues in the mid-nineteenth century. These debates are important in what they reveal about the way that control over the bodies of animals and women was articulated around identifications with nature, culture, sexuality and dominance. This connection can be cited in many Pre-Raphaelite works, such as W. Deverell, a Pet, 1853, the Grey Parrot, 1853 and Evelyn Pickering's later work, the imagery of birds encaged beside beautiful women, provoking questions of 'keeping' young women within domestic enclosures.
- 33.1 Access to art training depended on occupation, gender and class, thus women were discriminated against, in every stage of production of 'high culture'.
- 33.5. The sexual revolution, 1850-1930, concentrated on gaining suffrage and failed to include the working class woman in the struggles, as they were the most oppressed.
34. Feminism and Art History, N. Broude, M. Gerard, 1982, :Quilt Making the Great American Art, pg 315
35. The New Image, Tony Godfrey, 1986, pg 82.

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