

**BEYOND OPHELIA:**  
The Artistic Legacy of  
Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti (née Siddall)

Two Volumes

Volume 1

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## **Abstract**

Patriarchal art history has frequently dismissed the artistic output of Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, better known as Pre-Raphaelite model 'Lizzie Siddal', as deficient and imitative. In this thesis I argue the opposite: that Elizabeth's designs were not only innovative but essential to the aesthetic development of Pre-Raphaelite art.

Elizabeth's husband and mentor, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, held her work in such high esteem that he arranged for all her drawings to be photographed after her death. This resource is under-researched; therefore, I document current knowledge and create a new record of her oeuvre to provide a scholarly basis for future research.

John Ruskin believed Elizabeth's designs possessed 'genius', while William Michael Rossetti defined her special quality as 'facility of invention and composition'. I analyse her oeuvre to identify these visual attributes, also examining subjects, media and themes. I show how Elizabeth's idiosyncratic use of compositional elements, figure poses and groupings inspired and informed the work of Gabriel and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, hiding the true extent of her legacy in the work of others.

I conclude that far from being peripheral to the Pre-Raphaelite circle, Elizabeth's 'facility of invention and composition' was critical to the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art.

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**Figure 107:** Edward Burne-Jones, *Laus Veneris*. 1873-8. Oil on canvas. 119.4 x 180.3 cm. Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

**Figure 108:** Visual comparison Top: Edward Burne-Jones, *Laus Veneris* (Fig. 107, detail). Bottom: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Design for Moxon's Tennyson: King Arthur and the Weeping Queens*. 1856-7. Pen and brown ink on paper. 8.2 x 9.2 cm. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.

**Figure 109:** Visual comparison Left: Edward Burne-Jones, *Laus Veneris* (Fig. 107, detail). Right: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Composition Study for Bonifazio's Mistress*. 1856. Pen, brown ink and wash on paper. 19.5 x 17.0 cm. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.

**Figure 110:** Visual comparison Left: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Composition Study for Bonifazio's Mistress* (Fig. 109, right). Right: Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, *Study for The Gay Goss-Hawk*. (Fig. A.20).

**Figure 111:** Visual comparison Left: Edward Burne-Jones, *Laus Veneris* (Fig. 107, detail). Right: Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, *Study for The Gay Goss-Hawk*. (Fig. A.20).

**Figure 112:** Visual comparison Left: Edward Burne-Jones, *Clerk Saunders*. 1861. Oil on canvas. 119.4 x 180.3 cm. Tate Gallery, London. Right: Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, *Clerk Saunders*. (Fig. A.17).

**Figure 113:** Visual comparison Left: John Everett Millais, *The Bride of Lammermoor*. 1878. Oil on canvas. 151.1 x 107.3 cm. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. Right: Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, *Study for Jephthah's Daughter* (Fig. A.25, mirror image).

**Figure 114:** Visual comparison Left: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*. 1871-8. Oil on canvas. 212.1 x 133.0 cm (including frame). Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass. Right: Edward Burne-Jones, *The Blessed Damozel*. 1856-61. Watercolour, gouache, and shell gold on paper mounted on canvas. 64.8 x 44.5 cm (including frame). Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.

**Figure 115:** Visual comparison Left: Edward Burne-Jones, *The Blessed Damozel* (Fig. 114, right). Right: Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*. (Fig. A.12).

**Figure 116:** Frederic James Shields, *Sister Helen*. c.1890-5. Oil on panel. 55 x 37 cm. Private collection.

**Figure 117:** Visual comparison Left: Frederic James Shields, *Sister Helen* (Fig. 116, detail). Right: Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, *Sister Helen* (Fig. A.87, detail).

**Figure 118:** Visual comparison Left: Frederic James Shields, *Sister Helen*. (Fig. 116). Right: Frederic James Shields, *Study of a Draped Female Figure*. c.1890-5. Oil on panel. 55 x 36.5 cm. Private collection.



## **List of Accompanying Material**

Appendix A: a full catalogue of Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti's drawings in alphabetical order.

(Included in Volume 2 for ease of reference)

## Preface

My first encounter with ‘Lizzie Siddal’ was, in the words of my ex-boss, in ‘that painting of the girl in the river with the flowers’.<sup>1</sup> Of course he was referring to John Everett Millais’s painting *Ophelia* (1851-2, Tate Gallery, London, Fig. 1) a painting I had seen many times in passing. When called upon to write about symbolism in one of the assignments for my MA, I chose to explore the Victorian language of flowers and *Ophelia* immediately sprang to mind. I revisited the Tate Gallery, spent several hours staring at Millais’s painting, and unknowingly embarked on the journey that would lead to this doctoral thesis.

Although my initial interest was Millais’s depiction of Ophelia’s flowers and their correlation with Shakespeare’s words, it was the red-haired model that captured my imagination. As John Guille Millais, the artist’s son and biographer comments: ‘It is Ophelia’s face that holds the spectator, rivets his attention, and stirs his emotion’.<sup>2</sup> Who was she? Did she really pose in the river? What other paintings did she pose for? The obvious solution was to seek out a monograph, so I borrowed the only available book from my local library, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel* by Lucinda Hawksley.<sup>3</sup> What a life that girl in the river had led – according to Hawksley’s narrative! Being discovered in a bonnet shop, posing in a bath of water, committing suicide and then having her coffin exhumed at the dead of night! Was it all true? I was compelled to investigate further. Hawksley’s book was not properly referenced

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<sup>1</sup> Conversations with Gavin Ferguson, Back Office Manager, Centrica plc, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of John Everett Millais* Vol. I (London: Methuen, 1899), 145.

<sup>3</sup> Lucinda Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel* (London: André Deutsch (Carlton Publishing), 2004). See also the Introduction.

but did contain brief notes on sources and a bibliography, which led me to the work which sealed my fate, Jan Marsh's *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*.<sup>4</sup>

Marsh's book presented me with more questions than answers. Was Lizzie Siddal a milliner or a dressmaker? Did she really commit suicide, or was it an accident? Why had I not seen any of her drawings or paintings? What did she hope to achieve in her art? Coincidentally my initial interest corresponded with the Tate Gallery's blockbuster exhibition *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* in 2012, which did not disappoint.<sup>5</sup> Although it was William Holman Hunt's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona: Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1851, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery) that left me weak at the knees with his skill in depicting shining armour, crunchy fallen leaves, and the sumptuous textures of fabrics including velvet, I was inevitably transfixed by *Lady Clare* (1854-7, private collection, Fig. A.43) on the opposite wall. This jewel-like watercolour, along with two smaller watercolours and a drawing, ensured I visited the exhibition many times.

My interest grew and one quotation by Elizabeth Prettejohn kept ringing in my ears:

it is not sufficient merely to add some women to the Pre-Raphaelite canon. Instead it is a matter of writing a wholly new, and different, story about Pre-Raphaelitism - a story in which the activities of women are no longer incidental, but necessary to the plot.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, my PhD journey began with a quiet curiosity and developed into an all-consuming obsession to tell this new story about Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti

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<sup>4</sup> Jan Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (London and New York: Quartet Books, 2010 [1989]). See also the Introduction.

<sup>5</sup> *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, Tate Gallery, London, 12 September 2012 – 13 January 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), 69.

(née Siddall), the former model whose work as an artist has proved to be critical to the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art.

## Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to my late husband, Paul. Without his illness I would never have begun studying for pleasure.

I extend my sincere thanks to Liz Prettejohn and Jeanne Nuechterlein for their support and encouragement during the most challenging times; to Rupert Maas for allowing me to view his archives and lending me his copy of Eleonore Reichert's thesis; to Katherine Wodehouse and Caroline Palmer in the Western Art Print Room at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and Amy Marquis, Graham Robertson Study Room and Emma Darbyshire, Image Sales and Licensing, at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for their help with the photographic portfolios; to Hannah Squire and Helen Bratt-Wyatt of the National Trust at Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton; to Harriet Drummond at Christie's; to Jack Lowe of the Lifeboat Station Project for his help in understanding the wet collodion photographic process; to Robert Wilkes, friend and co-conspirator in the *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters: Making Art* conference and subsequent publication, to my York compatriot Julie Whyman for sharing my passion with knowledgeable discussion; to my good friends and fellow MA students Judy Leverton, Diane Ward, Debbie Innes, Janice Tunnicliffe, Lesley Pearce and Laurence Minaire for being there for the whole journey, and of course to all my friends and family who have endured my obsession with Elizabeth without complaining.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and that I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged and fully referenced.

# Introduction – Three Biographies, a Thesis and an Obituary

## Introduction

There is a willow grows aslant a brook  
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.  
There with fantastic garlands did she come  
Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, and long purples,  
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
But our cold maids do “dead men’s fingers” call them.  
There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds  
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,  
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up,  
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indued  
Unto that element. But long it could not be  
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death.<sup>1</sup>

First exhibited at the Royal Academy in the summer of 1852, John Everett

Millais’s *Ophelia* (Fig. 1) remains one of Tate Gallery’s most popular paintings.

Just as William Shakespeare’s words have framed Millais’s depiction of the scene, so in turn the painting has framed the public perception of its red-haired model, Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti (née Siddall), known to the many admiring gallery visitors as ‘Lizzie Siddal’. Yet this painting traps Elizabeth within the confines of its golden frame, focusing on her role as a model and ignoring her other notable achievements as an artist and a poet.

My aim in this thesis is to pluck Elizabeth from the muddy depths of Millais’s painting and explore her true artistic legacy. I will present her work as an artist in a totally new light. It is therefore appropriate to create distance from the traditional stories that surround her, and the controversial question of the

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<sup>1</sup> Hamlet, Act IV, Scene vii.

spelling of her maiden name.<sup>2</sup> I have therefore elected to use her married name, Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, to restore her to her rightful place within this historic literary and artistic family. My choice is inspired by the new monogram 'EER' that Gabriel created for his wife (Fig. 2), embossed on the manuscript copy of her poem 'O mother open the window wide', held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.<sup>3</sup> Griselda Pollock wrote, 'We are witnessing a paradigm shift which will rewrite all cultural history'.<sup>4</sup> My choice therefore reflects this shift and the necessity to change the public perception of the significance of Elizabeth's oeuvre to the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art. It also differentiates my work from that of other scholars who have chosen to use 'Siddal' or 'Siddall' according to their own preference. To avoid confusion, I will refer to each member of the Rossetti family by their given name after first mention, rather than the conventional family name. For her husband, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, I will use Gabriel, the name favoured by his Pre-Raphaelite associates.

### **Brief Biography and Literature Survey**

Before I begin to address Elizabeth's artistic legacy, it is essential to offer a brief biography and to situate her within the context of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. This necessitates revisiting some of the well-worn myths and stories which surround her. The main sources of information on Elizabeth, which have all contributed in different ways to establishing her legacy, are William Michael Rossetti's biographical article 'Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal' (1903), Violet Hunt's narrative *The Wife of Rossetti, Her Death and Life* (1932), Jan

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<sup>2</sup> See Griselda Pollock and Deborah Cherry, "Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: The representation of Elizabeth Siddal," in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, femininity and the histories of art* ed. Griselda Pollock (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2010 [1984]), 128-62.

<sup>3</sup> Manuscript sheet of poetry: 'O Mother open the window wide and let the daylight in', Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Accession no. WA1977.182.1. See also Serena Trowbridge, ed., *My Lady's Soul: The Poems of Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets Ltd, 2018), 70.

<sup>4</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Feminist Interventions in the History of Art," in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, femininity and the histories of art* ed. Griselda Pollock (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2010 [1988]), 24.



Marsh's in-depth monograph *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (1989) and Lucinda Hawksley's *Elizabeth Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel* (2004), augmented by Eleonore Reichert's doctoral thesis (1972) and an obituary published in the Sheffield Telegraph (1862). I will draw on these and other publications to present my brief biography of Elizabeth.

According to popular history, in 1848 three rebellious young artists were disillusioned with the 'stale and empty' art being produced by the British Royal Academy.<sup>5</sup> They vowed to revolutionise British art and thus the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was born. Art history has focused on the three main protagonists: John Everett Millais (1829-1896), William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), although there were four other founding members: artist James Collinson (1825-1881); sculptor Thomas Woolner (1825-1892); artist and art critic Frederic George Stephens (1828-1907) and Gabriel's brother, art critic and Pre-Raphaelite chronicler William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919). Holman Hunt explains in his memoirs that 'the first principle of Pre-Raphaelitism was to eschew all that was conventional in contemporary art'.<sup>6</sup> He also stresses the need to paint from an 'exact study of outdoor nature', as epitomised by Millais in the background of *Ophelia*, demonstrating a fundamental break from traditional studio-based painting.<sup>7</sup> To achieve these aims every detail was painted from life, with members of the Brotherhood posing for each other to ensure individualism. They continually sought 'Stunners', or models possessing a unique natural beauty, to differentiate their

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<sup>5</sup> William Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* (London: Sphere Books Ltd. (The Penguin Group), 1988 [1942]), 16.

<sup>6</sup> William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1905), I, 125.

<sup>7</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, II, 431.

work from the figures painted by the conformist academicians.<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth was initially just one of these ‘Stunners’.

Little is known about Elizabeth’s early life. One of seven children, she was born in Hatton Garden, London, on 25 July 1829.<sup>9</sup> Her parents, Charles and Elizabeth Eleanor (née Evans), were originally from Sheffield but had moved to London and by 1851 were living on the Old Kent Road, where the family business flourished.<sup>10</sup> Although she was probably home-tutored, Elizabeth clearly received a good education since she was able to read and write eloquently, if not always with grammatical correctness.<sup>11</sup>

Elizabeth’s brother-in-law, William, was the first to attempt to document what is known of her life. William had become a prolific chronicler of his brother’s work and life, but only mentioned Elizabeth in passing until 1903, when he offered his personal insight into her character, life and artistic oeuvre in an article published in the first volume of *The Burlington Magazine*. As well as recounting biographical anecdotes, in this ground-breaking article he clearly asserts Elizabeth’s position as an artist, itemising some twenty-three different subjects she illustrated. This article has provided the baseline for all subsequent study of her work. William also credits Elizabeth with artistic skill, having ‘much facility of invention and composition, with eminent purity of feeling, dignified simplicity, and grace’ in the drawings she produced, qualities which I will discuss further in

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, p.45

<sup>9</sup> Marion Edwards, “Elizabeth Siddal – The Age Problem,” *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 119 No. 887 (February 1977): 112.

<sup>10</sup> 1851 Census returns - (P.R.O.) HO 107/1563, fo. 332, 11.

<sup>11</sup> See Trowbridge, *My Ladys Soul*, 28. Trowbridge mentions William correcting both punctuation and spelling in his publication of Elizabeth’s poetry.

Chapter 4.<sup>12</sup> William's article, therefore, laid the foundation stone of Elizabeth's artistic legacy.

Yet William's accounts of Elizabeth's life and work are naturally biased and highly edited. His main aim was to protect and promote his brother's reputation, as can be seen from the article's concluding words, where he affirms that she was 'worthy of being espoused to a painter and poet'.<sup>13</sup> The critical importance of this article, however, is paramount. Although purporting to focus on five unpublished drawings of her by Gabriel, William devotes the greater portion to comments about Elizabeth's body of work, thus ensuring his readers understood that she was more than just Gabriel's wife. The article, however, is also identifiable as the source of some of the myths which contribute to Elizabeth's legacy, including the way she entered the Pre-Raphaelite circle.

According to the article, it was the Brotherhood's friend and associate Walter Deverell who introduced Elizabeth to the group towards the end of 1849. His search for a red-haired model to pose for the figure of Viola in his painting of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* led to his first encounter with Elizabeth. The now familiar tale of her discovery in a 'bonnet shop' has simply become part of her accepted back-story. Since no surviving first-hand accounts by either Elizabeth or Deverell exist, numerous versions of the discovery story have emerged, each creating a different layer of intrigue. All accounts are subject to the vagaries of oral history as all were written retrospectively and based on hearsay since the writers were not present. During the 1850s

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<sup>12</sup> William Michael Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* Vol. 1 No. 3 (1903): 278.

<sup>13</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 295.

Elizabeth's discovery was not deemed important enough to warrant contemporary comment.

William's account of Elizabeth's discovery is somewhat restrained in tone and gives little detail:

[Deverell] accompanied his mother to a bonnet-shop in Cranbourne Alley. Looking from the shop through an open door into a back room, he saw a very young woman working with the needle: it was Elizabeth Siddal.<sup>14</sup>

A livelier narration of this 'discovery myth' originates from Holman Hunt's memoirs. He asserts that Deverell bounded in to a PRB meeting and exclaimed:

"You fellows can't tell what a stupendously beautiful creature I have found. By Jove! She's like a queen, magnificently tall, with a lovely figure, a stately neck and a face of the most delicate and finished modelling; the flow of surface from the temples over the cheek is exactly like the carving of a Pheidean goddess. Wait a minute! I haven't done; she has grey eyes and her hair is like dazzling copper, and shimmers with lustre as she waves it down. And now, where do you think I lighted on this paragon of beauty? Why, in a milliner's back workroom when I went out with my mother shopping."<sup>15</sup>

Although writing over fifty years later, Holman Hunt uses speech marks to suggest he is recalling and quoting Deverell's actual words. William, therefore, appears to have not only provided the baseline for scholarly research into Elizabeth's art, but furnished future chroniclers, biographers and novelists with their starting point for embellishment.

There is another, rather more plausible version of the story, which Jan Marsh discovered in a previously unknown obituary in the Sheffield library archives.

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<sup>14</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 274.

<sup>15</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, I, 198.

The obituary suggests Elizabeth first became acquainted with the Deverell family in the capacity of dressmaker, not in a bonnet shop. The obituary is often dismissed because of critical errors, including the mis-spelling of Rossetti as 'Rossetta' and the confusion of Millais with Maclise. Other details, however, are correct, including Elizabeth's age, a point on which William himself was mistaken. This suggests that the writer, 'W.I.', identified as William Ibbett, a distant cousin of Elizabeth's, learned her back-story from conversations while she was in Sheffield. The mis-spelling of Rossetti may simply be accounted for by the issues of recollection associated with oral history.

The obituary text reads:

[Elizabeth] was a dressmaker and as such was introduced to the family of an artist who held some office at the Royal Academy. This artist had a son, a most promising student, the friend of Rosetta, Maclise, Holman Hunt and others – the nucleus, the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite school. Miss Siddall showed some outlines, designs of her own leisure hours to the elder artist Mr D[everell] and he, much pleased with them, introduced them to Mr D[everell] Jnr and the other young artists. She was encouraged to practise by them and did so at her leisure.<sup>16</sup>

As a dressmaker Elizabeth would have been accustomed to sketching and discussing designs with her clients, which suggests this version of the first encounter is more realistic. It is easy to envisage her developing those existing skills further with some tuition. In addition, Gabriel also includes mention of Elizabeth making her own dresses in correspondence, yet never comments about any hat she wore or created.<sup>17</sup> This inconsistency may be explained by historian Helen Rogers's comment that 'the figures of the needlewoman and the

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<sup>16</sup> 'The Death of Mrs D.G. Rossetta', *Sheffield Telegraph*, 28 February 1862, reproduced in full in Marsh, *Legend*, 157-8.

<sup>17</sup> William E. Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 10 vols (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, New York: D.S. Brewer, 2002-15), I, 197. Letter to Christina, 4 August 1852. Item 52.8.

prostitute were bound together in the Victorian imagination'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, by associating Elizabeth with millinery, purchased by women of the higher classes for social events, William may have strategically elevated her to a social class more acceptable to the Rossetti family.

After her initial introduction, Elizabeth was soon modelling for other members of the Brotherhood, posing for Holman Hunt's *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids* (1849-50, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) and *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1851, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery), before agreeing to pose for Millais's *Ophelia*. Millais painted the background from nature beside the Hogsmill river near Ewell, Surrey, and later added the figure of Ophelia in his studio.<sup>19</sup> He had purchased an antique dress for authenticity, and as Arthur Hughes is credited with explaining:

In order that the artist might get the proper set of the garments in water and the right atmosphere and aqueous effects, she [Elizabeth] had to lie in a large bath filled with water, which was kept at an even temperature by lamps placed beneath. One day, just as the picture was nearly finished, the lamps went out unnoticed by the artist, who was so intensely absorbed in his work that he thought of nothing else, and the poor lady was kept floating in the cold water till she was quite benumbed.<sup>20</sup>

Elizabeth became unwell after this event and Millais was forced to settle the doctor's fee. Her health, which was not mentioned before this incident, appears never to have fully recovered. Some two years after *Ophelia* was exhibited, Gabriel wrote to Brown on 29 March 1854 that she had been 'unwell lately',

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<sup>18</sup> Helen Rogers, "'The Good Are Not Always Powerful, nor the Powerful Always Good": The Politics of Women's Needlework in Mid-Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 4 (1997): 597.

<sup>19</sup> Millais, *Life and Letters*, I, 139.

<sup>20</sup> Millais, *Life and Letters*, I, 144.

giving the first of many references to Elizabeth's health in his correspondence.<sup>21</sup>

The comparison between Ophelia's watery grave and Elizabeth's bath-tub incident and subsequent early death was inevitable, thus, another myth was initiated. Following this incident Elizabeth modelled only for Gabriel, becoming his pupil in 1852 and producing a small but significant body of drawings and watercolours of her own during the 1850s.

The stories surrounding Elizabeth's death continue the myth tradition. A report was published in the *London Daily News* on 14 February 1862, the day after the inquest and three days after her death, under the headline: 'Death of a Lady from an Overdose of Laudanum'.<sup>22</sup> Gabriel and Elizabeth had dined with Algernon Charles Swinburne on the evening of 10 February, arriving home around 8.00 pm. Gabriel then left again to attend the Working Man's Club where he gave lessons in art. On returning home at around 11.30 pm he found Elizabeth was in bed 'snoring loudly and utterly unconscious'.<sup>23</sup> The report continues:

She was in the habit of taking laudanum and he had known her to take as much as 100 drops at a time and he thought she had been taking it before they went out. He found a phial on a table at the bedside that had contained laudanum, but it was then empty. A doctor was sent for and promptly attended ... He tried to rouse her but could not, and then tried the stomach pump without avail. He injected several quarts of water in the stomach and washed it out, when the smell of laudanum was very distinct. He and three other medical gentlemen stayed with her all night and she died at 20 minutes past 7 o'clock on Tuesday morning. The jury returned a verdict of 'Accidental Death'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 334 (item 54.29).

<sup>22</sup> "Death of a Lady from an Overdose of Laudanum." *Daily News*, 14 February 1862, reproduced in full in Jan Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*. London and New York: Quartet Books, 2010 [1989], 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> "Death of a Lady," *Daily News*, in Marsh, *Legend*, 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> "Death of a Lady," *Daily News*, in Marsh, *Legend*, 9-10.

This verdict ensured Elizabeth received a proper, Christian burial in the Rossetti family grave in Highgate Cemetery. However, subsequent biographies suggested suicide, since Gabriel had apparently found a note attached to her clothing. Several different versions detailing the contents of the suicide note exist, the first of these being published in Violet Hunt's full-length biography about Elizabeth in 1932. The title of her book, *The Wife of Rossetti: Her Life and Death*, does not even mention Elizabeth by name. When Rossetti's 'wife' is eventually identified, her name is incorrectly transposed as Eleanor Elizabeth Siddall, an inexcusable error.<sup>25</sup>

Violet Hunt claimed an authoritative 'family' voice. She had tenuous links to the Rossetti family, being the one-time common-law wife of Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford Madox Ford), the grandson of Elizabeth's brother-in-law William. As a feminist her book should have reflected her personal views, yet the opening lines of her introduction foretell her narrative trajectory:

The truth about Rossetti has been told, more or less: the truth about the woman he married, never. For the first time, brushing away the decent coverlet of leaves with which Rossetti's admirers have covered his reputation, I seem to have laid bare much that is painful, wild and unexpected but, at the same time, something beautiful, heroic even, and all that is pitiful.<sup>26</sup>

Violet Hunt, therefore, intended to divulge all the secrets her readers had been yearning to hear, whether true or fictive. It should be noted that she was not born until after Elizabeth had died, and did not move in with Hueffer until 1909, almost fifty years after Elizabeth's death. Her recollections are therefore based on pure hearsay, handed down through the generations of William's family and friends. She appears to have assimilated all the gossip circulating about her

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<sup>25</sup> Violet Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti: Her Life and Death* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc, 1932), xvi.

<sup>26</sup> Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, xvi.



subject, then using skills she no doubt learned from her novelist mother, added her own literary embellishments. The bonnet shop and bathtub inevitably make an appearance, and she was the first to 'quote' the content of the suicide note: '*My life is so miserable I wish for no more of it.*'<sup>27</sup> Laudanum was an over-the-counter remedy prescribed much as paracetamol is today. There were no controls over its preparation and sale until the late nineteenth century, therefore with evidence in the Coroner's Report of Elizabeth having been accustomed to taking over one hundred drops as a single dose, it is equally possible that the overdose was indeed an accident.

Regrettably, Violet Hunt only makes passing reference to Elizabeth's work as an artist. Despite her over-zealous embroidery of the basic story, gleaned both from William's recollections and family hearsay, Violet Hunt's book has made a significant contribution towards Elizabeth's legacy, presenting subsequent novelists with all the ammunition needed for their own imagination-filled journey through the pages of Elizabeth's life.<sup>28</sup>

Not all writing about Elizabeth has been a masterpiece of embroidery. Curator Jan Marsh is probably the leading scholarly author whose painstaking research on Elizabeth has greatly influenced public perception in recent years. *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (1989, the title is unfortunate as it promotes the 'myth' theme) is perhaps *the* seminal volume and presents a plethora of different aspects of Elizabeth's story. While also offering biographical detail, Marsh's focus is on Elizabeth as an artist. She includes chapters entitled 'Amiable Young Artist' and 'Life's Work', which clearly indicate Elizabeth's artistic achievement. In 'Life's Work' Marsh gives details of Elizabeth's known

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<sup>27</sup> Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, 305.

<sup>28</sup> See also Chapter 1.

works at the time of writing, mentioning the photographic portfolios Gabriel created of Elizabeth's drawings.<sup>29</sup> Marsh also curated the first solo exhibition of Elizabeth's work at the Ruskin Gallery, Sheffield, in 1991.<sup>30</sup>

Marsh notes how difficult it would have been for Elizabeth to pursue a career as an artist:

it was generally assumed in the 1850s that all women sought marriage, while only a few aspired to an artistic career. Of those who did, moreover, only a very few shared Elizabeth Siddal's social position, which makes her even more exceptional.<sup>31</sup>

As someone from an inferior social class, Elizabeth's association with Gabriel gave her access to materials and studio space that would not have otherwise existed. Her ambition and determination to succeed despite her circumstances is demonstrated by her enrolment at the Sheffield School of Art during her period of separation from Gabriel.<sup>32</sup> Her known oeuvre is what makes her, in Marsh's words 'even more exceptional' and deserving of further research. Marsh's postscript concludes that Elizabeth produced 'a small but substantial body of work, which no one but myself [i.e. Marsh] as yet takes very seriously'.<sup>33</sup> This perception is changing, partly due to Marsh's continued efforts in promoting the exhibition of Elizabeth's work. It was Marsh's book that inspired my interest in the subject, resulting in this thesis.

Following Marsh's monograph, but written to read more like a novel, was Lucinda Hawksley's *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel* (2004). The title is perhaps self-explanatory. Instead of a

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>31</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 173.

<sup>32</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 70.

<sup>33</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 214.

scholarly follow-up to Marsh's work, Hawksley returns to the traditional stories, and with each retelling they are elaborated further. Little space is given to Elizabeth's art, and even then, Hawksley's remarks are scathing:

Lizzie's paintings and sketches are naïve in style; some seem awkward and confused, yet in others the lines flow idyllically across the page. Her style is erratic, sometimes drawn with clarity, at other times sketchy and rough – indicative of the amount of laudanum she had taken before starting. If she had not been Rossetti's lover, it is unlikely that Lizzie would have had any chance of being noticed by the established art world.<sup>34</sup>

Hawksley's book, however, is extremely popular, being stocked by the bookshops in Tate Britain, home of Millais's *Ophelia*. As the great-great-great-granddaughter of Charles Dickens, Hawksley's family heritage has probably contributed to the success of her book, which is an easy read for the non-academic. However, Hawksley has also contributed to the cultivation of a specific public image of Elizabeth, not as an artist, but as the title suggests, as a tragic 'Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel'. The success of the book, which takes Millais's *Ophelia* as its cover illustration, and the popularity of the painting itself, simply detract from Elizabeth's legacy as a significant artist.

All four monographs are readily accessible to the general public. Both Marsh's and Hawksley's books have been re-published more than once, the obituary is printed in full in Marsh's monograph, Violet Hunt's 'novel' is available as a 'facsimile reprint' (a bound photocopy of an original publication) and William Michael's article from *The Burlington Magazine* is available online. This demonstrates the significance of these publications in maintaining a continued interest in Elizabeth, which has in turn encouraged more scholarly research into her art. Yet before either Marsh or Hawksley's books were published, scholarly

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<sup>34</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 102.

interest in Elizabeth as an artist was beginning to awaken. A German doctoral student, Eleanore Reichert, embarked on her research and produced her thesis, a neglected work which is of critical importance to Elizabeth's artistic legacy.

Reichert's *Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal: Leben und Werk einer viktorianischen Malerin* (*Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal: The Life and Work of a Victorian Artist*)

appeared in 1972.<sup>35</sup> Reichert gives a brief biography, but the majority of her thesis focuses on a detailed analysis of Elizabeth's work. Critically, she attempts to create the first alphabetical *catalogue raisonné* of Elizabeth's oeuvre, including those items deemed lost, and to provide a written description of each piece. She includes one hundred and two items by Elizabeth's hand, although only fifteen poor quality monochrome images are reproduced.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, despite her thesis being available in hard copy in many libraries worldwide,<sup>37</sup> there is no evidence of Marsh, or any subsequent scholar, referencing Reichert's ground-breaking research, a weakness which I will highlight in this thesis.<sup>38</sup>

## **Methodology**

The methodology I have chosen for analysing the similarities between Elizabeth's compositions and those of her fellow Pre-Raphaelites in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 loosely follows the seminal work of theorist and psychologist Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (1969).<sup>39</sup> Although this work is not modern, it provides an alternative – and visual – method of looking at Elizabeth's oeuvre, which has often been neglected in favour of the more popular forms of analysis.

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<sup>35</sup> Reichert, Eleanore. "Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal: Leben und Werk einer viktorianischen Malerin." Doctoral thesis. Universität Gießen, Germany, 1972.

<sup>36</sup> See also Chapter 3.

<sup>37</sup> According to WorldCat – "WorldCat," OCLC, n.d., accessed Mar 1, 2021, <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/256983655>.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>39</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1969 [1954]).

Based on the principles of Gestalt Theory (the whole being greater than its components), Arnheim breaks down the composition of an artwork into ten individual elements, but priority is given to 'Balance' as the first chapter, perhaps emphasising its importance in the compositional success (or failure) of a work of art. He defines balance as 'the state of distribution in which everything has come to a standstill'.<sup>40</sup> By this he does not mean that the composition is flat and uninteresting, but rather that every object appears to be perfectly placed within the image without the need for further alteration. A painting which lacks balance, however, may appear 'accidental, transitory, and therefore invalid', yet an artist may deliberately seek to create imbalance in order to generate a specific emotional response.<sup>41</sup> If Elizabeth's drawings conform to Arnheim's theoretical requirements for balance this may offer one reason for Rossetti and others borrowing from her work.

Arnheim uses a basic structural map to analyse paintings, formed by drawing lines to reflect the position of the centre vertical and horizontal and the two diagonals. He demonstrates this map using Paul Cézanne's painting *Madame Cézanne in a Yellow Chair* (1888-90, Art Institute of Chicago, see Fig. 3). The point where all four lines meet is the physical centre of the work. Arnheim suggests this point possesses the greatest stability as 'all the forces balance each other'.<sup>42</sup> A balanced composition is not necessarily based around the physical centre, as Arnheim continues 'the balance of the whole may be maintained by a large number of minor centers, all of similar strength'.<sup>43</sup> He explains that the two elements which contribute to the creation of stability and

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<sup>40</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 19.

balance in an artwork are weight and direction. According to his theory, the eye perceives that an object placed below the central horizontal line should appear to carry more weight than if placed above it. Equally, the same object placed to the right of the central vertical line seems heavier than the same object positioned to its left.<sup>44</sup> He also indicates the overall balance of each figure in a composition is dependent on 'secondary balance centers' which are focused on the hands and face.<sup>45</sup>

It must be remembered, as Arnheim stresses, that like 'every act of seeing', the perception of balance is 'a visual judgement'.<sup>46</sup> This should be understood from the perspective of the image viewer as well as that of the artist creator. Each individual possesses their own framework of interpretation, moulded by their individual cultural heritage and life experience, which contributes to their visual perception of an image. My own analysis will focus on visual similarities in composition, figure poses and the perception of balance, based on but not limited to Arnheim's theories.

### **Structure**

To present my research on Elizabeth, I have chosen a structure which commences with the current public perception of her, before introducing my new research and developing my thesis. Elizabeth has only been the subject of the four biographical studies mentioned, with Marsh's being the sole scholarly monograph. Together with the obituary, thesis and a number of academic papers, these form the nucleus of current knowledge about her. However, many more works of fiction, stage and screen have added to Elizabeth's

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<sup>44</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 2.

enduring popularity. In the first chapter, 'Reception and Perception', I will examine some of these sources to show how the myths and stories that surround Elizabeth have kept her in the public eye and have thus contributed to her legacy. Chapter 2, 'All Her Scraps and Scrawls', will focus on a unique but neglected resource – a set of photographs of Elizabeth's drawings which Gabriel commissioned after her death. These photographs present a much more rounded view of her oeuvre than the few drawings held in public collections, enabling the true extent of her artistic legacy to be analysed. In Chapter 3, 'Elizabeth's Oeuvre', I undertake a more detailed study of her work, the themes and subjects she tackled, the materials she used and her ambition as an artist, while in Chapter 4, 'The Untutored Imagination', I investigate the characteristics of her work which appealed to Ruskin and her contemporaries. In 'The Artistic Partnership', Chapter 5, I will explore the uncharted territory of how Elizabeth and Gabriel worked together in his studio, the roles she assumed in the working relationship, and the cross-fertilisation of ideas which inevitably led to her work being viewed as imitative. Chapter 6, 'Posthumous Reference', allows me to demonstrate how Elizabeth's work replaced her physical presence as Gabriel's muse. I will show how her artistic legacy continued to develop through his appropriation of her ideas from the photographs of her work. The final chapter, 'The Spread of Ideas', witnesses the expansion of Elizabeth's artistic legacy as I demonstrate how her original ideas provided the inspiration for many other artists within the Pre-Raphaelite circle. I will conclude by showing how my new and original research has revealed that the true extent of Elizabeth's legacy is much greater than is commonly perceived. Her contribution to the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art has been disguised by the lack of access to her work and the appropriation of her ideas by her male

colleagues, who inevitably gained the glory and recognition for their 'masterpieces'. I will also look to the future, to the projects I wish to initiate to pluck Elizabeth from *Ophelia's* muddy river and change public perception about her contribution to Pre-Raphaelitism and her artistic legacy.



# Chapter 1 – Reception and Perception

## Introduction

The date is 25 July 2029. London's Tate Gallery has just opened a groundbreaking new exhibition to celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti (née Siddall). Curated by the world's leading authority in the field, this exhibition focuses on Elizabeth's artistic legacy and demonstrates how her oeuvre shaped the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art. With the kind permission of their many owners, her drawings and watercolours are on display together for the first time since the exhibition curated by Jan Marsh at the Ruskin Gallery, Sheffield, in 1991. Hanging alongside Elizabeth's drawings are the works they inspired: world-famous paintings by the male Pre-Raphaelite artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Arthur Hughes and John Roddam Spencer Stanhope. This exhibition clearly demonstrates how Elizabeth's aptitude for figure pose and composition was appropriated by her fellow artists.<sup>1</sup> The most memorable room brings together Elizabeth's stunning study for *The Lass of Lochroyan*, recently discovered in the attic of a Derbyshire farmhouse, with some of the paintings it has so clearly inspired, including Stanhope's *Thoughts of the Past*, Hughes's *April Love* and Philip Hermogenes Calderon's *Broken Vows*, all three from the Tate Gallery's own collection. One *Times Online* reviewer heralds the exhibition as 'superlative' and affirms that it will 'rewrite the history of Pre-Raphaelite art forever'.<sup>2</sup>

This exhibition may be just a distant dream at present, but hopefully it will come to fruition as the public perception of Elizabeth's art is changing. More

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>2</sup> A fictional quote.

substantively and as a precursor, the spring of 2023 will see a revolutionary new exhibition of Gabriel's work staged by the Tate Gallery.<sup>3</sup> The most significant feature of this exhibition for 'Siddall' scholars will be the room devoted to exploring the two-way flow of ideas in the work produced by Gabriel and Elizabeth, resulting from the research carried out for my thesis. Examples of drawings and watercolours by both artists will be displayed together, providing the viewer with the opportunity to witness the true working relationship between the pair, so often described as that of male creator and female imitator.<sup>4</sup> But what is driving this change in perception and scholarly interest? And why now?

The way in which Elizabeth's persona, and more specifically her artistic output has been perceived by the art world and the public, has fluctuated over time. Although her work was praised during her own lifetime, it appears to have fallen in and out of favour with the waxing and waning of the general popularity of the Pre-Raphaelites. Interest has escalated during the first decades of the twenty-first century, bringing Elizabeth's role as both an artist and a poet into public consciousness again. In this chapter I will evaluate how different forms of public exposure have interacted with each other to shape the perception and reception of Elizabeth's art in the present day. I will examine a wide range of source material, including exhibition catalogues and reviews, scholarly texts, and internet resources as well as works of fiction, stage and screen, focusing on

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<sup>3</sup> Initial conversation at Tate Gallery, London, 13 January 2020, between the author and curator Carol Jacobi and subsequent email communications. The exhibition was due to open in October 2022 but has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 5.

those sources I believe have contributed most to shaping the public perception of Elizabeth.<sup>5</sup>

### **Early Days**

All artists need exposure of their work to gain public interest, and Elizabeth is no exception. In today's digital world the first port of call for information is the internet. While there are a number of websites dedicated to Elizabeth, such as [www.lizziesiddal.com](http://www.lizziesiddal.com), there is nothing as comprehensive as the artistic archives created for many of her male counterparts, such as the *Rossetti Archive* or the *Simeon Solomon Research Archive*.<sup>6</sup> Research into Elizabeth's art today, therefore, almost begins with a blank page.

Perhaps the most important way in which Elizabeth's artistic oeuvre is accessible to the public is when it is displayed in an exhibition. Although appearing in a large number of dedicated exhibitions of Pre-Raphaelite art, her success and inclusion in such presentations has had a rather chequered history, since the marginalisation of women artists is a continuing problem. The only occasion in which her work was exhibited during her lifetime was the *Exhibition of Paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, organised by Ford Madox Brown in 1857 at 4 Russell Place, Fitzroy Square, London. Twenty-two different artists were represented by seventy-two catalogue entries. Elizabeth's works on display were itemised in the catalogue as follows:

- 65 Clerk Saunders (Sketch for a Picture)
- 66 Sketches from Browning, Tennyson &c.
- 67 Sketch "We are Seven"

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<sup>5</sup> A full list of sources is included in the bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *The Rossetti Archive*, accessed Oct 13, 2021, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org>. Carolyn Conroy and Roberto C. Ferrari. *The Simeon Solomon Research Archive*, accessed Oct 13, 2021, <https://www.simeonsolomon.com>.

- 68 Sketch: The Haunted Tree  
69 Study of a Head<sup>7</sup>

At least six of her drawings would have been included since full details of the works from 'Browning, Tennyson &c.' were not recorded. The Browning is identifiable as *Pippa Passes*, and it is reasonable to assume *The Lady of Shalott* would have been the Tennyson, as Marsh suggests, since it is Elizabeth's most finished illustration of his work.<sup>8</sup>

Only Brown and Gabriel himself exhibited more individual pieces than Elizabeth. This is particularly significant as the other artists represented included Holman Hunt and Millais, both founder members of the Brotherhood, alongside other well-known members of the circle such as Hughes, Charles Alston Collins and George Price Boyce. As Brown curated the exhibition, the number of Elizabeth's works he included perhaps demonstrates his appreciation of her talent.

Poet and author Coventry Patmore published an article in the *Saturday Review* on 4 July 1857 detailing the artists and works exhibited.<sup>9</sup> Patmore, a keen supporter of the Pre-Raphaelites, devoted over half his article to Gabriel's watercolours and drawings. Brown received the second largest critique, but most significantly Elizabeth was third, gaining more critical appraisal than any other artist; including both Millais and Holman Hunt.<sup>10</sup> Patmore wrote:

There was one lady contributor, Miss E. E. Siddal, whose name was new to us. Her drawings display an admiring adoption of all the most startling peculiarities of Mr. Rossetti's style, but

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<sup>7</sup> *Exhibition of Paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. (Tate Gallery copy of unique original (A.N.L. Munby, Cambridge), 1857), Exhibition Catalogue.

<sup>8</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist 1829-1862*. Edited by Jan Marsh (Sheffield: The Ruskin Gallery, 1991), Exhibition Catalogue. 43, item 1.

<sup>9</sup> Coventry Patmore, "A Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition," *Saturday Review* 4.88 (1857): 11.

<sup>10</sup> Patmore, "A Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition," 11-12.

they have nevertheless qualities which entitle them to high praise. Her "Study of a Head" is a very promising attempt, showing great care, considerable technical power, and a high, pure, and independent feeling for that much misunderstood object, the human face divine. "We are Seven" and "Pippa Passes," by the same lady, deserve more notice than we can stop to give them. Her "Clerk Saunders," although we have heard it highly praised by high authorities, did not please us so much.<sup>11</sup>

In Patmore's review Elizabeth is clearly differentiated from the other exhibitors: she is identified as the only female artist among the group and also a newcomer to the exhibition scene. Patmore highlights Elizabeth's drawings as worthy of 'high praise', while noting the promise shown by her 'Study of a Head', believed to be her *Self-Portrait*.<sup>12</sup> Her watercolour *Clerk Saunders* (1857, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) is less revered, yet was her only work to be sold independently.

*Clerk Saunders* was purchased by American author and professor Charles Eliot Norton and was subsequently exhibited in the USA. The watercolour unfortunately received a poor response from the American critics. However, this may have been purely circumstantial as the exhibition arrived in New York at a time of an acute financial slump. Elizabeth's work, along with that of several other artists, 'was the recipient of kindred pejorative criticism about its supposed "childish vagrancies" and defective draughtsmanship'.<sup>13</sup> William J. Stillman reiterated this criticism in a letter to Gabriel's brother William, co-organiser of the exhibition, suggesting that with foresight *Clerk Saunders* and the other berated paintings should have been excluded, since the 'eccentricities

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<sup>11</sup> Patmore, "A Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition," 12.

<sup>12</sup> See also Chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Casteras, *English Pre-Raphaelitism and its Reception in America in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), 59.

of the school were new' to the American viewer.<sup>14</sup> The other works receiving criticism included Hughes's *April Love* (1855-6, Tate Gallery, London) and *Fair Rosamund* (1854, National Gallery of Victoria, Australia), both now considered central to the Pre-Raphaelite canon.<sup>15</sup> Gabriel himself shunned the exhibition in the USA, leaving the audience with no true comparison to Elizabeth's work. How different would the American reviews have been if Gabriel's contemporary jewel-like watercolours had been on display?

It should be noted that the content of the American exhibition was far more diverse than that of Russell Place. Aside from the works in oil, there were one hundred and eighty-eight watercolour drawings by eighty-one different artists. Of these, fifteen (almost twenty percent) were female. However, unlike Elizabeth, the drawings exhibited by these women (including Pre-Raphaelite associate Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon) depicted subjects that would have been deemed perfectly acceptable for a Victorian 'Lady' to engage with: still life, children, and tranquil landscapes. Nonetheless, the fact that *Clerk Saunders* travelled to the USA for exhibition alongside the work of the male Pre-Raphaelite artists, as well as the priority given to it in Patmore's review, demonstrate that Elizabeth's work was a significant force within the Pre-Raphaelite circle during the mid-1850s.

Although exhibitions are the main way in which Elizabeth's work as an artist is received by the public, and occur regularly throughout recent history, the very nature of her story has made it a firm favourite with authors, especially those writing fiction. The journey through her fictional life began in 1872 when author

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<sup>14</sup> William Michael Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism. Papers 1854-1862* (London: George Allen, 1899), 188.

<sup>15</sup> Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, 188.

Averil Beaumont supposedly took the Pre-Raphaelite story as inspiration for a novel. The work, entitled *Magdalen Wynyard*, is subtitled 'The Provocations of a Pre-Raphaelite', and was originally written in two volumes.<sup>16</sup> Today the second volume is readily available as a reproduction, but volume I appears to exist only as a rare book in the British library. Volume II bears little resemblance to Elizabeth's story. Indeed, Marsh describes the novel as involving 'aristocratic snobbery, obstacles to true love, long lost brothers and sensational death' with very little mention of art.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting, however, as Averil Beaumont is the pen name of Margaret Hunt, wife of Alfred William Hunt (an artist) and mother of Violet Hunt, author of the first full-length biography about Elizabeth mentioned in the Introduction. This early fiction work also hints at the untapped potential for future authors.

### **After Gabriel's Death**

Little was actually written about Elizabeth until after Gabriel's death in 1882, when *his* early biographers began to mention her, mostly as a supporting character in the life of a great artist. Some did demonstrate a contemporary awareness of her work as an artist, which appears to have lapsed over time. Their comments commend Elizabeth's work for her excellent use of colour. Marsh gives a detailed analysis of the views held by these early biographers; therefore I have focused purely on those most critical to understanding how Elizabeth was perceived in the years immediately following Gabriel's death.

The first reference to Elizabeth came in Theodore Watts Dunton and Frederic George Stephens's obituary to Gabriel which appeared in the *Athenaeum* on 15 April 1882. In the few brief sentences which they afforded her there was no

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<sup>16</sup> Averil Beaumont (Margaret Hunt), *Magdalen Wynyard*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872).

<sup>17</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 134.

mention of her work as an artist.<sup>18</sup> However, during the same year William Sharp provided a more detailed view of Gabriel's life and work. While not mentioning Elizabeth until she and Gabriel were married, Sharp does refer to her art:

Early in 1860 ... in "the mating time o' the year" he brought home his wife, Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall. This lady, who was very beautiful, and who showed brilliant promise as a colourist, he had known for a considerable time ...<sup>19</sup>

Sharp clearly accredits Elizabeth with a talent of her own, and for the first time since the 1857 Russell Place exhibition, her status as an artist is acknowledged. Only passing reference is made to her role as a model, focusing attention on the romantic attachment between the pair:

Several friends possess pencil and other drawings of her as she appeared before her husband in daily life, many of them of exquisite and delicate execution, and in each there is to be traced the artist lover's gaze as it caught pose after pose and expression after expression...<sup>20</sup>

At this time modelling was still considered akin to prostitution, and not something to be associated with the wife of the great artist. Therefore, Sharp is sanitising any modelling work as the act of a husband in love with his wife. The fact that most of the drawings Gabriel made of Elizabeth were done before marriage is ignored.

*Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* by Thomas Hall Caine, a friend of Gabriel's during his final years, was also published in 1882. Beginning in much the same vein as Sharp, he describes Elizabeth as 'a young lady of great

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<sup>18</sup> Theodore Watts Dunton and Frederic George Stephens, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti 1828-1882," *The Athenaeum*, 15 April 1882, reprinted in Theodore Watts Dunton, *Old Familiar Faces* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1916), 69-76.

<sup>19</sup> William Sharp, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1882), 22.

<sup>20</sup> Sharp, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 22-23.



personal beauty, in whom he [Gabriel] discovered a natural genius for painting'.<sup>21</sup> Hall Caine then expands on Elizabeth's artistic ability, again noting her excellent use of colour:

[Gabriel] felt impelled to give her lessons, and she became as much his pupil as model. Her water-colour drawings done under his tuition gave proof of a wonderful eye for colour, and displayed a marked tendency to style. The subjects too, were admirably composed and often exhibited unusual poetic feeling.<sup>22</sup>

Elizabeth's transition from model to artist is noted, but Hall Caine quickly moves on to her role as an artist, stressing the higher status of art. Her flair for composition and for creating something imaginative and expressive is remarked upon favourably. Thus, within a year of Gabriel's death, Elizabeth the artist had begun to emerge from beneath the shadow of her tutor. This may simply have been to detract from the couple's long pre-marital association, but nonetheless it shows recognition of her work.

A few years later in 1887 another biographer, Joseph Knight, makes more specific reference to Elizabeth's artistic talent:

She had not long been with him before he recognised in her a strong aptitude for art': This, with characteristic zeal, he sought to foster, and the position of model was soon associated with that of student. Under Rossetti's zealous tuition her progress was rapid, and her water-colour drawings soon displayed marked proficiency, and a fine sense of colour.<sup>23</sup>

Knight proceeds to give a detailed description of Elizabeth's self- portrait (Fig. A.82), which he maintains is 'admirably painted, and not in the least idealized'.<sup>24</sup> His appraisal of her work perhaps assisted a slight shift in the public perception

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Hall Caine, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Elliot Stock, 1882), 43.

<sup>22</sup> Caine, *Recollections*, 43

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Knight, *Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Walter Scott, 1887), 70-1.

<sup>24</sup> Knight, *Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 70.

of Elizabeth as an artist. Her use of colour, however, seems to fade from memory as the initial flurry of publicity after Gabriel's death was replaced by a steady stream of exhibitions and publications. The fact that many of Gabriel's early biographers referred to Elizabeth's art in their brief mentions suggests that she was indeed taken seriously as an artist during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Elizabeth remained in the public consciousness, often in the role of wife rather than artist, until Gabriel's brother William took up his pen to write the previously mentioned article for *The Burlington Magazine*, which provided the source material for many future publications.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Early Twentieth Century**

Although the occasional drawing or watercolour of Elizabeth's appeared in exhibitions over the next few years, the approach of the First World War brought a period of relative inactivity in the appreciation of Pre-Raphaelite art. The next significant showcase of Elizabeth's work was at the Tate Gallery, London in 1923. The *Loan Exhibition of the Paintings and Drawings of the 1860 Period* was a massive exhibition with three hundred and thirty-eight items on display. This may have been in part a reaction to the end of the fighting in the War, and partly to combat the recession of the 1920s. Twenty-three artists were represented in the exhibition, with Gabriel's work accounting for almost one third of the total. Two other female artists were included: Joanna Mary Wells (née Boyce, twenty-four works) and Florence Caxton (one single work). Eight of Elizabeth's works were exhibited: *St Agnes Eve*; *The Haunted Tree*; her *Self-*

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<sup>25</sup> See Introduction.

*Portrait, Clerk Saunders; Maiden Tied to a Tree; Lady Clare; Madonna and Child; and a study for Clerk Saunders.*<sup>26</sup> As the exhibition catalogue stated:

The aim of this Exhibition is to show some of the paintings by the artists who were chiefly responsible for the "Book Illustration of the Sixties," concurrently with their work in Black and White.<sup>27</sup>

This explains the unusual inclusion of drawings alongside oil paintings and watercolours, which enabled visitors to see more of the artist's thought process in operation. The catalogue continues:

... the present exhibition is intended to illustrate particularly, by means of less well-known but interesting works, the period from 1853, when Millais entered the Academy and Holman-Hunt went to the East, to the death of Rossetti's wife (Miss Siddal), in 1862.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps Elizabeth's works fell into the category of 'less well-known but interesting', but equally her death provided the end date for exhibited works. She was certainly well represented but remained in the shadows. The review in *The Times* from 18 April 1923 suggests the exhibition featured 'an exceptionally complete collection of the earlier works of Rossetti and Burne-Jones'.<sup>29</sup> Joanna Wells (née Boyce) is praised for the standard of her work being comparable with that of Millais in 'early portraits and domestic subjects'. The only mention of Elizabeth, however, is as Gabriel's wife, despite the number of her works exhibited equalling that of her male counterpart, Arthur Hughes, who is of course named.

*The Times's* brief closing report on the 1923 exhibition heralded it as a success:

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<sup>26</sup> See Figs. A.90; A.22; A.82; A.13; A.63; A.43; A.58; A.14.

<sup>27</sup> *Loan exhibition of paintings and drawings of the 1860 period (by British artists)*. (London: Tate Gallery, 1923), Exhibition Catalogue. 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Loan exhibition ... 1860 period*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> "The Tate Gallery: A Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition," editorial, *The Times* Apr 18, 1923, 8.

The exhibition of pre-Raphaelite paintings and drawings now open at the Tate Gallery will close on Sunday, July 29. The exhibition has aroused great interest, five thousand people visiting it at Whitsuntide week-end, and the Director states that no one interested in the 1860 period should miss seeing the collection, which is exceptionally complete, before its dispersal, as it is unlikely that it will be possible to reassemble again such a comprehensive group of these works.<sup>30</sup>

‘Great interest’ suggests that during the 1920s Pre-Raphaelite art was again in favour, and Elizabeth’s work was given more public exposure. The inclusion of three female artists, with Joanna Wells’s work making such a large contribution, perhaps indicates the impact that women had made during the First World War.

As previously mentioned in the Introduction, Elizabeth’s story was popularised by Violet Hunt’s ‘novel’ in 1932, which has subsequently inspired a large number of fiction writers and a handful of poets to take up their pens. Only a few dramatisations have been forthcoming, however, in the visual media of stage, film and television, which would have allowed Elizabeth to speak for herself. The first known dramatisation featuring Elizabeth as a member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle is *The Merciless Lady*, performed in Birmingham in 1934. This little-known play came to light in 2015, when two copies of the unpublished script and an album of photographs previously owned by Pre-Raphaelite scholar William Fredeman were sold at auction.<sup>31</sup> The four-act play was presented on 6-9 October 1934 by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. A photograph from the album (Fig. 4) was published in the online auction catalogue with the handwritten annotation ‘Act II Lizzy Siddal finds Rossetti and Fanny Cornforth together’. Curiously, the actress playing Elizabeth appears as

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<sup>30</sup> “Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition at the Tate Gallery,” editorial, *The Times* Jul 7, 1923, 8.

<sup>31</sup> “[Pre-Raphaelites]. John Ferguson and N.C. Hunter. *The Merciless Lady: A Play in Four Acts with Prologue and Epilogue*,” *Heritage Auctions*, 2015, accessed Mar 29, 2022, <https://historical.ha.com/itm/books/biography-and-memoir/-pre-raphaelites-john-ferguson-and-nc-hunter-the-merciless-lady-a-play-in-four-acts-with-prologue-and-epilogue/a/6135-97022.s>.

plump and healthy as Cornforth, who is identifiable from the painting *Lady Lilith* on Gabriel's easel in the background.<sup>32</sup> Dramatic licence is evident since this painting was not begun until 1866, four years after Elizabeth's death. The play was most probably inspired by Violet Hunt's 'novel', published some two years earlier.

The production certainly seems to have been significant enough for the scripts and photographs to have been preserved, as the auction website identifies one of the scripts as having belonged to 'Miss Elspeth Duxbury', who portrayed Elizabeth.<sup>33</sup> The photograph album also contains cuttings from the newspaper reviews. Unfortunately, the way in which Elizabeth's story is told in this play is not known, nor whether she is 'The Merciless Lady' mentioned in the title. The fact that the one photograph now in public circulation includes Elizabeth, which led to the future career success of Elspeth Duxbury, demonstrates that the role must have been a significant one. The production appears to have gone unnoticed by later playwrights, possibly because the aspiring young actress kept her first script tucked away in a drawer for posterity, while to the other cast members it was just another play.

### **The Late Twentieth Century**

Fiction authors were slow to seek inspiration from Elizabeth's story, but some ten years after Violet Hunt's publication, in the middle of the Second World War, William Gaunt's *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* first appeared. It was briefly reissued in 1943 under the new title of *The Pre-Raphaelite Dream* to avoid any offence to those suffering the real tragedy of war. While it is not strictly a novel,

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<sup>32</sup> *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Treuherz, Prettejohn and Becker, 192. Cornforth originally posed for *Lady Lilith*, but her face was later replaced by that of Alexa Wilding.

<sup>33</sup> *Heritage Auctions*. "Ferguson and Hunter. The Merciless Lady."

narrating the author's personal view of Pre-Raphaelitism in general, Elizabeth's story plays a significant role in the early chapters. The back-cover description of the reprint of 1988 likens the narrative style to that of a novel, 'full of incident and vividly recreated scenes', and indeed Gaunt's language is wildly theatrical. He does, however, mention Elizabeth's art and poetry, initially commenting in a most derogatory manner:

He [Gabriel] breathed genius into her. Under his influence she began to paint little pictures and write little poems ... Young women at that time did imitate the occupations of their artist admirers. They bedabbled themselves with pigment in the charming and pathetic belief that this would endear them the more to the men.<sup>34</sup>

With these few words, Gaunt appears to dismiss Elizabeth's work instantly, yet almost immediately he contradicts himself:

But in Lizzie there seemed to develop a creative spark ... This genius was embryonic but real. Her verses were as simple and as moving as ancient ballads: her drawings were as genuine in their mediaeval spirit as much more highly finished and competent works of Pre-Raphaelite art.<sup>35</sup>

Like so many writers both before and after, Gaunt refers to Elizabeth with the familiar name 'Lizzie'. In the space of one single paragraph her artistic efforts are both criticised and praised, providing his readership with a very mixed message. Surely this will have had an adverse effect on the public perception of her. Yet Gaunt's own obituary in *The Times* maintains that this was the book that established him as a successful author and 'turned the attention of a whole generation to the then neglected, if not derided, Pre-Raphaelites'.<sup>36</sup> This

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<sup>34</sup> Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy*, 42-3.

<sup>36</sup> "Mr William Gaunt." (obituary), *The Times*, May 26, 1980, 10.

suggests that despite its shortcomings, the continued popularity of Gaunt's book has added to Elizabeth's legacy.

After World War II ended there was an explosion of exhibitions commemorating the centenary of the founding of the Brotherhood. The first public event commenced in the summer of 1947 with Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery's *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848-1862)*. Elizabeth's work was extremely well represented, with a total of ten items exhibited. Once again, she was the only female artist included in the exhibition, mirroring the Russell Place exhibition of ninety years earlier. Works were lent by the Rossetti family and John Bryson, along with the Tate Gallery and Fitzwilliam Museum and included her *Self-Portrait*, six watercolours and three pen and ink drawings. It is worth noting that these were finished drawings (*Pippa Passes*, *Lovers Listening to Music* and the study for *Lady Clare*) rather than sketches, therefore her work was presented in the best possible light. Indeed, the review in *The Times*, dated 1 July 1947, singles her out for a mention: 'E.E. Siddal's small works are quiet and charming'.<sup>37</sup> Notably the anonymous reviewer is gender neutral when mentioning Elizabeth. They do not refer to her as 'Miss Siddal' or give her first name as with many of the male artists; her identity as a female artist remains undisclosed to their readership. They later suggest that 'It is, of course, because of their uninhibited concern with illustration that the pre-Raphaelites have lately gained new admirers', demonstrating a clear change in attitude from the previous decade.<sup>38</sup> Thus with the centenary approaching, Pre-Raphaelite art, including Elizabeth's work, was experiencing a boost in popularity.

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<sup>37</sup> "The Pre-Raphaelites: a 15-year survey," editorial, *The Times* Jul 1, 1947, 6.

<sup>38</sup> "The Pre-Raphaelites: a 15-year survey," 6.

Elizabeth's same six watercolours subsequently reappeared at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, in the spring of 1948 for *The Pre-Raphaelites: A Loan Exhibition of their Paintings and Drawings held in the Centenary Year of the Foundation of the Brotherhood*. The catalogue provides a brief biography of Elizabeth, identifying her as both Millais's and Gabriel's model and in art, an imitator rather than an innovator:

'Elizabeth Siddal was an assistant at a milliner's near Leicester Square, when she was seen by W.H. Deverell, who persuaded her to act as a model for his "Twelfth Night", and introduced her to Millais, who painted her as Ophelia. From about 1852, she became Rossetti's model, and her face recurs throughout his work in the 1850s. After a long and close association, he married her in 1861, but she died the next year. Her drawings, mostly produced, according to W.M. Rossetti, between 1854 and 1857, show the influence of her husband.<sup>39</sup>

A brief review appeared in *The Times* on 19 April 1948, but there was no mention of Elizabeth as a contributor.<sup>40</sup> Focus was placed firmly on the male members of the circle, with particular attention drawn to Burne-Jones's *Perseus* series. In the short space of a year Elizabeth's work appears to have slipped out of favour again, despite the same six watercolours being exhibited. This may simply have been because it was the 'Brotherhood' that was being celebrated, not Pre-Raphaelitism in general.

Interest in Elizabeth resumed, and another work of fiction was written around this time, *White Rose and the Red*, curiously authored by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) writing as Delia Alton. Described as the 'fictional biography of Elizabeth Siddall', the dated typed drafts remained sequestered away in the Yale Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript

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<sup>39</sup> *The Pre-Raphaelites: a loan exhibition of their paintings and drawings held in the centenary year of the foundation of the Brotherhood*. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1948), Exhibition Catalogue. 32.

<sup>40</sup> "The Pre-Raphaelites: Whitechapel Exhibition," editorial, *The Times* Apr 19, 1948, 6.



Library for over seventy years.<sup>41</sup> H.D. originally envisaged her narrative as a play, casting Greta Garbo as Elizabeth alongside Laurence Olivier as Gabriel. The work was finally published in 2009, when its editor, Alison Halsall, ultimately fulfilled H.D.'s wish that her story should be published.<sup>42</sup>

As Halsall states, it was H.D.'s intention to redefine 'a partially erased story, namely that of Elizabeth Siddall – woman and artist'.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, several decades before feminism really took hold, H.D. apparently pursued a feminist course in her rendering of Elizabeth's story. Halsall maintains that Violet Hunt's epic was the main source of information for H.D., to which the author added her own embellishments – including a love affair between Elizabeth and William Morris!

This book is an extremely challenging read as H.D.'s style is very stilted, flitting forward and backward in time and place. H.D.'s work is therefore unlikely to be as widely read as its author would have liked. Again, Elizabeth's art is barely mentioned:

Was painting more important than poetry? Gabriel said yes, in her case. She had begun the sketches, partly because she wanted something to do – he didn't like to see her sewing. She never scribbled in a note-book when there were people around, as he did. He said he liked her drawings. They were not good.<sup>44</sup>

This sole insignificant passage conflicts with the feminist viewpoint that H.D. wished to present. It suggests that Elizabeth only began drawing because Gabriel didn't like to see her engaged in the typical feminine pastime of sewing.

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<sup>41</sup> Alison Halsall, ed., *White Rose and the Red* (H.D. writing as Delia Alton) (Gainesville, Florida, USA: University Press of Florida, 2009), xi.

<sup>42</sup> Halsall, *White Rose and the Red*, xii.

<sup>43</sup> Halsall, *White Rose and the Red*, xxxii.

<sup>44</sup> Halsall, *White Rose and the Red*, 19

It purports that she was not a natural artist and was embarrassed by her inferior work. Yet as previously mentioned, in the same year Elizabeth's work had appeared in the centenary exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, which Halsall suggests had been seen by H.D.<sup>45</sup> This demonstrates the way in which reception and perception can be shaped and moulded by various methods of public exposure; the exhibition provided H.D. with the stimulus to research and write about Elizabeth, and Violet Hunt's biography supplied the inspiration.

Ten years later, and with the memorable title *Angel with Bright Hair*, Paula Batchelor's novel of 1957 purports to feature Elizabeth as its protagonist. True, the novel begins with Elizabeth, repeating the usual bonnet shop and bathtub tales, but Elizabeth the artist is of lesser importance. Batchelor introduces Elizabeth to oil painting in an original way by helping Gabriel to clean Deverell's brushes:

“Do you know how to clean these?” he asked, and held out some brushes and a rag. “Squeeze out what you can, only carefully – don't go against the hairs, of course – then get a little turps from that jar...”<sup>46</sup>

Her overall portrayal of Elizabeth is as someone who struggles with her drawing, rather than showing natural aptitude. Despite the title, Elizabeth fades into the background and the story focuses on Gabriel's life and antics with other women, although in keeping with the spirit of the late 1950s, his sexual promiscuity is hinted at rather than acknowledged. There are gaping chasms in the biographical narrative in areas where a novelist would have *carte blanche* to invent dialogue. The period 1858-60 is ignored, while the wedding, honeymoon, stillbirth, and death all happen 'off screen' towards the end of the

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<sup>45</sup> Halsall, *White Rose and the Red*, xlvii item 55.

<sup>46</sup> Paula Batchelor, *Angel with Bright Hair* (London: Methuen & Co, 1957), 22.

novel, leaving the reader frustrated at the lack of narrative completion.

Elizabeth's role as an artist in Batchelor's novel is weak and would have easily evaded recognition. Original used copies of the book are still widely available, perhaps demonstrating a lack of public enthusiasm for the volume.

Following the bicentenary Pre-Raphaelite interest remained quiet until the Maas Gallery became the focus of a number of small exhibitions held during the 1960s. Jeremy Maas, the gallery's founder, was enraptured with Gaunt's *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* when he came across it as a schoolboy in 1945.<sup>47</sup>

Some thirty years later he asserted that he 'would defend the book to this day as by far the best introduction to the Pre-Raphaelites', demonstrating Gaunt's lasting legacy.<sup>48</sup> While studying at Oxford, Maas pursued his interest in Victorian painting, and specifically in the Pre-Raphaelites, studying their work in the Ashmolean Museum and Tate Gallery. On launching the Maas Gallery in 1960, he immediately planned an exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite art and began assembling a collection. At this precise time the Rossetti family were parting with some of Elizabeth's drawings. Maas proudly relates the story of his first acquisition of Elizabeth's work:

One day at Sotheby's I spotted a parcel of beautiful drawings by Lizzie Siddal, with an estimate, I believe, of about £5. To my (and his) astonishment I was outbid for them by an elderly and distinguished-looking gentleman at about £120, thus creating a world record for her work. With sinking heart I asked a porter to slip my card into the parcel. On it I had asked the purchaser to kindly get in touch with me. He, Sir Geoffrey Mander, asked his wife, Lady Mander (Rosalie Glynn Grylls), to seek out the unexpected underbidder to enquire his interest. Most generously they offered to let me buy six of the drawings.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jeremy Maas, "The Pre-Raphaelites: a personal view," in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, ed. Leslie Parris (London: Allen Lane, 1984). 226.

<sup>48</sup> Maas, "The Pre-Raphaelites: a personal view," 226.

<sup>49</sup> Maas, "The Pre-Raphaelites: a personal view," 229.

The Maas Gallery acquired those six drawings, selling five but retaining the most exquisite, *The Lady of Shalott*. This sparked a series of exhibitions during the early 1960s at the gallery, featuring these drawings alongside other loaned pieces of Elizabeth's work. The Manders kept the drawings they purchased and eventually bequeathed their home, Wightwick Manor, and their collection of Pre-Raphaelite art to the National Trust. Lady Mander also published her own biography of Gabriel, which included many references to Elizabeth.<sup>50</sup> Further events were held at the Maas Gallery throughout the 1960s, keeping Elizabeth's work in the public eye and adding to the rising interest in the Pre-Raphaelites during the 1960s.

Once television became a popular form of entertainment, programme makers began to exploit the resurgent popularity of the Pre-Raphaelites. First shown in 1967 as part of the BBC *Omnibus* series, Ken Russell's adaptation, *Dante's Inferno*, is very much a product of the 'Swinging Sixties'.<sup>51</sup> Filmed in black-and-white, the dramatic scene is set in the film's opening sequence where a coffin is seen being raised from the earth under the light of a flaming torch. The coffin lid is opened, the shroud pulled back, and a hand reaches in to extract a book from behind the corpse's head. The camera then focuses on the skull of the exhumed figure before cutting away to the titles. The subtitle 'The Private Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Poet and Painter' identifies the corpse as that of Elizabeth to the initiated viewers.<sup>52</sup> Blending gothic horror with flower power, Russell depicts Elizabeth as a 'cockney sparrow', emulating Audrey Hepburn's Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* (1964), while Fanny Cornforth resembles a young

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<sup>50</sup> Rosalie Glynn Grylls (Lady Mander), *Portrait of Rossetti* (London: Macdonald & Co (Publishers) Ltd, 1964).

<sup>51</sup> "Dante's Inferno." *Omnibus*, BBC1, Dec 22, 1967, television broadcast.

<sup>52</sup> Ken Russell, "Dante's Inferno" YouTube video, 1:02, posted by Curva Peligrosa. Dec 10, 2012, accessed Mar 29, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTMgjf6P0Xk>.

Dusty Springfield and Christina Rossetti has a pronounced foreign accent despite having been born in England.

Russell favours sensationalism over historical accuracy, and Elizabeth's art is hardly mentioned. In a critical moment during one of their many arguments, Elizabeth screams at Gabriel 'I don't want to be an artist! I only did it to please you!'<sup>53</sup> This may be Russell's ploy to side-step presenting Elizabeth as an artist, which did not fit well with Oliver Reed's portrayal of Gabriel. Once again Elizabeth is depicted as inferior, as Gabriel's appendage, even as his plaything. Her character could easily be mistaken for that of Annie Miller, rather than the person Gabriel's brother William described as: 'a woman in whose whole demeanour maidenly and feminine purity was ... markedly apparent'.<sup>54</sup>

Russell's portrayal of Elizabeth is degrading, and more significantly, would have been detrimental to her public perception.

During the 1970s selected provincial and overseas galleries mounted small Pre-Raphaelite exhibitions in which one or two of Elizabeth's drawings were displayed. Interest was also stirring in the fiction world in America and Canada. Elizabeth Savage's *Willowwood* appeared in 1979, still drawing on the colourful details of Violet Hunt's monograph. Savage augments the now familiar story with the fictitious character of Will Little, changing small details and adding priceless gems to bolster her narrative. Such gems include Gabriel's mother and sisters sending Elizabeth a 'wastebasket' as a wedding gift!<sup>55</sup> While Savage's Elizabeth is a pathetic, sickly, and depressed figure, there is one short paragraph relating to her art which is noteworthy (her italics):

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<sup>53</sup> Russell, "Dante's inferno," 29:30.

<sup>54</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 273.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Savage, *Willowwood* (Boston, USA and Toronto, Canada: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 122.

*But she must draw harder, paint harder, write harder; force the world to acknowledge her as an artist in her own right. She must.*<sup>56</sup>

These few lines are easily missed, and do not sit comfortably with the rest of the book. The sentiment the words convey is very much that of the feminist era of the late 1970s. Despite the accent of the author's italics, this paragraph appears to have been slipped in as an aside, rather than being the focus of any feminist theme. Far more memorable is the way in which Elizabeth's life comes to a dramatic conclusion when Gabriel and Elizabeth have a massive argument over drug-taking and he invites her to drink the whole bottle of laudanum.<sup>57</sup> Violet Hunt's version of the suicide note is then repeated, reflecting how each new novel builds on its predecessors. Continued repetition reinforces the unsubstantiated narrative and embeds it in the public perception.

It was not until 1984 that the first major revival exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite art was staged at the Tate Gallery in London. Reviewing *The Pre-Raphaelites*, the feminist art-historians Griselda Pollock and Deborah Cherry concluded that such exhibitions simply perpetuated patriarchal convention, representing 'creativity as masculine and Woman as the beautiful image for the desiring male gaze'.<sup>58</sup> This indeed appeared to be the case, as analysis of the two hundred and fifty works exhibited showed that only three were by a woman artist, and that artist was Elizabeth. This is a significant change since the exhibition of 1923, when three female artists and a total of thirty-three of their works had been included. What was the reason for this change in fortune? It may be lack of public exposure, in whatever form. Joanna Wells, for example, had not been

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<sup>56</sup> Savage, *Willowwood*, 85.

<sup>57</sup> Savage, *Willowwood*, 143.

<sup>58</sup> Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, "The Pre-Raphaelites and Patriarchal Power," *Art History* Vol.7 No.4 (1984): 494.

included in the bicentenary exhibitions, nor the Maas Gallery exhibitions of the 1960s. Her early death from puerperal fever after the birth of her third child was unremarkable during Victorian times and her life was uneventful, thus she appears to have slipped from public consciousness. Elizabeth's life and death, on the other hand, has provided sufficient sensation to keep her in the public eye in other forms of exposure such as fiction.

Pollock and Cherry responded to the exhibition with their seminal article, 'Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddall', in *Art History* in June of the same year.<sup>59</sup> They asserted that Elizabeth 'epitomized the contradictions of woman as muse for, and object of, art celebrated by art historians and woman as ignored producer'.<sup>60</sup> They argued that the deliberate misspelling' of her family name was critical to the way in which the public perceived her: 'Siddall' was her birth name, the name which belonged to her as a 'historic individual', while the alternative spelling, 'Siddal', acted as a cipher, or 'sign of the genius of Dante Gabriel Rossetti'.<sup>61</sup> With the continued public use of the spelling 'Siddal', the real Elizabeth has been replaced by the cipher, which has been surreptitiously transmitted into public consciousness.

Despite this response, interest in Elizabeth, possibly generated by the publicity surrounding the exhibition, was beginning to grow. Her own poetry, which so far had received little attention, began to inspire other poets, which in turn contributed to her public perception. In 1985 Gillian Allnutt wrote a poem

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<sup>59</sup> Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock. "Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddal." In Griselda Pollock. *Vision and Difference: Femininity, feminism and histories of art*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010 [1988], 128-62. Originally published in *Art History* Vol.7. No.2 (1984), 206-27. See also Introduction.

<sup>60</sup> Cherry and Pollock, "Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature," 129.

<sup>61</sup> Cherry and Pollock, "Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature," 131.

entitled 'Lizzie Siddal: Her Journal (1862)' which has since been republished in a modern anthology.<sup>62</sup> Rather than presenting the reader with the diary entries suggested by the title, the poem jumps around events in Elizabeth's life and expands on her possible thoughts.

Allnutt has divided Elizabeth's life into eight sections of varying length. She reads her own work aloud in a podcast made for the University of Durham, which gives a totally different impression to when the reader reads it silently.<sup>63</sup> In the podcast Allnutt suggests her words form pictures on the page. Section 6 of the 'Journal' perhaps demonstrates the unusual way in which words and space are used effectively:

Laudanum  
is half  
a honeymoon – and by my little window blows laburnum,  
morning brief

euphoria, the hour of butter  
milk. But then the windblown  
waterlight withdraws. The long dour  
afternoon

grows over me, a hood, a close brown pod  
and I –  
my soul, my sun, my seed –  
am poisoned inly.<sup>64</sup>

This section condenses many elements of Elizabeth's story into just a few lines: her addiction to laudanum, its effects on her physical and mental health, and the loss of her baby. Allnutt's Elizabeth, however, is not an aspiring artist, but yet again the pathetic figure of Gabriel's muse.

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<sup>62</sup> Gillian Allnutt, "Lizzie Siddal: Her Journal (1862)," in Gillian Allnutt, *How the Bicycle Shone: New and Selected Poems*, (Hexham, Northumberland, Bloodaxe Books, 2016), 30-35.

<sup>63</sup> Gillian Allnutt, "Gillian Allnutt on a Life in Poetry" podcast, posted by *READ - Research in English at Durham* May 9, 2018, accessed Feb 20, 2022, <https://readdurhamenglish.wordpress.com/2018/05/09/new-podcast-gillian-allnutt-on-a-life-in-poetry/>.

<sup>64</sup> Allnutt, "Lizzie Siddal: Her Journal (1862)," 35.



Despite the occasional relapse, the feminist approach spearheaded by Pollock and Cherry gained ground, and in the late 1980s an exhibition presented in Manchester, Birmingham and Southampton, showcased the work of twenty female artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The catalogue for *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, curated by Marsh together with Pamela Gerrish Nunn, gives a detailed analysis of Elizabeth's five works which were included, and once again presents her as an artist. Susan Casteras's review in *The Art Bulletin* in December 1998 gives an enlightening comment on the difficulties of staging exhibitions of women artists' work:

Unfortunately, there is no North American venue for Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists, a comment, perhaps, on how hard it still is to find museums willing to showcase historical exhibitions of work by women artists-hardly a controversial subject after more than two decades of "progress"<sup>65</sup>

Closely following the exhibition of women artists, Marsh curated Elizabeth's first ever solo exhibition, which was held at the Ruskin Gallery, Sheffield, in 1991. The accompanying exhibition catalogue provided the most complete survey of Elizabeth's oeuvre at the time. Marsh wrote:

This list of exhibits includes both original works of art and photographs of existing works when originals were not available for inclusion in the exhibition. These photographic copies are denoted by \*. Other works known, but unlocated or unavailable for loan are also mentioned, in an attempt to provide a comprehensive list of EES works.<sup>66</sup>

Marsh's title clearly defines Elizabeth as an artist. The provincial location of Sheffield had both benefits and drawbacks. As previously mentioned, Elizabeth

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<sup>65</sup> Susan P. Casteras, "Reviewed Work(s): *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* by Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn: *The Victorians: British Painting 1837-1901* by National Gallery of Art," *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 80 No. 4 (1998), 750.

<sup>66</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 42.

spent some time in Sheffield and attended the School of Art there.<sup>67</sup> Her parents lived in Sheffield prior to moving to London, and she still had family connections there. Sheffield embraced Elizabeth as one of their own, thus the local interest in the exhibition would have been great. However, the British art world is centred on London, and Elizabeth's exposure at this critical exhibition would have been limited to locals and those who already acknowledged her importance as an artist and made the journey to Sheffield.

Marsh lists fifty-eight catalogue items from Elizabeth's artistic oeuvre, however in several entries she suggests that more than one sketch exists, without either describing or illustrating the additional sketches. Although this comprises the only published list of Elizabeth's work, Marsh's exhibition catalogue is not fully illustrated and is now out of date. In the past thirty years new works have come to light at auction sales from sound Rossetti family provenance. Several works that were deemed lost have now reappeared. Works that were extant have disappeared. The medium of the printed *catalogue raisonné* itself has been superseded by the internet, where entries can be easily modified and updated as new research provides further information. My future aim is to create an online resource documenting her work based on my research which will enable easy access to Elizabeth's work and demonstrate its significance.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Twenty-First Century**

The twenty-first century has spawned a collection of new novels, either featuring Elizabeth as a protagonist, or including her as a supplementary character, rather than simply regurgitating the original story in the format of a fictional biography. Of all the books inspired by Elizabeth's story, Fiona

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<sup>67</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>68</sup> See Appendix A.

Mountain's *Pale as the Dead* (2002) has perhaps the most original narrative. This is not a straightforward fictional retelling of the same old story, although it does of course include the traditional myths, such as the exhumation of Elizabeth's coffin (naturally with added embellishment). However, this novel acknowledges Elizabeth as an artist, and even mentions one of her watercolours being exhibited:

A friend took me to see a Pre-Raphaelite exhibition at the Tate. Years ago now. There was one of Lizzie Siddal's picture there, *Clerk Saunders* it was called ... It was very striking, the figures rather stiff and spiky but beautiful in their own way, rather intense. It struck me that she was the only woman represented in the entire show. I read about her in the catalogue and looked her up in a couple of books, and it intrigued me because she was drawn as such an enigma. No one seemed to agree about even the basics. If she was to be recognised as an important female Victorian artist, a recognition her pictures obviously merited, it's only right that someone should attempt to shade in the landscape of her life. Don't you think?<sup>69</sup>

This extract appears to embody much of the public perception of Elizabeth in the early twenty-first century and has possibly helped to shape it. The quoted paragraph can be validated: Elizabeth's work had been on display in London in an exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 2000, and *Clerk Saunders* was indeed one of the two works on display.<sup>70</sup> Mountain's subsequent comments cut to the heart of the gender problem. The interplay between exhibition and fiction, previously seen in H.D.'s work, is critical here.

Mountain's storyline, however, is unique. Her protagonist is an ancestor detective who is hired to investigate a missing girl, Bethany, among whose possessions is a diary belonging to a John Marshall. Bethany's story and

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<sup>69</sup> Fiona Mountain, *Pale as the Dead* (London: The Orion Publishing Group Ltd, 2002), 94.

<sup>70</sup> "Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites," Tate Gallery, London, 9 March – 28 May 2000. The other item was listed as *The Quest of the Holy Grail (Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail, Fig. A.83)*.

disappearance have a remarkable synergy with Elizabeth's life, and the two stories are narrated side-by-side throughout the novel. It is not until the end that the reader learns the truth: John Marshall was the doctor who attended Elizabeth's stillbirth, and supposedly took the baby away for burial. The child survived and the Marshalls brought her up. Bethany, the missing girl, turns out to be Elizabeth's great-great-great-granddaughter. While there is documentary evidence to confirm that Dr John Marshall was indeed present at the stillbirth, the rest is original fiction. Yet this work of fiction shows how authors are fascinated by Elizabeth's story, creating their own narratives to fill in the gaps in knowledge. As we have seen with Violet Hunt's monograph, these fictional 'fillers' can often become indistinguishable from the truth over time.

Television drama resurrected the Pre-Raphaelite story when the BBC presented two more versions for the entertainment of their viewers. In 1975 a series called *The Love School* was shown, but in 2009 a much wider audience was reached when the BBC screened *Desperate Romantics*.<sup>71</sup> Based on Franny Moyle's book of the same name, the drama was 'fictionalised' by screenwriter Peter Bowker to suit twenty-first century taste. The narrator, Fred Walters, a character invented by Bowker, combines the attributes of Walter Deverell, William Michael Rossetti and Frederick George Stephens. Described by its producer, Ben Evans, as a 'fun, sexy relationship drama' which marries authentic fact with fiction, this raunchy bodice-ripper side-steps the art-historical

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<sup>71</sup> *Desperate Romantics*, BBC2, Jul 21 to Aug 25, 2009, Television broadcast. This series was re-screened from Monday 15 February 2022.

angle to highlight the physical relationships between the characters, leaving little to the viewer's imagination.<sup>72</sup>

The traditional myths of the bonnet shop, bathtub and suicide are naturally reiterated. Elizabeth's art is barely mentioned until episode four. Contrast this paucity with the number of times Gabriel and Elizabeth are witnessed indulging in pre-marital sex and it is easy to see how public perception is so easily manipulated to ignore reality in favour of dramatic fiction. The casting of Aiden Turner in the role of Gabriel simply relegates Amy Manson's Elizabeth to the supporting role of 'object'. Gabriel states: 'She is the key that unlocks the treasure of my talent', which is the embodiment of Pollock and Cherry's previously mentioned feminist criticism of thirty years earlier: 'Siddal becomes a cipher for masculine creativity inspired by and fulfilled in love for a beautiful feminine face'.<sup>73</sup> Yet much of this patriarchal stance originates from Bowker, the male screenwriter, rather than from female author Moyle's original book. Elizabeth's story has been transformed into what Bowker believed would appeal to a twenty-first century audience and ensure high viewing figures, regardless of inconsistencies and anachronisms. Portraying her purely as an artist would not have generated the mass appeal of a bed-hopping romance. Easily purchased on DVD, the viewers' lasting (and misleading) impression of Elizabeth will simply move public perception back towards the traditional patriarchal view. Hopefully it might also awaken an interest in a few to explore Elizabeth and her life's work in a little more detail, visit art galleries, read books, and form their own opinions.

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with producer Ben Evans in "A Portrait: A Behind the Scenes Featurette." *Desperate Romantics*, Directed by Paul Gay and Diarmuid Lawrence, (London: BBC Worldwide, 2009), DVD.

<sup>73</sup> "Episode 1: The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood look for a muse to inspire their best work yet." *Desperate Romantics*, BBC2, Jul 21, 2009, Television broadcast. Cherry and Pollock, "Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature," 132.

As *Desperate Romantics* continues to demonstrate, the art historical canon is still undeniably patriarchal, a fact which is substantiated by the lack of real 'progress' in foregrounding the work of women artists. The Tate Gallery held another blockbuster exhibition in 2012: *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*. A comparative analysis was performed on the one hundred and seventy-five works in this exhibition to the one carried out on the exhibition of 1984. The analysis reveals that a mere seven items were painted by women artists. Four of these were by Elizabeth (including two of those exhibited in 1984), two by Rosa Brett, and one by Florence Claxton.<sup>74</sup> Joanna Wells was still absent. All the works were small, representing a token acknowledgement of the women of the Pre-Raphaelite circle rather than a celebration of their work. Additionally, William Morris's wife Jane and daughters May and Jenny were credited with the traditionally feminine activity of embroidering his designs, while May's designs for bed linen and furnishings were acknowledged. Two photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron were also included. Visitor numbers were similar for both the recent exhibitions, with 219,292 attending in 1984 and 242,957 in 2012, suggesting that interest in the Pre-Raphaelites has remained stable.<sup>75</sup> Although the 2012 exhibition gave a much more rounded view of the Pre-Raphaelite circle and the art produced by its members, creativity still appeared to remain, as Cherry and Pollock argue, 'intimately connected with the workings of patriarchal power within our society', despite the best efforts of any feminist interventions.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*. Edited by Barringer, Tim, Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith (London: Tate Gallery, 2012), Exhibition Catalogue.

<sup>75</sup> Amy Richardson, Visitor Communications Assistant, Tate Gallery, London, email message to the author, Oct 7, 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Cherry and Pollock, "The Pre-Raphaelites and Patriarchal Power," 494.

The exhibition may have inspired the staging of the most recent drama about Elizabeth, Jeremy Green's *Lizzie Siddal*. Green's play, the only production to present Elizabeth as its protagonist, was performed at the Arcola Theatre in Hackney towards the end of 2013. This small and intimate theatre staged a most memorable production which was extremely well received by critics. Green wanted to give Elizabeth a voice, something he felt had been lacking in previous portrayals. Howard Loxton, reviewing for the *British Theatre Guide*, specifically commented on how Elizabeth was presented: 'Emma West's Lizzie is self-contained, a beautifully gauged study of a woman gaining confidence in her own abilities and wanting to become herself a painter'.<sup>77</sup> This is a complete juxtaposition with the traditional patriarchal view of Elizabeth as a pathetic, weak female.

Green sets the scene by initially depriving Elizabeth of her voice. The play opens at Elizabeth's graveside, paying homage to Ken Russell's *Dante's Inferno*, with a brief conversation between Gabriel's associates, Charles Augustus Howell and Henry Virtue Tebbs, who have assembled to perform the exhumation. The next scene returns the story to the beginning and finds Elizabeth posing for Holman Hunt when Gabriel bursts in. The stage directions for this scene frequently state 'LIZZIE *opens her mouth to reply*', but she is repeatedly cut off by Holman Hunt, who answers all Gabriel's questions to her. Holman Hunt explains that Elizabeth 'cannot talk because I am paying her sixpence an hour not to talk, or move'.<sup>78</sup> Green therefore begins by presenting the traditional view of Elizabeth as the object of the male gaze, there to be seen but not heard. By scene five Elizabeth has found her voice and has become an

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<sup>77</sup> Howard Loxton, "Review: 'Lizzie Siddal' (Arcola Theatre)," *British Theatre Guides*, accessed Mar 29, 2022, <https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/lizzie-siddal-arcola-theatre-9624>.

<sup>78</sup> Jeremy Green, *Lizzie Siddal* (London: Nick Hern Books Ltd, 2014), 11. Act 1 Scene 2.

artist, promising 'To commit to art. All or nothing'.<sup>79</sup> Green subsequently turns the subject/object dilemma on its head when Elizabeth asks Gabriel to pose for her. He does so grudgingly, uttering 'God, I hate this. I hate being a model. It makes me feel like an object'.<sup>80</sup> The audience is thus forced to consider the other side of the artist's pencil.

Perhaps the most critical words of the play are uttered by Mr Young Mitchell, head of the Sheffield School of Art where Elizabeth attended classes during the period between 1858 and 1860:

Miss Siddal, your story – what you've done – no one has ever done. For a model to climb down from the gallery wall and pick up the paintbrushes herself. Whoever heard of that before? A woman. How many women painters are there? – one or two who dabble in drawing rooms – they've money and leisure. But you... had nothing. To start with nothing, and to *do* work, *show* work, *sell* work. From scratch to make yourself an artist – a woman artist. To come up here and insist on learning to draw better... You're too important to be allowed to fade into nothingness.<sup>81</sup>

In this short speech Green has extracted the essence of Elizabeth's incredible achievement for a Victorian woman. Yet her artistic legacy has been continually overshadowed by the now familiar tales of her life and death. The *Evening Standard* reviewer believes Green achieved his aim, ending his review 'It's pleasing to hear from Lizzie the woman, rather than simply admire Lizzie the mute model'.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the appearance of a 'new' Elizabeth, the pathetic figure trapped in Millais's painting still manages to keep her head above the water. In 2015

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<sup>79</sup> Green, *Lizzie Siddal*, 31. Act 1 Scene 5.

<sup>80</sup> Green, *Lizzie Siddal*, 35. Act 1 Scene 5.

<sup>81</sup> Green, *Lizzie Siddal*, 78. Act 2, Scene 2.

<sup>82</sup> "Review: 'Lizzie Siddal - Arcola Theatre'," *Go London (Evening Standard)*, Nov 25, 2013, accessed Mar 29, 2022, <https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/lizzie-siddal-arcola-theatre-review-8961652.html>.



another biographical novel, *Ophelia's Muse* by Rita Cameron, followed in Violet Hunt's footsteps. Cameron takes the basic story but adds her own twists, seamlessly blending the known 'facts' with fiction. She firmly places Elizabeth as a Victorian woman who simply desires to be a wife and mother.<sup>83</sup> Although her art is mentioned, the focus is on her role as a muse. The online reviewer, *Girl with her Head in a Book*, sums up this novel accurately:

It's a pretty lifeless novel. Lizzie goes from poverty-stricken shop girl to naive model for Walter Deverell to fallen woman, staggering about and being unhealthy before finally succumbing to her misery. Rossetti is the selfish artist and priapic egotist who cares not for her comfort but rather his art. Cameron does nothing to raise them from the two dimensions and they feel flat on the page. She has taken a story which has the potential to have all the emotion of an operatic tragedy and managed to make it feel dull.<sup>84</sup>

Sadly, too many readers of this genre conflate fiction with reality, and thus the myths are compounded and begin to take on a life of their own.

To counter these fictive accounts of her life and promote the perception of Elizabeth as an artist and poet, a second solo exhibition of her work was held at the Manders' former home Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton, which ran from 1 March to 24 December 2018. 'Beyond Ophelia', curated by Hannah Squire, was a small and intimate exhibition, allowing the visitors close access to Lord and Lady Mander's collection of Elizabeth's drawings.

The publicity material for the exhibition notes a clear indication of the changing perception of Elizabeth as an artist:

Reinstating Lizzie Siddal as an important and influential artist and poet, this is only the second solo exhibition of her work.

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<sup>83</sup> Rita Cameron, *Ophelia's Muse*, (New York, Kensington Books, 2015), 237.

<sup>84</sup> Book review, *Ophelia's Muse*, accessed Jan 5, 2021, [Review: Ophelia's Muse, Rita Cameron - Girl with her Head in a Book](#).

Although a professional member of the Pre-Raphaelite artistic circle, Siddal is mainly remembered today as the model for the iconic Millais painting, *Ophelia* (1851-2), and as the wife and muse of the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

This exhibition examines Siddal's style, subject matter, depiction of women, her influence on other artists, and the prejudice she faced as a professional female artist in the patriarchal Victorian art world.<sup>85</sup>

This change was praised by author and 'blogger' Kirsty Stonell Walker, who visited the exhibition and posted a review on her website:

The exhibition takes up only one room (with magnificent Morris wallpaper) but the key with Siddal's work is quality, not quantity. Lord knows I've been to some massive exhibitions at the national museums and left not feeling any closer to the subject than when I'd walked in the first of the rooms. With 'Beyond Ophelia' Wightwick have achieved the damn near impossible task of making you forget that Miss Siddal had been that poor lass in the bath tub and brought you face-to-face with her as a serious artist and poet of great potential.<sup>86</sup>

Both publicity material and Walker's review present evidence of the shift that appears to be taking place in the public perception of Elizabeth at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century. The press release clearly identifies Elizabeth as an artist and poet, and a significant member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, which shows how today's media can be used to manipulate perception. The continued use of media, both in print and online, will be critical to the future efforts needed to change public opinion.

Also in 2018, Canadian author Dawn Marie Kresan appears to have drawn on both Elizabeth's own poetry and Allnutt's earlier work in creating *Muse*, a

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<sup>85</sup> "Beyond Ophelia: A Celebration of Lizzie Siddal, Artist and Poet," *Artfund*, 2019, accessed Mar 29, 2022, <https://www.artfund.org/whats-on/exhibitions/2018/03/01/beyond-ophelia-a-celebration-of-lizzie-siddal-exhibition>.

<sup>86</sup> Kirsty Stonell Walker. "Review: Beyond Ophelia: A Celebration of Lizzie Siddal, Artist and Poet," *The Kissed Mouth* (blog), Apr 29, 2019, accessed Mar 29, 2022, <http://fannycornforth.blogspot.com/2018/04/review-beyond-ophelia-celebration-of.html>.

selection of poems arranged in three sections. The poems in the first part tell the story of Elizabeth's life, while part three includes some interesting imaginary scenes such as 'Elizabeth Siddal and Marilyn Monroe in Conversation' and 'Elizabeth and Robert Graves attend my Poetry Reading'. Section two, on the other hand, contains only three short poems, one of which makes a painfully sharp point:

**Painter Without Hands**

She weeps over useless stumps.  
What is the point of keeping oneself clean  
and sinless if the body will be torn  
from itself in either case?  
Her desire to paint, to hold  
the smooth varnished handle, cup  
saturated shades in cracked palms, the citrus  
dye of a liquid orange daybreak.  
Butchered, the knob-boned shorn-skin twists  
like thick branches blown from a trunk,  
bluntly chopped short before the edge of sky.<sup>87</sup>

This poem can be interpreted in many ways, but one reading sees Elizabeth's artistic ambitions as being destroyed by her female body, corporeal weakness and early death. The metaphor of an artist without hands which Kresan has used to illustrate Elizabeth's desire to succeed as an artist is inspirational. The closing line alluding to her artistic career being ended by her premature death encourages the reader to reflect on what might have been had she lived. Such a modern treatment of Elizabeth's story is an interesting addition to the field of literature, contributing to the way in which the public perception of Elizabeth is changing.

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<sup>87</sup> Dawn Marie Kresan, *Muse* (Toronto, Canada: DK Graphic Design, 2018), 45.

Elizabeth Macneal's *The Doll Factory* (2019) is one of the more recent novels to be inspired by Elizabeth's story.<sup>88</sup> The author says she had always been fascinated by the Pre-Raphaelites, and originally considered writing a fictional biography about Elizabeth, but felt that she would 'not be able to have as much fun with the plot as she would have liked', so *The Doll Factory* was born.<sup>89</sup> It retells Elizabeth's story using fictional characters, with the protagonist being Iris, a young doll-maker who yearns to be an artist and sees modelling for artist Louis Frost as a way of achieving her ambition. However, the story has many twists, not least the appearance of Silas Reed, a collector of curiosities and taxidermist who provides the Pre-Raphaelite artists with the stuffed animals they need for accuracy in their paintings, ranging from the mouse in Millais's *Mariana* to the sheep in Holman Hunt's *Hireling Shepherd*.

Silas has a dark side to his character and turns out to be a murderer, creating stuffed mouse likenesses of his intended victims. He pursues Iris, eventually incarcerating her in a cellar; he has already stuffed an 'Iris' mouse. The story has a weak but happy ending as Iris escapes and achieves her artistic dream. The parallels with Elizabeth's story are clear, but despite the huge publicity surrounding Macneal's debut novel, the book appears to have had little effect on the public perception of Elizabeth since it is so far removed from reality.

Novels based on the Pre-Raphaelites, and more specifically Elizabeth's story, are emerging from as far afield as Australia (*Beauty in Thorns* (2017) by Kate Forsyth), with more new publications appearing all the time (for example *The Ophelia Girls* (2021) by Jane Healey). This continued popularity of the subject

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<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Macneal, *The Doll Factory* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>89</sup> Charlotte Eyre, "Elizabeth Macneal reveals both the macabre and painterly inspirations behind her sought-after debut novel," *The Bookseller* (Mar 1, 2019): 23.

keeps Elizabeth in the public eye, but generally for the wrong reasons. The novels always reinforce the traditional tales of the bonnet shop, bathtub, suicide note and exhumation and rarely give any attention to the other Elizabeth, the aspiring artist who received Ruskin's patronage. Without the public interest and willingness to purchase such novels, would Elizabeth's art become more prominent, or would she slip into the vast realms of forgotten female artists?

Fiction, however, is only one way in which Elizabeth's name has been kept in circulation. As previously mentioned, she is becoming more widely recognised as a poet as well as an artist. While her art is the focus of my thesis, it is prudent to mention her poetry here, since the resurgence of interest in both appears to run concurrently. In 2019 Serena Trowbridge published a detailed study of all Elizabeth's poetic manuscripts, together with analysis and interpretation. *My Ladys Soul* provides the most comprehensive record of Elizabeth's poetry to date, with sixteen full poems and six fragments discussed.<sup>90</sup> Although Elizabeth's work had been published piecemeal by Gabriel's brother William in various volumes of correspondence and memoirs, Roger C. Lewis and Mark Samuels Lasner were the first to present her known poems, along with a selection of her drawings, in *Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal*, where fifteen poems and two fragments were included with only a brief commentary.<sup>91</sup> Trowbridge builds on this with her in-depth notes, documenting the various iterations between manuscript versions of the same hand, and remarking on William's rigorous editing of Elizabeth's words and grammar in many cases. This shows how William exercised control over Elizabeth's work (and posthumous reputation) in the same way as over his

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<sup>90</sup> Trowbridge, *My Ladys Soul*.

<sup>91</sup> Roger C. Lewis and Mark Samuels Lasner, ed., *Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal* (Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada: The Wombat Press, 1978).

brother's. It is only by returning to the words written by Elizabeth's own hand that *her* voice is allowed to be heard.

As Trowbridge's study demonstrates, a significant change is evolving in the perception of female artists, but there is still a long way to go. 2019 also saw the staging of a high-profile exhibition dedicated to the women of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* was again curated by Jan Marsh, but this time enjoyed the prime location of the National Portrait Gallery, London, from 17 October 2019 to 26 January 2020. 71,166 visitors attended this exhibition, significantly lower than the Tate exhibitions where predominantly male artists' work was displayed. Twelve women associated with the movement through all its phases were represented, from Elizabeth in the 1850s to Evelyn De Morgan and Marie Stillman in the early twentieth century. The catalogue entry for Elizabeth is quite different to any previous catalogues, firmly presenting her as an artist. Large text quotations reinforce this status, such as: 'Artistic ability is the keynote of the earliest version of her story' and 'Art was the only thing for which she felt seriously' (Fig. 5).<sup>92</sup> Anyone thumbing through the catalogue could not fail to notice these striking quotations which contrast sharply with the traditional pathetic figure so often publicised.

However, the *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* exhibition did not present Elizabeth as purely an artist – or a model. Exhibits included a manuscript page of poetry in her own handwriting held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, a lock of her hair with an accompanying note belonging to the Delaware Art Museum, USA and some of Gabriel's sketches of her.<sup>93</sup> Several of her familiar watercolours were

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<sup>92</sup> *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters*. Edited by Jan Marsh (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2019), Exhibition Catalogue. 27, 29.

<sup>93</sup> These items have unfortunately been omitted from the exhibition catalogue.

included, as well as her less familiar drawing *The Macbeths* (Fig. A.57). The overall impression was of a more rounded individual, a creative woman who was ambitious, who wrote poetry and painted, and who occasionally modelled for her fellow artists. This shows the emergence of a different Elizabeth, perhaps the beginnings of the paradigm shift in public perception which Linda Nochlin called for back in the 1970s.<sup>94</sup> I hope my research will continue to accelerate this process.

A further study of Elizabeth's poetry was published in March 2021, *The Poems of Elizabeth Siddal in Context* by Anne Woolley, a product of her doctoral thesis at Keele University.<sup>95</sup> Heralded as a significant volume, Woolley analyses Elizabeth's poetry in relation to her contemporaries, including Tennyson, Swinburne, Christina Rossetti and of course Gabriel. She classifies Elizabeth as 'a deliberately silent poetic voice' because her poems were only published after both her own and Gabriel's deaths.<sup>96</sup> She also distinguishes Elizabeth as 'the only female Pre-Raphaelite poet/artist', which is not entirely correct as Christina also produced many illustrations.<sup>97</sup> Above all, Woolley has attempted to recover Elizabeth's 'lost voice' to poetry in the same way that I am hoping to achieve for her art.<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately, retailing at £80, Woolley's book is expensive. With a niche market it will only have a limited circulation, which will limit its impact on the public perception of Elizabeth. I therefore plan to make my research accessible to as wide an audience as possible. As well as the

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<sup>94</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* ed. Linda Nochlin (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 146.

<sup>95</sup> Anne Woolley, *The Poems of Elizabeth Siddal in Context*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2021).

<sup>96</sup> Woolley, *Poems*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> Woolley, *Poems*, 4. For an example of Christina's illustrations see the manuscript copy of *Sing-Song* in the British Library: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manuscript-of-sing-song-a-collection-of-nursery-rhymes-by-christina-rossetti>, accessed Aug 24, 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Woolley, *Poems*, 263.

online project, I plan to publish not only a scholarly volume which I hope will inspire further research, but also a 'trashy novel' which will present Elizabeth from this new perspective to the obvious market of avid readers.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the public perception of Elizabeth as an artist has been shaped by those who have written about her, exhibited her drawings, portrayed her on stage or screen and researched her life and work. From a few brief words in the many biographies of her husband Gabriel to full length biographies of her own, from model to artist, from the 1857 Pre-Raphaelite exhibition at Russell Place to a retrospective solo exhibition at the Ruskin Gallery, Sheffield, and the *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* exhibition in the heart of London, Elizabeth's story has inspired many more to write about her and so the cycle of perception and reception is continually refuelled.

Perception is, however, subjective. Each writer, curator, or actor presents the public with their personal interpretation of the story. Each reader, viewer, or member of the audience will form a different impression of the same book, exhibition, or performance. No two people will come away with entirely the same perception of the same work. Thus, the shaping of public perception depends on reception and interpretation, which is then followed by subjective reproduction. Over time, and with many iterations, the perception of Elizabeth is beginning to change. As Marsh writes in her postscript to *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*:



biography is not reincarnation but a form of exhumation. From the contents of her coffin, so to speak, each age remakes the image of Elizabeth Siddal to its own specification.<sup>99</sup>

Each new decade brings with it a different interpretation of Elizabeth's story.

Today, in the twenty-first century, she is emerging as a noteworthy poet and an artist who made a significant contribution to the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art. This thesis will add another layer to Elizabeth's story – one that has not been heard before. In the next chapter I will begin this process by analysing a unique resource, the photographic portfolios which Gabriel had made of Elizabeth's work, to demonstrate their importance in ascertaining the true extent and sophistication of her artistic oeuvre.

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<sup>99</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 215.

## Chapter 2 – ‘all her scraps and scrawls’: The Photographic Portfolios of Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti’s Drawings

### Introduction

After Elizabeth’s death Gabriel began the huge task of locating and assembling a collection of every piece of her work that he could possibly reclaim from its current owners. This took several years and included all her rough sketches, more detailed drawings and watercolours. As well as displaying her watercolours on the walls of his drawing room in Cheyne Walk, Gabriel appears to have had another motive in gathering her oeuvre together. On 23 April 1869 he wrote to Charles Elliot Norton, the American who had purchased *Clerk Saunders*, to ask him to return the drawing. Gabriel offered a drawing of his own in exchange, explaining that he desired the drawing

... to add to those of hers which are now mine, and which every year teaches me to value more & more as works of genius, even apart from their personal interest to me ... I have had all her scraps and scrawls in ink photographed.<sup>1</sup>

While documenting Gabriel’s appreciation of Elizabeth’s work, this letter also provides written evidence that his motivation for gathering all Elizabeth’s works together was to have them photographed. Although photography was still a relatively new medium in the 1860s it had been employed in the art world since the 1840s.<sup>2</sup> During the 1850s there was an increase in experimentation with photographing artworks and by the 1860s a commercial market had blossomed.<sup>3</sup> Private collectors and museums such as the South Kensington

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<sup>1</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, IV, 175-6 (item 69.48).

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Hamber, “A Higher Branch of the Art”: *Photographing the Fine Arts in England, 1839-1880* (London: Gordon & Breach, 1996), 233.

<sup>3</sup> Hamber, “A Higher Branch of the Art,” 233.

Museum were having their collections photographed.<sup>4</sup> Gabriel would have been aware of these developments and chose to exploit the potential of photography to preserve Elizabeth's drawings. The ensuing photographs were subsequently compiled into portfolios and distributed to his friends and associates.

Several copies of these photographic portfolios survive in whole or part and are of critical importance to the study of Elizabeth's work. They provide scholars with a much clearer view of the true extent of her oeuvre than is generally appreciated from the limited number of her drawings held in national collections, yet these portfolios are still severely under-researched. Hidden away in the prints and drawings departments of a select few museums, these unique albums provide an extraordinary resource for the study of the output of a Victorian female artist who was an integral part of the Pre-Raphaelite circle.

In this chapter I will document the current knowledge about this neglected resource to facilitate future scholarship. I will provide a detailed description of the portfolios, from the creation of the photographs to the compilation and dissemination of the albums, as well as the location and condition of the extant copies and the work being undertaken to preserve them. Of necessity the chapter will be descriptive, but I will also demonstrate the critical importance of the photographic portfolios in understanding Elizabeth's oeuvre and its impact on Gabriel's work, as well as on the wider visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art.

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<sup>4</sup> Hamber, *"A Higher Branch of the Art,"* 201-4 and chapter 8. The V&A hold a Photographic Register dating from the 1850s.

## The Photographs

The apparent lack of interest in the photographic portfolios by Elizabeth's few biographers seems astonishing, although according to Anthony J. Hamber, nineteenth-century photographs of artworks are 'often seen as almost worthless documentary records. Hence they have almost invariably been thrown away'.<sup>5</sup> Neither William Rossetti nor Violet Hunt even acknowledge their existence. Lucinda Hawksley merely footnotes the fact that Elizabeth's works were photographed, conceding that some of the images 'are now the only visual references remaining' of lost works.<sup>6</sup> Jan Marsh is the sole biographer who has clearly studied the portfolios and to an extent recognised their importance. More recently, Jesse Hoffman's paper entitled 'Rossetti's Bad Photographs' remarks on the lack of scholarship, but only considers the portfolios from the angle of understanding Gabriel's 'motivation for creating them while destroying images of Elizabeth herself'.<sup>7</sup> These albums are an essential resource and fundamental to the study of Elizabeth's artistic legacy. I will therefore begin to address the gap in scholarly attention by examining the creation of the photographs.

Once he had assembled a sizeable collection of Elizabeth's works, Gabriel arranged for them to be photographed. Jan Marsh dates this event to 1866,<sup>8</sup> but there is documentary evidence that the process began earlier – in the autumn of 1865. On 9 October 1865 Gabriel wrote to one of his patrons, the Liverpool merchant and passionate art collector John Miller:

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<sup>5</sup> Hamber, "A Higher Branch of the Art," 26.

<sup>6</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 92 n.13.

<sup>7</sup> Jesse Hoffman, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bad Photographs," *Victorian Studies* Vol. 57 No. 1 (2014): 57-87.

<sup>8</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 13.

I am now having some drawings by my late wife photographed, and when I get copies shall beg your acceptance of some. I forget whether I ever drew your attention much to any of her designs, but I am sure you will find them repay examination, as she had real inventive genius<sup>9</sup>

This letter provides a firm date as to when the photographs were actually in the process of being taken. This new, earlier, date for the photography perhaps highlights the difficulty Gabriel had in recovering all Elizabeth's works. It appears to be something he pursued tirelessly for the rest of his life. Although the portfolios were created within a shorter timeframe, not all Elizabeth's drawings were available for inclusion. Gabriel's above-mentioned letter to Norton was written in 1869, while in 1870 he wrote to his old friend Barbara Bodichon to ask whether by any chance she owned a drawing he had still not traced:

I have been for some time past very anxious to get back all such sketches by my late wife – however slight – as were not in my own hands; as I admire her work even more now if possible than I did years ago. I have got most of those which Ruskin had, but find that he has lost sight of, or rather I believe given away, several. Did you happen to be the recipient in any instance? There was particularly a little pen-&-ink design (of a woman kneeling by a fire place with a boy in the background) which I am very sorry to find is lost, as it was done to illustrate a poem of my own. I mention it with little hope that this or something else which was Ruskin's may chance now to be yours, but thought I would ask you. Were it so, I would gladly give you something of my own in exchange if agreeable to you.<sup>10</sup>

The drawing Gabriel refers to is one of Elizabeth's studies for *Sister Helen*, three of which are included in the portfolio.<sup>11</sup> This letter demonstrates not only Gabriel's desperation to try and recover every single piece of Elizabeth's work,

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<sup>9</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, III, 337 (item 65.145).

<sup>10</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, IV, 350-1 (item 70.2).

<sup>11</sup> *Sister Helen* is discussed in Chapter 6.

but also confirms his increasing veneration of her ideas. It should also be noted that at the beginning of the new decade, Elizabeth was still very much at the centre of Gabriel's world. He completed *Beata Beatrix* (Tate Gallery, London) in 1863 while *The Seed of David*, a triptych altarpiece for Llandaff Cathedral in South Wales, depicting Elizabeth's features on all the angels in the centre panel, was finished in 1864. His manuscript volume of poetry was recovered from her exhumed coffin in the autumn of 1869 and he was still pursuing her missing drawings to complete his collection. His ongoing dependence on the 'artefacts' or 'relics' associated with his dead wife is often overlooked, as attention is focused on his flourishing relationships with Jane Morris and Fanny Cornforth. Thus, painting images of her and gathering all her work together could perhaps be interpreted as cathartic actions undertaken as part of his grieving process.

By the autumn of 1865, Gabriel had obviously assembled a sufficient quantity of Elizabeth's drawings to proceed with having each item individually photographed. He was clearly at ease with photography, the modern method of capturing an image on paper. Photography began with an innovative new process developed by William Henry Fox Talbot, known as the Talbotype or calotype, in around 1839. By the 1860s the most popular method used was the collodion wet plate process, as detailed in a manual from 1854 by Frederick Scott Archer.<sup>12</sup> This manual gives an in-depth explanation as to how the convoluted process should be carried out. However, photography historian Anthony J. Hamber describes the process in simple terms:

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<sup>12</sup> "The Collodion Process on Glass by Frederick Scott Archer. 1854," *Seán MacKenna*, n.d., accessed Mar 11, 2022, <http://www.samackenna.co.uk/fsa/fsatitle1.html>.

The Wet-Collodion process consisted of pouring collodion containing potassium iodide onto a glass plate which was then tilted until the emulsion formed an even coating. All the manipulations of the collodion process had to take place within about twenty minutes, the time it took for the collodion to dry. Once the plate had been coated with the collodion solution it was then immediately sensitised in a bath of nitrate of silver and the camera exposure taken. The plate was then developed without delay.<sup>13</sup>

The exposure was made by removing the lens cap, counting the seconds to obtain optimum exposure, and swiftly replacing the lens cap.<sup>14</sup> The time needed for the exposure would have varied according to light conditions, but the optimum time would have been around five to seven seconds.<sup>15</sup> The resulting glass negatives were then coated with a type of varnish and could be stored and used time and again to produce prints on light-sensitive paper.<sup>16</sup> The paper was prepared by coating it with a mixture of albumen (egg white) and sodium chloride (salt), then dipping it into a solution of sodium nitrate in water before drying. Initially the photographer would have had to prepare the solutions from the raw materials himself, but by the early 1860s both collodion solution and prepared papers were commercially available.<sup>17</sup>

The photographs of Elizabeth's work were taken using the collodion wet plate process. This is confirmed by a collection of sixty-one original glass negatives held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (see Fig. 6 for an example).<sup>18</sup> The glass plates are of a standard size, 21.7 x 16.8 cm full plate and 16.8 x 11.9 cm half plate, which were manufactured for use in the wet collodion cameras at the

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<sup>13</sup> Hamber, "A Higher Branch of the Art," 80.

<sup>14</sup> Jack Lowe, 'The Lifeboat Station Project', *York Consortium for Conservation and Craftsmanship Tuesday Talks* 9 November 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Lowe, 'The Lifeboat Station Project'.

<sup>16</sup> Lowe, 'The Lifeboat Station Project'.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Pritchard. *The development and growth of British photographic manufacturing and retailing 1839-1914* (doctoral thesis. University of Leicester, 2010), 89.

<sup>18</sup> Unknown photographer (John Robert Parsons?). *Glass plate negatives of drawings by Elizabeth Siddal*. c.1865. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. WA1977.353

time. Sixty of these glass plates are intact and well preserved, but regrettably one is broken. The glass negatives have been numbered consecutively from 1 to 61, however negatives numbered 20-27 inclusive are not of Elizabeth's work but of works by Gabriel himself and others, reproducing detailed drawings and oil paintings including Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* and Burne-Jones's *The Knight's Farewell*. There are therefore only fifty-two intact surviving glass negatives for the photographs taken of Elizabeth's work. The broken plate, no. 19, has been identified as an untitled drawing in the portfolio (Fig. A.46). These negatives all form part of the collection bequeathed to the museum by former Oxford Fellow and Tutor at Balliol College, John Bryson. Another Fellow of Balliol College, Kenneth Garlick, was also Keeper of Western Art at the Ashmolean Museum and was one of the executors of Bryson's will.<sup>19</sup> This connection may have had some influence on Bryson's decision to leave the greater part of his collection to the Ashmolean. In addition, some of his collection was sold at Christie's during 1977-8 in the execution of his will.<sup>20</sup> Although much has been documented about the content of his bequest, it is not known how Bryson obtained the items for his collection. Born in 1896, he is unlikely to have begun purchasing artworks until the 1920s. William Rossetti's death in 1919 means it is possible that at this time his descendants may have decided to sell items that were of little interest to them. Bryson was simply attracted to anything Pre-Raphaelite, therefore many items in his collection may have been part of an auction lot acquired from Rossetti descendants.

A complete photographic portfolio consists of sixty-nine images. Sixty-seven are photographs of drawings by Elizabeth, and the remaining two depict

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<sup>19</sup> "Papers of John Norman Bryson." *Balliol College Archives and Manuscripts*, n.d., accessed Mar 13, 2022, <http://archives.balliol.ox.ac.uk/Modern%20Papers/bryson.asp>.

<sup>20</sup> "Papers of John Norman Bryson."



sketches of Elizabeth by Gabriel. A baseline collection of photographs can be identified from the fifty-three glass negatives. The portfolios, therefore, also include fourteen photographs of other drawings where no glass negative exists. Many of these supplementary images are of more detailed drawings such as *Pippa Passes*, *Lovers Listening to Music*, and *The Lady of Shalott*. This immediately raises many questions.

It is easy to speculate that the negatives for the supplementary images are missing simply because they had been broken and were therefore disposed of. Since an intact glass negative is required to produce a print, it is likely that any broken negative would have been deemed worthless and therefore discarded. Attitudes have changed for the better and the unique value of these surviving glass negatives has now been recognised. The broken negative (no.19) was preserved in a box wrapped in tissue paper, but an unknown number may have been damaged at some time after the negatives were bequeathed to the Ashmolean Museum. Conversely, some of the negatives may still be in Rossetti family possession, or have been retained by the photographer, since photographs of Elizabeth's more finished drawings would have been more valuable than those of the rough sketches. It may also indicate that a different photographer and process was used for Elizabeth's more technically proficient drawings, as discussed later.

As well as the glass plates and photographic portfolios, the Ashmolean Museum also holds a modern set of reprints taken directly from the glass negatives.<sup>21</sup> These are kept in an envelope addressed to 'The Keeper', Department of Fine Arts, Ashmolean Museum. Unfortunately, this envelope was delivered 'By

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<sup>21</sup> Envelope addressed to "The Keeper, Department of Fine Arts, Ashmolean Museum." Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, c.1978-9, viewed Sep 9, 2014.

Messenger' and is therefore impossible to date. However, since the glass negatives formed part of the Bryson bequest in 1976-7, it is reasonable to assume that the reprints were made in the late 1970s by the Ashmolean Museum, soon after the plates were acquired.

The modern reprints are in two sizes which correspond to the sizes of the images in the portfolios and on the glass plates. They do not constitute a full set of prints of Elizabeth's works from the glass negatives; the image for plate no.36 is missing. This is one of her studies for *Clerk Saunders* which has caused some confusion to scholars. The prints in the surviving portfolios show two similar images with the position of the figures transposed (Fig. 7, top). In her exhibition catalogue Marsh indicates one may be a study for the woodblock she was making while in Hastings in 1854, but states that the signature is *not* reversed.<sup>22</sup> To add to the confusion, William presented a collotype copy of the same drawing to the bookstall of The Women's Social and Political Union in 1909. This copy is printed with reversed initials in the bottom left-hand corner (Fig. A.16). Perhaps the printer of the modern set of reproductions felt unable to reproduce the image in what he believed was the correct orientation from the supplied negative. It also potentially confirms that glass negative no.36 may indeed be the study for the woodblock since the image would have been reversed and is therefore printed correctly in the collotype. As two similar studies exist, one appearing to be a mirror image of the other, it does seem possible that these are Elizabeth's original drawing and her subsequent version for the woodblock.

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<sup>22</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 65.

Among the modern reprints there are two images which do not have glass negatives. One is *Landscape with Castle, Tree and Landing Stage* (Fig. A.49) which is included in the photographic portfolios. This suggests that the negative for this image did exist in the collection at the date the reprints were made and has possibly since been damaged and disposed of. In addition, there is indeed a copy of the image from the broken glass negative no.19. This verifies that the negative was intact at the time the reprints were made but was subsequently broken while in the Ashmolean Museum's collection. Following my research and feedback to the museum this negative has now been conserved and digitally recorded for posterity (Fig. 8).

### **The Photographer**

Unfortunately, Gabriel gave no indication in his correspondence as to the identity of the photographer he engaged to take the images of Elizabeth's work. There are several possible candidates, all of whom were well-known to Gabriel. Many had photographed either Gabriel himself or his work, therefore it is likely that one or more of those discussed below was indeed responsible for taking the photographs of Elizabeth's drawings.

One of the photographers who is known to have photographed Gabriel's paintings is Frederick Hollyer. Perhaps the best-known photographer of the second half of the nineteenth century, Hollyer took up photography around 1860. In 1865, the year the photographs of Elizabeth's work were taken, Hollyer was elected to the Photographic Society of London, suggesting that he was already an established photographer by this time.<sup>23</sup> His original studio was located in Kentish Town (London NW5), almost six miles from Gabriel's home in

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<sup>23</sup> John Hannavy, ed., *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 710.

Cheyne Walk, Chelsea (London SW3). He did not relocate to much closer premises in Pembroke Square, Kensington (London W8) until 1870.<sup>24</sup>

Hollyer did not meet members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle until 1865, when he photographed work by Simeon Solomon using the wet collodion process. He later photographed drawings and paintings by George Frederic Watts, Burne-Jones, Gabriel and many others.<sup>25</sup> Catalogues were published listing all the works he had photographed and the prints he produced for sale.<sup>26</sup> Although proficient in the wet collodion process, Hollyer favoured the platinum print, or platinotype, which he exploited to its fullest after 1878 in his photography of artists' drawings.<sup>27</sup> The platinotype process offered a superior representation of all tonal ranges between light and dark than its predecessors (Fig. 9). Many of Hollyer's photographs of drawings are now held in Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery. As the date range for these items is 1867-1910 and the print size around 23 x 35 cm, there is no match with the photographs taken of Elizabeth's work.<sup>28</sup> Also, having provided comprehensive lists of all the artworks he photographed, none of the editions of the sales catalogues mentions photographs of Elizabeth's drawings. It therefore seems improbable that Hollyer was the photographer.

Another leading photographer associated with the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle was Julia Margaret Cameron. Cameron was given her first camera in 1863, when she was forty-eight years of age. She celebrated taking her first 'perfect

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<sup>24</sup> Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, 710.

<sup>25</sup> "Frederick Hollyer Biography," Victoria and Albert Museum, n.d., accessed Mar 4, 2022, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/f/frederick-hollyer-biography/>.

<sup>26</sup> Horace Townsend, *Catalogue of Platinotype Reproductions of Pictures &c. Photographed and Sold by Mr. Hollyer No.9 Pembroke Sqr. London W.* (London: Egyptian Hall, 1902).

<sup>27</sup> Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, 711.

<sup>28</sup> "Biography for Frederick Hollyer," *Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery*, n.d., accessed Jan 17, 2016, <http://www.bmagic.org.uk/people/Frederick+Hollyer>. Note: This link is now obsolete. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery have a new collections website which is not yet fully functional.

success' in 1864, a photograph of ten-year-old Annie Wilhelmina Philpot, which was sent to the child's father with an accompanying letter from Cameron expressing her delight with the resulting image.<sup>29</sup> In 1865, therefore, she would still have been a novice.

Cameron certainly used the wet collodion process for producing her prints.<sup>30</sup> Her camera lens had an optimal focus of about twelve inches, and according to her biographer, Colin Ford, this meant 'it would have been virtually impossible with such a lens to get a close-up portrait in focus on the 28 x 23cm (11 x 9") plates used'.<sup>31</sup> Ford continues that in 1866 she acquired a camera which took even larger plates (38 x 30 cm, 15 x 12"), exacerbating the problem.<sup>32</sup> Neither of these plate sizes correspond with those of the surviving glass negatives of Elizabeth's drawings held in the Ashmolean Museum. In addition, the process of photographing drawings in sharp focus is very different from the soft hazy backgrounds typical of Cameron's style (Fig. 10), and with the equipment she is known to have used it is unlikely that a sharp image of a drawing would have been achievable.

Although she became acquainted with members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle at her sister Sara Prinsep's home, Little Holland Park House, in October 1860 the Camerons purchased two cottages next door to the Tennysons at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight. It appears that it was there that her photographic career blossomed, and many sitters including Charles Darwin, Henry Longfellow and Watts travelled to Freshwater specifically to have their portrait photographs

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<sup>29</sup> Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron: A Critical Biography* (Los Angeles and London: Getty Publications and National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2003), 40.

<sup>30</sup> Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 41.

<sup>31</sup> Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 41.

taken.<sup>33</sup> Cameron reports having created a dark room in her coal store and a glass house from a chicken coop.<sup>34</sup> She took and developed all her images personally.

Two types of photograph appear to dominate in Cameron's work: the portrait photograph (such as those mentioned above) and the literary/historical illustration (including works by Tennyson). Although she photographed Holman Hunt and Gabriel's sister Christina, Gabriel himself evaded being captured by Cameron's camera.<sup>35</sup> However, he was known to have admired Cameron's work, having visited her exhibition at London art and print dealer Colnaghi's premises in 1865.<sup>36</sup> There is no record of her having photographed any works of art, preferring to create her own form of art through her photographs. Despite her close association with the Pre-Raphaelite circle, it is difficult to propose Cameron as the photographer of Elizabeth's drawings. Her location on the Isle of Wight, her style of photography, and the fact that she had not photographed artworks all seem to preclude her from consideration.

Another close associate of the Pre-Raphaelites who must be considered as the possible photographer is Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), who purchased his first camera in 1856. He initially chose to photograph architecture and landscape as well as taking numerous portrait images of family and friends.<sup>37</sup> A meticulous list-maker, Dodgson recorded the place, date and subject of all the photographs he took in a notebook. The content of these notebooks was recreated by Edward Wakeling and made available in an online

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<sup>33</sup> Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, 259.

<sup>34</sup> Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Colin Ford, "A Pre-Raphaelite Partnership: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Robert Parsons," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol.146 No. 1214 (2004): 316.

<sup>36</sup> Ford, "A Pre-Raphaelite Partnership," 314.

<sup>37</sup> Morton N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (London: Pan MacMillan, 2015 [1996]), Chapter 6.

database.<sup>38</sup> Analysis of the data shows that the dominant subject photographed by Dodgson between the years of 1861 and 1870 was portraiture.

Gabriel's studio assistant Henry Treffry Dunn noted the friendship between Gabriel and Dodgson, indicating the latter was 'another frequent visitor to Cheyne Walk'.<sup>39</sup> Indeed from 6-8 October 1863 Dodgson visited Gabriel at home and recorded taking a number of photographs. These were all figure studies and include the now famous portrait image of Gabriel (Fig. 11) as well as several photographs of the Rossetti family group in the garden.<sup>40</sup> In addition Dodgson noted taking eleven photographs of works by Gabriel, including three drawings of Elizabeth, one of Jane Morris, and one of Annie Miller.<sup>41</sup> In his scrupulous record keeping there is no mention of having taken any photographs of drawings by Elizabeth. Because he recorded every photograph so meticulously, it seems unlikely that Dodgson was involved with the photography of Elizabeth's work.

From their early beginnings in around 1855, brothers William and Daniel Downey became very popular photographers in the latter half of the nineteenth century, eventually operating by 'Special Appointment to Her Majesty the Queen'.<sup>42</sup> During the late 1860s they photographed Queen Victoria and other members of the Royal Family at various locations including Balmoral in

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<sup>38</sup> "The Charles Dodgson Photographic Database," Edward Wakeling, n.d., accessed Jan 18, 2016, <http://awfhost.co.uk/cgi-bin/cdpc/main.pl?T=1861-65&S=&L=&R> and <http://awfhost.co.uk/cgi-bin/cdpc/main.pl?T=1866-70&S=&L=&R>. NOTE: This database is now obsolete, potentially due to the publication of Wakeling's book: *The Photographs of Lewis Carroll* (Austin, Texas, University of Texas Press, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Henry Treffry Dunn, edited and annotated by Gale Pedrick, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his Circle: (Cheyne Walk Life)* (London: E. Mathews, 1904), 66.

<sup>40</sup> See NPG P29; P56; P1273 (21b and 25b). *National Portrait Gallery*, n.d., accessed Mar 20, 2022, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/>.

<sup>41</sup> See note 191.

<sup>42</sup> See for example "Back of Carte-de-Visite advertising studio of 'W. & D. Downey'." n.d., accessed Mar 20, 2022, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8b/W.\\_%26amp;\\_D.\\_Downey00.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8b/W._%26amp;_D._Downey00.jpg).

Scotland and Frogmore House, Windsor.<sup>43</sup> Gabriel met the Downey brothers when visiting his friend William Bell Scott in Newcastle and sat for a *carte-de-visite* in December 1862 (Fig. 12).<sup>44</sup> He subsequently arranged for further photographs to be taken of himself, William Bell Scott and John Ruskin in the garden of Tudor House, Cheyne Walk, in June 1863.<sup>45</sup>

The Downey brothers were prolific photographers and specialised in portraiture, with the National Portrait Gallery now holding almost one thousand examples of their work. They do not appear to have diverged from this path to photograph drawings or paintings. Their business did not expand to London until 1872, when William opened a studio in Ebury Street. It appears likely, therefore, that neither William nor Daniel Downey was responsible for the photographs of Elizabeth's work.

Charles Thurston Thompson, son of wood-engraver John Thompson, who originally joined his father in the family business, is another possible candidate for photographing Elizabeth's drawings. Thompson later took up photography and by 1851 was sufficiently skilled to be responsible for taking many of the photographs of the Great Exhibition in 1851, as well as the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1855. He became well-known for his fine art photography, which included images of furniture and sculpture as well as paintings.

Thompson engaged in several private commissions, including photographing works of art being sold by art dealer Ernest Gambart, but the main focus of his

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<sup>43</sup> "W. & D. Downey," *National Portrait Gallery*, n.d., accessed Mar 6, 2022, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp06902/w--d-downey>.

<sup>44</sup> "Dante Gabriel Rossetti, albumen carte-de-visite, NPG x45950," *National Portrait Gallery*, n.d., accessed Mar 6, 2022, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw122288>.

<sup>45</sup> See for example "William Bell Scott; John Ruskin; Dante Gabriel Rossetti." NPG x12959, *National Portrait Gallery*, n.d., accessed Mar 6, 2022, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw122112>.



career was to photograph items donated to the newly opened South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum. He is particularly noted for having been commissioned by Prince Albert to document the condition of the Raphael Cartoons in 1858, which were then at Hampton Court Palace (Fig. 13).<sup>46</sup> The Victoria and Albert Museum still hold the glass negatives for these photographs; they are three feet square and a quarter of an inch thick. This size of plate would have been specially prepared to take account of the extremely large cartoons.

As a wood-engraver, Thompson is listed as working on the illustrations for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems published in 1857.<sup>47</sup> Gabriel's letter to him in the spring of that year concerning some photographs of proofs was most likely to have been in connection with this publication.<sup>48</sup> There is no evidence of further contact or correspondence between the two men, therefore it is unlikely that Thompson was involved in the photographs of Elizabeth's drawings.

The final photographer under consideration is John Robert Parsons, one of the lesser known potential photographers. Parsons was an artist before turning to photography.<sup>49</sup> Working as a photographer from 1860, his studio was located at 26 Edwards Street, Portman Square, as given on back of his *Carte de Visite*.<sup>50</sup> He lodged with his cousin William Haylett Royston at 1 Cheyne Row (just

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Mulholland, "Definitely not 'Point-and-Click': Photographing the Raphael Cartoons in 1858," *Victoria and Albert Museum*, Jan 30, 2014, accessed Mar 14, 2022, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/caring-for-our-collections/early-photograph>.

<sup>47</sup> "Poems by Alfred Tennyson; illustrated by T. Crestwick, J. E. Millais, W. Holman Hunt, W. Mulready, J. C. Horsley, D. G. Rossetti, C. Stanfield, D. Maclise. Imprint: Edward Moxon, Dover Street, 1857," *The Royal Academy of Arts*, n.d., accessed Mar 14, 2022, <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/book/poems>.

<sup>48</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 179, (item 57.22).

<sup>49</sup> Ford, "A Pre-Raphaelite Partnership," 310.

<sup>50</sup> Ford, "A Pre-Raphaelite Partnership," 310.

around the corner from Cheyne Walk) which is where he met and dined with Gabriel.<sup>51</sup>

In July 1865 Parsons photographed Jane Morris in a series of images posed by Gabriel in the gardens of Tudor House, Cheyne Walk, copies of which can be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Fig.14). These images were albumen prints produced from glass negatives using the wet collodion process. The size of this original albumen print is 19.8 x 14.7 cm, which would have been cropped from the standard full plate negative of 21.7 x 16.8 cm, the same size used for the photographs of Elizabeth's drawings.

Parsons is also known to have photographed drawings by Gabriel. In a letter to his brother William dated 6 September 1872 Gabriel talks about having a painting photographed: 'a photo of it should at any rate have been taken ... The photo should be about the size of the largest Parsons has done for me'.<sup>52</sup> This choice of words indicates that Parsons had photographed works for Gabriel on more than one previous occasion. Colin Ford also suggests that Gabriel 'made a habit of having copy photographs made of all his pictures'.<sup>53</sup>

Gabriel's view of Parsons's skill as a photographer of artworks was confirmed later, when the relationship between the two men soured over the onward sale of these photographs. In November 1878 Gabriel wrote to Marie Stillman that

... the fact is, since my photographer Parsons gave up business, every attempt I have made to get coloured work reproduced in photography has been such a ghastly failure that

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<sup>51</sup> Ford, "A Pre-Raphaelite Partnership," 310.

<sup>52</sup> William Michael Rossetti, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir* 2 vols (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895), II, 254.

<sup>53</sup> Ford, "A Pre-Raphaelite Partnership," 317.

I have given up entertaining the question when I finish a picture.<sup>54</sup>

There is no further explanation of what is meant by 'coloured work'. Given the date of the letter it seems likely to be referring to the large oil canvases which dominated Gabriel's artistic output at that time. Hollyer would eventually take on the role of photographing those paintings.

Ford also confirms Gabriel's preference for Parsons as a photographer:

Although his letters mention a handful of other photographers, it is clear that Rossetti always considered Parsons to be the best, and preferred to use his services whenever possible.<sup>55</sup>

Since Gabriel valued the services of Parsons so greatly, this perhaps makes him the photographer of choice for Elizabeth's drawings that Gabriel also held in high esteem. Parsons had excellent credentials; he had already visited Cheyne Walk to take the posed photographs of Jane Morris in July 1865, the same year that Elizabeth's work was photographed.<sup>56</sup> Gabriel was elated with the resulting images and retained them for future use. Parsons's work would still have been fresh in Gabriel's mind in the autumn; therefore, it would seem reasonable to assume that Parsons was also responsible for photographing Elizabeth's drawings.

It is possible, however, that more than one photographer was accountable for the images contained within the photographic portfolios. As the Fitzwilliam copy is bound, the images are better preserved than the loose sheets of the Ashmolean copies. This means that some images have retained characteristics which suggest they were not taken by the same camera as most images, and

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<sup>54</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, VIII, 218-9 (item 78.269).

<sup>55</sup> Ford, "A Pre-Raphaelite Partnership," 317.

<sup>56</sup> These photographs are discussed further in Chapter 6.

possibly not by the same photographer. Firstly, there are a few photographs which are larger than the standard glass plate size (21.7 x 16.8 cm) of the surviving glass negatives. Since the width of standard plates and half plates will only slot into specific cameras, a different camera would have been needed for the larger images. One example of these larger images is sheet 2, which contains photographs of *Pippa Passes* (27.6 x 20.5 cm) and *Lovers Listening to Music* (23 x 20.5 cm). Secondly, as mentioned previously, the photographs of Elizabeth's more detailed drawings, including *Pippa Passes* and *Lovers Listening to Music*, do not have glass negatives in the Ashmolean Museum's collection. These photographs depict a better-quality image than the photographs of her rough sketches. Elizabeth's *The Lady of Shalott* (22 x 16 cm) provides an excellent example of this. The photograph in the Fitzwilliam album remains in incredibly sharp focus, displaying the figures on the tapestry hanging on the wall behind the Lady as clearly as in the original drawing. It also includes the whole image; any cropping is minor and does not remove key motifs. Fig. 15 shows a comparison between two widely available reproductions of Elizabeth's *The Lady of Shalott*. As can be seen, the recent colour digital image of the original drawing used for producing a fine art print is infinitely superior to the more widely available internet version. Most internet reproductions of Elizabeth's *The Lady of Shalott* are significantly flawed; the drawing is not black and white and does not lend itself to monochrome reproduction. The clarity of the image is surprisingly poor, and the image is often cropped, eliminating the motif of the bird sitting on top of the loom. The photograph of the image in the Fitzwilliam portfolio appears superior to the high-quality digital version, which raises further questions about the technique used (Fig. 16). While the image colouring appears consistent with those albumen

prints produced by the wet collodion process, the clarity of the detail is exceptional. This may suggest a larger plate was used, perhaps increasing the exposure time, or that a different photographic technique was employed. Since the higher definition platinotype was not in use before the early 1870s, could Parsons possibly have acquired a different camera to photograph the more detailed drawings?

The Fitzwilliam Museum copy also contains the two photographs of Gabriel's drawings of Elizabeth which were enclosed as a memorial to his wife (Fig. 17). The first image at 24 x 20 cm is larger than the standard plate size (21.7 x 16.8 cm) of the surviving glass negatives, therefore at least one of these two images was also taken by a different camera to the main collection. Since Dodgson is known to have photographed three of Gabriel's drawings of Elizabeth, could these two photographs have been his work?

There is another possibility that the two photographs of Gabriel's sketches of Elizabeth included in the portfolios may have been produced by publishers W.A. Mansell & Co., as the Delaware Art Museum holds an attributable copy of both images. The Mansells' studio was originally at 2 Percy Street, Rathbone Place, not far from the British Museum, where their principal photographer, Stephen Thompson, was hired to record significant items in the museum's collection.<sup>57</sup> Some of his photographs of the ancient treasures have recently found their way to auction, including a series of albumen prints produced in 1872.<sup>58</sup> The Delaware Art Museum received their copies of the photographs as part of the

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen Thompson et al., *Catalogue of a series of photographs, from the collections of the British Museum* (London: W.A. Mansell & Co., 1872).

<sup>58</sup> "Fine Books, Manuscripts & Works on Paper. Lot 278: Stephen Thompson [Assyrian Antiquities], 23 mounted albumen photographs only (of 45), [1872]," *Forum Auctions*, Mar 27, 2020, accessed Mar 25, 2022, [https://www.forumauctions.co.uk/65398/Thompson-Stephen-Assyrian-Antiquities-23-mounted-albumen-photographs-only-of-45-1872?Itemid=&auction\\_no=1057&view=lot\\_detail](https://www.forumauctions.co.uk/65398/Thompson-Stephen-Assyrian-Antiquities-23-mounted-albumen-photographs-only-of-45-1872?Itemid=&auction_no=1057&view=lot_detail).

Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft bequest. Bancroft appears to have purchased them in either 1892 or 1898, directly from W.A. Mansell & Co., as there are two entries in *The Debbie Book* listing a total of five images.<sup>59</sup>

There is little information available about the other activities of W.A. Mansell & Co., or how they came to photograph the two drawings by Gabriel that are now in the Delaware Art Museum. However, the Delaware archives reveal that Bancroft also bequeathed a copy of one of Mansell's sales catalogues (Fig. 18), accompanied by one of his receipts for a number of the photographs he purchased from them (Fig. 19). Mansell's catalogue identifies that these images, including the 'Mrs Dante Rossetti Series', are 'Printed by the Permanent Platinotype Process', while the receipt is dated 1892, ten years after Gabriel's death. Although it is possible that the drawings were photographed earlier, as previously mentioned, Hollyer was Gabriel's favoured photographer using the platinotype process during his lifetime, and therefore more likely to have been Gabriel's choice. The catalogue states that if required, photographs would be authenticated, 'signed with the name "W.M. Rossetti"', suggesting that both William and the Mansells were simply profiteering from the popularity of both Gabriel's work and the fashion for collecting photographic prints. It therefore seems unlikely that Thompson or Mansell & Co. were involved in photographing the more detailed images in the portfolios.

While it is not critical to know who was responsible for taking the photographs, my analysis helps to understand both the circumstances of production and Gabriel's attitude to photography. From this research it appears that John

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<sup>59</sup> "Catalogue of Paintings and Photographs of the Collection of Samuel Bancroft, Jr." *The Debbie Book*, 402. *Delaware Art Museum*, n.d., accessed Mar 25, 2022, <https://cdm16397.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16397coll21/id/6840>.

Robert Parsons is the most likely candidate to have taken the bulk of the photographs for the portfolios, since Gabriel was delighted with the images of Jane Morris and valued his skill as a photographer. He may well have purchased a second camera to take the larger, more detailed images. Although much of the detail surrounding the photographic portfolios is speculation, it is clear that Gabriel went to enormous lengths to arrange for every possible piece of Elizabeth's work to be photographed, demonstrating his desire to preserve the products of her untutored imagination.

### **The Photographic Portfolios**

Once the photographs had been taken, developed, and printed multiple times, they were cropped and mounted on sheets of card which were then bound into albums. 'Photographic portfolio' is the term now commonly used to describe the albums, a term which first appears to have been employed by Marsh in *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* in 1989.<sup>60</sup> Gabriel used the word 'portfolio' in a letter to Allingham, but also simply referred to the albums as 'a set of the photos [...] made from Lizzie's sketches'.<sup>61</sup> 'Photographic portfolio' has subsequently become the preferred term and is now employed by scholars and museums alike.<sup>62</sup>

It is not known how much of the process Gabriel performed himself. There is little information about the cost of hiring a photographer, printing the copies of the photographs or assembling the albums, but some idea can be obtained from what is available. In researching the history of photography at the South

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<sup>60</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 187, 197.

<sup>61</sup> George Birkbeck Hill, ed., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham 1854-1870* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1897), 276-7.

<sup>62</sup> See for example: Hoffman, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bad Photographs," and "H.V. Tebbs Collection of Pre-Raphaelite Photographs – Collection History," *The Trustees of Princeton University Library*, n.d, accessed Mar 12, 2022, <http://findingaids.princeton.edu/collections/C0988/#collhist>.

Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), Hamber discovered that the museum sold 35,942 photographs of items in its collection between October 1859 and March 1863. The total income from these sales was £2,264 – 7s – 8½d. This equates to a sales price per photograph of around 6d (sixpence).<sup>63</sup> The purchase price from the photographer would obviously have allowed for some profit. In addition, Hamber also found that Thompson, as official photographer to the museum, received an annual fee of £100, which would equate to less than £2 per week.<sup>64</sup> This is comparable with the average wage of 36s (shillings) estimated for London artisans in 1867.<sup>65</sup>

Gabriel, on the other hand, was earning well above the London average wage from his art. He would have had sufficient funds available to finance both the photography and reproduction of these images, the binding of the albums and the photographs taken of Jane Morris in July 1865. During 1865 and the early part of 1866 he sold several large oil paintings including *The Blue Bower* (1865, The Barber Institute, Birmingham) originally sold to art dealer Ernest Gambart for £120,<sup>66</sup> *The Beloved* (1865, Tate Gallery), originally sold to Birkenhead banker George Rae for £300,<sup>67</sup> and *Regina Cordium* (1866, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow), originally sold to Brighton-based collector John Hamilton Trist for £170.<sup>68</sup> Together with portraits and watercolours, Gabriel would have had an income of well over £600 during this eighteen-month period.

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<sup>63</sup> “10<sup>th</sup> Report of the Department of Science and Art’, appendix N, 145-6,” in Hamber, “*A Higher Branch of the Art.*” 412.

<sup>64</sup> “Public Records Office, *Precis of the Minutes of the Department of Science and Art’* (Q.167) (G), 29 January 1863,” in Hamber, “*A Higher Branch of the Art.*” 412.

<sup>65</sup> Arthur L. Bowley, *Wages in the United Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1900), 70.

<sup>66</sup> “*The Blue Bower*” (Archival History), *The Rossetti Archive*, accessed Jan 26, 2022, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s178.rap.html>.

<sup>67</sup> “*The Beloved*” (Patron, Original cost), *The Rossetti Archive*, accessed Jan 26, 2022, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s182.rap.html>.

<sup>68</sup> “*Regina Cordium*” (Patron, Original cost), *The Rossetti Archive*, accessed Jan 26, 2022, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s190.rap.html>.



To further contextualise this sum, just a few years earlier, in March 1862, William Carpenter, leaseholder of 16 Cheyne Walk which Gabriel eventually rented, offered to sell him the house and entire contents for the princely sum of £250.<sup>69</sup>

At least four copies of the portfolio are known to have survived. The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford holds two incomplete copies while the Princeton University Library, New Jersey, and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge each hold one complete copy. All portfolios appear to have been created from the same large sheets of 2 mm board (see Fig. 7 for an example). Three copies demonstrate virtually identical dimensions for each sheet (Princeton: 53.0 x 36.5 cm,<sup>70</sup> Fitzwilliam: 53.0 x 36.0 cm,<sup>71</sup> and Ashmolean 1: 53.7 x 36.4 cm,<sup>72</sup>) indicating that they were probably trimmed and bound in a similar way. The second Ashmolean copy however is somewhat larger (57.1 x 45.6 cm).<sup>73</sup> It is possible that this copy was not cut down to size because it was never bound.

Alternatively, these may have been surplus sheets retained by Gabriel, or indeed kept for his own use. The copy in the Fitzwilliam Museum is bound, whereas the other extant copies are loose sheets. The binding does not appear to be original but has served to protect the albumen prints from light deterioration (Fig. 20).

Each surviving copy of the portfolio is unique, differing slightly from the other copies in the layout of images. An example of this is provided by the sheet

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<sup>69</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 456 (item 62.17 n.2).

<sup>70</sup> "The 'Photographic Portfolio' of Drawings [sic] by EES," *The Trustees of Princeton University Library*, n.d., accessed Mar 12, 2022, <https://findingaids.princeton.edu/collections/C0988/c001>.

<sup>71</sup> "Photographic Portfolio of Drawings by Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti." *Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*. Viewed September 6, 2016.

<sup>72</sup> "Portfolio of photographs of drawings and watercolours by Elizabeth Siddal." WA1977.355. *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*. Viewed and photographed May 21, 2014; April 21, 2016.

<sup>73</sup> "Portfolio of photographs of drawings and watercolours by Elizabeth Siddal." WA1977.355. *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*. Viewed and photographed May 21, 2014; April 21, 2016.

containing the six known sketches for *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (Fig. 21).

Three copies of this sheet have been examined.<sup>74</sup> Although each sheet contains the same six images, the layout differs completely from copy to copy. This is potentially because Gabriel (perhaps with assistance) compiled and distributed each copy separately, possibly with the intended recipient in mind.

From analysis of all the individual sheets it is clear that the Fitzwilliam and Princeton copies are very similar and the sheet order appears to be the same. However, since Princeton consulted the Fitzwilliam copy, they may simply have arranged their loose sheets in the same order for consistency. As the Ashmolean copies are not bound the numbered sheet order is of no consequence; the order is simply that of the sheets in the box after the last viewer replaced them. It is not known whether there is any significance in the order of the sheets, nor whether the bound Fitzwilliam copy is in the original order. However, it does appear from the Fitzwilliam copy that Elizabeth's more finished drawings are presented at the front of the portfolio, with *Pippa Passes* and *Lovers Listening to Music* immediately following Gabriel's two drawings of her, while the sheet containing the sketches of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* forms the last page.

It cannot be assumed that the portfolios actually contain *all* Elizabeth's 'scraps and scrawls'. In recent years, several drawings have been sold at auction from secure Rossetti family provenance which were not included in the portfolios.

This implies that Gabriel had been unsuccessful in retrieving all her drawings from their owners before the photographic session. It also suggests there may

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<sup>74</sup> Despite numerous emails to Princeton University Library, I have been unable to obtain photographs of their copy of the portfolio for analysis. Their 'Finding Aid', however, provides a detailed description of the images on each sheet.

be more drawings yet to be discovered. The major contribution these photographic portfolios make to the study of Elizabeth's work is that they contain images of sixty-seven authenticated drawings by her hand, providing a firm basis on which to begin building a true picture of her oeuvre. In Appendix A I have compiled my current view of Elizabeth's oeuvre, which also provides the base data for my online *catalogue raisonné* project.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Recipients**

The earliest documented mention of the collection of photographs being presented as a gift is found in a letter to William Allingham dated 8 November 1866. Gabriel's letter, which accompanied the copy of the portfolio sent to Allingham, contains the following paragraph:

Herewith I send you a set of the photos, hitherto made from Lizzie's sketches – many mere scraps, but all interesting. I shall have the watercolours photo'd in due course, but this is a troublesome job, as a first negative will be necessary, then a touched proof, and then a second negative, or the effect will be all false. I shall also print descriptions of each design. Room is left in the portfolio I think to contain these additions when ready.<sup>76</sup>

Close reading of this paragraph provides some interesting details. Although he suggests many of the items photographed are 'mere scraps', Gabriel counters this by confirming they are 'all interesting'. This gives further evidence of his admiration for Elizabeth's designs. Gabriel subsequently reveals his in-depth knowledge of the photographic process by describing the steps required to produce an accurate photograph of a watercolour. This was undoubtedly learned from first-hand experience of watching his own photographer at work. It

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<sup>75</sup> My Catalogue Raisonné project is discussed in the Conclusion.

<sup>76</sup> Hill, *Letters*, 276-7.

is not known whether Elizabeth's watercolours were ever photographed; to date no evidence has been found.

In addition, Gabriel states that he will provide descriptions for each of Elizabeth's drawings, for which blank pages had been necessarily included in the binding. Unfortunately, the surviving portfolios are of no help in proving this statement. The Ashmolean Museum and Princeton University Library are no longer bound; each sheet is separate and there are no blank pages in either collection. The Fitzwilliam Museum copy is bound, but as mentioned previously the binding does not appear to be original. Although two blank pages do exist at the beginning and end of the portfolio these are made from paper, not board, and appear to have been inserted to protect the boards when the portfolio was re-bound. According to George Birkbeck Hill, William Michael suggests the descriptions were never written.<sup>77</sup>

Allingham records receipt of the parcel from Gabriel in his diary entry for 9 November 1866:

On my return find a parcel by rail from Gabriel containing the portfolio of photographs from drawings by his poor Wife; they are naturally full of his influence. Also two very beautiful pencil portraits of her by his hand, one a head, the other full-length.<sup>78</sup>

Allingham's text also contains details which help identify the other contents of the portfolio, specifically the description of Gabriel's two drawings which were included. The two photographs included on sheet 1 of the Fitzwilliam copy of the portfolio meet Allingham's description (Fig. 17). Allingham describes Elizabeth as Gabriel's 'poor Wife', adding that her drawings 'naturally'

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<sup>77</sup> Hill, *Letters*, 277.

<sup>78</sup> Helen Allingham and D. Radford, eds., *William Allingham: A Diary* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1908), 144.

demonstrate the influence of her husband's work. The contrast between the choice of words describing Elizabeth's work and Gabriel's 'beautiful pencil portraits' is stark. Clearly at this time Allingham adheres to the traditional view that a woman was permitted only to be an imitator, never an innovator. In 1874 he married Helen Paterson, niece of Laura Herford, the first female to be admitted to the Royal Academy Schools. Ironically, Helen showed a talent for art from an early age and later became a very successful artist. She followed in her aunt's footsteps and was herself the first woman to be granted associate membership of the Royal Watercolour Society, a career which Allingham supported.<sup>79</sup>

Allingham's copy of the photographic portfolio was known to have been passed to his wife and was in her possession when his diaries were published in 1908. She was one of the editors and footnoted his diary entry (quoted above) with the comment 'These are now in Mrs. Allingham's possession'.<sup>80</sup> Following her death in 1926 it is likely that the portfolio, along with some of her own artworks, was left to her grandson Patric. On his death in 1989 the collection was left to the Hampstead Museum; however, the portfolio was not among the items they received.<sup>81</sup>

The copy of the photographic portfolio now held in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, was given to Charles Augustus Howell. Howell was an art dealer and close friend of Gabriel who masterminded and was present at the exhumation of Elizabeth's body to recover the manuscript volume of Gabriel's poetry. His copy of the portfolio is inscribed on the first board page (Fig. 22):

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<sup>79</sup> "Helen Allingham R.W.S. (1848-1926)," *The Helen Allingham Society*, 2000-2019, accessed Mar 15, 2022, [http://www.helenallingham.com/Helen\\_Biography.htm](http://www.helenallingham.com/Helen_Biography.htm).

<sup>80</sup> Allingham and Radford, *William Allingham: A Diary*, 144.

<sup>81</sup> Rebecca Lodge, Curator, Burgh House and Hampstead Museum, email message to the author, Oct 5, 2016.

Photographs  
from designs and sketches  
by  
Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti  
given to  
Charles A. Howell  
by his friend D.G. Rossetti  
January 1867<sup>82</sup>

This copy also contains a small label on the inside front cover which states:

Presented by  
C. Fairfax Murray, Esq.  
Nov. 1916

'Presented by' indicates that Murray gave the copy to the museum while he was still alive, not as part of a bequest. Murray was another friend of Gabriel, working in his studio around 1869-70.<sup>83</sup> Murray wanted his collection of artworks to be accessible to the general public, so as well as donations to the Fitzwilliam Museum, he also gave a large quantity of drawings to Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, and more than forty paintings to the Dulwich Picture Gallery. Murray seems to have selected his beneficiaries carefully according to their specialism. He may have chosen the Fitzwilliam Museum to receive the portfolio to provide it with a more academic location in the seat of one of the country's finest universities, and thereby to encourage further study of its contents.

The two incomplete copies held in the Ashmolean Museum were part of the bequest of John Bryson, a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, in 1976. It is interesting to note that Bryson replicated Murray's choice of scholarly beneficiary as well by selecting the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, as the

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<sup>82</sup> "Photographic Portfolio of Drawings by Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti." *Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*. Viewed Sep 6, 2016.

<sup>83</sup> See for example Fredeman, *Correspondence*, IV, 121, (item 69.106).

recipient for his own bequest. One copy includes a portion of the original board cover (Fig. 23) inscribed:

LIZZIE ROSSETTI  
Photo's of Drawings  
~~PAINTED IN WATER COLOURS~~  
BY  
DANTE G. ROSSETTI'S  
Copy (his notes and WMR's)  
~~*N.B. The copyright of this picture is the exclusive property of  
the Artist'*~~

On the reverse is an explanatory note:

Cut from the cover of the deteriorating portfolio included in the Bryson Bequest. September 1987. NSP.

This gives a clear indication that one of the copies now in the Ashmolean Museum may have been Gabriel's personal copy. The fact that the original typewritten text on the label has been crossed through and annotated by hand adds further credence to that possibility. Unfortunately, this fragment is all that remains as physical evidence of ownership, since the card sheets containing the photographs are now loose and preserved in a random order in a museum storage box. At some stage in its history, the cover and binding of this copy became damaged and the sheets were separated. Such damage to a bound portfolio is most likely to occur when the item in question is a well-used favourite, subject to continued opening, closing and page-turning. This damage was potentially caused by Gabriel's repeated use of his copy of the photographic portfolio. Although large at around half a metre by a third of a metre, a set of photographs pasted into an album or portfolio would have been infinitely more portable and accessible than Elizabeth's original drawings, which were probably framed for display on the walls of Gabriel's drawing room. The

evidence provided by the number of instances where he has appropriated motifs from drawings included in the portfolios offer the real possibility that Gabriel kept one copy of the portfolio as a source book.<sup>84</sup>

However, there is some confusion over which copy the board cover belongs to, a fact substantiated by the inclusion of hand-written captions to the photographs. These captions also appear in the Fitzwilliam copy given to Howell, indicating that titles were perhaps added to the copies presented as gifts. The captions are written in what appears to be Gabriel's own handwriting (see Fig. 24), which demonstrates his close personal connection with Elizabeth's drawings. The captions for the same image are inconsistent between copies. For example, in the Ashmolean Museum version the image from glass negative 43 is entitled '*Tennyson: La Morte d'Arthur*', whereas the Fitzwilliam Museum copy caption reads '*King Arthur*'. This variance adds credence to the theory that Gabriel created each portfolio individually and distributed it upon completion, not remembering what he had written on the previous copy.

The final known copy of the portfolio exists in the Princeton University Library, New Jersey. This copy is believed to have been given to Henry Virtue Tebbs and his wife Emily at around the same time as Charles Augustus Howell received his, January 1867, and was purchased by Princeton in April 2005.<sup>85</sup> According to the Princeton archive, Tebbs was 'a close friend and admirer of

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<sup>84</sup> See Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>85</sup> "H.V. Tebbs Collection of Pre-Raphaelite Photographs – Collection History."



Rossetti'.<sup>86</sup> Gabriel's correspondence supports this friendship, dating it from early 1864.<sup>87</sup>

Tebbs's collection was inherited by his two unmarried daughters and was divided between the Tate Gallery and the Ashmolean Museum on their deaths. Princeton purchased the portfolio, along with some other photographs, in April 2005, believing the items had been separated from the main collections bequeathed to the galleries.<sup>88</sup> Both the Ashmolean Museum and the Tate Gallery have advised that the photographic portfolio was not among the items which they received from the Tebbs bequest.<sup>89</sup> It therefore appears likely that the photographs may have changed hands several times before being acquired by Princeton.

Like Howell, Tebbs was present at the exhumation of Elizabeth's coffin in October 1869.<sup>90</sup> Both had received their copy of the portfolio a couple of years before this event took place. The friendships were long-lasting as William listed both Tebbs and Howell among Gabriel's closest friends in 1874, along with various others including fellow Pre-Raphaelites Brown, George Boyce, Burne-Jones and Morris, as well as his trusted physician Dr John Marshall.<sup>91</sup> Any of these friends could equally have been the recipient of a copy of the portfolio, yet no records exist to confirm their receipt.

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<sup>86</sup> "H.V. Tebbs Collection of Pre-Raphaelite Photographs – Collection History."

<sup>87</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, III, 118-127.

<sup>88</sup> "H.V. Tebbs Collection of Pre-Raphaelite Photographs – Collection History."

<sup>89</sup> Lisa Cole, Gallery Records, Tate Gallery, email message to the author, 29 Jan 2020: Bequest item TG 4/4/154 -TG 4/4/154/1 (Tebbs Bequest) contained only two watercolours: N05921 *Carlisle Wall* (1853) and N05922 *The Mountains of Moab* (1854). Caroline Palmer, Western Art Print Room Manager, Ashmolean Museum, email message to the author, 12 Oct 2021: the Tebbs bequest consisted of seven artworks and a monetary gift.

<sup>90</sup> Rossetti, *Family Letters*, I, 274.

<sup>91</sup> Rossetti, *Family Letters*, I., 329.

During my research I also discovered the existence of a previously unknown copy of the photographic portfolio. The review of the principal acquisitions by the Victoria and Albert Museum during 1911 gives the following description:

The other bequest received during the year is an interesting collection of 69 photographs of drawings by Miss Siddal (afterwards Mrs. D.G. Rossetti) left to the library by the late Frederic J. Shields.<sup>92</sup>

Shields was another close associate of Gabriel during the 1860s and based on the evidence provided by the Fitzwilliam copy, this is clearly a description of the contents of the portfolio. Gabriel first met Shields in 1864 and their friendship blossomed.<sup>93</sup> William published correspondence between Shields and his brother together with recollections of the years 1865-9, a period when Shields himself was involved in a large-scale project with a photographer named McLachlan.<sup>94</sup> In return, there are numerous references to Gabriel in Ernestine Mills's edited collection of Shields's own correspondence and recollections.<sup>95</sup> There is, however, no mention of Elizabeth or the photographic portfolio.<sup>96</sup>

A visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum's archive at Blythe House near Olympia provided evidence that the museum had indeed received 'the portfolio of photographs from drawings by Miss Siddall (Mrs D.G. Rossetti)'.<sup>97</sup> The letter forwarding the portfolio to the museum was dated 15 September 1911 (Fig. 25), and their acknowledgement of receipt and thanks was despatched back a few

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<sup>92</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, *Review of the Principal Acquisitions 1911 (with illustrations)* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), 32.

<sup>93</sup> P.G. Konody, "Shields, Frederic James (1833–1911)," rev. Vivien Allen, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, accessed Mar 29, 2022, <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/36067>.

<sup>94</sup> See for example William Michael Rossetti, ed., *Rossetti Papers 1862-1870* (London: Sands & Co, 1903), 70-1, 300, 345-6.

<sup>95</sup> Ernestine Mills, ed., *The Life and Letters of Frederic Shields* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1912).

<sup>96</sup> See also Chapter 7.

<sup>97</sup> "Archive File: Frederic James Shields Bequest." *Victoria and Albert Museum Archives*, London. Viewed and photographed May 26, 2016.

days later. The archive file notes 69 photographs (correct as per the Fitzwilliam Museum copy) and lists the museum numbers allocated to them (1646 to 1714 – 1911). I requested a visit to study this copy of the photographic portfolio, but when the items with these museum numbers were retrieved, they were not the expected photographs.<sup>98</sup> Despite repeated attempts to locate the portfolio there has been no response from the Victoria and Albert Museum.

This additional copy of the portfolio confirms that it was Gabriel's friends who were chosen to receive copies – not Elizabeth's. Shields did not enter the Pre-Raphaelite circle until two years after Elizabeth's death, therefore had no personal connection with her. Why did Gabriel present copies of the portfolio to *his* friends? Did they ask for a copy as a memorial of her life and art? That may have been the case for some of his artist friends, but it would have been unlikely for Howell or Tebbs to have requested one. In addition, if other friends had known about the portfolios, surely the likes of Brown, Ruskin, William Bell Scott and Algernon Charles Swinburne would have been delighted to own one. Yet there is no firm evidence to confirm any of these received a copy.

Marsh suggests that Swinburne was sure to have received a copy, but no evidence has yet been found to support her theory.<sup>99</sup> Swinburne had been out to dinner with Elizabeth and Gabriel on the night of her death and had become a good friend of hers. He subsequently moved into Tudor House, Cheyne Walk, with Gabriel in October 1862 for a brief period, but by the time the portfolios were created in 1865-6 Gabriel was corresponding with Swinburne by

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<sup>98</sup> Kate Quinlan, Victoria and Albert Museum, email message to the author, Jun 8, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 29.

mail, whose letters are addressed from 22a Dorset Street.<sup>100</sup> There is no documentary evidence of a copy of the portfolio having been given to Swinburne.

Bell Scott's close friendship with Gabriel, and the fact that he was living in London 1864-70, suggest that he would have been in a prime position to receive a copy of the portfolio. There are some fourteen letters from Bell Scott to Gabriel covering the period 1866-7, but none mention his receipt of a copy.<sup>101</sup> This, however, cannot be taken as conclusive evidence. During this period all Bell Scott's correspondence was written during stays at Penkill Castle, Scotland, when he was decorating the walls of a staircase. Gabriel could easily have delivered a copy to Bell Scott by hand when he was back in London.

Another potential recipient of the portfolio is Ruskin, who played such a critical role in establishing Elizabeth's career as an artist. Ruskin was still on excellent terms with Gabriel in 1863, when the photograph for the carte-de-visite depicting Ruskin, Bell Scott and Gabriel was taken.<sup>102</sup> However, apparently there was a dispute between Gabriel and Ruskin over the circulation of these photographs and Ruskin ended the connection in 1865. This may offer some explanation if Ruskin did not receive a portfolio, since Gabriel seems to have begun distributing them in 1866. There is also the unknown quantity of Elizabeth's work that Ruskin purchased. If he and Gabriel had a major disagreement, would Ruskin have returned all the works to Gabriel? If not, would that account for some of the items which were not photographed?

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<sup>100</sup> See for example Fredeman, *Correspondence*, III, 191, (item 64.129); and Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, ed., *The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: William Heinemann, 1918), 37, (item 57).

<sup>101</sup> "William Bell Scott. Additional Manuscripts 838." *Durham University Library Special Collections Catalogue*, n.d., accessed Mar 17, 2022, <http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ead/msc/addm838.xml>.

<sup>102</sup> "William Bell Scott; John Ruskin; Dante Gabriel Rossetti." NPG x12959.

Brown and Gabriel were still very close friends in 1867 when Gabriel drew a portrait of him on 31 January.<sup>103</sup> Yet there does not appear to be more than a tantalising hint that he may have received a copy of the portfolio. On 'Thursday night [22 November 1866]' Gabriel writes:

My Dear Brown

If you can conveniently, will you let me have that big scrap-book again tomorrow (Friday). My reason is that I believe I shall begin a portrait of Janey on Saturday, & if I do it in the same action as the drawing in the book, I might square it off life size before she comes.<sup>104</sup>

Gabriel refers to 'the drawing' in the 'big scrap-book' here, but there does not appear to be any drawing he made of Jane Morris that may have provided the inspiration for a painting he completed in 1867-8 as most were studies of her head only.<sup>105</sup> Could his mention of 'scrap-book' here possibly refer to a copy of the portfolio? Since he was compiling and distributing the portfolios at the time, perhaps some of Elizabeth's original inspirational drawings were still in the photographer's studio preventing Gabriel from accessing them. Could Gabriel have been inspired by one of Elizabeth's sketches to provide the 'same action' he desired for the painting, but replacing her figure with that of Jane Morris? Regrettably Fredeman does not offer a suggestion regarding the drawing or painting to which Gabriel alludes. The date of the letter, although added by Fredeman in line with subsequent letters, is within a couple of weeks of Gabriel sending the documented portfolio to Allingham, so clearly there is a possibility that Brown had received a copy previously. Their close friendship and location

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<sup>103</sup> Virginia Surtees, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Catalogue Raisonné* 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I, 158 (no. 270).

<sup>104</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, III, 487 (item 66.180).

<sup>105</sup> See also Chapter 6.

would have meant it much easier to borrow a portfolio back from Brown than other recipients such as Allingham.

There are many other potential recipients of a copy of the portfolio, including Morris and Burne-Jones. Gabriel did not fall out with Morris until they were living under the same roof at Kelmscott Manor in the 1870s, therefore both Morris and Burne-Jones would be strong candidates. Dr Marshall, Gabriel's trusted physician, who notably attended both the delivery of Elizabeth's stillborn child and her death, is surely another possibility. It is also feasible that Gabriel may have hand-delivered copies of the portfolio to some of his closest friends, including Morris, Burne-Jones, Swinburne, Bell Scott and Brown, which would account for the lack of documentary evidence.

There is no further evidence that Liverpool based John Miller, one of the first to hear about Gabriel's photographic plans, ever received a copy of the portfolio. Miller was a patron rather than a friend, so did Gabriel have ideas about selling some of the photographs?

Were there any female recipients of the portfolios? Likely candidates would include Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes Belloc, whose friendship with Gabriel led to Elizabeth's visit to Hastings in 1854, or Elizabeth's sisters Lydia and Clara, who often accompanied her on her travels. There is no mention of any of these receiving a copy.

Of the known recipients of the portfolio – Allingham, Howell, Tebbs and Shields – only two, Allingham and Howell, are confirmed as having received their copy directly from Gabriel, the evidence being based on correspondence or inscription. Tebbs and Shields possessed a copy at the time of their death, but

it is not known how they acquired it. If, as suggested previously, Gabriel hand-delivered these copies, then it is possible that many further copies were made and may still exist. As seems to have been the case with Allingham's copy, the recipients' descendants may not have known what the portfolios were or realised their significance. They may have been disposed of or even lie hidden away in an attic somewhere. Howell's copy is inscribed, but were all the copies similarly inscribed? If they have lost their cover, as in the case of Tebbs's copy, then it is impossible to say.

Hamber suggests that during the 1850s many artists undertook 'the exchange of gift photographs'.<sup>106</sup> One example he gives is a gift from Gabriel to Holman Hunt, a Daguerreotype of *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* shortly before the latter's first trip to the Holy Land.<sup>107</sup> Holman Hunt recalls the gift, which was still in his possession at the time of writing his memoirs.<sup>108</sup> The portfolios, therefore, were not the first photographic gifts Gabriel had presented to his friends.

By documenting what is now known about the original recipients I have identified that the photographic portfolios were all presented to Gabriel's closest friends. No evidence exists that copies were given to Elizabeth's family or friends. Many copies may have been simply thrown away as their original recipients died; little value was apportioned to collections of Victorian photographs of artworks. A vast amount of further research is needed to try and unravel the full story of the recipients, which this thesis does not allow for. What my research has shown, however, is that some of the recipients treasured

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<sup>106</sup> Hamber, "A Greater Branch of the Art," 189.

<sup>107</sup> Hamber, "A Greater Branch of the Art," 189.

<sup>108</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, I, illustrated opposite 135.

their copy of the portfolios, and in some cases believed them of sufficient importance to donate to a museum.

### **The Purpose**

So why did Gabriel go to the trouble of collecting all Elizabeth's drawings together, having them photographed, and then creating albums of the photographs? According to Marsh, the portfolios were created as a memorial of his wife's art, yet as previously mentioned, the known copies appear to have been given to *his* friends, not hers.<sup>109</sup> If the exercise was purely as a memorial, then surely *her* friends and family would also have been among the recipients? It is therefore necessary to explore the possible reasons behind Gabriel's actions in more detail.

At some stage during his life Gabriel owned two albums of photographs of paintings by the Old Masters, now in the University of East Anglia library.<sup>110</sup> In total there are one hundred and forty two images, and the estimated date given for these albums is 1850-82.<sup>111</sup> This suggests that Gabriel may have owned at least one of these albums prior to creating the portfolios of Elizabeth's work. Were they possibly the inspiration behind having her drawings photographed? In doing so, was Gabriel elevating Elizabeth to the same status as the Old Masters? As previously mentioned, private collectors and museums were using photography to document their collections for posterity. Surely Gabriel would have been aware of this too?

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<sup>109</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 13.

<sup>110</sup> "Unbound - UEA Archives Blog: 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti's photograph albums examined'." *The University of East Anglia*, May 20, 2015, accessed Mar 20, 2022, <https://unboundueaarchives.wordpress.com/2015/05/20/dante-gabriel-rossettis-photograph-albums-examined/>.

<sup>111</sup> "A collection of 19th-century photographic prints of old master paintings: believed to have been the property of D.G. Rossetti and to have been bequeathed by him to Frederic J. Shields." 2 vols. Microform. *University of East Anglia Library and Archives*, YA1882, TR501.



To create a scrapbook of someone's life is certainly one way of producing a lasting memorial to them, something which could be handed down through generations, and which is still done today. This process would involve collecting all kinds of mementos, correspondence, photographs etc. to build a full picture of a life well-lived. Gabriel's focus was not on Elizabeth's life, but purely on her art. His efforts to reclaim as many of her drawings as possible is testament to the importance he placed on her work. Conversely, he destroyed all the correspondence that he could find. As Marsh explains: 'On leaving Chatham Place he burnt a great number of letters, in order to destroy all that reminded him of his wife'.<sup>112</sup> Marsh's assertion is seriously flawed. Gabriel did not obliterate everything that held memories of Elizabeth; he carefully preserved her artistic oeuvre.

In addition, at least one example of a letter written by Elizabeth still exists and is frequently reproduced (including by Marsh herself).<sup>113</sup> It is a letter sent to Gabriel while she was in France during 1855-6. How did this particular letter survive? Was it in someone else's possession at the time of mass incineration? Or did Gabriel believe it was sufficiently innocuous to leave as a reminder? His brother, William, was the first to publish the contents of the letter in 1899, therefore it must have remained in Gabriel's possession until his death.<sup>114</sup> There is no rationale in retaining one letter while destroying the rest, yet at the same time preserving her drawings forever by means of photography.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that Gabriel also destroyed photographs of Elizabeth. Georgiana Burne-Jones recalls Gabriel's reply when

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<sup>112</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 22.

<sup>113</sup> See for example Marsh, *Legend*, 60-1.

<sup>114</sup> Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, 110-3.

she asked him for some photographs of Elizabeth as a keepsake. Quoting direct speech from a conversation held some forty years previously, she cites Gabriel's own words:

“The photographs of Lizzie are only from two of my sketches. On several occasions when attempts were made to photograph her from life, they were all so bad that none have been retained.”<sup>115</sup>

Despite the inconsistencies associated with oral history, this episode was sufficiently important to Georgiana to imprint it in her memory and recall when writing her husband's memoirs. She was offered the choice of two photographs of Gabriel's sketches of Elizabeth instead. These were obviously the sketches that Gabriel felt represented the Elizabeth that he wanted to be remembered. It would also seem feasible that these same two photographs were the ones he chose to include on the first page of the photographic portfolios.

Despite Gabriel's destructive acts, there do appear to be a couple of extant photographs. The first, reputedly of Elizabeth, comes with a myth of its own (Fig. 26). It is now held in The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, and was given to them in 1963 in memory of Abraham Jay Fink, a collector of miniatures.<sup>116</sup> Until recently, as the inscription on the back of the frame suggests, this photograph was believed to have been a miniature, ‘the only portrait the artist painted / of his wife after her marriage’.<sup>117</sup> However it is now believed to be a *carte de visite* photograph, hand-coloured by Gabriel in gouache.<sup>118</sup> The myth, as given by the museum, is that its original recipient was the nurse who had

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<sup>115</sup> Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd, 1904), 281-2.

<sup>116</sup> “Mrs Rossetti,” *The Walters Art Museum*, n.d., accessed Mar 22, 2022, <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/19820/mrs-rossetti/>.

<sup>117</sup> “Mrs Rossetti.”

<sup>118</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 32; Hoffman, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bad Photographs,” 61.

delivered Elizabeth's stillborn daughter. When she came upon hard times it was sold and subsequently entered the collection of J.P. Morgan, eventually acquired by A.J. Fink.<sup>119</sup> Marsh adds that 'self-styled art expert Dr George C. Williamson' relates and elaborates on how Gabriel's brother William and Murray concurred with the story, including that it was a miniature.<sup>120</sup> According to Marsh, it was Morgan who was responsible for the current 'gold Fabergé frame decorated with jade, opal and diamonds', ensuring its 'elevation from keepsake to cult object'.<sup>121</sup> However Jo Briggs, Associate Curator of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Art at The Walters Art Museum, provides evidence that it was Williamson himself who chose the stones and arranged the 'new and lavish frame' for this item.<sup>122</sup>

Briggs has extensively researched Williamson's claims about this photograph and notes that he was a key player in its history. Although she cannot confirm a financial interest, it was Williamson who originally identified the sitter as Elizabeth and the painter as Gabriel, then persuaded Pierpont Morgan to purchase the piece. Thus, Williamson was responsible for 'turning 'a commercially produced image into a relic, a fragile piece of paper into a three-dimensional object, irrevocably altering it and mediating our relationship to it'.<sup>123</sup> Briggs concludes that there is insufficient evidence to confirm this is a genuine photograph of Elizabeth and confirms Williamson's role in the creation of a 'Pre-Raphaelite Icon'.<sup>124</sup> The subject therefore remains open to speculation.

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<sup>119</sup> Jo Briggs, "The Making of a Pre-Raphaelite Icon: G.C. Williamson and Walters 38.419," *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* Vol. 70-71 (2012-13): 79.

<sup>120</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 31.

<sup>121</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 31-2.

<sup>122</sup> Briggs, "The Making of a Pre-Raphaelite Icon," 84.

<sup>123</sup> Briggs, "The Making of a Pre-Raphaelite Icon," 82.

<sup>124</sup> Briggs, "The Making of a Pre-Raphaelite Icon," 86.

A second photograph was published by Violet Hunt in 1932 as the frontispiece of her biography of Elizabeth, *The Wife of Rossetti: Her Life and Death* (Fig. 27). Hunt claims this photograph was taken by Frederick Hollyer, not of Elizabeth herself, but of an old Daguerreotype of her.<sup>125</sup> The Daguerreotype was apparently owned by Elizabeth's aunt, a Mrs George Button. Violet stresses however that this was 'the only likeness I have ever seen done from life'.<sup>126</sup> As previously mentioned, Violet was not born until six months after Elizabeth's death, therefore she is in no position to vouch for the truthfulness of the image. According to Hoffman, the image is now lost.<sup>127</sup> Hollyer died in 1933, and Violet's biography was published in 1932, therefore it does appear *possible* that he may have photographed the Daguerreotype. However, since he was born in 1838, he would have been in his nineties at the time. He retired from his studio in 1913, leaving the business to his sons, one of whom was also named Frederick, and therefore it would seem more likely that Violet was referring to Frederick Hollyer Junior.

Both these photographs have one very striking similarity: Elizabeth's eyes are closed. This contrasts sharply with her *Self-Portrait*, painted when Gabriel was away visiting William Bell Scott in Newcastle in 1853.<sup>128</sup> Conversely, a large number of Gabriel's drawings of Elizabeth depict her with closed eyes or a downward gaze, perhaps validating that these are indeed photographs of Elizabeth. Since Gabriel claimed to have destroyed them all, is it possible that a couple were missed in the same way as the letter mentioned earlier?

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<sup>125</sup> Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, Frontispiece.

<sup>126</sup> Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, xxvii.

<sup>127</sup> Hoffman, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bad Photographs," 82, note 9.

<sup>128</sup> See also Chapter 4.

To add to the intrigue, William also divulged that the manuscript of the PRB Journal, the record of the Brotherhood's early activities, was deliberately damaged:

There are several gaps in the Journal, owing to my own laches; and several more, owing to a performance by my brother, justifying the designation once (I think) applied to him by a cabman, "a harbitary cove". After the Journal had been finally (though not of any set purpose) discontinued, it lay by me unnoticed for a number of years. When at last I had occasion to re-inspect it, I found that several pages had been torn out by my Brother, and several others mutilated. I never knew accurately—never at all enquired—why he did this. I suppose that at some time or other he took up the MS. in a more or less haphazard way, and noticed in it some things which he did not care to have on record regarding himself, and also in all likelihood regarding Miss Elizabeth Siddal, to whom he was then engaged.<sup>129</sup>

William immediately accused his brother of having been the perpetrator of the crime, which suggests that he was aware of Gabriel's other acts of destruction. He continues: 'the portion destroyed by my Brother amounted, I dare say, to a fair fifth of the whole'.<sup>130</sup> Fredeman, a later editor of the published journal, offers a different view of the extent of the damage. He identifies the journal as a 'mutilated fragmentary manuscript', having examined the extant leaves in great detail. It appears that the leaves are now loose, although they were once bound in a notebook.<sup>131</sup> Fredeman states that forty-nine leaves have survived from an estimated total of sixty-nine, which equates to nearer one third of the original journal, rather than William's lower estimate. Fredeman continues to describe the further mutilation of around twenty of the extant leaves, indicating

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<sup>129</sup> William Michael Rossetti, ed., *PreRaphaelite Diaries and Letters* (London: Hurst & Blackett Ltd, 1900), 207-8.

<sup>130</sup> Rossetti, *PreRaphaelite Diaries and Letters*, 208.

<sup>131</sup> William E. Fredeman, ed., *The P.R.B. Journal: William Michael Rossetti's Diary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 157.

that the missing sections from the pages have been torn rather than cut.<sup>132</sup> This seems to indicate that the perpetrator was in a hurry when executing his censorship.

The difference between William's and Fredeman's estimates of the missing pages is considerable. As the author of the diary, William would have had an implicit knowledge of the contents. He would have known with certainty whether the missing pages contained any mention of Elizabeth – since he wrote them. Notably Marsh contests William's view, 'since most excisions antedated her appearance on the scene'.<sup>133</sup> This is a valid point. It is believed that Elizabeth's first encounter with the Pre-Raphaelites was in late 1849 or early 1850. William began keeping the Journal from 15 June 1849, some six months before it is generally assumed Elizabeth entered the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Deverell's painting *Twelfth Night*, her first modelling role, was exhibited in the summer of 1850. Fredeman has carefully identified the dates of the missing leaves, the largest proportion of which appear during 1849 (12 leaves): 30 May to 21 July (6 leaves); 26 July to 12 August (3 leaves); 28 September to 5 October (1 leaf); 20 to 31 October (1 leaf); 25 November to 7 December (1 leaf).<sup>134</sup> Five leaves are missing from 1850 and one from 1851. The majority of the missing leaves (at least eleven out of sixteen), therefore, are undeniably dated before Elizabeth became involved with the Pre-Raphaelites. Marsh's statement, therefore, is correct.

William's accusation of his brother is therefore brought into question. As custodian of the family reputation and self-appointed chronicler of Pre-

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<sup>132</sup> Fredeman, *P.R.B. Journal*, 157.

<sup>133</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 141.

<sup>134</sup> Fredeman, *P.R.B. Journal*, 162-7.

Raphaelite history, would the missing pages have contained personal reflections that may also have been detrimental to his own or his family's reputation? William stresses that the journal was 'entirely [his] own affair, and was compiled without pre-consulting any of [his] fellow members'.<sup>135</sup> He first mentions the journal in *Preraphaelite Diaries and Letters* (1900), when original Brotherhood members Holman Hunt and Stephens were still alive. There had been friction between Holman Hunt and Gabriel regarding leadership of the Brotherhood, which the former notes in his memoirs and the latter records in a letter, written in French, to critic Ernest Chesneau.<sup>136</sup> Could it have been William who destroyed the missing pages before publishing the journal? The truth may never be discovered, yet this possibility cannot be ignored.

While preserving all Elizabeth's drawings by photographing them, Gabriel appears to have placed less emphasis on her other major output: her poetry. Despite suggesting to Christina that some verses might be included in one of her anthologies, it was William who first published any of Elizabeth's words, with 'A Year and a Day' appearing in *Family Letters and a Memoir* in 1895, some thirteen years after Gabriel's death.<sup>137</sup> Many of Elizabeth's hand-written manuscripts still exist in the Ashmolean Museum, some only as fragments on torn scraps of paper. As noted in Chapter 1, her poetry has now been extensively researched by Trowbridge in *My Ladys Soul* and Woolley in *The Poems of Elizabeth Siddal in Context*.

These manuscripts also formed part of the Bryson bequest to the Ashmolean Museum, along with the glass negatives and photographs mentioned earlier,

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<sup>135</sup> Rossetti, *PreRaphaelite Diaries and Letters*, 206.

<sup>136</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, I, 418; Rossetti, *Family Letters*, 128-9.

<sup>137</sup> Rossetti, *Family Letters*, I, 176.

which suggests that they may have been part of the same auction lot. Gabriel and William both made clean hand-written copies of some of Elizabeth's manuscripts, as Trowbridge suggests that Elizabeth's writing was rather difficult to read, her punctuation 'minimal' and her spelling 'erratic'.<sup>138</sup> Perhaps in this case the hand-written copies were preferable to photographs of poor handwriting, thus this could also be construed as a conscious effort to preserve her poetry as well as her art.

It is perplexing, however, that Gabriel destroyed every letter, photograph or memory of Elizabeth he could find – yet painstakingly preserved her drawings by having everything photographed. Why were her drawings of such critical importance to him? Hoffman suggests one reason for his action:

The photographs from life are withdrawn from view because they fail to express Siddal adequately, but those that reproduce her body of work meet approval for their ability to reveal the products of her imagination.<sup>139</sup>

Hoffman, therefore, proposes that retaining the memory of Elizabeth's artistic output was of greater importance to Gabriel than of keeping an image of her person. True, by photographing her drawings Gabriel did create a memorial to Elizabeth, but was there another purpose in destroying, or altering, the photographs? Hoffman suggests that the hand-colouring of the Walters Art Museum photograph was a 'correction' by Gabriel's hand which would 'reveal his anxiety over the ways in which Siddal would be remembered, especially how her posthumous image would be seen by others'.<sup>140</sup> This is indeed a possibility. As previously mentioned, Georgiana Burne-Jones happily accepted one of

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<sup>138</sup> Trowbridge, *My Ladys Soul*, 28.

<sup>139</sup> Hoffman, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bad Photographs," 74.

<sup>140</sup> Hoffman, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bad Photographs," 63.



Gabriel's drawings of Elizabeth instead of a photograph. Gabriel also included the two photographs of his sketches of her as the first page of the photographic portfolios, which were then distributed among his friends. His actions recall the last line of his sister Christina's poem, *In An Artist's Studio*, 'Not as she is, but as she fills his dream'.<sup>141</sup> By destroying the photographs, correspondence and journal pages, yet preserving her 'scraps and scrawls' for posterity, Gabriel is effectively creating his own persona for Elizabeth. He is presenting her to the world as *he* wants her to be remembered. However, if this was his purpose he failed, as previously discussed in Chapter 1, it is Millais's *Ophelia* that encapsulates the public perception of Elizabeth.

Is it also possible that Gabriel may have attempted to create a catalogue of Elizabeth's work – a rudimentary *catalogue raisonné*? This idea may be substantiated by the care with which the photographs were assembled on the individual pages, bringing together all Elizabeth's designs for the same subject.<sup>142</sup> Gabriel's process of collecting all her drawings together to have them photographed is very similar to the process I have undertaken in trying to establish the true extent of her oeuvre to build an online *catalogue raisonné*. Our methods and technology may be different, but our aim is similar: we both want to ensure that Elizabeth's work as an artist is preserved in Pre-Raphaelite history.

Presenting the portfolios as gifts to his friends may just have been an afterthought as the true reason for creating the portfolios may have been entirely personal for Gabriel. While the actual process may have been

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<sup>141</sup> R. W. Crump, ed., *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*. Notes and Introduction by Betty S. Flowers, (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 796.

<sup>142</sup> See for example Fig. 21.

cathartic, Elizabeth's work became an important source of inspiration for Gabriel, as I will discuss in Chapters 5 and 6. The creation of an album of photographs of her work would have provided him with an easy-to-use tool that he could leaf through when looking for design ideas. The primary function of the portfolio, therefore, may have been as a source book rather than as a memorial. Elizabeth's original drawings would not have withstood continued handling, therefore creating the glass negatives meant that the images could be reproduced as often as necessary if they became damaged. It is Gabriel's potential use of his copy of the portfolio as a source book which underlies its true significance to understanding Elizabeth's artistic legacy.

### **The Significance**

Prior to my research the true significance of the photographic portfolios as a unique resource had not been realised by the museums that currently hold them in their collections. Only Princeton had catalogued the portfolio sheets and provided an online record, albeit without images. Neither the Ashmolean nor the Fitzwilliam had included the portfolios as part of their online collection.

Following several visits, I provided the Ashmolean Museum with a document identifying the drawings depicted in each of the glass negatives, loose photographs and sheets of the photographic portfolio, which was kept with the artefacts for future visitors. Subsequently, in the summer of 2018, much of the collection was photographed and digitised. The photographic portfolios were included as part of the process for the first time. Many images are now available online.<sup>143</sup> Similar identification documents have been provided to the Fitzwilliam Museum and Princeton University Library. I hope that my work will

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<sup>143</sup> "Collection Search 'Siddal'," *The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*, accessed Mar 12, 2022, <https://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search>.

ensure the museums have a better understanding of the importance of these photographs and like the Ashmolean Museum, make them available online to assist further research.

As well as the photographic portfolios, a number of other photographs of Elizabeth's work in the Ashmolean collection are of critical importance when considering her oeuvre. One image appears to have been included in the 'Keeper' envelope containing the modern photographic reprints in error. It is not a reprint from any of the glass negatives but is the only known photograph of one of Elizabeth's early watercolours, *We Are Seven* (Fig. A.103), the drawing Elizabeth gave to Dr Acland while she was in Oxford to thank him for his kindness. J.B. Atlay, Acland's biographer, writes:

Miss Siddal had good reason to be grateful to the Aclands ... Before she departed she insisted on her doctor accepting one of her drawings, a painting of the churchyard among the mountains immortalised by Wordsworth in 'We Are Seven.' It hangs now, a strange and somewhat weird arrangement of colours, in Miss Acland's drawing room.<sup>144</sup>

It is possible that Dr Acland's daughter, Sarah Angelina, took this photograph herself as she was a keen photographer and later became a leading exponent in early colour photography. The Aclands were friends with the Liddells, and Sarah's first encounter with photography was when Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) photographed them as children.<sup>145</sup> She took lessons in art from Ruskin during the time he stayed with the family, and collected photographic prints before taking up the subject herself.<sup>146</sup> Among the photographs of their family home, Sarah captured *We Are Seven* on the wall by her desk, hung above Millais's

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<sup>144</sup> J.B. Atlay, *Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, Bart., K.C.B., F.R.S., Regius Professor of Medicine in the University of Oxford: A Memoir* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1903), 228.

<sup>145</sup> Giles Hudson, *Sarah Angelina Acland: First Lady of Colour Photography* (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2012), 9.

<sup>146</sup> Hudson, *Sarah Angelina Acland*, 13; 18.

portrait of John Ruskin at Glenfinlas, now in the Ashmolean Museum, which was bequeathed to her father by Ruskin himself (Fig. 28). It is just possible to identify *We Are Seven* in this photograph from the dip of light in the background which is clearly visible in the detailed image of the watercolour (Fig. A.103). There are many ways in which this photograph could have found its way into the envelope of modern reprints, but all are irrelevant. Much more significant is the fact that this reprint is the only known image of *We Are Seven*. The location of the original watercolour is unknown. This photograph is of critical importance to art historians yet has been virtually ignored.

A further selection of photographic prints was included in Bryson's bequest to the Ashmolean Museum.<sup>147</sup> These are held in an envelope ('Bryson Envelope') postmarked 7 Nov 1955 and addressed to him at home.<sup>148</sup> The envelope contains nine images of works by Elizabeth, only two of which are included in the photographic portfolios. Of the remaining seven drawings, three have been sold at auction during the twenty-first century, while four are unlocated and known only from these photographs. It is not known how Bryson acquired the photographs, but his collection is of critical importance.

Yet another envelope, known as the 'Millais' envelope, contains another two photographs of Elizabeth's work, alongside drawings by Millais himself.<sup>149</sup> Neither were included in the photographic portfolios. Of these two drawings, one is now in Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton, while the other was sold at

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<sup>147</sup> K.R., "The Bryson Bequest to the Ashmolean and the V & A," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 119 No. 890 (1977): 363.

<sup>148</sup> Envelope addressed to "J.N. Bryson Esq., 7 Beleyre Court, Woodstock Road, Oxford." *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*, Postmarked Nov 7, 1955, viewed Apr 20, 2016.

<sup>149</sup> Envelope marked "Millais." *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*, n.d., viewed Sep 11, 2014

Christie's in 2018.<sup>150</sup> It is not known how the photographs of Elizabeth's work became combined with those of drawings by Millais.

Perhaps the most significant point to be made is that twenty-seven of Elizabeth's drawings are only known because of the portfolios and glass negatives. These include all Elizabeth's designs for *The Lass of Lochroyan*; several studies for *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Jephthah's Daughter* and *Lady Clare*; her only drawings for *The Gay Goss-Hawk* and *Landscape with Castle, Tree and Landing Stage*, and a selection of other sketches.<sup>151</sup> Without the portfolios we would not have known of the existence of many of these drawings. Some, such as *The Lass of Lochroyan*, are mentioned in Gabriel's correspondence, but he remained silent on many others, including her only landscape, which would have been lost to art history if it had not been photographed. Critically, many of these twenty-seven studies are fundamental to understanding Elizabeth's artistic legacy.<sup>152</sup>

These twenty-seven drawings, plus the four identified from the Bryson envelope, are now deemed 'lost' as their current location is unknown. It is possible the original drawings may remain in Rossetti family possession or in other historic private collections. The only knowledge of these thirty-one drawings is from the photographs. These photographs therefore represent about twenty percent of Elizabeth's total artistic oeuvre. Without reference to the extant copies of the portfolios and supplementary photographs, the true extent of Elizabeth's work and its significance to the visual development of the Pre-Raphaelite movement to date has been severely underestimated. As I will discuss in the following

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<sup>150</sup> *Study for the Nativity* (Fig. A.70); *Sketch for Unidentified Subject with Four Figures*. (Fig. A.102)

<sup>151</sup> These images are reproduced in Appendix A. See Figs. A.6; A.7; A.10; A.15; A.20; A.21; A.23; A.30; A.31; A.33; A.34; A.35; A.38; A.45; A.46; A.49; A.52; A.53; A.54; A.66; A.71, A.72; A.73; A.75; A.86; A.87 and A.110.

<sup>152</sup> See also Chapter 3.

chapters, these drawings, now known only from photographs, are essential in assessing Elizabeth's artistic legacy.

## **Conclusion**

The photographic portfolios that Gabriel created present Elizabeth as an artist who produced a body of work that is worthy of being recorded. In this chapter I have provided an in-depth study of the photographic portfolios with the aim of stimulating further research. As well as documenting current knowledge of the extant copies, I have assessed the potential photographers, analysed the known and possible recipients, and questioned Gabriel's motives in creating these records of Elizabeth's work.

My research has demonstrated the critical importance of the portfolios to the study of Elizabeth as an artist, and to fully appreciating her contribution to Pre-Raphaelite art. The thirty-one images of unlocated works extend her known oeuvre beyond the confines of works held in public and private collections. The sixty-seven images contained in the portfolios, along with the supplementary photographs in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, form the foundation for my proposed online *catalogue raisonné* of her work.<sup>153</sup> This project would not be possible without the extant copies of the photographic portfolio. Gabriel's heroic effort to preserve Elizabeth's work for the future should not go unnoticed. It clearly demonstrates his admiration for, and perhaps his dependence on, her untutored imagination. I will expand on this theme in Chapter 5, focusing on the developing artistic relationship between Gabriel, Elizabeth, and her work.

The methodical practice of cropping the photographs of her drawings and pasting them into the portfolios would have given Gabriel some comfort in the

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<sup>153</sup> See Appendix A.

years after Elizabeth's death, perhaps also the feeling that she was still there, working in the studio with him. Creating the portfolios would have given him thinking time and enabled him to develop thoughts about his own art, perhaps subconsciously absorbing some of Elizabeth's ideas along the way through constant exposure to her drawings. The existence of the damaged fragment of board cover along with the glass negatives shows there is a strong possibility that Gabriel kept a copy of the portfolio himself for use as a source book, an idea which I will explore further in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7 I will show how Elizabeth's ideas, documented in the photographic portfolios, have permeated the work of other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. But first, in the next chapter I will look in detail at Elizabeth's oeuvre.

## Chapter 3 - Elizabeth's Oeuvre

### Introduction

My analysis of the photographic portfolios in the previous chapter has demonstrated that Elizabeth's oeuvre is much more extensive than the few drawings which have become popular in recent years. Her life's work comprises over one hundred and ten items, the majority of which are pencil or pen drawings. While many of these are rough sketches, they open a window into Elizabeth's mind as she worked. This is especially true of her designs which take the form of a series of sketches on one particular theme, such as her drawings for *St Cecilia* from Tennyson's *The Palace of Art* (Figs. A.95 to A.99) and sketches for Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (Figs. A.33 to A.39). Viewing each series as a whole, especially the rough sketches, shows how Elizabeth tried to capture her ideas literally as they entered her head, resolving problems and conflicts with each new attempt.

Elizabeth's oeuvre adheres very closely to the list of 'immortals', a list of 'great thinkers and workers' which formed the nucleus of source ideas for the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.<sup>1</sup> While subjects outside of this list were also undertaken, they were considered subordinate to those included. Holman Hunt published a list in his memoirs but confessed to destroying the actual inventory drawn up by the Brotherhood. The names he reproduced were taken from a first draft opportunely copied by his father. The original list, he explains, 'included further names than those in the present copy, amongst them were many contemporaries now utterly forgotten'.<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to know the names omitted from the published list, but they may well have included the work

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<sup>1</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, I, 159.

<sup>2</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, I, 160.



of some of the other authors Elizabeth chose to illustrate. Even with the reduced list, nearly three quarters of her known oeuvre depicts subjects taken from the names listed as ‘immortals’, which shows her willingness to participate fully in the aims of the circle. It underlines her commitment to the ethos of Pre-Raphaelitism which is generally only recognised in public consciousness by her unflinching dedication as a model, either for the bathtub incident or in holding difficult poses such as for the figure of Sylvia in Holman Hunt’s *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1851, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery).

Any study of Elizabeth’s oeuvre is bound to encounter problems, but the photographic portfolios provide an invaluable resource in countering these issues. In this chapter I will discuss the problems I encountered in some detail and examine the previous attempts to document Elizabeth’s life’s work. This will be followed by an analysis of her output in terms of medium, themes and subjects. I will then look at the possibility that her illustrations specifically targeted the expanding book illustration market.

### **Difficulties with the Study of Elizabeth’s Oeuvre**

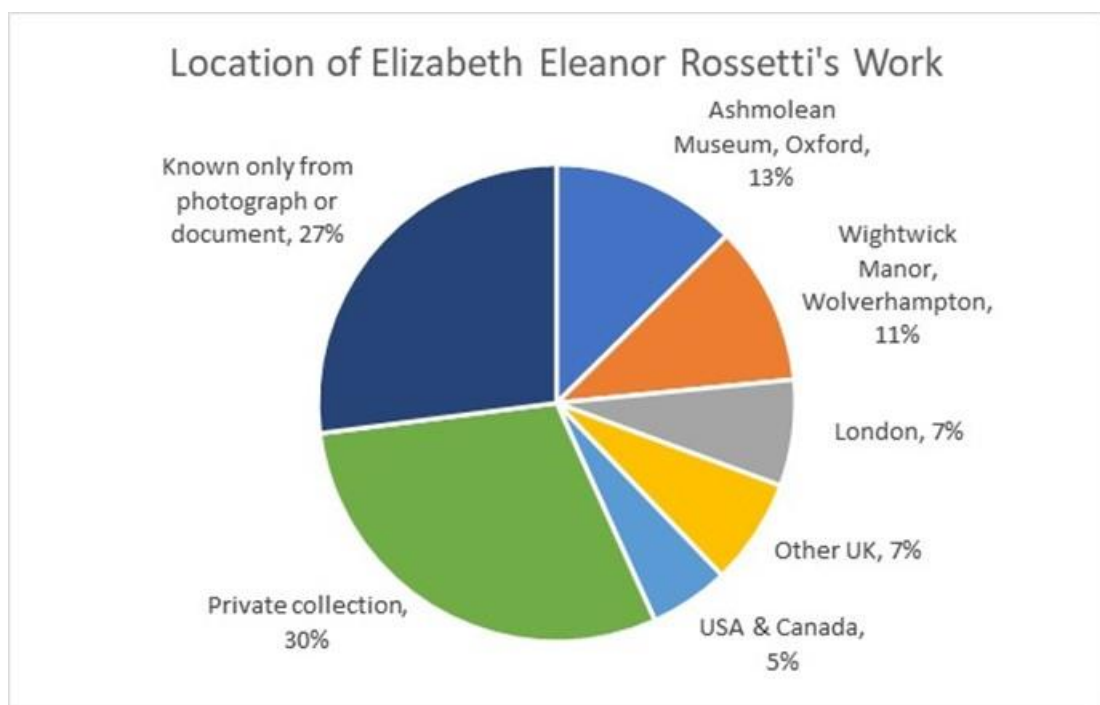
Studying Elizabeth’s body of work has involved much trawling through various sources. Only recently have scholars begun to include her drawings in thematic discussions, where comparison of her work is often made with subjects also tackled by the male Pre-Raphaelite artists.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite the existence of the photographic portfolios, most of Elizabeth’s drawings are poorly documented. There are several possible reasons for this lack of information, not least because she is a female artist in a circle dominated by strong male characters

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Elaine Shefer, “Elizabeth Siddal’s ‘Lady of Shalott’,” *Woman’s Art Journal* Vol. 9 No. 1 (1988): 21-9.

whose work has clearly been given priority. However, there are other more significant problems which have hindered any study of her drawings.

One of the major issues in studying Elizabeth's oeuvre is the difficulty in viewing any of her work. Little more than one third of her oeuvre is held in public collections. Of these, only eight items (seven percent) can be found in the museum hub of central London. The two major collections of her work are situated in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and the National Trust property Wightwick Manor, in Wolverhampton. The remaining items in public collections are scattered in smaller provincial locations in the UK, with six pieces (around five percent of her oeuvre) currently located in the USA and Canada.



**Chart 1:** Location of Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti's Works.

Despite there being some forty-two drawings and sketches in UK public collections, Elizabeth's works are not easily accessible. This is in part due to the invisibility of works on paper which are rarely on display due to their susceptibility to light damage. Drawings in public collections are preserved

away from public view in protective boxes in the holding museums' prints and drawings rooms. Occasionally such works are exhibited in a safe environment with dimmed lighting and protective glass frames, but normally they are only available to view by making an advance appointment.

The public accessibility to view works by women artists is an ongoing problem. Like Elizabeth, many female artists achieved success during their working lives. The major institutions, however, maintained a patriarchal collecting practice, leading to works by female artists being underrepresented in their collections. This imbalance has recently been noted and efforts are beginning to be made to improve the situation. An excellent example of this is demonstrated by the National Gallery's recent acquisition of a self-portrait by Artemisia Gentileschi. The press release announcing the acquisition highlights the significance of the inequality between the artists in the collection: the gallery holds in excess of 2,300 works, of which only twenty (less than one percent) are by female artists.<sup>4</sup> Much more time and effort is needed to improve the accessibility to the work of female artists.

With only one third of Elizabeth's oeuvre held in public collections, the remainder is divided fairly equally between items held in private collections and items now deemed 'lost', which are only known from photographs or mentions in written correspondence. None of these are readily accessible to the general public. In addition, it is impossible to say how many more pieces may exist, or may have once existed, which remain unidentified, which have been

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<sup>4</sup> "The National Gallery acquires Artemisia Gentileschi Self Portrait," *The National Gallery*, 2018, accessed Apr 21, 2021, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/the-national-gallery-acquires-artemisia-gentileschi-self-portrait>.

unknowingly destroyed, or which simply remain forgotten, perhaps hidden away in family 'treasure' boxes in attics.

Another contributory factor to the absence of documentation about Elizabeth's work is the lack of digital accessibility. Until the end of 2020, images of few of her drawings had been available online. The Ashmolean Museum has recently digitised its collection of photographs from the portfolios and envelopes, making more of Elizabeth's oeuvre widely accessible. The supplementary details provided, however, are of the photographs, not of the original artworks. Much of the information about Elizabeth's drawings is therefore missing from the public sphere. I needed to address this lack of accessibility and information before I was able to analyse Elizabeth's work in more detail.

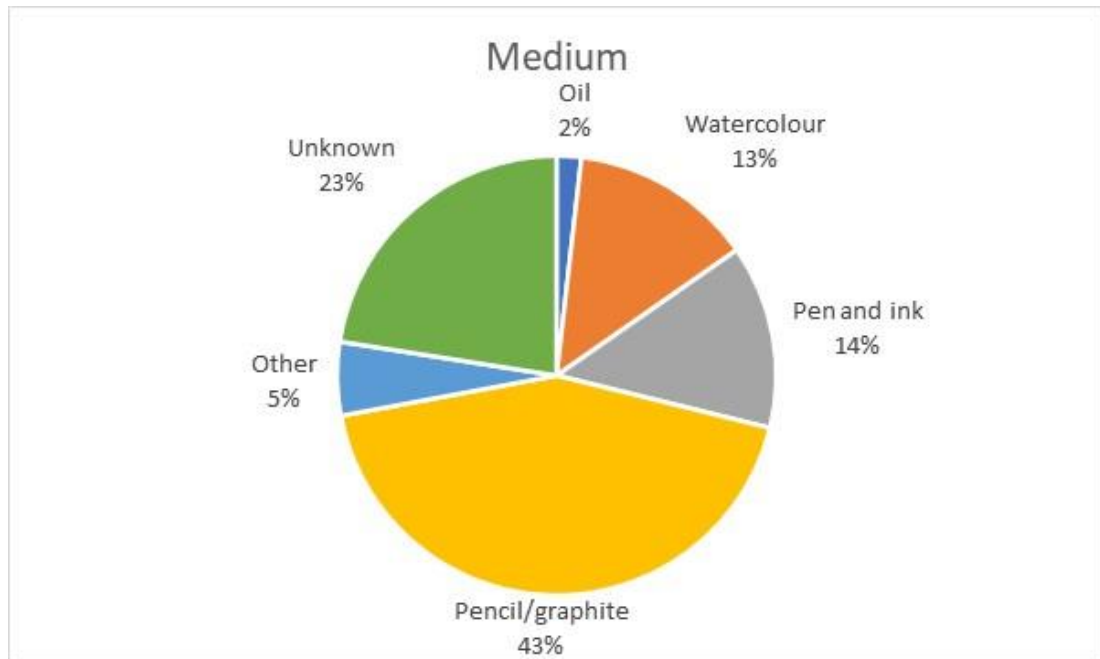
### **Medium**

Although her body of work is relatively small when compared with those of her male colleagues, Elizabeth appears to have been keen to try different techniques. In her oeuvre of more than one hundred items, there are no less than thirty-six different combinations of medium recorded in exhibition catalogues, on gallery websites and in auction notes.<sup>5</sup> However, the descriptions may be misleading as they will have been written by different experts, male and female, who may have used their own standard vocabulary. For example, 'Pen, ink and pencil on paper' may be equivalent to 'Pen and brown ink over pencil', or even 'Pencil and ink'. With so many pieces being unavailable to view it is impossible to confirm or rationalise these descriptions. However, the fact that Elizabeth has created a sketch in pencil and then drawn

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<sup>5</sup> See item descriptions in Appendix A.

over it in ink suggests that she was happy with that composition and wished to make it more permanent.



**Chart 2:** Media used in Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti's Works.

Additionally, the terms used are often problematic. For example, 'Gouache' is the recorded medium for *The Eve of St Agnes*, held in Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton, but without analysis of paint samples we cannot be sure of the exact constituents of the medium used. Both Gabriel and Elizabeth prepared their own paints using a combination of pigments, water and gum Arabic, with proportions varying each time and for each specific work. It is likely that white would regularly have been included to create the thicker, more opaque effects, often resembling works in oil paint. Perhaps the medium Elizabeth used would more accurately be described as 'opaque watercolour'. I have therefore included this work in the watercolour section of my analysis.

'Graphite' is another problematic term which appears to have been used only by two institutions, the British Museum and Wightwick Manor, for a selection of Elizabeth's drawings. In all probability, 'graphite' and 'pencil' equate to the

same medium, and my research has shown that this is most likely to have been the wood encased graphite sticks produced in Cumbria by what is now known as the Derwent Pencil Company.<sup>6</sup> I have therefore combined pencil and graphite in the same section.

The 'Other' section includes Jane Morris's jewel casket and the wall paintings in the Red House, Bexleyheath, which are known items but do not fit neatly into any category. The 'Unknown' section represents those works known only from photographs where the medium is unclear.

A chart can only give a broad outline of Elizabeth's use of media. Clearly the chart shows the largest proportion (almost half) of her surviving work was created in pencil/graphite. Pencil sketches are generally held to be products of an artist's imagination, capturing their initial ideas on paper. It would therefore seem logical that more items in pencil would survive, despite the fragility of paper, since more rough sketches would have been made. Of her finished work, items drawn with pen and ink are almost equal to those painted in watercolour, which might suggest that she had no firm preference of medium. Conversely, the large number of ink drawings may also point towards a different purpose, or proposed outlet, for these pieces, namely book illustration, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Elizabeth also appears to have enjoyed mixing media, such as ink with a wash, sometimes using scratching out for highlights, pencil with black chalk, and working on coloured and textured papers. Certainly, many of her different 'styles' resemble those also used by Gabriel. For example, Elizabeth's

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<sup>6</sup> "Our Story: A proud heritage dating back to 1832," *Derwent (Acco Ltd.)*, 2021, accessed Mar 1, 2021, <https://www.derwentart.com/en-gb/c/about/company/our-story>.

*Deposition from the Cross* appears similar in style and technique to Gabriel's *Giorgione Painting* (1853, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery) (Fig. 29). Likewise, one of her sketches for *St Cecilia* displays characteristics comparable with *Gabriel's Design for an Unknown Subject, perhaps from Dante* (1852, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery) (Fig. 30). The similarities are inevitable as Gabriel was Elizabeth's tutor and they were working together in his studio.<sup>7</sup> The transfer of ideas in the artistic partnership will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

### **Documenting Elizabeth's Oeuvre**

My starting point for examining and documenting Elizabeth's oeuvre was therefore assembling details and images of her works from every possible source, including the photographic portfolios, museum records, mentions in correspondence, auction catalogues and exhibition catalogues, as well as previous scholarly study. As noted previously, the process of documenting Elizabeth's work as an artist began with William Michael Rossetti's first attempt at listing Elizabeth's designs in the *Burlington Magazine* article of 1903, where twenty-three different subjects which Elizabeth had illustrated were identified. These included the familiar drawings and watercolours including *Pippa Passes*, *Lady Clare* and *Clerk Saunders*, as well as less well-known works such as *The Gay Gos-Hawk* and *The Lass of Lochroyan*.<sup>8</sup> William Michael also mentions watercolours and oil paintings that are now unlocatable but require recording to produce as complete an inventory of Elizabeth's oeuvre as possible.

There was little subsequent interest in documenting Elizabeth's oeuvre until the stirring of the feminist movement in the 1970s. As previously mentioned,

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<sup>7</sup> The working relationship between Gabriel and Elizabeth is discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>8</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 277.

Reichert's thesis has proved invaluable. Her descriptions provide sufficient detail to identify each item against my own draft inventory which is reproduced in Appendix A.

One example of the importance of Reichert's work can be found in the identification of one of the loose photographs in the Ashmolean Museum collection (Fig. A.48). In her exhibition catalogue Marsh gives the sketch the title of *Landscape with Lying Figure*.<sup>9</sup> She suggests that this drawing appears to be a preliminary sketch for the watercolour *We Are Seven* (Fig. A.103) as there are a number of common elements including the trees in the top left-hand corner. She adds that it is also 'sometimes described as *The Lady of Shalott*, lying in a boat'.<sup>10</sup> Marsh has annotated the catalogue entry with a double asterisk, indicating that the work was 'unlocated or unavailable for loan' and meaning that she only knew the drawing from the photograph. Reichert, however, had obviously seen the original drawing personally and provides the following comprehensive description:

*Bleistiftzeichnung; in der l. oberen Ecke Beginn eines Aquarells*  
(Pencil drawing; in the top left-hand corner commencement of a watercolour)

*Inschrift: (auf Rückseite in W.M.R.s Handschrift)*  
(Inscription: (On verso in W.M.R.'s handwriting)  
"By Lizzie R. / Lady of Shalott"

*In unkenntlich gegeben Trümmern und Steinen liegt geradeausgestreckt eine Frauengestalt, mit ausgestreckten Armen, in geballten Händen etwas haltend. L. hinter ihr Bäume, deren Wipfel in verschiedenen Abstufungen grün aquarelliert sind. R. vorn Gestrüpp und Äste. Gestalt sehr groß für die sie umgebende Szenerie.*  
(Amidst unrecognisable ruins and rocks lies the outstretched

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Siddal: *Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Siddal: *Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 70.



figure of a female. Her arms are also extended and she holds something in her balled fists. To the left and behind her are some trees, the tops of which have been painted with different shades of green watercolour. To the front right lie tree branches and bushes. The figure is very large in comparison with the surrounding landscape.<sup>11</sup>

This accurately describes the photograph of the drawing in the Ashmolean collection (see Fig. 31 for detail of top left-hand corner). Clearly William believed it was a further study for *The Lady of Shalott* and annotated it as such. I have therefore catalogued it accordingly. Reichert also notes that this drawing was in Rossetti family possession at the time she wrote her thesis (1972). It has not appeared at auction since that date so most probably remains with Rossetti descendants. Reichert's neglected thesis has thus enabled the correct identification of this drawing from the photograph. A further example where Reichert's research has assisted me in checking my own work includes her identification of three different versions of *Pippa Passes* (see Figs. A.77-9), where Marsh records only two.<sup>12</sup> These overlooked details are critical to building an accurate picture of Elizabeth's oeuvre.

Lewis and Lasner's *Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal*, published in 1978, demonstrates the renewed world-wide interest in Elizabeth as more than just a Pre-Raphaelite model.<sup>13</sup> Viewing Elizabeth's output as both poetry and art, they presented images of fifteen of her drawings. Marsh claims this book 'represented the first significant publication of her pictorial work, and the first republication of her verse since William Rossetti's original efforts'.<sup>14</sup> However, Lewis and Lasner's book, published by the Wombat Press, was limited to five

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<sup>11</sup> Reichert, "Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal," Item K.41.

<sup>12</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 45,47. See also Chapter 6.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis and Lasner, *Poems and Drawings*.

<sup>14</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 150.

hundred copies, making it a collector's item rather than a widely available resource. Its impact on the perception of Elizabeth as an artist and poet, therefore, was restricted to the elite few who obtained a copy.

It was Marsh's own personal efforts that really brought Elizabeth's work as an artist into the limelight in her retrospective exhibition at the Ruskin Gallery, Sheffield, in 1991. As previously mentioned, even this exhibition catalogue is now out of date, but it provides the most detailed published account of Elizabeth's artistic oeuvre. It is from these building blocks and extensive personal research that I have constructed my own comprehensive list of Elizabeth's works (Appendix A) on which my statistical analysis of her oeuvre is based. The data I have collected will form the basis of my online *catalogue raisonné* project. I have chosen to echo Reichert in my choice of the two main areas on which to focus my analysis: the media Elizabeth used and the themes and subjects she tackled. Reichert briefly touched on these areas, thus leaving room for a much more detailed analysis.

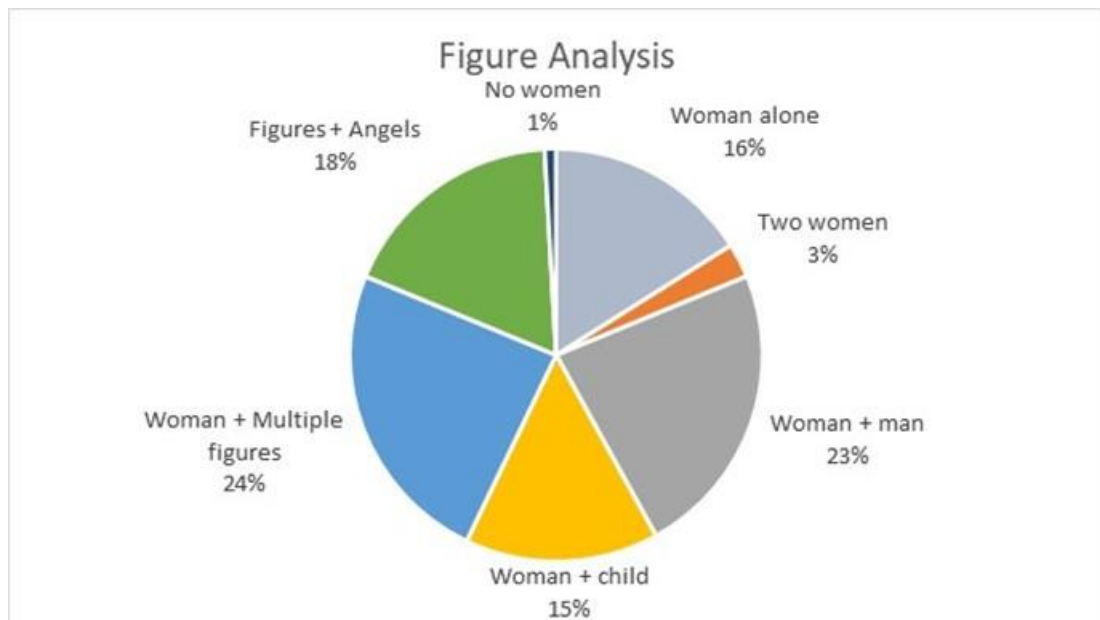
### **Themes and Subjects**

The second area I analysed concerned exactly what Elizabeth depicted in her work, the themes that emerged and the inspiration behind the subjects she depicted. It is interesting to note that Elizabeth tackled many of the same themes that her male counterparts worked on. She did not shy away from the more difficult subjects such as the fallen woman. *Pippa Passes* was created at the same time as Holman Hunt was working on *The Awakening Conscience* and Gabriel was producing designs for *Found*.<sup>15</sup> However, one feature clearly dominates Elizabeth's oeuvre: the majority of her designs focus on the *actions*

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<sup>15</sup> The subject of the Fallen Woman is also discussed in Chapter 5.

of women, rather than on simple figure depictions. She presents the viewer with women alone, women together, women with children, women with men, and women accompanied by angels or spectres. Very few of her works do not include a woman in some form. There are, however, no representations of a single male figure in her work. The nearest equivalent is *Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail* and its preparatory sketches, which include the male figure of Sir Galahad with two very feminine angels. For this reason, the category has been interpreted as figures with angels rather than women with angels.



**Chart 3:** Analysis of Figures in Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti's Works.

The chart above shows the distribution of these different figure groups, which provides a sharp contrast with Gabriel's much more varied oeuvre. This perhaps demonstrates the constraints Victorian society placed on women, but it may have been Elizabeth's personal choice. By the 1850s Queen Victoria had been on the throne for twenty years. The young eighteen-year-old novice queen was now a wife and mother as well as head of an expanding empire. A woman's ability to rule effectively was no longer in question; Queen Victoria was a woman with power. Yet ordinary women were still chained to the feminine

sphere of domesticity. They remained as chattels while their menfolk were at liberty to enjoy the world of work, travel and socialising. Was Elizabeth rebelling against these constraints with her depictions of women? If we look more closely at some of her drawings it may be possible to provide some answers.

Deborah Cherry suggests that many of Elizabeth's drawings 'persistently addressed the look of women'.<sup>16</sup> As well as *The Lady of Shalott* who is captured at the moment of her look, Cherry also mentions:

... the exchange of glances in *Pippa Passes*, Margaret's vision of her dead lover in *Clerk Saunders*, the search for a sight of ships at sea in *The Ladies Lament for Sir Patrick Spens*.<sup>17</sup>

Although much has been written about Elizabeth's choices reflecting her transition from model (being looked at) to artist (being able to look) which I also address in Chapter 4, I believe there is more to Elizabeth's depictions of women than simply the act of looking. It is the *reason* they are looking that is critical to understanding her oeuvre. The significance lies in the action the women are undertaking or the situation they are facing that is causing them to look.

Elizabeth appears to seek out the moments in the narrative where the internal tension is at its highest. Some of her women are confronting a difficult decision, while others have already chosen their path and are accepting the consequences. Still others are shown in a typical domestic role, either with children or dependent on a male figure. Elizabeth's drawings of women can be grouped according to the type of women they represent. By this I do not mean by their physical figure type, which I will discuss in Chapter 6, but by their

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<sup>16</sup> Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 189.

<sup>17</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 190.

character traits: some women appear to be strong-willed and independent while others are submissive and accommodating.

While I will discuss many of Elizabeth's works in detail in subsequent chapters, some also warrant mention here. Her drawing, *The Lady of Shalott* (Fig. A.47, discussed in Chapter 4), has received much scholarly attention as the precise moment Elizabeth chose to depict from Tennyson's poem is when the Lady turns her head to look out of the window at Sir Lancelot. This depiction differs significantly from that of the other Pre-Raphaelite artists, because as well as being the moment of 'the look', Elizabeth's drawing also represents the Lady's *decision* to look. There was a choice for the Lady to make: to look, or to refrain from looking, which is exactly what she had chosen until that moment. Without her making that decision there would have been no look. Elizabeth's Lady is therefore empowered to choose her own destiny.

Pippa also had a choice in Elizabeth's drawing of Robert Browning's poem *Pippa Passes* (Fig. A.77, discussed in detail in Chapter 5). The moment illustrated is precisely when Pippa is passing by the 'poor girls' on the Duomo steps. Elizabeth shows Pippa glancing in their direction, which naturally engages with their heckling. She could have chosen to depict Pippa walking by with her head turned away, simply focusing on her geese. Browning is silent on Pippa's reaction to the girls' comments, only mentioning her twice in the stage directions: at the beginning of the scene when the reader learns she will pass the group of 'poor girls', and subsequently just as she approaches them.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the choice to depict 'the look' was purely Elizabeth's. Yet again Elizabeth has empowered her character with the right to choose.

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Browning, *Pippa Passes* (London: William Heineman, 1906), 64, 68.

The theme of empowerment runs through several of Elizabeth's works. *Lady Clare* (Fig. A.43, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7) takes the decision to tell her future husband, Lord Ronald, about her humble past, rather than keep her true identity a secret. Elizabeth illustrates the moment when Clare is communicating her decision to her nurse and mother and resisting attempts to persuade her to change her mind. In *Clerk Saunders* (A.13, discussed in Chapter 7) Elizabeth illustrates a complex tale of love and destiny, of liberation and of acceptance. Walter Scott's ballad tells how lovers May Margaret and Clerk Saunders declare their love for each other and swear to secrecy about their affair: Unfortunately, the lovers are discovered sleeping together by May Margaret's seven brothers. Clerk Saunders is murdered for what the brothers believe is an act of violation of their sister, but he returns as a spirit to ask May Margaret to pledge her love for him one more time. This is the pivotal moment Elizabeth has chosen to depict.

May Margaret is thus torn between empowerment and subservience. It was *her* choice to agree to sleep with Clerk Saunders, knowing if they were found out they would face the wrath of her brothers. But having made that initial choice, she must accept the consequences of her brothers' actions. Although the situation shows some similarities with that depicted in *The Lady of Shalott*, there is less certainty of the consequences. The Lady was fully aware that turning to look at Sir Lancelot would invoke the curse, whereas May Margaret hoped the lovers would avoid being detected. May Margaret's empowerment brought her pleasure, which subsequently turned to despair. She therefore had to accept her destiny and when the spirit of Clerk Saunders appears to ask for her to pledge her love again, she willingly agrees, knowing that one day they will be

reunited. Elizabeth's depiction shows May Margaret at the precise moment when she accepts the consequences of her choice.

Are Elizabeth's hopes and aims for her future career as an artist reflected in her depictions of women in control of their own decisions, and therefore of their own destiny? Did she feel constrained by her life prior to becoming part of the Pre-Raphaelite circle? Did creating her own art and poetry offer her the chance to look, instead of simply be looked at? Was her work limited by the social etiquette of Victorian society or was it just a way of exploring and making sense of the society in which she lived? Although Elizabeth's work is often viewed biographically, societal norms must be considered as a possibility since another group of drawings appears to follow on from the theme in *Clerk Saunders*, showing women meekly accepting the destiny they have been handed by the actions of others.

In *Lady Affixing a Pennant to a Knight's Spear* (Fig. A.42) the female figure is not looking at her knight, who is about to leave for battle. Instead, she stares intently at the red, almost heart-shaped, pennant he is fastening to his spear which bisects the painting, and the couple, diagonally. This, while uniting them in the act of attaching the pennant, will soon divide them as he rides off into the distance. The exterior (male) space is clearly differentiated from the interior (female) space by the pastel shades of sunrise, which highlights the gender gap. It was the knight's decision to go into battle, not the Lady's. She has no choice in this instance but to accept what is about to happen, and the possibility that her lover will never return. She is not empowered but resigned. She may also be proud that her beloved is riding off to fight for King and Country, but she is powerless to change the situation.

The same can be said of Elizabeth's designs for *The Woeful Victory* (Figs. A.105-A.108), where the Lady realises that she will be forced to marry the victor of a duel fought to win her hand. The knight she must wed is the one who has just killed her true love. The fight was not her choice, but she is bound by the consequences of the men's actions. She could only watch while her future was decided before her eyes. Now she must meekly accept the result of the duel.

Elizabeth's sketches for *Jephthah's Daughter* (discussed in Chapter 7) also show a woman who is not in control of her destiny, yet they convey the power of the events which took place. The original narrative is found in the Bible, in the book of Judges, Chapter 11, but is retold from the daughter's perspective by Tennyson, which is possibly Elizabeth's source of inspiration. The Bible version, however, perhaps conveys the essence of the emotion felt in Elizabeth's drawings rather better than the poem, as Tennyson omits much of the narrative. Having won an important battle, Jephthah offered the first item from his house to be burned as an offering of thanks for the victory. When his only daughter rushed out to greet him, he was duty bound to fulfil his promise.

Elizabeth's series of seven studies (Figs. A.25-31) show how she worked through an idea in her attempts to find the perfect composition to narrate the tension between the pair. A wide range of emotions is clearly visible on Jephthah's face in the various drawings, yet his daughter remains calmly accepting of her fate. The daughter is the subject of the narrative, and therefore of Elizabeth's sketches, but she is not empowered to change her destiny. She must assume the submissive role and allow her father to honour his promise to God.



In *The Macbeths* (Fig. A.57), Elizabeth has perhaps depicted the ultimate empowerment of woman. This drawing is inspired by Act II, scene II, of Shakespeare's famous play. Macbeth has just returned from murdering King Duncan with 'his arms bathed in blood and with two daggers clasped in his left hand'.<sup>19</sup> Lady Macbeth, greeted by his pitiful whining, assumes control of the situation by taking the daggers and despatching her pathetic husband to wash the blood from his hands. She subsequently smears blood on the faces of his grooms to incriminate them.<sup>20</sup>

This is the only known Shakespearean theme Elizabeth tackled. Marsh comments that it is 'remarkable for the violent connotations of the scene depicted', however she does not discuss Elizabeth's choice of scene.<sup>21</sup> Here the male/female relationship has been turned on its head. Macbeth, at this precise moment in time, is an agitated and feeble wreck of a man. The deadly deed is accomplished, yet he seems incapable of movement. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, shows her strength of character in dealing with both her whimpering husband and the severity of the situation. She is in control of both her own destiny and that of her husband.

Gabriel subsequently depicted *The Death of Lady Macbeth* (c.1875-6, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), a scene in the final act of the play which happens off-stage. This appears to be the antithesis of Elizabeth's depiction of Lady Macbeth as a strong woman. Gabriel has chosen instead to present her at her weakest moment; the moment she has decided to end her life because she could take no more of the pressures of guilt from her actions. It is interesting to

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<sup>19</sup> Macbeth, Act II, Scene II, stage direction following line 13.

<sup>20</sup> Macbeth, Act II, Scene II, lines 35-56

<sup>21</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 73, Item 51.

note that this drawing was made after Gabriel's own mental breakdown and attempted suicide in 1872. Possibly his own guilt following Elizabeth's death influenced his choice of subject.

As well as taking most of her inspiration from literature, there is further evidence that also suggests Elizabeth observed and represented 'nature', or life around her. The figures she depicts are often the same figure types - self-portraits of herself and Gabriel (see collage Fig. 32). This may be because she did not have access to or feel comfortable using other models. Conversely, during the early days of Pre-Raphaelitism it was natural for artists to include family, friends and fellow artists as models for the many different roles they required. Millais, for example, used both parents and colleagues in *Isabella* (1849, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) while Gabriel persuaded his mother and sister to sit for *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9, Tate Gallery, London). Therefore, it seems more likely that Elizabeth was simply following Pre-Raphaelite convention in her choice of models.

Elizabeth also made a couple of more detailed figure studies from life. These are known only from the photographs held in the Ashmolean Museum collection, but they do provide an insight into her willingness to learn and practice her technical skills. The model for the drawing known as *Seated Woman with Child* (Fig. A.81) is suggested to be one of Elizabeth's sisters, probably Ann, who was already married with children when Elizabeth was working as an artist. Lewis and Lasner propose that *Woman in Armchair, Reading* (Fig. A.110) is a self-portrait,<sup>22</sup> yet it could equally be another sister, perhaps Lydia, who was Elizabeth's frequent companion. She also produced

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis and Lasner, *Poems and Drawings*, Plate 15.

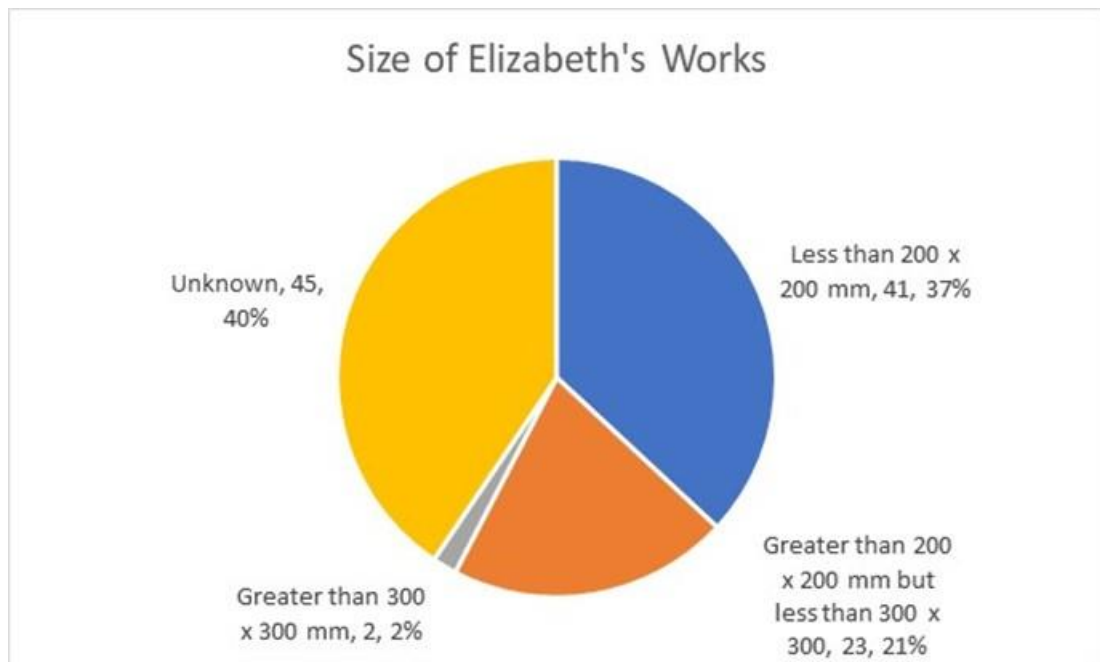
one drawing of an unrecognisable landscape, also known only from a photograph (Fig. A.49), which may be related to Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* since it depicts a castle and a landing stage. However, almost three-quarters of her known oeuvre depicts illustrations from works of literature, with a large proportion of these (equating to half her total output) being poetry. This interesting statistic immediately demands further attention and suggests that book illustration may have been a target market for her work.

### **Book Illustration**

The possibility that Elizabeth's work was aimed at the growing market for book illustration is reflected in both the subject and size of her work. While the size of a large number of her drawings is unknown, where the dimensions are known the majority are less than 200 x 200 mm, and virtually all are less than 300 x 300 mm. This 300 mm maximum is critical as a guideline, since even the largest of Gabriel's drawings for book illustrations falls within this tolerance, and many are much smaller.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For example: *St Cecilia* design for Moxon's Tennyson (1856-7, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Fig. 67 right) is 82 x 99 mm; *The Prince's Progress* compositional study for the title page (1865, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Fig. 96 top right) is 111 x 163 mm.



**Chart 4:** Size of Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti's Works.

In the mid-nineteenth century the most widely used method for illustrating books was wood engraving, made popular by the Dalziel brothers. Boxwood was the preferred choice of the engravers since the wood was close-grained and thus suitable for cutting the blocks in fine detail.<sup>24</sup> Designs were small so that they could be accommodated by the limited diameter of the box wood.<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth's small drawings have often been attributed to her lack of funds or to her gender, since it was considered 'indecorous' for a woman to 'draw attention to herself in any public sphere'.<sup>26</sup> A female artist would therefore be accused of challenging this convention by creating a large canvas and exhibiting it in public.

A more plausible reason for the size of Elizabeth's drawings is that she was targeting the flourishing book illustration market, which is also substantiated by her choice of subjects. During the time she was active as an artist many of her associates in the Pre-Raphaelite circle were involved in book illustration, with

<sup>24</sup> Morna Daniels, *Victorian Book Illustration* (London: The British Library, 1988), 7.

<sup>25</sup> Daniels, *Victorian Book Illustration*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women's Press, 1987), 69.

Millais being the most prolific, contributing to twelve publications between 1852 and 1861.<sup>27</sup> Gabriel himself had provided illustrations for Allingham's *The Music Master*, published in 1855. This provides a contemporary source which may have inspired her to consider book illustration as a commercial outlet for her work.

Illustrations for poetry anthologies in the mid-nineteenth century often consisted of one illustration on the left-hand page which faced the title and first stanza(s) of the poem. Alternatively, the illustration was placed above the title and verse on the right-hand page (see Fig. 33). As Clarissa Campbell Orr suggests, illustrating books was 'an area in which women amateurs made a distinct contribution throughout the nineteenth century'.<sup>28</sup> Thus Elizabeth may have felt comfortable with this genre as an area to explore with her career as an artist. Book illustration certainly appears to have been key in one of her designs for *St Agnes' Eve* (Fig. 34), which shows the pencil tracings of an accurately measured rectangle protruding from beneath the ink outline. Such attention to detail demonstrates her awareness of the size requirements for book illustration and her eagerness to present work suitable for publication.

As previously discussed, analysis has shown that many of Elizabeth's drawings are illustrations taken from works of literature, with the poetry of Tennyson and Walter Scott being the most popular. Subjects from the Bible also figure significantly, which although not strictly literature, was an acceptable written source for Pre-Raphaelite illustration.<sup>29</sup> In addition, there was a market for

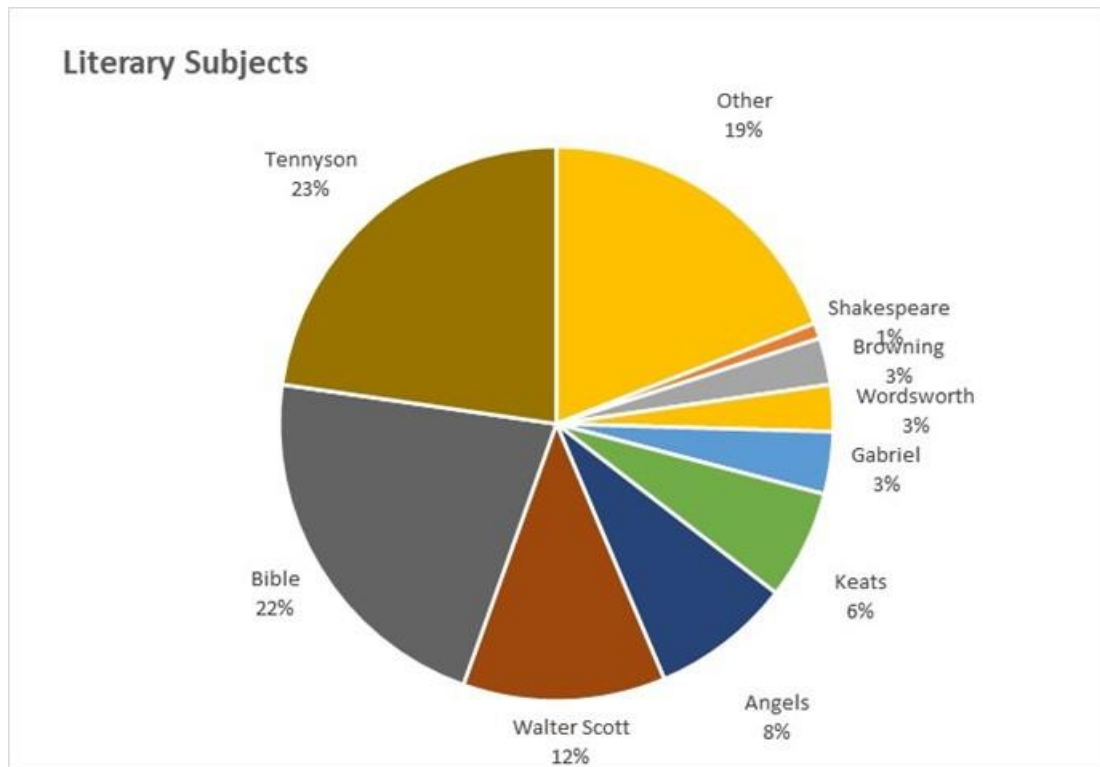
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<sup>27</sup> Paul Goldman, *Victorian Illustration* (London and Burlington, Vermont, USA: Lund Humphries, 2004 [1996]), 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> Francina Irwin, "Amusement or instruction? Watercolour manuals and the woman amateur," in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 159.

<sup>29</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, I, 159.

religious images as Victorian children were taught about God in Sunday School with illustrated copies of the Bible.<sup>30</sup> Drawings where the subject is unidentified may also have been intended as preliminary ideas for literary illustration. For example, the subject of angels, which Elizabeth revisited on many occasions, may also have literary origins.



**Chart 5:** *Literary Subjects in Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti's Works.*

In total, more than three-quarters of Elizabeth's known subjects were taken from published literary works, and of those, many designs were for planned volumes of poetry. Elizabeth is known to have produced drawings for two specific projected publications.<sup>31</sup> The first was an anthology of traditional Scottish ballads to be edited by William Allingham, with illustrations to be provided by both Elizabeth and Gabriel. Although there was much discussion and planning for this volume, unfortunately it did not materialise.

<sup>30</sup> Daniels, *Victorian Book Illustration*, 26

<sup>31</sup> There were also plans for Elizabeth to illustrate a volume of Christina's poetry: see Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 332 (item 54.28).

Evidence of Elizabeth's work on Allingham's proposed volume can be found in Gabriel's correspondence, with further validation in her prepared drawings. On 7 May 1854 Gabriel wrote to Allingham that 'Miss Siddal has made a sketch from Clerk Saunders which promises to be beautiful when drawn on the wood'.<sup>32</sup> Her work obviously progressed well and a couple of weeks later he updated Allingham: 'I have no doubt when I come to town I shall bring with me a wood block which she has begun beautifully'.<sup>33</sup> Gabriel then confirms both the proposed volume and the completion of Elizabeth's drawing in a letter to Ford Madox Brown on 23 May:

I think I told you that she and I are going to illustrate the old Scottish ballads which Allingham is editing for Routledge. She has just done her first block (from Clerk Saunders) and it is lovely.<sup>34</sup>

*Clerk Saunders* was one of the ballads taken from Walter Scott's *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, which was popular with members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Elizabeth is known to have owned two volumes of the series; her copies of Volumes III and IV (published 1807) are preserved in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. It is not known whether she also owned Volumes I and II, but it is indeed possible as *Sir Patrick Spens*, the subject of one of her watercolours, appears in one of these earlier volumes. The extant copies of these pocket-sized books, measuring just 17.5 x 11 cm, bear an inscription on the first title page in Elizabeth's own hand. Using black-ink she has claimed ownership by writing 'Eliz<sup>th</sup>. E. Siddal' (with a single 'L') in the top right-hand corner of the first leaf.<sup>35</sup> On the inside of the front cover is a label confirming

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<sup>32</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 344, (item 54.42).

<sup>33</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 352, (item 54.48).

<sup>34</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 354, (item 54.49).

<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, photographs were not permitted of the inscription or annotations.

that these two volumes were presented to the museum by Charles Fairfax Murray in October 1917.

Volume III is of particular interest as it contains three of the poems Elizabeth is known to have worked on for Allingham's intended anthology. The contents page of Volume III is annotated with pencil marks, which Marsh suggests 'were projected as illustrations for the book of border ballads to be edited by Allingham'. These pencil marks are noted against seventeen of the ballads. If Marsh is correct, it is curious that *The Gay Goss-Hawk* was not marked with a pencil annotation and yet was illustrated by Elizabeth. *Clerk Saunders* and *The Lass of Lochroyan* were both annotated and illustrated. The illustrations for the remainder of the annotations do not appear to have been begun.

The annotations are in the form of a horizontal line at the beginning of the title. The marks appear to have been made hurriedly and are scruffy, not with the care I would have expected Elizabeth to have taken in a treasured volume. It seems more likely that the marks may have been made by Gabriel or Allingham himself, if indeed they were the ballads intended for publication. There are no further annotations in either volume. The pages containing the ballads remain clean, including both those ballads Elizabeth illustrated and those that are annotated in the contents. Volume IV, however, is little used, despite the same inscription on the title page. Many sets of pages have not even been opened. Pages 41-48 and 49-56 for example are uncut and still joined at the top edge. No annotations are present on the contents page. Since the planned anthology did not reach publication, it is impossible to verify the reason for the annotations in volume III or the hand that inscribed them.



The titles of the ballads Elizabeth illustrated from the *Minstrelsy* differ slightly from those subsequently used by Gabriel and William for her drawings. For consistency I will refer to the works by Scott's original titles. The ballads Elizabeth illustrated, *The Gay Goss-Hawk*; *The Lass of Lochroyan*; *Clerk Saunders* and *Sir Patrick Spens* are all discussed in Chapter 7.

The second volume for which Elizabeth produced illustrations was the Moxon edition of Tennyson's collected poems. Tennyson, as can be seen from the chart, was perhaps Elizabeth's favourite choice for illustration. Her love of Tennyson's poetry is supposed to have originated at an early age. William Michael recounts the story of her first encounter with the poet's work on the first page of his previously mentioned article in the *Burlington Magazine*:

Almost the only anecdote that I have heard of Elizabeth's early life, before she came into my circle, is that "she had read Tennyson, having first come to know something about him by finding one or two of his poems on a piece of paper which she brought home to her mother, wrapped round a pat of butter."<sup>36</sup>

The speech marks indicate he is quoting directly from a known source, yet he refers to the story as an 'anecdote'. This suggests that like many of the stories surrounding Elizabeth, it is nothing more than hearsay spawning yet another myth. This story has found its way into even the most scholarly of publications on Elizabeth's work, including Marsh's exhibition catalogue.<sup>37</sup>

Hearsay or not, it cannot be denied that Tennyson was an important source of inspiration for many of Elizabeth's works. She illustrated seven of his poems, thus appearing to have owned (or had unlimited access to) both volumes of

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<sup>36</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 273.

<sup>37</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 11.

*Poems* (1842 edition).<sup>38</sup> Some of Elizabeth's unidentified sketches may also have been rough drafts for Tennyson's poems, but a detailed study of the two volumes mentioned, alongside further analysis of her drawings, would be essential to identify any connection. This may be an area for future research.

Millais, Holman Hunt and Gabriel all contributed illustrations for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poetry, along with other artists who did not share Pre-Raphaelite values. Gabriel believed the wrong artists had been chosen and expressed his displeasure in a letter to Allingham on 23 January 1855:

The other day Moxon called on me wanting me to do some of the blocks for the new Tennyson. The artists already engaged are Millais, Hunt, Landseer, Stanfield, Maclise, Creswick, Mulready & Horsley. The right names would have been Millais, Hunt, Madox Brown, Hughes, a certain lady & myself. NO OTHERS.<sup>39</sup>

In a subsequent letter dated 17 March 1855, he pursued the matter further:

I wrote about it to Woolner, who has been staying for a week or two with the Tennysons, and they, hearing that several of Miss Siddal's designs were from Tennyson, and being told about Ruskin, etc., wish her exceedingly to join in the illustrated edition, and Mrs. T. Wrote immediately to Moxon about it, declaring that she had rather pay for Miss S[iddal]'s designs herself than not have them in the book.<sup>40</sup>

Although she prepared several illustrations for Tennyson's poems and gained the support of both Tennyson and his wife, unfortunately none of Elizabeth's work appeared in the Moxon publication. Gabriel's insistence and Tennyson's intervention, however, demonstrate the respect for Elizabeth's illustrative work. What was the reason for her omission? Who had the final choice of illustrators?

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<sup>38</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Poems* (London: Edward Moxon, 1842).

<sup>39</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 7, (Item 55.4).

<sup>40</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 26, (Item 55.14).

It appears that Moxon, the publisher, had the controlling hand. In *Tennyson and his Pre-Raphaelite Illustrators*, George Soames Layard suggests:

In the choice of collaborators Moxon was mainly the moving spirit, although it is more probable that, in pitching upon the three Pre-Raphaelites, Tennyson himself may have taken the initiative.

Beyond, however, suggesting their names, it would appear that there was no further action taken by him.<sup>41</sup>

Although the list of contributing artists includes many names that are now unfamiliar, such as marine artist Clarkson Frederick Stanfield, landscape painter Thomas Creswick and John Calcott Horsley, a Royal Academician who specialised in history and genre scenes, these artists were well-known during the mid-nineteenth century. Notably they are all male. Possibly Elizabeth was excluded by Moxon because she was a lesser-known artist – and female. Moxon had been publishing Tennyson's work for over twenty years, enjoying success with many volumes of poetry.<sup>42</sup> Tennyson became Poet Laureate in 1850, therefore the illustrated edition of his poetry was a high-profile publication. Moxon simply appears to have employed his business expertise by rejecting Elizabeth's work in favour of the more popular male artists.

Although the volume is now considered one of Moxon's best publications it was not an immediate business success. The book was expensive at 'one and a half guineas', far more than the usual 'five or six shillings' normally paid.<sup>43</sup> The artistic styles within the illustrations are inconsistent and the friction between those styles is visible. Would sales have increased significantly if Gabriel's choice of illustrators had been taken up by Moxon? Would Elizabeth now be

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<sup>41</sup> George Soames Layard, *Tennyson and his Pre-Raphaelite Illustrators* (London: Elliot Stock, 1894), 4-5.

<sup>42</sup> June Steffenson Hagen, "Tennyson's Troubled Years with Moxon & Co.: A Publishing Relationship," *Browning Institute Studies* Vol. 7 (1979): 22.

<sup>43</sup> Hagen, "Tennyson's Troubled Years," 23.

recognised as a significant artist if her work had been included? Would the volume still have been considered a Victorian classic? We can only speculate.

Despite her lack of publication, Elizabeth appears to have been a pioneer in Pre-Raphaelite book illustration. In the years following her death many members of the circle, including Arthur Hughes and Frederick Sandys, as well as Millais, Holman Hunt and Gabriel himself, prepared drawings to illustrate literary publications. It seems that as illustrated volumes became more popular, Elizabeth was inspired to take up her pencil and sketched out her rough ideas with the aim of having her work published.

### **Conclusion**

What then did Elizabeth leave us to consider as her oeuvre? The projected volume of ballads did not materialise, and the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems did not include any of Elizabeth's drawings, so we will never know how successful she might have been as a book illustrator. Unlike many of her fellow Pre-Raphaelite artists she completed very little (if anything) in oils, the most enduring medium for preserving artworks over time. Her oeuvre consists primarily of sketches, known more from photographs of photographs than being viewed in person. Her extant works are more often held in private collections and therefore unavailable for public viewing. Those in gallery collections are sequestered away in archives to protect the delicate drawings on paper from light damage, only viewable by prior appointment. Her oeuvre is not to be found in the printed volumes of library shelves, the permanent displays on gallery walls, or even on the virtual gallery of the internet. Elizabeth's artistic legacy, therefore, appears not to take on a physical form, but rather to emerge from her designs, her rough sketches, in essence - her ideas. The very same ideas that

Gabriel thought important enough to document for posterity by having them photographed. It is Elizabeth's original *ideas* that form her oeuvre, and thus her legacy. Ideas that were subsequently 'plagiarised' by her male colleagues; ideas that were critical to the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art. In the remaining chapters of my thesis, I will explore some of Elizabeth's work in detail to examine how her ideas were exploited by Gabriel and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle.

## Chapter 4 – The Untutored Imagination

### Introduction

As mentioned in my introduction, Elizabeth's work has often been dismissed as derivative and a poor imitation of the great work of Gabriel. Yet during her lifetime Elizabeth's aptitude for original design and use of colour was admired by her contemporaries. Gabriel, Ruskin and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle were entranced by the qualities encapsulated in her work. How can we evaluate those qualities? In this chapter I will look in detail at two of Elizabeth's early works, her drawing of *The Lady of Shalott* and her *Self-Portrait*, to analyse the qualities in terms of the critique of Gabriel's brother William and John Ruskin. I will demonstrate that the characteristics of her work that were so often criticised, namely the power of her imagination, her naïve style and lack of artistic training, proved to be the most envied of her skills. In Chapters 6 and 7 this will be expanded to show that many of her designs were so admired they were subsequently 'borrowed' by Gabriel and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle.

### Ruskin's 'Genius'

Among those who most admired Elizabeth's work was leading art critic Ruskin. Gabriel introduced him to Elizabeth in April 1855, and he immediately offered to buy everything she had produced to date for the negotiated sum of £30.<sup>1</sup> Ruskin then proposed two further options of patronage for her consideration. The first was to buy each piece of work as she produced it, and the second:

‘that he should settle on her £150 a year forthwith, and that then she should send him all she did – he to sell them at a higher

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<sup>1</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 283.

price (if possible) to her advantage, and if not, to keep them himself at the above yearly rate'.<sup>2</sup>

With Gabriel's persuasion the second option was chosen, offering Elizabeth the financial security she needed to work as an artist. But why should Ruskin make such a tempting offer?

Many have seen Ruskin's patronage of Elizabeth as an act of 'philanthropic concern', or a hook to snare the bigger prey, Gabriel himself.<sup>3</sup> Cherry proposes that Ruskin's offer was not the only act of philanthropy extended towards Elizabeth, suggesting it was also the reason behind artist and feminist Barbara Bodichon's and poet Bessie Parkes's friendship.<sup>4</sup> In a letter of 1854, Bodichon wrote to Parkes that she too believed Elizabeth was 'a genius and will, if she lives, be a great artist'.<sup>5</sup> This is immediately qualified by the revelation that her life was 'full of trials, her home unhappy and her whole fate hard'.<sup>6</sup> Thus by befriending her, and by helping her to achieve her maximum potential under such trying circumstances, they were seen as helping the poor, unfortunate girl.

Conversely, Ruskin's patronage may have been through genuine admiration of her work. Writing to his friend, Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, Ruskin said:

These geniuses are all alike, little and big – I have known five of them – Turner, Watts, Millais, Rossetti – and this girl – and I don't know which was, or which is, the wrongheadedest.<sup>7</sup>

By calling her a 'genius' here, Ruskin is effectively placing Elizabeth on an equal level with the four male counterparts he names. In theory this should

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<sup>2</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 25-6, (item 55.14).

<sup>3</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 161.

<sup>4</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 161.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Barbara Leigh Smith to Bessie Rayner Parkes, May 1854, Library and Archive Collection, Girton College, Cambridge, BRP V/172. Cited in Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement* (London: Virago Press, 1989), 66.

<sup>6</sup> BRP V/172 in Marsh and Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement*, 66.

<sup>7</sup> Atlay, *Sir Henry Wentworth Acland*, 228.

have guaranteed her success as an artist. However, the history of art, like history in general, is *his* story, not hers. As discussed previously, Gabriel is traditionally heralded as the creator, the inventor, while Elizabeth is inevitably the imitator. Despite this, the underlying significance is that both Ruskin and Bodichon believed there was a special quality about Elizabeth's art that set it apart. Both used the same word to describe her: 'genius'.

The gendering of 'genius' is as old as history itself. It is upheld as a characteristic solely applicable to the human male. Feminist Christine Battersby takes the discussion back to Aristotle, who identifies women as simply the provider of 'the soil, the container and the environmental conditions' in which the male seed can produce fruit,<sup>8</sup> or, in Griselda Pollock's words, 'Men create art; women merely have babies'.<sup>9</sup> Pollock amplifies this in the context of 'genius', misquoting from Octave Uzanne's *The Modern Parisienne* and losing some of the critical emphasis. Pollock quotes: 'The woman of genius does not exist; when she does she is a man'.<sup>10</sup> The correct citation reads 'The woman of genius not only does not exist; but *when she does she is a man*'.<sup>11</sup> The omitted words and italics would have strengthened Pollock's argument that tradition maintained female artists 'were not historically significant ... because they did not have the innate nugget of genius (the phallus) which is the natural property of men'.<sup>12</sup> Battersby offers a similar quotation but from a different source, Cesare Lombroso's *The Man of Genius*: 'there are no women of genius; the

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<sup>8</sup> Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1994 [1989]), 41.

<sup>9</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Vision, Voice and Power: Feminist Art Histories and Marxism," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010 [1982]), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Pollock, "Vision, Voice and Power," 30.

<sup>11</sup> Octave Uzanne, *The Modern Parisienne* (London: William Heineman, 1912), ix.

<sup>12</sup> Pollock, "Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art," 2.



women of genius are men'.<sup>13</sup> Replication of the identical view shows that during the latter part of the nineteenth century 'genius' remained an essentially male characteristic, thereby increasing the significance of Ruskin's comments.

In opposition, however, Marsh and Nunn claim that Ruskin 'saw the artist as having a special innate quality (whether or not it be called genius) which he neither envisaged women as possessing nor encouraged women to cultivate'.<sup>14</sup>

This is not unusual since Ruskin himself admitted being prone to self-contradiction.<sup>15</sup> Yet Elizabeth was not the only female artist to benefit from Ruskin's guiding hand. He offered support to several other aspiring women artists who achieved varying degrees of success. Ruskin had a seven-year long correspondence with Anna Blunden, advising her to abandon figure painting and turn to landscapes, and he communicated with Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford.<sup>16</sup> He was so harsh in his criticism of Anna Mary Howitt's painting *Boadicea Brooding over her Wrongs*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856, that she gave up painting completely and turned to spiritualism.<sup>17</sup> Despite these many associations, Ruskin did not offer financial incentives to Elizabeth's contemporaries; he merely offered advice. Elizabeth was unique in receiving this level of patronage. This offers further evidence that Ruskin saw something special in her work that he felt was worthy of investment.

It must be noted, however, that during the 1880s Ruskin patronised another female artist financially by purchasing the manuscript of *Tuscan Songs* from

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<sup>13</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *The Man of Genius* trans. from revised ed., (London: Scott, 1891 [1863]), 138, cited in Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Bob Blaisdell, *John Ruskin: On Genius* (London: Hesperus Press, 2011), 97.

<sup>16</sup> See Virginia Surtees, *Sublime & instructive: letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton* (London: Joseph, 1972).

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Howitt, *Margaret Howitt* (London: Isbister and Company, 1889), 231.

author and illustrator Francesca Alexander. However, as Jessica Feldman confirms, Ruskin 'edited it with a heavy hand – even brutally to feminist eyes over a century later'.<sup>18</sup> Even with this purchase he merely describes Alexander as 'a girl of quite peculiar gift'; she is not classified as a genius.<sup>19</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Ruskin attempted to edit any of Elizabeth's work; William assumed that responsibility as part of his role as family archivist.

Conversely, not all Elizabeth's associates believed she was a genius. Anna Mary Howitt's mother disagreed with Ruskin and Bodichon. She stated her own opinion clearly: 'I could never believe she possessed the artistic genius he ascribed to her, for what she produced had no originality in it'.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this was an act of jealous revenge for Ruskin's treatment of her daughter, or maybe she was simply biased in favouring Anna Mary's work.

What did Ruskin mean by using the term 'genius' to describe Elizabeth? In *Modern Painters* Vol. I, originally published in 1843 and therefore available to Elizabeth and Gabriel, he defines great art as that 'which conveys to the mind of the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas'.<sup>21</sup> Consequently a great artist is one 'who has embodied, in the sum of his works, the greatest number of the greatest ideas'.<sup>22</sup> To clarify, Ruskin identifies the exact kind of ideas he is referring to:

- I. Ideas of Power. – The perception or conception of the mental or bodily ideas by which the work has been produced.

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<sup>18</sup> Jessica R. Feldman, *Victorian Modernism: Pragmatism and the Varieties of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 44.

<sup>19</sup> Feldman, *Victorian Modernism*, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Howitt, Margaret Howitt, 340.

<sup>21</sup> E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, ed., *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (Library Edition), 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903–12), III, 92.

<sup>22</sup> Cook and Wedderburn, *Complete Works*, III, 92.

- II. Ideas of Imitation. – The perception that the thing produced resembles something else.
- III. Ideas of Truth. – The perception of faithfulness in a statement of facts by the thing produced.
- IV. Ideas of Beauty. – The perception of beauty, either in the thing produced, or in what it suggests or resembles.
- V. Ideas of Relation. – The perception of intellectual relations, in the thing produced, or in what it suggests or resembles.<sup>23</sup>

While the language is Victorian, these definitions are clear and concise, and perhaps hold the key to understanding Ruskin's use of the term 'genius'. The repetition of 'perception' in defining each 'idea' emphasises its importance. Referring to the artist as creator, Ruskin therefore sees the ability to generate these great 'ideas' as innate. 'Genius' is embodied deep within the artist. 'Perception' equates to the artist's ability to create something with thought, originality, imagination and truth. Elizabeth's designs certainly meet these criteria. Could Ruskin have judged Elizabeth's work according to these standards?

Despite the Pre-Raphaelites disparaging attitude towards Sir Joshua Reynolds and his work, his definition of 'genius' pre-empts Ruskin's own words and demonstrates a strong correlation with Pre-Raphaelite ideology:

Genius is supposed to be a power of producing excellences which are out of the reach of the rules of art, - a power which no precepts can teach, and which no industry can acquire.<sup>24</sup>

Holman Hunt reminisces that 'the first principle of Pre-Raphaelitism was to eschew all that was conventional in contemporary art', thus rejecting Reynolds's

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<sup>23</sup> Cook and Wedderburn, *Complete Works*, III, 93.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Gilpin Johnson, *Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1891), 147.

legacy in the form of the Royal Academy, its method of tuition, and all the rules associated with it.<sup>25</sup> Yet Reynolds's above definition of 'genius', although written almost a century before, seems to anticipate the aims of the Brotherhood and can be directly applied to Elizabeth. Her natural ability and untutored imagination potentially hold the key to understanding why Ruskin, Gabriel and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle found her work so inspiring.

Reynolds also claimed that 'Invention is one of the great marks of genius'.<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth's powers of invention were noted by Gabriel's brother William, who wrote:

She had much facility of invention and composition, with eminent purity of feeling, dignified simplicity, and grace; little mastery of form, whether in the human figure or in drapery and other materials; a right intention in colouring, though neither rich nor deep.<sup>27</sup>

It may be tempting to read these comments from the traditional Victorian patriarchal standpoint by adding the unwritten suffix 'for a woman' after each phrase, as suggested by art historian Colin Cruise as recently as 2011. Quoting from another passage written by William, he explains '[t]he subtext here is that she was overrated at a time when her talents represented, for her friends, an alternative to conventional art'.<sup>28</sup> Cruise's quotation reads:

As to the quality of her work, it may be admitted at once that she never attained to anything like masterliness ... in those early "Praeraphaelite" [sic] days, and in the Praeraphaelite

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<sup>25</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, 125.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses*, 151.

<sup>27</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 278.

<sup>28</sup> Colin Cruise, *Pre-Raphaelite Drawing* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), 138.

environment, which was small, and ringed round by hostile forces, things were estimated differently.<sup>29</sup>

When the full extract is examined, it is clear that Cruise has omitted the true context in which the comments were made (Cruise's omissions in italics):

As to the quality of her work, it may be admitted at once that she never attained to anything like masterliness - *her portrait shows more competence than other productions; and in the present day, when vigorous brush-work and calculated "values" are more thought of than inventiveness or sentiment, her performances would secure little beyond a sneer first, a glance afterwards, and a silent passing by. But in those early "Praeraphaelite" [sic] days, and in the Praeraphaelite environment, which was small, and ringed round by hostile forces, things were estimated differently.*<sup>30</sup>

William's article was written in 1903, some fifty years after the events he was describing, thus he looked back from a different cultural and historical standpoint. Reading the full extract suggests a different 'subtext'; one in which William believes that during the height of the early Pre-Raphaelite circle Elizabeth's work was admired in the context in which it was received. Something in the drawings she produced from her untutored imagination captured the attention of her male contemporaries and stimulated their own artistic production. Cruise therefore appears to have manipulated William's words to substantiate the continuation of the patriarchal argument.

There is a further piece of neglected evidence which supports this feminist reading of William's words. After his marriage to Brown's daughter Lucy in 1874, William became a supporter of Women's Suffrage.<sup>31</sup> As well as addressing an important women's meeting, he participated in the Women's

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<sup>29</sup> Cruise, *Pre-Raphaelite Drawing*, 138.

<sup>30</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 278.

<sup>31</sup> Angela Thirlwell, *William and Lucy: The Other Rossettis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 239.

Rights demonstration in May 1880.<sup>32</sup> In May 1909 he donated three collotypes of Elizabeth's drawings to the book stall of the Women's Social and Political Union.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, viewed from a feminist perspective, William's praise should be taken at face value. He recognised certain special qualities in Elizabeth's work. These qualities would subsequently be exploited by Gabriel and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, as will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. William also mentions the technical shortcomings found in Elizabeth's work. As well as the 'little mastery of form', he also suggests 'Her designs resembled those of Dante Rossetti at the same date: he had his defects, and she had the deficiencies of those defects'.<sup>34</sup> Julian Treuherz elaborates, identifying Gabriel's 'defects' as his impatience, his 'lack of drawing skills' and his less than perfect 'grasp of anatomy and perspective' due to an incomplete art education.<sup>35</sup> True, many of these characteristics are visible in Elizabeth's work, but Gabriel would not have viewed them negatively.

William's words actually echo those of his brother written nearly fifty years earlier in a letter to Brown: 'Her power of designing even increases greatly, and her fecundity of invention and facility are quite wonderful, much greater than mine'.<sup>36</sup> The use of the term 'facility' in both cases is noteworthy. Battersby identifies both 'ease' and 'facility' as qualities necessary to become a great artist. 'Facility' thus defines the difference between art and craft; the effortless ease with which the artist is able to produce his masterpiece as opposed to the blood, sweat and tears of the craftsman. Elizabeth is credited with 'facility',

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<sup>32</sup> Thirlwell, *William and Lucy*, 239.

<sup>33</sup> Sold at Bloomsbury Auctions November 2012. Inscribed on the reverse 'Presented by Wm. M Rossetti for the Book Stall of the Women's Social and Political Union, May 1909'. See Figs. A.62, A.99 and A.108.

<sup>34</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 278.

<sup>35</sup> *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Treuherz, Prettejohn and Becker, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 354 (item 54.49).

suggesting that she executed her designs with the confident strokes of someone in control of both her ideas and her drawing implements.

From my analysis in this and previous chapters it is possible to identify that the qualities in Elizabeth's work which were most admired by her contemporaries are:

- Her use of colour
- Her poetic compositions
- Her originality and invention
- Her natural, untutored ability

It is difficult to further analyse Elizabeth's skill with colour since most of her watercolours are now unlocated or privately owned. The selection in public galleries is not representative of her oeuvre and cannot be brought together for comparison. I will examine the characteristics of her compositions in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, but two areas warrant further discussion here. To understand the significance of the originality and inventiveness of her designs and her natural ability as an artist I will analyse two of Elizabeth's works which I feel exemplify these characteristics: *The Lady of Shalott* and her *Self-Portrait*.

### ***The Lady of Shalott: 'much facility of invention'***

One reason for the appeal of Elizabeth's work to Gabriel, Ruskin and other contemporaries can be linked to her powers of invention, including the fresh and original motifs she incorporated into her drawings. As mentioned earlier, William acknowledged that her work possessed 'much facility of invention'.<sup>37</sup> I will now focus on Elizabeth's innovation, analysing the original motifs found in her drawing of *The Lady of Shalott* (Fig. 35). Many previous interpretations

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<sup>37</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 278.

have been placed upon this specific work; it is therefore pertinent to set the art-historical scene before providing my own original analysis.

*The Lady of Shalott* is one of Elizabeth's best-known drawings. Illustrating Tennyson's poem of the same name, the image is widely available on the internet and can even be purchased as a reproduction.<sup>38</sup> The poem tells of a mysterious Lady, isolated in a tower, whose existence centres around weaving a tapestry depicting the world reflected in her mirror. She has heard that looking out of the window towards Camelot will invoke an unknown curse.<sup>39</sup> Gallant Sir Lancelot rides by, and the sound of his singing overwhelms the Lady, who turns to view him with her own eyes. Ignorant of her fate, she takes a boat and floats down the river to Camelot and her death.<sup>40</sup>

Elizabeth's drawing, however, is not a straightforward representation of Tennyson's words. Its detail and refinement as a drawing has ensured its inclusion in recent scholarship on the illustrations of Tennyson's poetry, and more recently in feminist art historical discourse. Interpretation of Elizabeth's depiction is both problematic and varied. Reading the poem alongside the drawing allows the viewer to identify where Elizabeth has followed Tennyson's words implicitly, and where she has diverged.

In the first two stanzas Tennyson sets the scene and locates Shalott as an island in the river, with the Lady imprisoned in a four-towered building on the island. Looking through the window in Elizabeth's depiction suggests the viewer's position is elevated, commensurate with being in a tower, yet the

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<sup>38</sup> See for example <https://www.1st-art-gallery.com/Elizabeth-Eleanor-Siddal-2/The-Lady-Of-Shalott.html> accessed Mar 5, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott" (1942 version) in Arthur Quiller-Couch (Ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (New Edition) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953 [1939]), 839-844.

<sup>40</sup> Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," 839-844.



window appears to look out on the river from a distance rather than an island surrounded by water. Tennyson mentions 'willows and aspens' (line 10) which could be identified as the line of trees flanking the riverbank in the drawing. A further large tree is positioned to the left-hand side of the window. The remaining two stanzas in Part I of the poem describe how daily life goes on outside the tower with scarcely anyone being aware of the Lady's existence. Here Elizabeth has included barges and boats on the river to echo Tennyson's words. This brief analysis of the first four stanzas demonstrates that although Elizabeth has taken the essence of Tennyson's poem as the basis for her drawing, she has not felt constricted by his words.

This flexible representation continues throughout her drawing. Part II of the poem describes how the Lady must weave images of the world she sees reflected in her mirror. Tennyson describes all those who pass by in detail, and Elizabeth appears to have incorporated many of these figures into the completed tapestry hung on the back wall of her room. Above the Lady's left shoulder two figures appear to be in an intimate conversation; these may represent the 'two young lovers lately wed' (line 70). Behind them stands a horse with his dismounted rider and above her right shoulder are a group of three figures, perhaps the knights and damsels mentioned in the third stanza. Unlike many of the other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle who also illustrated *The Lady of Shalott*, Elizabeth depicts an upright weaving loom rather than an embroidery frame. The shuttles containing the yarn for weaving are visible in her hands. She has followed Tennyson's words implicitly here as true tapestry is a woven cloth and not hand embroidered as often thought.

The third part of the poem is overflowing with rich detail about Sir Lancelot as he rides by on his way to Camelot. From the height of the tower window in Elizabeth's drawing the image reflected in the mirror is an impossibility but fits the narrative. Sir Lancelot's reflection confirms him as the archetypal knight in shining armour; his helmet and plume as described by Tennyson are clearly visible in Elizabeth's drawing. He carries a shield and a pennant, the former mentioned in the poem, the latter omitted, but this may be Elizabeth's interpretation of 'a red-cross knight' (line 60). The form of Sir Lancelot reflected in the mirror clearly illustrates Tennyson's words 'He flash'd into the crystal mirror' (line 106), while her treatment of the classic line 'The mirror crack'd from side to side' (line 115) is not literal. Her placement of the cracks in the circular mirror carefully avoids shattering the image of Sir Lancelot and highlights him instead.

From this point Elizabeth's drawing and Tennyson's poem diverge. While Tennyson concludes the story of the Lady, who realising she is now cursed, takes a boat down the river to Camelot and her death, Elizabeth's narrative stops at the specific instant when the Lady turns her head to look out of the window. It is Elizabeth's decision to capture this precise moment – the moment of 'the look' – that has generated the most interest. Cherry subtiles her section on Elizabeth 'Woman in the Relay of the Gaze', since she 'persistently addressed the look of women'.<sup>41</sup> For Cherry, Elizabeth's Lady is not just the object being seen, but also the subject permitted to look for herself. This is often viewed biographically in terms of Elizabeth's transition from model to artist, or as 'illustrations to the story of her life and love'.<sup>42</sup> The Vasarian view

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<sup>41</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 189.

<sup>42</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 191.

that an artist's work and life were inextricably intertwined is still very much in evidence in biographical writing today. Elaine Shefer suggests 'the drawing has little to do with Tennyson's poem, but it has a great deal to do with an 18-year-old girl beginning to discover herself as an artist'.<sup>43</sup> Tim Barringer also connects this drawing with Elizabeth's life, suggesting 'the image of a skilled woman at work weaving a large and thankless textile may well have had personal resonances' of her role as a dressmaker.<sup>44</sup> Both read the drawing in terms of Elizabeth's transition from model to artist, which correlates with another popular interpretation of Tennyson's poem.

Tennyson's Lady could also be understood as representing the artist, as Stephanie Forward proposes.<sup>45</sup> She elaborates that the life of an artist can run against the current of daily life. Working alone in a studio for long periods of time waiting for the creative impulse to strike is not conducive to an active social life. Forward links this biographical detail back to Tennyson and his own life, suggesting that he 'often felt overwhelmed by his celebrity status, which impinged upon his privacy and interrupted his writing'.<sup>46</sup> Yet none of these interpretations account for Elizabeth's addition of the original symbols.

A biographical stance is also taken by Lucinda Hawksley, who reads *The Lady of Shalott* in terms of Elizabeth's relationship with Gabriel. This neatly ties in with a further theme in Tennyson's poem, that of unrequited love, which can easily be superimposed on the Elizabeth/Gabriel relationship. Gabriel appeared

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<sup>43</sup> Shefer, "Elizabeth Siddal's 'Lady of Shalott'," 26.

<sup>44</sup> Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012 [1998]), 154.

<sup>45</sup> Stephanie Forward, "An Introduction to 'The Lady of Shalott,'" *British Library*, May 15, 2014, accessed Mar 7, 2022, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-the-lady-of-shalott#>.

<sup>46</sup> Forward, "An Introduction to 'The Lady of Shalott'."

reluctant to marry Elizabeth despite frequent declarations of his intent.<sup>47</sup>

Hawksley describes the scene, including some of Elizabeth's original motifs, in narrative detail:

In Lizzie's picture, the Lady is a demure, unruffled figure in the centre of the room, yet around her all is turning to chaos. Her weaving is unravelling in thousands of broken skeins, billowing out from the loom as though blown by a hurricane; the mirror has not simply cracked from side to side but is a mass of spidery breaks, and a cupboard door has flung open wildly. All that remains calm is a crucifix by the window and the Lady herself, who wears a pained smile – it shows recognition of what she has done but also an expression of stunned happiness in the first flush of love.<sup>48</sup>

Notably Hawksley views the cupboard door as having been 'flung open wildly' rather than simply depicted as being open. She mentions the appearance of a crucifix by the window – but fails to discuss either motif further. Instead, Hawksley draws a comparison with the Lady and Elizabeth herself as being 'in the first flush of love', probably due to the drawing being dated 1853, relatively early in her relationship with Gabriel.

This relationship is also foregrounded by Christine Poulson:

If 'The Lady of Shalott' is, on an allegorical level, an exploration of the artist's relationship to society, it is equally, and more obviously, an exploration of sexual repression, longing and fear.<sup>49</sup>

Relating back to Tennyson's words 'two young lovers lately wed' (line 70) she acknowledges the biographical elements. Her language, however, is embroidered with the same skill as the Lady weaving her tapestry:

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<sup>47</sup> See for example Virginia Surtees, *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 149 (entry for 4 October 1856) and 195 (entry for 16 March 1857).

<sup>48</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 91-2.

<sup>49</sup> Christine Poulson, *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art 1840-1920* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 186.

Lancelot's sexual potency is suggested by images of meteors and fire; his blazing sexuality remains safe only so long as it is contained and controlled, kept at one remove by the mirror: the Lady's exposure to it kills her.<sup>50</sup>

While this interpretation aligns perfectly with Aiden Turner's portrayal of Gabriel in the BBC's production *Desperate Romantics*, it seems far removed from Elizabeth's actual depiction of the scene.<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth's Lady appears calm and unruffled. Neither she nor Sir Lancelot is smouldering with sexuality, a description more suited to Holman Hunt's portrayals of the scene.

A further interpretation is proposed by Barringer, suggesting that Elizabeth's drawing is a comment on the separate indoor/outdoor spheres assigned to males and females during the Victorian period.<sup>52</sup> The outside space inhabited by masculinity is represented by Sir Lancelot's reflection in the cracked mirror. He occupies the public realm outside the tower. He is active while the Lady is passive. She is only permitted to view the walls of her sparsely furnished room and is consigned to feminine domesticity. Yet as discussed, Elizabeth's Lady appears in control of her destiny. Captured at the very moment she turns to look out of the window and invoke the curse, she has actively chosen to look and therefore to accept her fate. Consequently, she cannot be construed as the passive Victorian female but is perhaps more representative of the empowered and emancipated 'New Woman'.<sup>53</sup>

While acknowledging that some of the motifs in Elizabeth's drawing are original, Cherry refutes the claim that the discrepancies between Elizabeth's drawing and Tennyson's poem are the result of her imagination:

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<sup>50</sup> Poulson, *The Quest for the Grail*, 186.

<sup>51</sup> *Desperate Romantics*, BBC2.

<sup>52</sup> Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, 154.

<sup>53</sup> See for example Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 1992).

The bird perched on top of the tapestry frame, the furniture and the crucifix are not found in the poem, nor are certain details in the poem included in the drawing. To account for these differences we need to dispense with the notion that the poem is the exclusive source for the drawing, the origin of its meaning. Nor should we propose artistic licence or imaginative interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

What I believe Cherry is inferring here is that both poem and drawing should be understood in the wider context of Victorian society, associating the Lady's moment of dissent with the wider realm of Victorian values. Elaine Shefer elaborates by suggesting 'the connection between her [the Lady's] action and The Fall was understood by the Victorian audience as an act of moral disobedience'.<sup>55</sup> It is in this context that I will examine the original motifs Elizabeth included in her drawing, which under close examination reveals an innovative richness of detail, mostly overlooked in recent scholarship.

The original motifs Elizabeth included in her drawing are the crucifix placed in front of the window, the bird perched on top of the loom holding a bunch of keys, the devil-like figure on the chair leg, the empty cupboard with the open door, and the tree by the window invading the Lady's private interior space. I will analyse each of these motifs to assess their significance to her construction of the drawing.

The crucifix does not appear in Tennyson's poem, so why did Elizabeth include it? Marsh is eager to offer a potential explanation for both the crucifix and bird:

Small and stiff as it is, the drawing shows the Lady as a calm, composed figure, not an agonized, fateful victim. Her appearance is familiar, even prosaic, set in a domestic work room that is also a place of prayer, as indicated by the crucifix

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<sup>54</sup> Deborah Cherry in *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Edited by Leslie Parris (London: Tate Gallery, 1984), Exhibition Catalogue. 266, (catalogue item 198).

<sup>55</sup> Shefer, "Elizabeth Siddal's 'Lady of Shalott'," 25.

on a low chest before the window. A songbird (a favourite pet among women in the early Victorian period) is perched on top of the loom. Neither bird nor crucifix features in the poem, but have been added by the artist as emblems of her interpretation of the Lady.<sup>56</sup>

Marsh, therefore, dismisses these motifs as the traditional accompaniments of a Victorian woman. Viewing the bird as a pet and the crucifix as signifying the Lady's acts of religious devotion, Marsh identifies Elizabeth's Lady with the stereotypical Victorian woman. In this interpretation the cupboard could therefore represent the altar on which the crucifix is placed for the Lady's devotion. However, there is one key juxtaposition here which Marsh has totally missed: the crucifix is positioned immediately in front of the forbidden window. For the Lady to kneel in front of the crucifix in devotional prayer she would unavoidably look out of the window and down the river to Camelot, thus invoking the curse. Elizabeth, therefore, has included the crucifix for another purpose.

Traditionally the depiction of a crucifix in an artwork represents Christ's self-sacrifice and death on the cross to save sinners in the Christian religion.<sup>57</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, nearly a quarter of Elizabeth's oeuvre depicts subjects from the Bible, thus attesting to her knowledge of Christian doctrine. Has she therefore invoked the traditional use of symbolism here by including the crucifix? Does her drawing indeed reflect the Victorian moral values of Christianity? If so, can the other original motifs in her drawing of *The Lady of Shalott* be viewed in a similar manner?

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<sup>56</sup> Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (London: Quartet Books, 1985), 46.

<sup>57</sup> J. Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (London: John Murray, 1974), 80.

Often cropped from reproductions, the second of Elizabeth's original motifs is a small bird perching on top of the Lady's loom. The bird is holding a large ring with two keys attached. Elizabeth depicts a similar bird in a number of compositions including *Madonna and Child with an Angel (Holy Family)*, (Fig. A.61) and *Angels with Cymbals* (Fig. A.6). In these drawings the context suggests the bird represents a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Christian religion. This symbol had previously been used by other Pre-Raphaelite artists, including Gabriel and Millais.<sup>58</sup> It is possible to extend this analogy to envisage the bird on the loom as a dove, especially when viewed together with the crucifix. This perhaps adds strength to a religious interpretation of Elizabeth's additions, but the bird does not appear to represent the Holy Spirit here.

The importance of the dove symbolism requires further analysis: 'Dove' was also one of the nicknames Gabriel used for Elizabeth. In his Valentine poem he calls her his 'dear dove divine'.<sup>59</sup> Violet Hunt goes overboard with elaborating on the significance of the dove in Elizabeth's life and death, referring to her on several occasions as the 'meek, unconscious dove'.<sup>60</sup> She also claims Gabriel was creating a new monogram for Elizabeth which included a dove. This is unsubstantiated; as previously mentioned, the monogram embossed on Elizabeth's manuscript of her poem 'O mother open the window wide' simply contains her initials 'EER' in an oval.<sup>61</sup> Gabriel often used the hieroglyph of a dove instead of her name in his letters.<sup>62</sup> Fredeman actually prints the dove

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<sup>58</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9, Tate Gallery); John Everett Millais, *Christ in the House of his Parents (The Carpenter's Shop)* (1849-50, Tate Gallery).

<sup>59</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 97 (item 56.5).

<sup>60</sup> Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, 56; 70; 96.

<sup>61</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>62</sup> Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, 114; 125.



symbol in a letter from Gabriel to William dated 12 April 1855.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Violet Hunt describes how Elizabeth had a pet dove that had escaped from its cage. The bird apparently returned exhausted on the morning of Elizabeth's death and was buried with her.<sup>64</sup> Gabriel subsequently included the image of a dove flying out of his drawing of St Cecilia for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poetry.<sup>65</sup> A dove also appears in Gabriel's painting of Elizabeth in *Beata Beatrix*, completed after her death. Conversely this reading of the bird appears to support a biographical interpretation of Elizabeth's Lady rather than a religious one. Does Elizabeth see herself as the Lady imprisoned in the tower? Or does the Lady represent the conventional domestic life of a Victorian woman, a life which may have hindered Elizabeth's ambitions as an artist?

Depicted together, however, the crucifix and the dove could also represent the attributes of St Scholastica, sister of St Benedict and considered to be the first Benedictine nun. When she died, St Benedict saw his sister's spirit departing her earthly body as a dove. If it was Elizabeth's intention to reference St Scholastica, it would emphasise the piety of her Lady. However, this interpretation becomes less plausible when the other motifs are added to the equation.

There may be a simple explanation for the presence of the keys the bird is holding in Elizabeth's drawing; they may just be the keys to the open cupboard door. Equally there is no mention in Tennyson's poem of how the Lady gains her freedom from her tower prison; the keys may provide her means of escape, brought to her by the bird flying in through the open window. However,

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<sup>63</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 31 (item 55.18).

<sup>64</sup> Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, 299; 318.

<sup>65</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Saint Cecilia*. (Fig. 67 right).

continuing with the theme of traditional religious iconography, the key ring in Elizabeth's drawing is large, and therefore in keeping with the medieval setting, and appears to hold two keys. This could be construed as the attribute of St Peter, leader of the twelve apostles. Jesus presented St Peter with two keys, one of gold and one of silver or iron, to admit the souls of the departed through the gates of Heaven or Hell.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps these represent the choices that the Lady is faced with: Heaven if she meekly weaves her tapestry; Hell if she looks out of the window. This interpretation of the keys may begin to explain a religious interpretation of the crucifix and bird, but perhaps it is further enhanced when the remaining motifs are also analysed.

The religious theme may be continued by returning to the open cupboard door. As mentioned, the crucifix stands on the cupboard, which is significant to its interpretation. After Christ's crucifixion he was laid to rest in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. However, when Mary Magdalene subsequently went to pay her respects, the stone securing the tomb entrance had been moved and the tomb was empty.<sup>67</sup> As Mary later discovered, Jesus had risen from the dead. With the placement of the crucifix on the cupboard, is it possible that Elizabeth has incorporated a representation of the empty tomb into her drawing? Another of her drawings, *The Maries at the Sepulchre* (Fig. A.64) depicts this biblical scene, so she was familiar with the narrative.

The viewer's attention is drawn to the open cupboard door by the shadow of the crucifix falling across the top of the cupboard. The crucifix itself is positioned immediately above the empty interior and the head of Jesus is also inclined towards that space. This appears to be a construct by Elizabeth, suggesting

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<sup>66</sup> Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, 184.

<sup>67</sup> The Gospel According to St John 20:1-2.

careful thought by the artist to communicate something specific to her viewers. The cupboard door does not appear to have been 'flung open wildly' as Hawksley suggests,<sup>68</sup> but carefully depicted as being open to reveal the emptiness inside. Taken alone, there appears to be little significance of the open cupboard door – but surely it would have been easier to draw a cupboard with closed doors if there was no meaning intended? Therefore, Elizabeth depicted the open door with a specific purpose in mind.

The significance of the open door and empty cupboard builds when the creature carved on the leg of the Lady's stool is taken into consideration. Rather than a plain, functional seat, Elizabeth has depicted a gargoyle-type beast with small horns, leathery wings, and a serpent-like tail on the single visible leg of the weaving stool. Forming the apex of a triangle between the crucifix and the empty cupboard, this devil-like creature may be Elizabeth's representation of Satan. This apparent juxtaposition of good and evil recalls the Biblical tale of the Garden of Eden when Satan, taking the form of a serpent, tempted Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge telling her 'your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'.<sup>69</sup> This perhaps substantiates Shefer's connection between Elizabeth's drawing and the Victorian interpretation of The Fall. The religious symbolism would have been known to a Victorian audience, but since there does not appear to be any analysis of *The Lady of Shalott* by Elizabeth's contemporaries, we can only speculate as to their understanding of the drawing.

The final original motif Elizabeth has included is the tree growing outside the window, which has begun to invade the interior space of the Lady's room. The

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<sup>68</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 92.

<sup>69</sup> Genesis 3:5.

trunk remains outside, in the exterior (male) environment of Sir Lancelot (Adam). The branches, however, infiltrate the feminine space, enticing the Lady (Eve) to partake of that which is forbidden and look out of the window.

Elizabeth's tree may represent the Tree of Knowledge from which Eve plucked and ate the forbidden fruit, with the drawing showing the whole cycle of Christianity from The Fall to the Salvation and Resurrection. But why would Elizabeth include such specific iconography in her illustration of a contemporary poem? Could it have another meaning?

It is possible that one aim of Elizabeth's composition was to construct a thought-provoking critique of Victorian society. She was clearly familiar with religious symbolism, having posed for Holman Hunt's *A converted British Family sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids* (1850, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) and *Light of the World* (1851-3, Keble College, Oxford), as well as Brown's *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* (1852-6, Tate Gallery, London). Elizabeth illustrated many Bible stories herself, and also included a depiction of the Judgment of Solomon in a stained glass window on the right-hand side of her watercolour *Lady Clare* (Fig. A.43). This inclusion of the biblical tale adds to the poignancy of her interpretation of the narrative of another of Tennyson's poems. It is reasonable, therefore, to suggest that a similar explanation can be applied to the symbolism in *The Lady of Shalott*.

Yet Elizabeth's drawing is more complex than simply adding religious iconography to Tennyson's narrative. Towards the end of 1853 when she was working on her drawing Victorian London was in a state of religious flux. Holman Hunt had recently completed *Our English Coasts (Strayed Sheep)*

(1852, Tate Gallery, London) and was preparing for his trip to the Holy Land.<sup>70</sup> According to Jason Rosenfeld, *Our English Coasts* was 'a veiled critique of the undefended state of the Channel coast' which was later renamed *Strayed Sheep* and viewed in terms of the religious dilemma of the period.<sup>71</sup> The Oxford Movement, which Elizabeth encountered for herself in 1855,<sup>72</sup> rebelled against the direction the Church of England was taking and argued for a closer adherence to the doctrine and values of Catholicism. Was Elizabeth making a comment about the religious unease of the time? William suggested that he 'never perceived her to have any religion', but the obituary in the *Sheffield Telegraph* states that her father had been a regular attendee at Queen Street Congregational Church, Sheffield.<sup>73</sup> This suggests that Elizabeth's upbringing would have included religious instruction, perhaps reinforcing the criticism of the Church of England. Her poetry implies strong religious beliefs, in particular the words of 'Life and night are falling from me' (also known as 'Lord May I Come?') express a faith in God, salvation, and the promise of Heaven.<sup>74</sup> It therefore seems entirely possible that Elizabeth, like Holman Hunt, may indeed have been commenting on the unsettling religious situation of the period.

Conversely, the original motifs Elizabeth included in her drawing may also have sexual connotations which relate to the constraints placed on women in Victorian society. In Dutch seventeenth-century genre painting a caged bird symbolised sexual desire, such as in Pieter de Hooch's *Couple with Parrot* (1668, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne). If the cage door was open and the

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<sup>70</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, I, 336; 365.

<sup>71</sup> Jason Rosenfeld in *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*. Edited by Barringer, Tim, Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith (London: Tate Gallery, 2012), Exhibition Catalogue. 99, Catalogue item 71.

<sup>72</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 51 (item 55.33).

<sup>73</sup> 'The Death of Mrs D.G. Rossetta' in Marsh, *Legend*, 157.

<sup>74</sup> Trowbridge, *My Ladys Soul*, 49-55.

bird free to escape, this alluded to a loss of virginity.<sup>75</sup> This symbolism was known to members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle as Millais demonstrated in *Waking* (1865, Perth Museum and Art Gallery). In this interpretation Elizabeth's bird is uncaged and holds the key to freedom. The open cupboard door and encroaching branches entice the Lady to reject the constraints of her virginity, surrendering herself to the approaching knight. The crucifix and devil-like creature, however, remind her of her moral duty as a Victorian woman. This too has echoes of *The Fall*, perhaps confirming Elizabeth's desire to offer a personal comment on Victorian society.

When she produced *The Lady of Shalott*, motifs like the crucifix, bird and devil-like creature were unique to Elizabeth's interpretation of the poem, so where did her ideas come from? Certain motifs may have been inspired by the much admired *The Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan van Eyck, purchased by the National Gallery in 1842. As Alison Smith explains, Holman Hunt's first design clearly 'reprises van Eyck's convex mirror', and is also likely to have been known to Elizabeth through the social gatherings of the Pre-Raphaelite circle.<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth's circular mirror appears to be what Elizabeth Prettejohn terms 'a generous imitation' of one of these works.<sup>77</sup> Alternatively she may have based her design on a mirror in Gabriel's collection.<sup>78</sup> The devil-like creature ornamenting the Lady's stool recalls the carved figures on the chair behind the Arnolfini couple. The encroaching tree branches seem to echo the vine in Gabriel's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, while the pose of Elizabeth's Lady

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<sup>75</sup> Elaine Shefer, "'The 'Bird in the Cage' in the History of Sexuality: Sir John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1 No. 3 (1991): 448.

<sup>76</sup> *Reflections: Van Eyck and the Pre-Raphaelites*. Edited by Alison Smith (London: National Gallery Publications, 2017), Exhibition Catalogue: 56.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters: The Art of Imitation from the Pre-Raphaelites to the First World War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 20-39.

<sup>78</sup> See next section 'Elizabeth's Self-Portrait' for details of Gabriel's mirrors.

resembles that of his Virgin Mary and as previously mentioned, a dove appears as the Holy Spirit in the same painting. This perhaps demonstrates Elizabeth's acute awareness of the detail in the work of other artists, not just of composition, but of motifs and their significance.

The sharing and discussing of ideas was commonplace within the Pre-Raphaelite circle, demonstrated by members making 'contributions to each other's efforts: by sitting as models, suggesting motifs [...], trading technical tips, and offering criticism of work in progress from the initial design stage to final details of execution'.<sup>79</sup> In the same way that Elizabeth may have 'borrowed' the mirror, carved creature and invading tree, it seems only natural that the dissemination of ideas should flow both ways and include other artists borrowing from her. In Holman Hunt's final illustration for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems the mirror remains, but the roundels borrowed from *The Arnolfini Portrait* are replaced by two images. To one side Holman Hunt depicts an image of God enthroned, and to the other a crucifix.<sup>80</sup> Prettejohn asks, 'Can Hunt have borrowed the idea of including a Crucifixion, in the right oval, from Elizabeth's drawing?'<sup>81</sup> Since Elizabeth was the first to include the crucifix, which is not mentioned in Tennyson's poem, into her depiction of the scene, this seems to be the only plausible explanation. Subsequently John William Waterhouse included a crucifix in the prow of the boat in his painting of 1888 (Tate Gallery, London). Would Holman Hunt and Waterhouse have included a crucifix if they had not seen it in Elizabeth's drawing? If these two artists borrowed Elizabeth's original ideas, then there is surely the possibility of further 'generous imitation' of Elizabeth's work. This aspect will be examined further in

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<sup>79</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 40

<sup>80</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 228

<sup>81</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 227.

Chapter 7, but now I will turn my attention to the second area under consideration, Elizabeth's natural ability as an artist.

**Elizabeth's Self-Portrait: 'perception of faithfulness'**

Among the few extant works by Elizabeth in colour, her *Self-Portrait*, believed to be in oils but more likely to be watercolour with gum Arabic (Fig. 36), is perhaps the most intriguing. When Gabriel went to Newcastle to visit his friend William Bell Scott during the summer of 1853 Elizabeth was permitted to work in his studio. Gabriel left for his trip during June, returning to London the Friday before 19 July.<sup>82</sup> We can therefore assume Elizabeth began working on her painting sometime during this period. By 25 August the piece was well advanced, as Gabriel wrote to Brown 'Lizzy has made a perfect wonder of her portrait, which is nearly done, and which I think we shall send to the Winter Exhibition'.<sup>83</sup> Remarkably, in two short months, Elizabeth had apparently mastered the previously untried medium of mixing pigments with oils and painting on canvas, as well as producing an accurate representation of herself. Is this another addition to the growing number of myths that surround Elizabeth? Was it possible for a complete novice to have produced a polished piece of work in such a short space of time? If indeed she did create this 'masterpiece' as described, then this is surely evidence of her possessing a natural artistic ability. Yet it is difficult to believe that Elizabeth worked entirely alone in Gabriel's studio while he was in Newcastle with no other human contact and produced the *Self-Portrait* without any tuition. Further analysis of the circumstances surrounding the creation of this work and its subsequent history are therefore necessary to understand the *Self-Portrait* in context.

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<sup>82</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 276 (item 53.44).

<sup>83</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 281 (item 53.48).



During the period preceding the summer of 1853 Gabriel worked predominantly on drawings or jewel-like watercolours, therefore Elizabeth would have had little opportunity to observe how to prepare and paint with oils. However, Gabriel's technique when painting with watercolours was highly unusual, since he used 'thick pigment, often minutely stippled, hatched and scumbled, to give a vibrant surface, sometimes mixing paint with gum to give a richer effect'.<sup>84</sup> This technique is clearly visible in *Dante Drawing an Angel on the Anniversary of Beatrice's Death* (1853, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Fig. 37), which would have been known to Elizabeth since she posed for the figure of Beatrice. Gabriel used fine brushes to achieve the minute detail rather than those with large heads normally associated with watercolour washes. This technique was perhaps developed from his work in oils combined with the effects he may have seen achieved by some eighteenth-century watercolourists. Paul Sandby (1731-1809), for example, used fine brushes and tiny brush strokes to create detailed paintings which contrast sharply with the loose free-flowing style of J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851). It is possible, therefore, that Elizabeth simply copied Gabriel's watercolour technique in oils; or she may have turned to someone else for assistance.

The role Ford Madox Brown played in Elizabeth's art education has not been explored by art historians. Despite the short-lived master-pupil relationship between Gabriel and Brown, the bond of friendship remained strong, and extended to include both Elizabeth and Brown's second wife, Emma. Many instances of meetings between them are recorded. As previously mentioned, Elizabeth sat for the figure of Christ in Brown's *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet*.<sup>85</sup> It

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<sup>84</sup> *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Treuherz, Prettejohn and Becker, 32.

<sup>85</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 43.

was Brown who took Elizabeth shopping for paints when she received the first instalment of Ruskin's allowance.<sup>86</sup> More significantly, Gabriel confirmed that Brown's guiding hand offered Elizabeth constructive advice on improving her *Self-Portrait*, which she acted upon. In his letter to Brown of 3 January 1854 he writes: 'She has followed your suggestion about her portrait, and done several things which improve it greatly'.<sup>87</sup> This advice, delivered in person by a respected and trusted friend and colleague, was obviously gratefully received.

It is not known what Brown's 'suggestion' for improvement entailed, but analysis of Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* suggests it may have related to facial proportions.

The current advice given to students of portraiture is as follows:

Viewed from the front, the head is a rough oval approximately one and a half times as long as it is wide.

The eye line is halfway between the top and the bottom of the oval.

The eyebrows are situated slightly above the eyes [...].

The bottom of the nose is located halfway between the eyebrows and the bottom of the chin.

The mouth is located slightly above halfway between the nose and the chin.<sup>88</sup>

Applying these rules to Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 38) shows that her features are correctly aligned. This indicates Elizabeth's awareness of facial proportion and her desire to practise and improve her understanding of the technical aspects of artistic production. To further investigate the possibility that Brown was instrumental in Elizabeth's understanding of facial proportion I analysed several of his face and figure drawings. Notably his preparatory drawing of wife Emma for *The Last of England* (Fig. 39), although not following these rules of proportion rigidly (the eyeline is slightly above the recommended

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<sup>86</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 31 (item 55.19).

<sup>87</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 31 (item 55.19).

<sup>88</sup> Allan Kraayvanger, *Secrets to Drawing Heads* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co. Inc, 2005), 14

position), shows a similar method of construction to Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait*. This offers potential evidence that Brown may have been responsible for assisting Elizabeth with more than just the odd few words of advice on her self-portrait, as Gabriel is unlikely to have included facial proportion in his role as Elizabeth's tutor. Since Gabriel acknowledges that Brown offered helpful advice about Elizabeth's self-portrait, it is probable that this was an ongoing dialogue, with Elizabeth showing Brown the painting frequently and learning from his comments.

Another puzzle concerning Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* is that it is the only finished item in her oeuvre that is circular in shape. Why did she choose this shape? Was it something she had seen? At the time Elizabeth was painting her *Self-Portrait* Brown was intermittently working on *The Last of England* (1852-5. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery). He had begun working on it in 1852, an oval painting on a rectangular wooden support.<sup>89</sup> If Brown was helping Elizabeth with her *Self-Portrait*, she would have seen *The Last of England* from its early stages and may therefore have been inspired to choose the circular shape for her *Self-Portrait*.

Brown used a wooden panel to create his shaped paintings, yet Marsh cites Elizabeth's support as 'canvas'.<sup>90</sup> It would be easy to create a circular shape on a panel by hammering a small nail into the centre and marking the outline with a pencil. A similar method could be used on paper. However, the flexibility of attempting this on a stretched canvas would possibly distort the circle. Another option would have been to draw around a circular object, for example a plate, to

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<sup>89</sup> Alison Smith, catalogue entry 94 (Ford Madox Brown, *The Last of England*), in *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 128.

<sup>90</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 43.

create the outline shape on the canvas. Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* is listed as 23cm (9 ins) in diameter.<sup>91</sup> Many plates are indeed of this size, including simple glazed pottery as well as various examples of the blue and white porcelain so coveted by Gabriel in the 1860s. It seems likely that a novice would have taken the easiest option and simply borrowed one of the plates from Gabriel's apartment to create the circular shape. Conversely, the painting itself may not be circular at all – it is possible that the framer simply chose a circular mount to display the *Self-Portrait* to best effect.

A further possibility is that the use of a circular mirror may have influenced the shape of Elizabeth's self-portrait, as she would have used a mirror to capture her own image. Although the circular mirror depicted in *The Arnolfini Portrait* mentioned earlier might have provided the inspiration, Gabriel is known to have possessed a collection of mirrors. Treffry Dunn's image of the drawing room at Cheyne Walk gives some idea of the scope of his collection (Fig. 40). Notably three circular mirrors are depicted. Some of these mirrors may indeed have been in Chatham Place during the period Elizabeth was painting her *Self-Portrait*, as on 21 October 1852 Gabriel wrote to his mother asking her to send him a selection of mirrors:

The scrivancier particularly would be of use to me, but most of all the looking-glass over the drawing-room mantelpiece. Indeed, without this, I should be obliged either to buy or hire one, as a large scrivancier looking-glass is indispensable to me in my present pictures, being the only means of casting reflexions on objects to imitate an out-of-door effect. The round mirror from the drawing-room would also be very serviceable to me in various ways in painting, if you could let me have it'<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 43.

<sup>92</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 204 (item 52.13).

Could Elizabeth have used one of these mirrors for her *Self-Portrait*? A scrivancier is a type of desk mirror, more commonly referred to as a dressing-table mirror, which is hinged to a base so that the angle of the mirror can be adjusted easily. Many shapes were available, but an oval design was popular (Fig. 41). This type of mirror would have enabled Elizabeth to angle her reflection easily in order to paint it. The mention of a round mirror confirms one would have been in Chatham Place prior to Elizabeth commencing her *Self-Portrait*.

In addition, Treffry Dunn used a convex circular mirror to depict a reflection of Gabriel's bedroom in Cheyne Walk.<sup>93</sup> The watercolour itself is mounted in a circular frame, giving the impression of looking into the circular mirror. This image specifically demonstrates the distortion to the bed created by the convex surface of the mirror. The possibility that Elizabeth's face is perhaps slightly distorted by the mirror reflection cannot be ignored, as it is not known whether she used a plane or convex mirror. If the mirror was hung on the wall (as in Treffry Dunn's watercolour) the height would have made it difficult for Elizabeth to work between canvas and mirror. A desk-mounted mirror would have been easier, but there may still have been issues with creating the perfect reflected image.

Brown also depicts a convex circular mirror in *Take Your Son Sir!* (1851-7, Tate Gallery, London). If Brown had been mentoring Elizabeth in Gabriel's absence, this painting may have been known to her. It is even conceivable that she discussed the use and choice of a mirror with him during her work.

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<sup>93</sup> Sophia Farley and Claire Reeves, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bedroom at Tudor House, 16 Cheyne Walk," *Wightwick Manor, National Trust*, n.d., accessed Mar 4, 2022, <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1287978>.

Like many artists in the Pre-Raphaelite circle, Gabriel depicts mirrors in several of his paintings. In *Lady Lilith* (1868, Bancroft Collection, Wilmington Society of Fine Arts, Delaware) he depicts the female figure gazing into a hand-held mirror while an arched mirror graces the back wall. This hand-held mirror offers another possibility to finding the key to Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait*. With Gabriel's love of mirrors (and male vanity) it is possible that a hand-held mirror was also included in his collection. This might have provided an accessible way for Elizabeth to have viewed herself and transferred her image to the canvas. Gabriel depicts her as being right-handed (see for example Fig. 42), thus holding her brush in her right hand and the mirror in her left she could easily manoeuvre the mirror angle to obtain the perfect composition. However, if she was painting in oils, this would have compromised her use of the mahlstick and palette, since both would have required the use of her left hand.

Two small convex mirrors, originally belonging to Gabriel, now hang at Kelmscott Manor.<sup>94</sup> If one of these is the 'round mirror' mentioned by Gabriel in his letter to his mother, and it was in Gabriel's apartment in 1853-4, it could well have been the mirror used by Elizabeth. It would have been relatively easy for her to remove the small mirror from the wall and prop at a suitable angle on a nearby table to work from, leaving both hands free for painting. Copying from a circular mirror would have resulted in a circular image. With little experience but a wealth of determination this also seems a plausible explanation for the circular shape.

The question inevitably arises as to why Elizabeth suddenly decided to paint her *Self-Portrait* while Gabriel was away. It is not known what she had been

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<sup>94</sup> Christopher Catling, *Kelmscott Manor* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 2014), 13; *Reflections*, 52-3.

working on prior to his departure for Newcastle; her earliest dated work, *The Lady of Shalott*, is signed and dated December 1853 and therefore post-dates her *Self-Portrait*. If Gabriel had not been away, would she have still painted her *Self-Portrait*? Would she have chosen to paint a portrait of him instead?

One of the reasons that Elizabeth may have decided to create her *Self-Portrait* was because other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle had been involved with making portraits. Gabriel had drawn a pencil portrait of Thomas Woolner in July 1852 before he left for Australia, and subsequently the Brotherhood met at Millais's studio on 12 April 1853 to produce drawings of each other to send over to Woolner.<sup>95</sup> It is unlikely that Elizabeth would have been present at this male gathering, but no doubt she would have known about it, and possibly seen the portraits before they were despatched to Australia. Several of these portraits are painted in an oval format; Holman Hunt's chalk drawings of Gabriel (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery) and Millais (National Portrait Gallery) as well as Gabriel's pencil and wash image of his brother William (National Portrait Gallery). The angle of the profile in the drawing of Millais and Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* are similar. If Elizabeth had seen these images only weeks before Gabriel's trip to Newcastle, it might have provided the inspiration to begin work on her *Self-Portrait*. This suggests Elizabeth's aim may have been to consolidate her position within the Pre-Raphaelite circle. By producing a portrait of herself which fitted seamlessly into the style and format of the Woolner portraits she was confirming her membership of the elite group, and perhaps even staking her claim to be 'one of the boys'.

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<sup>95</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, I, 340-1.

Unlike many other female artists, however, Elizabeth does not depict herself with the tools of her trade. Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun for example (*Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat*, c.1782, National Gallery, London) ensures the viewer recognises her artistic competence by including the colours used to paint the flowers on her hat on the paintbrushes and palette held in her left hand. Like Elizabeth, Vigée-Lebrun makes direct eye contact with the viewer. If she did not depict herself as an artist, what was Elizabeth trying to achieve in her *Self-Portrait*?

Deborah Cherry suggests that during the Victorian period 'self-portraits claimed a visual presence for women artists'.<sup>96</sup> While the images their male colleagues created often evidenced their bohemian lifestyle, those of the female artists were intended to create a suitable 'professional identity'.<sup>97</sup> In other words, painting a self-portrait was necessary for a female artist to show that she was serious about her work and wished to be recognised in the capacity of an artist. Perhaps this was Elizabeth's intention. The desire for recognition dates back many centuries to the change in the status of the artist during the Renaissance. This is evident from the wood cuts of self-portraits by the artists included in the 1568 edition of Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*.<sup>98</sup>

One of the Northern Renaissance artists who created several self-portraits at different stages of his career was Albrecht Dürer. Gabriel was particularly attracted to Dürer's work and owned a set of thirty-two prints of his series 'The

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<sup>96</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 90.

<sup>97</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 91.

<sup>98</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori* (*The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*) (Florence: Appresso I Giunti, 1568).



Humiliation and Exaltation of our Redeemer'.<sup>99</sup> A comparison of Elizabeth's self-portrait with Dürer's painting of 1493 (Fig. 43) identifies a number of similarities. As a novice artist Elizabeth has delineated the shadows on her forehead, eyes, cheek, chin and neck in a very similar way to the much more accomplished Dürer. The angle of the three-quarter profile is almost identical, and the jaw and hair line are very similar. Elizabeth has highlighted her own defining features – her heavily lidded eyes and her straight nose are very different from Dürer's, yet there is something of the same slight aloofness present in both paintings. However, since Dürer's painting was in private ownership it is probable that any similarity is coincidental.

One work which Elizabeth would have seen in the National Gallery is Jan van Eyck's *Portrait of a Man (Self-Portrait?)* (1433) wearing a red turban, purchased by the gallery in 1851. Again, Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* shows remarkable similarities with a mirror image of van Eyck's painting (Fig. 44). As previously mentioned, van Eyck's work was highly regarded by members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, especially Gabriel. Although the correlation with the Dürer seems stronger, particularly with regard to the shading, the three-quarter profile and the touch of white at the neckline suggest that Elizabeth was aware of both paintings, and probably of many more self-portraits, before embarking upon her own.

Cherry also believes that a 'concern with respectability underpins' Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait*.<sup>100</sup> She refers to Elizabeth's class distinction, suggesting that choosing to portray herself in 'day wear' produced an image 'at the intersections

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<sup>99</sup> Jerome J. McGann, "Library of D.G. Rossetti," The Rossetti Archive, 2008, accessed Mar 21, 2022, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/dglibrary.rad.html>.

<sup>100</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 84.

between bourgeois respectability and professional identity'.<sup>101</sup> A woman's 'respectability was signified through dress, hairstyle and deportment', elements which are clearly visible in Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait*.<sup>102</sup> Cherry reiterates the correlation between prostitution and needlework, particularly as Elizabeth's family background confirms her social status to be lower than that of her fellow Pre-Raphaelite artists. Presenting herself in 'day wear' is perhaps an attempt to elevate her to the status of the wealthy patrons who readily paid to have their portraits painted. Perhaps she felt the painting would speak for itself; the inclusion of the symbols of the artist's trade was unnecessary.

Notably Elizabeth has depicted herself on a green background. Green is the complementary colour to red, its opposite on the colour wheel, thus she may be emphasising her knowledge of colour theory by choosing the colour to complement her auburn hair. However, it should be noted that green is also the colour of the woman's dress in *The Arnolfini Portrait*. Since Elizabeth appears to have been inspired by van Eyck's painting in *The Lady of Shalott*, it is indeed possible that the colour mirrors that of *The Arnolfini Portrait*. Is this another example of 'generous imitation'?

In the best image we have of the *Self-Portrait*, the colour of Elizabeth's dress is difficult to ascertain; it appears to be a dark brownish-purple. Reichert's description of Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* suggests that she was fortunate enough to see the painting herself:

Kleid dunkel-lila, etwas in Grau abgestuft.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 90-91.

<sup>102</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 84.

<sup>103</sup> Reichert, "Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal," Item K.66.

[Dress dark purple, somewhat blended with grey]

The colour of Elizabeth's dress is especially important as at some time during 1854 Gabriel painted two similar watercolour portraits of Elizabeth. In one, she is wearing a green dress and in the other, her dress is lilac (Fig. 45). In both portraits the background is green. One is framed in a similar gold frame to Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait*, except it is oval rather than circular. It appears more than a simple coincidence that Gabriel chose to paint these two portraits so soon after Elizabeth had completed her own (January 1854). Furthermore, the colour palette in all three is very similar. Had her work inspired him to produce his own portrait of her? Did this constitute further lessons in portraiture?

The most striking difference, however, is that in both Gabriel's portraits Elizabeth's eyes are lowered demurely, and the neck of her white blouse is fastened with a brooch. Elizabeth has painted herself looking directly at the viewer. Cherry claims that Elizabeth has therefore 'pictured herself as one who sees'.<sup>104</sup> By this it can be understood that Elizabeth has inverted the status quo – she is demonstrating that she is now the artist. Having modelled for Holman Hunt, Millais and Gabriel, she undoubtedly realised her features were worthy of being depicted. As a model her role was to delight the eye. She posed for male artists, was viewed by predominantly male spectators, and 'purchased' by male collectors. She was the object, the 'sign' of masculine creativity, the focus of male attention.<sup>105</sup> As Cherry and Pollock explain, the cipher 'Elizabeth' - the two-dimensional representation painted on canvas - was *available* to be looked at, yet she had no reciprocal right to look back. As an artist, however, Elizabeth is on the other side of the brush. She claims the right to look, and chooses to

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<sup>104</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 85.

<sup>105</sup> Pollock, "Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature," 134.

do so, portraying herself as a woman fundamentally in control of her own destiny – rather like her interpretation of *The Lady of Shalott*. Her *Self-Portrait* is *her* view of herself. This is how she felt she should be depicted – not as the Guggums of Gabriel’s many drawings, nor as the pathetic figure of Ophelia in Millais’s work.

A major issue with Elizabeth’s *Self-Portrait* is her questionable skill as a novice in the use of oil paint. There are no other extant examples of her work in oils for comparison. Although it is currently listed by Marsh as being painted in oils, this identification of the medium has not been consistent across the decades. While it is generally assumed that this is the same *Self-Portrait* that Elizabeth presented for exhibition in 1857, the catalogue entry is silent on medium and simply reads: ‘Study of a head’.<sup>106</sup> The term ‘study’ can be used to refer to a rough design painted in oils as preparation for a large canvas. For example, John Constable produced many of these oil sketches, including *Dedham Lock and Mill* (1816, Victoria and Albert Museum, London). ‘Study’ is more often used, however, for a drawing or watercolour sketch made for the same purpose; therefore, it is possible the drawing exhibited was in fact a watercolour.

Elizabeth’s *Self-Portrait* passed into William’s possession on Gabriel’s death and was subsequently loaned to an exhibition at Leighton House in 1902. The catalogue entry reads:

Item 14: Elizabeth E. Rossetti ... Head of Herself ... c.1856  
(Water-colour)  
Lent by Mr William Rossetti<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *Exhibition of Paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.*

<sup>107</sup> *Loan exhibition of pictures: catalogue.* (London: Leighton House Museum, 1902), Exhibition Catalogue.

This is clearly a *Self-Portrait* by Elizabeth, but here William has identified the medium as watercolour. William had also stated watercolour was the medium in *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters* (1900) in a note preceding a letter from Gabriel to Brown dated 25 August 1853. His note reads: “Lizzy” is Miss Siddal. Her portrait, watercolour, is the one reproduced in the *Family Letters* of my brother’.<sup>108</sup> This image is identical with the one William subsequently published in the *Burlington Magazine* article in 1903. With modern technology it is possible to overlay this image with a copy of the coloured photograph that is now upheld as Elizabeth’s *Self-Portrait* painted in oil. The two images match exactly (see Fig. 46) therefore it seems reasonable to assume that they are one and the same painting.

Possibly the medium has become confused over time. On William’s death the *Self-Portrait* was inherited by his daughter Helen Rossetti Angeli, who loaned it to the Tate Gallery’s exhibition of 1923. This catalogue entry, however, lists the medium as oil, as is recognised today:

Item 25: Miss Siddal, by herself. c.1854  
Oil, circular, diam. 9 in.  
Lent by Mrs Rossetti Angeli<sup>109</sup>

Current sources, including Marsh’s exhibition catalogue from the retrospective in 1991, suggest Elizabeth’s *Self-Portrait* is painted in oil on canvas, which as I have explained, now seems unlikely. It should be noted, however, that Marsh admits she has never seen the *Self-Portrait*. She knows it only from the

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<sup>108</sup> Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, 36.

<sup>109</sup> *Loan exhibition of paintings and drawings of the 1860 period*.

photograph she obtained for the exhibition catalogue from an Oxford photographer.<sup>110</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Reichert also notes the medium as oil, stating that it has been '*immer Familienbesitz Rossetti*' (always in Rossetti family possession).<sup>111</sup> Her detailed description of the colouring of the eyes in Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* adds strength to my claim that Reichert has seen the actual painting:

Die tiefliegenden Augen sind grün-grau-blau, auch das Weiße darin grünlich.<sup>112</sup>

[The deep-set eyes are green-grey-blue, the whites of them also greenish.]

This level of detail is not visible in the colour images available of the painting. However, since the image William published several times matches exactly with the coloured image most recently provided, as I have demonstrated (Fig. 46), it would seem reasonable to assume that Reichert simply accepted the medium as given by the Rossetti family at the time. Marsh believes Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* probably remains with Rossetti descendants, but despite years of searching she has been unable to locate it. I have had no success either, but also think it remains in the Rossetti family.

Was William Michael therefore correct in his original identification of Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* as a watercolour? Did Helen Rossetti Angeli guess the medium simply by looking? The way Gabriel and Elizabeth used the medium, the texture of pigment mixed with gum Arabic is completely different from the

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<sup>110</sup> Jan Marsh, email message to the author, December 7, 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Reichert, "Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal," Item K.66.

<sup>112</sup> Reichert, "Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal," Item K.66.

traditional wash effect of other watercolours. It is often difficult to differentiate between the opaque watercolours/gouache produced using Gabriel's technique and true oil paintings, especially behind glass. The circumstances and success of Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* would be much more comprehensible if it was indeed created using Gabriel's technique of pigment mixed with water and gum Arabic. The speed at which the painting was completed, the accuracy of her depiction of herself, and her skill in handling the medium just do not reconcile with the idea of a novice artist working in oils on canvas for the first time. William had first-hand knowledge of Gabriel's watercolour technique and some experience of drawing himself. His daughter Helen, however, may not have had the same level of knowledge. Helen was apparently the most artistic of William's children,<sup>113</sup> eventually taking up miniature painting herself.<sup>114</sup> Thus she too should have had some idea of the different media available to artists but was perhaps ignorant of Gabriel's special technique. I propose, therefore, that there is only one *Self-Portrait*, painted using Gabriel's favoured technique of pigment with water and gum Arabic, not oils as is currently believed. Expert assessment and a paint sample would be necessary to prove this – but first the *Self-Portrait* needs to be located. Perhaps this will happen as a result of further research inspired by my thesis.

Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* remains an enigma despite my detailed analysis. It seems most likely that she did complete the painting during the time Gabriel was away in Newcastle, but that it is a watercolour thickened with gum Arabic on paper rather than oil on canvas as currently believed. It is probably not circular at all but has been framed in a gold frame with a circular aperture to

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<sup>113</sup> William Michael Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, 2 vols (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), I, 278-9.

<sup>114</sup> Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, II, 456.

display it at its most beautiful. Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait* probably remains in Rossetti family possession, in the hands of one of Helen Rossetti Angeli's descendants. The family now value their privacy and that must be respected, although I hope some future researcher will be able to persuade them to share further details of all works by Elizabeth in their possession so that her oeuvre may be fully appreciated.

William himself was particularly enamoured with Elizabeth's *Self-Portrait*, and therefore kept it as a memento. In the *Burlington Magazine* article, he writes:

In 1853-4 she painted a portrait of herself – the most competent piece of execution that she ever produced, an excellent and graceful likeness, and truly good: it is her very self. This work remains in my possession, and there are few things I should be sorrier to lose.<sup>115</sup>

This description embodies Ruskin's key idea of 'perception of faithfulness' since the painting appears to provide a truthful representation of Elizabeth.<sup>116</sup> It also demonstrates the 'eminent purity of feeling, dignified simplicity, and grace' which William saw in her work. Whatever medium or method she used, the fact remains that her *Self-Portrait* was produced in just a few weeks by a novice. This is perhaps the best example of the natural ability, innate talent, or 'genius' that Elizabeth possessed.

## **Conclusion**

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Elizabeth's work possessed certain qualities which entranced Ruskin, Gabriel and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Ruskin called her a 'genius' and ranked her alongside artists such as Turner and Watts, offering her an allowance to enable her to pursue

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<sup>115</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 277.

<sup>116</sup> Cook and Wedderburn, *Complete Works*, III, 93. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 278.



her career as an artist. Rather than being imitative and derivative, her work was full of original ideas and motifs. Although Elizabeth adhered to the basic principles of Pre-Raphaelitism and explored the same subject matter as her male colleagues, she had her own agenda and created her own designs. She was keen to be recognised as an artist, producing her *Self-Portrait* in the historic tradition, following in the footsteps of Dürer and van Eyck. Perhaps the quality that was most admired during Elizabeth's lifetime was the product of her untutored imagination – her original ideas – which may also hold the key to her artistic legacy. Before examining this theory in the wider context, in the next chapter I will investigate Elizabeth's growth as an artist, focusing on her artistic partnership with Gabriel and the way in which his work began to absorb her ideas.

## Chapter 5 – Gabriel and Elizabeth Rossetti: The Artistic Partnership

### Introduction

Despite the popular interest in their personal relationship, the artistic partnership between Elizabeth and Gabriel has received little scholarly attention. Yet during the early years of the 1850s Elizabeth spent much of her time in Gabriel's studio, either posing for him, learning her craft as his pupil, or working alongside him on individual and shared projects.

From the sparse research already completed on their working relationship two contrasting viewpoints emerge. The first treads the conventional art-historical path, dismissing Elizabeth's work as imitative or derivative, a copy of the work of her tutor, Gabriel. This stance was typified in 1973 by art historian and former Assistant Keeper of prints and drawings at the British Museum, John Gere, who describes Elizabeth in the following poetic terms:

Elizabeth Siddal had been [Rossetti's] inspiration throughout the 1850's, but it is impossible to form any clear idea of her personality. Under Rossetti's influence she made drawings and wrote verses, but she seems to have had no original creative power: she was as the moon to his sun, merely reflecting his light. She is a tragic, or at least a pathetic figure endowed with the fatal gift of extreme beauty without the temperament or personality to live up to it.<sup>1</sup>

Gere's 'attack' on Elizabeth is twofold. Firstly, the popular perception discussed in Chapter 1 which inextricably binds her with the drowning figure in John Everett Millais's painting *Ophelia* is painfully reinforced by his use of the terms 'tragic', 'pathetic' and 'enigma'. For Gere, Elizabeth has no existence beyond her image. She has no personality, no creativity; she is devoid of every

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<sup>1</sup> John Gere, "Introduction," in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn and Edwin Becker. London: Thames and Hudson, 2003. Exhibition Catalogue, 14.

attribute except beauty. Furthermore, Gabriel is upheld as the sun, the most powerful source of light, radiating his magnificent creative energy. Elizabeth is placed in direct opposition to Gabriel. Although she is credited with writing poetry and creating drawings, she has 'no original creative power' of her own and is therefore only capable of imitation. Elizabeth is not permitted to express her own artistic voice; she must simply echo the brilliance of her tutor Gabriel, just as the moon reflects the light of the sun. The artistic partnership for Gere, therefore, was a one-sided arrangement purely designed to showcase Gabriel's overwhelming talent and genius. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, this was not the reality of the situation.

This patriarchal status quo was questioned by Germaine Greer with the rise of feminism in the late 1970s:

It is customary to take for granted that in an artistic partnership [...] the male was always the predominating figure, the innovator and the initiator, with the woman following as his emulator. Often the similarity between the works of both partners leads inevitably to this conclusion, but does not in fact constitute very good grounds for it.<sup>2</sup>

Greer, however, does not elaborate on the possible reasons for this similarity. Many female artists were part of an artistic family, learning their skills from their fathers, brothers or partners, and often working in their studio as assistants.<sup>3</sup> Their style would naturally emulate that of their male counterpart since that is what is expected of a studio assistant, working on the background or lesser details of the master's composition. As Greer concludes, there is little substance to this method of evaluation, but the ensuing wave of feminism through the 1980s sought to redress the balance and recover women artists

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<sup>2</sup> Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd, 1979), 42-3.

<sup>3</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 20-25.

back into mainstream art history. Elizabeth returned to the limelight, and the way in which she was 'reclaimed' as an artist is perhaps best described in Marsh's words:

Latterly, in the 1980s, a new version of Elizabeth Siddal has been emerging, who is partly a victim of masculine oppression and partly a rediscovered proto-feminist, as fits the age ... feminist art historians have discovered her among the numerous disregarded women artists of the past. Implicit in this new approach is a determined effort to detach Elizabeth Siddal's story from that of Rossetti and the PRB, with which it has been historically entwined, and present her with a biography of her own<sup>4</sup>

This approach, however, is equally flawed. Apart from the lack of personal history before encountering Walter Deverell, it is impossible to detach Elizabeth from either Gabriel or the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Her story forms an integral part of Pre-Raphaelite history; neither could exist without the other.

A third, median path is therefore needed to reassess the artistic partnership from a more realistic perspective. This middle course is the route proposed by Elizabeth Prettejohn, who suggests:

... the participation of women is not only important in its own right, but ... it shaped the collaborative practices of the movement in a decisive way.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter I will examine the working relationship between Elizabeth and Gabriel from this new perspective. I will examine Elizabeth's transition from her early beginnings as Gabriel's model to becoming his pupil and emerging as an artist in her own right. I will analyse her role as his muse from the initial stages when her appearance and ability to hold a pose were key attributes to the

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<sup>4</sup> Jan Marsh, "Imagining Elizabeth Siddal," *History Workshop* No. 25 1988: 78.

<sup>5</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 9.

collaborative working of two like-minded individuals. I will show how, with the progression of both skill and time, the artistic partnership flourished. I have selected examples of both artists' work to illustrate each step of the journey. These include the first drawings Gabriel made of his new model; the series of sketches made at Hastings and of Elizabeth at the easel; Gabriel's unfinished oil painting *Found* (begun 1854, Delaware Art Museum) and Elizabeth's *Pippa Passes* (1854, Figs. A.77-9) as their contributions to the popular theme of the fallen woman which was tackled by many members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle; and the collaborative project of *Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail* (Figs. A.83-6) and illustrations for Tennyson's and Allingham's volumes of poetry. The body of work created by the two artists during the 1850s, therefore, provides a narrative of the development of the artistic partnership and begins to highlight Elizabeth's contribution to Pre-Raphaelitism. I will show how her role grew over time and demonstrate how the artistic partnership between the pair may have operated on much more equal terms than has previously been acknowledged.

### **Model**

As discussed in the Introduction, Elizabeth's first encounter with the Pre-Raphaelite circle was in the role of model, posing for Walter Deverell's painting *Twelfth Night* in 1849-50. She then sat for various other members of the group, including Holman Hunt and Brown, with Millais's *Ophelia* perhaps marking the pinnacle of her early modelling career. William suggests that *Rossovestita* (1850, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Fig. 47), a study for a larger work based on Robert Browning's poem *Pippa Passes*, was perhaps the first piece featuring Elizabeth as Gabriel's model.<sup>6</sup> This small watercolour depicts a full-length flame-haired female figure wearing a beautiful red brocade dress. She is

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<sup>6</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 274.

fingering a heavy chain which hangs around her neck. The visual impression is very much that of a Venetian portrait with sumptuous fabrics and rich colours. Viewed between full-face and three-quarter profile, the figure does not meet the spectator's gaze but stares straight ahead of her. If this is indeed Elizabeth, it differs from Gabriel's later drawings which generally depict her with demurely lowered eyes. There is an air of awkwardness about the pose which suggests the model was not entirely comfortable with the situation; perhaps it was the first time she had been alone in Gabriel's studio.

Marsh, however, believes William may be mistaken, and confirms that the features depicted in *Rossovestita* are unlike those in later works in which Elizabeth is identified as the model, for example *Beatrice, Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, Denies Him Her Salutation* (1855, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).<sup>7</sup> Instead, Marsh proposes that a pencil study for *The Return of Tibullus to Delia* produced towards the end of 1851 (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Fig. 48) was more likely to have been the first time Elizabeth sat to Gabriel.<sup>8</sup> This drawing is also posed, with the model's eyes closed while she apparently sucks on a strand of hair as Delia daydreams while waiting for the return of her lover. The closed eyes would certainly have been a more comfortable pose for a first sitting. In addition, Elizabeth may have nervously fingered with a strand of her own hair while Gabriel was preparing to sketch her, which then resulted in the pose being adopted for the drawing. In both drawings there is a visible 'distance' between the artist and the model, a form of invisible glass wall that maintains their separation. They are, at this stage, simply artist and model.

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<sup>7</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 162.

<sup>8</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 163.

This arms-length relationship was short-lived. After Millais's bathtub fiasco during the painting of *Ophelia*, Elizabeth only posed for Gabriel. During 1852 she became Gabriel's pupil and was soon producing her own designs under his guidance.<sup>9</sup> She continued to model for him, perhaps to maintain her access to art tuition and materials. Modelling for one's fellow artists was very much part of the ethos of Pre-Raphaelite collaboration. As time progressed, however, Elizabeth's role as a model began to undergo a transformation. The early drawings and watercolours bearing her trade-mark auburn hair and heavy-lidded eyes all appear theatrical in style. Here, Elizabeth is role-playing, assuming the character Gabriel wanted her to portray, rather than simply being herself. Later, instead of asking Elizabeth to pose as characters in specific narratives, Gabriel became preoccupied with capturing her likeness at every imaginable opportunity. Brown commented in his diary on 4 August 1855 that Gabriel had shown him 'a drawer full of "Guggums"'; numerous drawings of Elizabeth identified by his pet name for her.<sup>10</sup> Virginia Surtees's catalogue, produced to accompany an exhibition staged at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery in 1991, contains over fifty such images.<sup>11</sup> At this stage in the working relationship it appears to have been her physical presence, her personal characteristics, and perhaps an added element of romance, that provided Gabriel with a tireless inspiration to recreate her image on paper. Elizabeth had begun to assume the role of Gabriel's 'muse'; her physical presence seemed to stir his creative spirit into producing drawing after drawing in a seemingly unending stream.

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>10</sup> Surtees, *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown*, 148.

<sup>11</sup> *Rossetti's Portraits of Elizabeth Siddal*.

By the time the pair visited Hastings in 1854 Gabriel was sketching Elizabeth incessantly (Fig. 49). His desire to draw her asleep, awake, sitting, reading, or simply just standing in the room with him soon became an obsession. The series of drawings he created there depict a more relaxed figure in a homely setting. In these drawings Elizabeth is herself. There is an air of intimacy about them, implying that the pair are comfortable in each other's presence. Marsh suggests this series of drawings denotes 'the change in her position from that of model to friend and beloved ... expressive of tender and delicate affection'.<sup>12</sup> Yet again, the art historical world is presenting a biographical and patriarchal view (even when written by a female scholar!) It is important to remember that while she was in Hastings, Elizabeth was working equally hard on her own art. It was there that she produced a unique selection of drawings as illustrations for a proposed volume of ballads to be edited by William Allingham (which I will discuss later in this chapter). The drawings she made in Hastings have proved to be some of the most significant works of her legacy and include sketches for *The Lass of Lochroyan* (Figs. A.52-4) and *The Gay Goss-Hawk* (Fig. A.20).<sup>13</sup> The patriarchal view prevails, however, and it is Gabriel's drawings of Elizabeth that always accompany the Hastings narrative.

### **Pupil**

As well as the evidence provided by her own oeuvre,<sup>14</sup> a number of Gabriel's drawings depict Elizabeth as an artist (Fig. 50). Undated, they have been estimated by Jerome McGann to have been produced around 1860, yet Surtees places them immediately after a signed and dated work from 1856.<sup>15</sup> Although

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<sup>12</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 168.

<sup>13</sup> For details of the significance of *The Lass of Lochroyan* and *The Gay Goss-Hawk* see Chapter 7.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Rossetti's Portraits of Elizabeth Siddal*, Item nos. 32,33,34.



spanning only four years, this time difference could be significant and will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Only one of the drawings is in a public collection; the others remain in private hands or are unlocated, but all form an important resource in understanding the working relationship between the pair. In these few drawings Gabriel has chosen to depict Elizabeth as an artist, not as a model or his 'beloved'. She is busy working at an easel, apparently unaware of the fact that she is being watched.

Perhaps the most significant feature of all these drawings is the size of Elizabeth's easel and support. Since none of her known works are as large as the depicted canvas, many questions arise. In one image (Fig. 50 top left) Gabriel has portrayed Elizabeth standing with her back to the window in Chatham Place, resting both hands on the back of a chair while gazing intently at the support placed on the easel. In this image it is not clear whether she is viewing one of her own works, or one of Gabriel's. As Prettejohn explains, the collaborative ethos of the Brotherhood created an atmosphere in which members freely offered 'criticism of work in progress from the initial design stage to final details of execution'.<sup>16</sup> Given the large size of the support, this drawing could be interpreted as Elizabeth critiquing one of Gabriel's paintings. However, during the period of high activity when both artists were working together in Gabriel's studio, he did not paint any large oil canvases. Instead, both artists focussed on producing small, jewel-like watercolours. Conversely, the image might also suggest that Elizabeth created more oil paintings than current sources confirm. Certainly Lucinda Hawksley believes that on Elizabeth's return from France in 1856, she 'threw herself back into art,

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<sup>16</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 40.

reworking some of her watercolours in oils'.<sup>17</sup> Among the works Hawksley cites are oil versions of *Lady Affixing a Pennant to a Knight's Spear* and *The Lass of Lochroyan*.<sup>18</sup> Marsh also mentions that Elizabeth was planning an oil version of *Clerk Saunders* in 1856.<sup>19</sup> However, no primary source is given for this information by either author and no further oil paintings have been discovered.

Gabriel's other images of Elizabeth the artist depict her seated at the easel (Fig. 50 top right and bottom) with what appears to be a paintbrush in her right hand and a mahlstick in her left. She rests her right hand on the mahlstick while working on the support. Perhaps the most useful images to analyse are the two on the right where the viewer can observe her technique. The support depicted in the lower drawing is somewhat smaller in proportion to the easel than in the other images, suggesting that this image does depict the artist at work. The first element of note is the mahlstick. Normally associated only with painting in oils, the mahlstick is used to keep the working hand off the support and the wet oil paint. In Gabriel's drawings Elizabeth looks comfortable with handling both mahlstick and brush, suggesting the experience was not new to her, and not just a pose.

A mahlstick is not normally used for watercolour, but with the specific technique for painting in watercolour with gum Arabic that was developed by Gabriel and Elizabeth together, would she have needed a mahlstick? Would she have used an easel? Elaborating on the technique, Treuherz describes how Gabriel used a 'thick pigment, often minutely stippled, hatched and scumbled, to give a

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<sup>17</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 131.

<sup>18</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 134.

<sup>19</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 193.

vibrant surface, sometimes mixing paint with gum to give a richer effect'.<sup>20</sup> If Elizabeth had been using thicker paint here, as perhaps she did in her *Self-Portrait*, there would have been no risk of dripping or bleeding of colours, therefore she may well have used a mahlstick to prevent her working hand touching the drying paint. However, the possibility that Gabriel simply posed Elizabeth for these drawings cannot be ignored. They may have been produced as a form of publicity material to help promote her work as an artist. The image in Fig. 50 top left, for example, exists as a traced copy, suggesting it may have been reproduced several times.

Another unusual feature is that in all these drawings Elizabeth's brush appears to be a fine brush for detailed strokes, rather than a large-headed watercolour brush. This does offer some correlation with the unusual watercolour technique employed by both artists, particularly as Gabriel's use of fine brushes for oil painting was remarked upon by his friend William Bell Scott.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, Elizabeth's clothes are not covered by an overall to protect them from splashes of paint, water or thinning medium. No rags are in evidence to wipe the brushes and her hands show no sign of paint. Elizabeth appears immaculate, just as she would have been if fulfilling any other role posing as Gabriel's model. There is no palette in sight, nor any water or mixing fluid/oil. Despite appearances, the evidence seems to suggest these may indeed be 'staged' rather than natural sketches. Yet Marsh believes they are 'informal poses rather than those of a model – which are a testament to the seriousness with

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<sup>20</sup> Julian Treuherz, "The Most Startlingly Original Living," in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn and Edwin Becker (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), Exhibition Catalogue, 32.

<sup>21</sup> W. Minto, *Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott, and Notices of his Artistic and Poetic Circle of Friends 1830 to 1882*, 2 vols (London: James R. Osgood, McIlvaine & Co, 1892), I, 250.

which she pursued her art'.<sup>22</sup> The images in this series are therefore open to interpretation. In many ways they are simply further examples of Gabriel's obsession with drawing 'Guggums', but notably they specifically depict Elizabeth as an artist.

As previously mentioned, the actual date of the drawings is problematic since they are all undated. McGann opts for a creation date of around 1860-1. This date would align with Gabriel's letter to William Allingham dated 29 November 1860, in which he confirms that Elizabeth continues to work as an artist.

Indeed and of course my wife *does* draw still. Her last designs would I am sure surprise and delight you, and I hope she is going to do better than ever now.<sup>23</sup>

If the series of drawings was produced around 1860, perhaps Gabriel's aim was to re-establish Elizabeth's position as an artist within the Pre-Raphaelite circle following their marriage. The period of the couple's separation between 1858 and 1860 provides little information about Elizabeth's activities, and no known artwork is firmly dateable to this period. For an artist such a period of inactivity would be untenable, therefore the possibility must exist of finding further examples of Elizabeth's work in the future. Her designs for *The Woeful Victory* (Figs. A.105-8) were produced in 1860, therefore depicting her at the easel at this time would have inspired confidence in Gabriel's (and potentially Elizabeth's) prospective patrons.

Conversely, Surtees believes these drawings of Elizabeth as an artist were created around 1856. There is evidence to dispute this date. In September 1855 Elizabeth travelled to France with Mrs Kinkaid, a distant relative of the

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<sup>22</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 169.

<sup>23</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 333 (item 60.54).

Rossetti family, returning to London in May 1856. During the period of absence, however, Gabriel had not sat idle but had used other models, including Annie Miller. It seems that after Elizabeth's return the relationship between the pair became strained. Gabriel and fellow artist Boyce had been socialising with Miller, and Brown noted in his diary on 16 July 1856 that Gabriel 'seems to have transferred his affections to Annie Miller and does nothing [but] talk of her to Miss Sid'.<sup>24</sup> This apparently so incensed Elizabeth that she stormed off. However, by 8 September Madox Brown notes that the situation has changed: 'Gabriel has forsworn flirting with Annie Miller it seems, Guggum having rebelled against it. He and Guggum seem on the best of terms now, she is painting at her picture'.<sup>25</sup> From these diary entries it appears that the relationship between Elizabeth and Gabriel was beginning to transform into a turbulent love/hate affair. This does not seem to present the right atmosphere for the production of Gabriel's calm drawings of Elizabeth the artist.

There is a third option which has not yet been considered: that the drawings of Elizabeth at the easel were produced around 1853-4. A sketch, known as *Rossetti sitting to Elizabeth Siddal* (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Fig. 51), perhaps offers a little more insight. Securely dated by Gabriel 'Sept 1853', the drawing depicts, in the colourful language penned by Hawksley:

... the two of them in the studio at Chatham Place. In it, he reclines on a couple of chairs – sitting on one with his feet resting on the other – while an eager Lizzie bends over her canvas to sketch him. The scene is dimly lit by a tall lamp, her canvas rests on the backrest of his second chair and she peers intently at him. Meanwhile, Rossetti sits in a relaxed fashion, his hands in his pockets, observing her as keenly as she is

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<sup>24</sup> Surtees, *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown*, 183.

<sup>25</sup> Surtees, *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown*, 187.

observing him. The brown-ink sketch, swiftly executed, captures a wonderfully intimate moment in their relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Hawksley also forges a biographically romantic link between the two artists, somewhat at odds with her description of 'eager Lizzie', the dedicated young aspiring artist who was making the most of every opportunity to practise her skills. It seems more likely that the sketch recorded a real incident when Gabriel posed for Elizabeth to sketch him. In the commentary accompanying the image on the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery's website it is suggested that 'no portrait by her of Rossetti is known to survive'.<sup>27</sup> The same commentary continues:

Recently the identity of Rossetti has been questioned (Christopher Newall). Is Rosetti [*sic*] drawing an imagined scene of himself in this scene or is it in fact someone else close to the Rossetis [*sic*]?<sup>28</sup>

This interpretation is questionable. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, many of Elizabeth's depictions of male figures resemble sketches Gabriel made of himself at around the same time. There seems to be the same similarity in the case of this sketch. The features of the figure posing for Elizabeth bear a clear resemblance to the caricature of Gabriel and William drawn in the same year and with a more detailed self-portrait drawn in 1855 (Fig. 52). Following the Pre-Raphaelite tradition, Elizabeth probably sketched Gabriel on many occasions. The pair would have been working in the studio together, with Gabriel providing the ideal model for any male figure Elizabeth wanted to

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<sup>26</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> "Rossetti Sitting to Elizabeth Siddal," *Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery*, n.d., accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.preraphaelites.org/the-collection/1904P480/rossetti-sitting-to-elizabeth-siddal/>. Note: This link is now obsolete. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery have a new collections website which is not yet fully functional.

<sup>28</sup> "Rossetti Sitting to Elizabeth Siddal."

include. It is also possible that she just added his head and features to the figures in her partially completed drawings.

The significant point, however, is the fact that Gabriel has dated this sketch of Elizabeth. None of the other drawings are dated, so does this sketch mark a particular moment in her artistic career, and were the other sketches made in the ensuing few months? In September 1853, the date of the sketch, Gabriel had recently returned via Coventry from visiting Bell Scott in Newcastle.<sup>29</sup> It was during this period that Elizabeth had completed her *Self-Portrait*.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps Gabriel recognised a change in Elizabeth's art on his return to London. Had she, in his eyes, now matured into a fully-fledged artist? Could this sketch of her in the process of drawing him have been made to celebrate her success? Laurel Bradley suggests this sketch 'possibly fuels speculation about how Siddal could draw as well as be drawn'.<sup>31</sup> This image, therefore, depicts a turning point, a complete role reversal: Elizabeth is now the artist; Gabriel is the model posing for her. Up to this stage Elizabeth had been Gabriel's pupil, learning from him and being guided by him. During his absence in the summer of 1853, she had worked alone as a professional artist in Gabriel's well-equipped studio. This series of drawings, therefore, may have all been completed within a year or so of the dated sketch. In the same way that Marsh suggested the Hastings drawings denoted a change in her role, perhaps this series of drawings shows Gabriel marking Elizabeth's transition from pupil to artist. The working relationship certainly forges ahead in a new direction from around 1854.

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<sup>29</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 272 (item 53.42).

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>31</sup> Laurel Bradley, "Elizabeth Siddal: Drawn into the Pre-Raphaelite Circle," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* Vol. 18 No. 2 *British Art: Recent Acquisitions and Discoveries at the Art Institute* (1992): 145.

## Artist

As she gained in confidence Elizabeth continued to work at her drawing and began to occupy a more established place within the Pre-Raphaelite circle. As was customary, she continued to sit for Gabriel (and he for her), while pursuing her own career as an independent artist. Her transition from pupil to artist is perhaps best demonstrated by analysing one of her fully finished drawings, *Pippa Passes* (Fig. 53), which illustrates Robert Browning's poem of the same name. Elizabeth was working on *Pippa Passes* at the same time as other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle were tackling the theme of the fallen woman: Gabriel was producing sketches for *Found* and Holman Hunt was developing *The Awakening Conscience*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854. The chosen subject was new and innovative; prostitution was a very real part of city life and the subject of the fallen woman provided artists with the opportunity of depicting scenes highlighting Victorian morality. During the second half of the nineteenth century the portrayal of everyday life in Victorian London became very popular, with large canvases such as William Powell Frith's *The Railway Station* (1862, Royal Holloway, University of London) and William Logsdail's *St Martin in the Fields* (1888, London, Tate Gallery) depicting city folk going about their daily business.

Elizabeth was now participating in the activities of the Pre-Raphaelite circle and sharing her work with her fellow artists for comment. Although there is no firm evidence, according to Barbara Bodichon's biographer, Pam Hirsch, *Pippa Passes* was submitted as Elizabeth's contribution to the theme 'Desolation' in a



folio circulated among members of the group in July 1854.<sup>32</sup> Gabriel peruses his submission:

I don't know what design I shall put into the *Folio*. I'm doing one of Hamlet & Ophelia which I meant for it - deeply symbolic & farsighted, of course - but I fear I shall not get it done in time to start the *Folio* again soon, so may perhaps put in a design I have made of *Found*.<sup>33</sup>

Contributing to the folio firmly situates Elizabeth within the framework of artists in the Pre-Raphaelite circle and demonstrates how she participated in the group as an equal. Notably Gabriel does not mention her involvement, although she may have added her drawing after his.

Although the folio was circulated during the summer of 1854, the actual date when Elizabeth was working on *Pippa Passes* is problematic. Gabriel's sketch for *Found* (Fig. 54) is inscribed with the date '1853' by the artist; Elizabeth's drawing is signed and dated 1854, however William suggests she was working on *Pippa Passes* between *We Are Seven* (Fig. A.103) and *The Ladies' Lament* (Fig. A.40).<sup>34</sup> The style and technique used in *Pippa Passes* is similar to that of *The Lady of Shalott* (Fig. A.47) which is signed and dated 15 December 1853. It is reasonable to assume there may have been some overlap during the winter of 1853-4 when she was sketching ideas for both subjects. It is impossible to unravel the date issue further and 1854 can only be held as the year in which the drawing was completed.

*Pippa Passes* was shown to Browning in the autumn of 1855. Gabriel wrote to him on 22 October:

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<sup>32</sup> Pam Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Pimlico (Random House), 1999), 49-50. There is no reference given for this point.

<sup>33</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 369 (item 54.57).

<sup>34</sup> Rossetti, *Family Letters*, I, 175.

I was, and am, very eager to show you the little design, (which is of the scene where Pippa meets the girls,) as, in spite of immature execution, I think you will agree that it is full of very high genius.<sup>35</sup>

Browning was obviously delighted with Elizabeth's interpretation of his poem as Gabriel explained to Allingham:

In London I showed Browning Miss Siddal's drawing from *Pippa Passes*, with which he was delighted beyond measure, and wanted excessively to know her.<sup>36</sup>

Gabriel's enthusiasm and pride in showing Elizabeth's drawing to Browning shines through in these two brief extracts from his letters. It shows how he was beginning to appreciate her work sufficiently to show it to the person who perhaps mattered the most: the author whose words she had illustrated.

*Pippa Passes* is one of Elizabeth's more detailed drawings, but there are no known sketches of her compositional ideas. Although little is known about Elizabeth's working practices in the studio, Marsh points out that very few of her finished drawings or watercolours have any surviving preparatory sketches. She therefore assumes that it may have been Elizabeth's normal practice to destroy all her drafts once the finished work was completed.<sup>37</sup> This assumption is flawed, however, as there are many known examples where a series of sketches precede a watercolour, including *Clerk Saunders*, *Lady Clare*, and *St Agnes Eve*.<sup>38</sup> In the case of *Pippa Passes*, there is one small figure in the top right-hand corner of the same sheet as a *Figure Study of Woman in Armchair, Reading* (Fig. A.110) which may provide evidence of an early design idea. The tiny female figure is clad in a similar robe to the one depicted in the finished

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<sup>35</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 70 (item 55.52).

<sup>36</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 80 (item 55.58).

<sup>37</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> See Figs. A.13-17; A.43-6; A.90-4.

drawing of *Pippa Passes*, and a bird can be seen on the ground in front of her (Fig. 55). The main drawing of the woman in the armchair is known only from the photographic portfolios, but the small figure was cropped when the image was reproduced. Fortunately, the glass negative still exists in the Ashmolean Museum and a modern photographic reprint provides an explanation for the omission of the small figure: a hand-written note beside the small figure states 'Leave this out'. Potentially Gabriel saw no benefit for including the additional figure in the portfolio. Yet finding this small, unknown sketch reiterates the importance of the Ashmolean Museum collection, as without the preservation of the glass negatives this possible preliminary sketch for *Pippa Passes* would have been lost. *Figure Study of Woman in Armchair, Reading* is undated, but Gabriel drew Elizabeth numerous times seated in a similar armchair, the earliest of which is inscribed 'Dec 1853' (Fig. 56). If Elizabeth's sketch of the woman in the armchair is of the same period, this fits perfectly with the proposed dates for her to have been working on *Pippa Passes*.

A comparison of *Found* and *Pippa Passes* provides an excellent example of how Gabriel and Elizabeth may have worked together in his studio at the height of their artistic relationship. In the brief scholarship on the subject there is no mention of the time the two artists would have spent together, either thinking about or discussing their compositions. Elizabeth did not have a conducive atmosphere or suitable facilities at home to practise her drawing, as Ruskin wrote to his friend Dr Acland:

She is uncomfortable in her family, who, though kind enough in other matters, set their faces steadily against all her artist's feelings—and have in no wise any sympathy with her, so that

she goes up to her room without fire in winter to hide herself while she draws.<sup>39</sup>

Gabriel's studio was infinitely more suitable for an ambitious young artist to work in, and each artist would have benefited from the other's company. The working relationship is therefore likely to have been a very social affair. Gabriel was known for being gregarious and it is impossible to believe that the two artists worked together in silence! Drawing and sketching in such proximity to each other would have ensured the osmosis of ideas was inevitable. It is also unlikely that the studio was kept immaculately tidy, as tidiness was not one of Gabriel's character traits. Later in life his studio was littered with half-finished works, as depicted by Treffry Dunn (Fig. 57), and there is no reason to suppose his habits had changed over time. It is probable that easels and tables were covered with sketch books of ideas, figure studies and all manner of scraps of paper full of doodles.

During a typical working day one artist may have made a rough sketch as an idea took shape. Subsequently it may have been laid aside while they worked on another piece. The other artist would have had ample opportunity to muse over the many unfinished drawings scattered around the studio. Discussion of composition, motifs, and figure poses would have been commonplace as ideas were developed and worked on. Subconscious recollection or conscious adoption of an observed motif may then have infiltrated a later preparatory sketch. The resulting similarities between the drawings produced by the two artists would have led to Elizabeth's work always being criticised as imitative. This type of transmission of ideas may well have been responsible for the

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<sup>39</sup> Cook and Wedderburn, *Complete Works*, XXXVI, 205.

connections identified below between Gabriel's sketches for *Found* and Elizabeth's *Pippa Passes*.

Gabriel's earliest preparatory sketch for *Found* (Fig. 54) depicts a country drover enroute to market who chances upon a girl he recognises as his former sweetheart. The theme is reflected in the accompanying biblical text, 'I remember thee: the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy betrothal' from the book of Jeremiah.<sup>40</sup> In his only attempt to follow the Pre-Raphaelite ethos of 'truth to nature', Gabriel sought out a suitable model or location for each element of his drawing. The bridge was apparently Blackfriars Bridge, viewed from the window of his apartment in Chatham Place.<sup>41</sup> Brown sourced the calf and cart from a local farm, and posed for the figure of the drover himself, while a suitable brick wall was eventually found in Chiswick.<sup>42</sup> Fanny Cornforth later posed for the head of the fallen woman although she is not the model for the initial sketch. This preparatory sketch is drawn with absolute precision, giving an insight into the potential of the finished painting.

Elizabeth elected to illustrate a passage from a contemporary literary source rather than street-life itself. Her work illustrates Browning's poem 'Pippa Passes'; the scene is taken from the end of section three and depicts country girl Pippa driving her flock of geese past a group of 'Poor Girls' sitting on some steps discussing life.<sup>43</sup> Marsh and Nunn suggest *Pippa Passes* 'offers a female perspective on the topic, suitably modified through the literary source'.<sup>44</sup> By choosing to illustrate Browning's poem rather than a scene from real life, Elizabeth has rendered the scene acceptable for a female artist, raising it above

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<sup>40</sup> J.B Bullen, *Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd, 2011), 68; Jeremiah 2:2.

<sup>41</sup> Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, xix.

<sup>42</sup> Bullen, *Rossetti: Painter and Poet*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> Browning, *Pippa Passes*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> Marsh and Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement*, 115.

the level of the depiction of a common prostitute favoured by her male colleagues. The association between modelling and prostitution potentially influenced her choice, since Browning's poem focuses on the country girl Pippa; the prostitutes are just one of many groups encountered on her journey.

There are many visual parallels between the motifs depicted in the sketches for *Found* and *Pippa Passes* (Fig. 58). Analysing them helps to provide an insight into the working relationship in Gabriel's studio. Ideas appear to have bounced back and forth between the two artists as the drawings took shape. Perhaps the most prominent similarity is the way in which strong verticals strengthen both compositions. These vertical lines are emphasised by the railings which enclose part of the picture space in both drawings. In *Found*, the railings surround a cemetery where a tombstone bearing the partial inscription 'There is joy ... the Angels in he ... one sinner that ...' is visible. The full text refers to Luke 15:7, 'there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance', therefore offering another reference to the moral concerns depicted in the image. Conversely in *Pippa Passes* the railings appear to enclose a garden; the boundary between garden and street is echoed by the vertical trunks of sapling trees. Browning's poem places the prostitutes on the steps of Asolo's *Duomo Santa Maria*.<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth, however, does not depict the cathedral steps, but she may have added the enclosed garden (*Hortus conclusus*) as a subtle reference to the dedication of the *Duomo*. Associated with the purity of the Virgin Mary,

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<sup>45</sup> Browning, *Pippa Passes*, 64.

intercessor between man and God, the garden may also emphasise Pippa's innocence and symbolise future hope for the fallen women.<sup>46</sup>

Both Gabriel and Elizabeth have chosen to depict the fallen women as a juxtaposition of town and country. The figures representing the country, the drover and Pippa, are depicted as innocent and pure, indicated by their simple and unadorned clothing and their erect stance. The theme of moral difference is highlighted in both cases by the dress code of the fallen women, whose attire is more elaborate and accessorised, reflecting their profession. While Gabriel's sketch shows a pure country girl who has become a fallen woman, Elizabeth's drawing maintains the country girl's innocence. This provides two different perspectives on the subject: the male and the female. From Gabriel's male standpoint the drover (representing man in general) is the innocent party. His fallen woman has brought about her own demise. This clearly absolves the men who visit prostitutes of any blame. Elizabeth, however, does not judge her fallen women, but in some ways implicates their clients. Instead, she shows that as a woman, Pippa is responsible for her own destiny. She has the right to choose her path in life. Interpreting the drawings in this way would certainly align with Victorian ideals of morality.

In both images the innocence of the countryside seems to be depicted as confined or protected: Elizabeth's garden is enclosed while Gabriel's calf is netted. However, to the right of Gabriel's drover a pair of birds are gathering nesting material, while Elizabeth has included two tiny birds flying to the left of Pippa driving her geese to market. Since the birds are positioned in the

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<sup>46</sup> Hall, *Dictionary*, 327.

'country' side of both drawings, this may be representative of the freedom of the countryside compared with the confinement of the city.

Both images make extensive use of the drawn line to give a sense of place. The streets are cobbled, and the fallen women are positioned on a raised flagstone pavement or steps. A similar cross-hatching technique is used to form shadows, while distance and perspective are created with background buildings and figures. This perhaps offers evidence of the master/pupil relationship, where Elizabeth learned her craft through observation of Gabriel's hand at work.

It is notable that one of Elizabeth's fallen women presents a mirror image of the prostitute's pose in Gabriel's sketch for *Found* (Fig. 59). Since his drawing was created first, this would appear to offer further evidence of the master's influence on his pupil's work. However, Elizabeth has not simply copied Gabriel's pre-existing drawing, but has absorbed its essence and created a new image which subtly references the former. This demonstrates not only her independence as an artist, but also her participation in the sharing of ideas which existed within the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Conversely, the clothing worn by the fallen woman in Gabriel's unfinished painting of his scene is much more elaborately dressed than in his original sketch. Elizabeth's drawing with her elegant 'poor girls' may well have inspired his more ostentatious representation. These examples show how the two-way transmission of ideas would have easily occurred subconsciously within the working environment of a shared studio.



Perhaps the most critical difference which sets Elizabeth's *Pippa Passes* apart from the depictions of her male colleagues is that of the gaze. Elizabeth's drawing embodies the female gaze; there are no major male figures depicted. Pippa's eyes are modestly lowered and averted from the viewer. Cherry suggests this 'downcast gaze' is symbolic of Pippa's virgin-like pureness.<sup>47</sup> Her head is held high, and she merely glances in the direction of the group of prostitutes, whose contrasting facial expressions are suggestive of past revelry. The interplay of the gaze within the image is revealing. One prostitute almost catches the viewer's eye; the second taunts Pippa with an accompanying hand gesture, 'Oh, you may come closer - we shall not eat you!'<sup>48</sup> The third is almost hidden from view behind the other two, yet she seems repentant. No direct eye contact is made between the figures depicted. Pippa's shadow is cast over the fallen women, and weeds grow around their feet. This appears to highlight the moral divide, emphasised by a vertical pillar separating Pippa from the prostitutes. Elizabeth's fallen women do not appear to be ashamed of their profession but accepting of it. The Victorian association between artists' models and prostitution, and indeed her own role as a model, may have influenced her representation of these women, as Barringer suggests.<sup>49</sup>

In *Found*, however, Gabriel's fallen woman turns her head from both the viewer and the drover, ashamed of what her life has now become. Bullen suggests that the powerful grip exerted by the man round the seemingly pathetic wrists of the woman could be interpreted as 'shame and disgrace on the woman's part'.<sup>50</sup> Conversely, he argues that this 'tangle of hands' perhaps indicates conflict, as

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<sup>47</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 161.

<sup>48</sup> Browning, *Pippa Passes*, 68.

<sup>49</sup> Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, 156.

<sup>50</sup> Bullen, *Rossetti: Painter and Poet*, 68.

'her body language might equally express a reluctance to give up the luxuries of the city for the deprivations of the country'.<sup>51</sup> Bullen's interpretation perhaps removes the element of shame, aligning *Found* with *Pippa Passes*. There is no direct eye contact here either; only the calf appears to stare directly at the viewer. Bullen sees the calf as representing 'sexuality itself caught and enmeshed in the strangulating nets of repressive morality'.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, this rather psychoanalytical interpretation also highlights common links between *Found* and *Pippa Passes*, since both are concerned with how morality and sexuality are viewed in Victorian society.

There is another sketch for *Found* dated c.1853 (Fig. 60 top left) in which Gabriel appears to have planned the position of the two figures. Was this rougher sketch in fact the first sketch he made for the subject? If so, then did he refine his figure's pose after seeing Elizabeth's drawing, since the dated sketch bears more resemblance to Elizabeth's figure? The final oil painting was never completed, but a series of sketches exists for the figure pair (Fig. 60). This shows how Gabriel was continually working to perfect the pose of both his figures. It is possible that seeing Elizabeth's prostitute in *Pippa Passes* may have prompted such revisions.

Another significant feature of Elizabeth's work lies in the fact that she produced three drawings offering two versions of *Pippa Passes* (Fig. 61), each offering a very different interpretation of the same scene. It is not known which drawing was completed first since they are all signed and dated 'EES 1854'. The best-known version is held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, as it is reproduced in many publications and available online and as a giclée print. The second

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<sup>51</sup> Bullen, *Rossetti: Painter and Poet*, 68.

<sup>52</sup> Bullen, *Rossetti: Painter and Poet*, 78.

drawing appears to be an almost identical copy given to Barbara Bodichon.<sup>53</sup> The third drawing is virtually unknown and remains in private ownership. My only sight of it has been as an illustration in Deborah Cherry's book, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*.<sup>54</sup> I have been unable to obtain a better copy of the image or further details as Cherry's response to my request explains:

The version in *Painting Women* was from a private collector who invited me long ago to see her collection, which included this one drawing by Siddall ... I don't have a high res digital version, as these were analogue days. I would have to have a search in my archives to find the black and white photograph. As you know Siddall worked and reworked her designs, refining her ideas and modulating various features.<sup>55</sup>

Elizabeth certainly formulated her ideas many times by creating a series of sketches for one subject, but the only other time she appears to have made two finished versions of a drawing was for *Lovers Listening to Music*. This was because the original was promised to Allingham, but Gabriel inadvertently sold it to Ruskin as part of his patronage.<sup>56</sup> Marsh believes that Elizabeth made a copy so that Allingham would not be disappointed.<sup>57</sup>

Comparison of the two versions of *Pippa Passes* (Fig. 61) shows some striking differences, unlike the two versions of *Lovers Listening to Music* (Figs. A.55-6). The most significant variation is the depiction of Pippa's hair. In the Ashmolean version Pippa appears neat and tidy, not a single hair out of place. When read in conjunction with her simple dress, her hair resembles a wimple, completing the appearance of a nun's habit. This serves to reinforce the impression of Pippa's purity. Conversely in the drawing owned by a private collector Pippa is

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<sup>53</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, IV, 350-1 (item 70.2).

<sup>54</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, Plate 29.

<sup>55</sup> Deborah Cherry, e-mail message to the author, December 8, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 26 (item 55.14).

<sup>57</sup> *Elizabeth Siddall: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 45.

depicted with free-flowing locks. This contrasts sharply with the Victorian image of innocence and aligns Pippa more closely with the prostitutes she is passing.

As A.N. Wilson explains:

No respectable woman wore her hair loose – which is what gives these loose-haired Pre-Raphaelite maidens so much of their erotic charm for the men who painted them and the men who bought the pictures.<sup>58</sup>

Although he was referring to Gabriel's later paintings, this comment is particularly relevant to the second version of *Pippa Passes*. Why did Elizabeth change the way Pippa's hair was depicted? What is the significance of the loose hair? What else diverges between the two versions?

There are numerous other small differences. In the drawing held by the private collector sunflowers can be seen through the railings in the garden. In the Victorian language of flowers, tall sunflowers mean haughtiness, while dwarf sunflowers mean adoration.<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth's sunflowers are not tall; they only appear to reach half-way up the railings. Was their inclusion, and thus the meaning of adoration, the artist's intention? The two little flying birds are missing from this version of the drawing, yet the geese are depicted in much the same positions. Why were they omitted? Was this a later version of the drawing or an earlier one?

The depiction of the garden itself differs between the two versions. In the Ashmolean copy the flowers and shrubs are drawn in less detail but the turrets on the castle in the far background are more prominent. The donkey driver in the distance appears to be beating his donkey in the private collector's version,

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<sup>58</sup> A.N Wilson, *The Victorians* (London: Arrow Books (Random House Group), 2003), 163.

<sup>59</sup> L.V., *The Language and Sentiment of Flowers* (London: Frederick Warne & Co, c.1875), 58.

but in the Ashmolean copy he seems to be tending to its needs. There are also differences between the facial expressions on the faces of the 'Poor Girls', with the figures in the version held by the private collector looking decidedly more sinister. More significantly, the prostitute depicted at the front of the group wears a crucifix on her string of pearls. As a religious symbol it seems to conflict with the lifestyle of its wearer. Why did Elizabeth include the crucifix?

The differences between the two images suggest that unlike *Lovers Listening to Music*, which seems to have been reproduced by making a tracing of the original, *Pippa Passes* appears to be a freehand copy. Tracing was certainly used in Gabriel's studio; there are some surviving tracings of his drawings in museums, including one of the drawings of Elizabeth studying the canvas in Chatham Place mentioned earlier.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the Ashmolean version has clear pencil lines showing beneath the ink, for example along the lines of the steps, showing that Elizabeth has used these to set the perspective.

Whatever the means of reproduction, it was the Ashmolean version that Gabriel chose to photograph and include in the portfolios of Elizabeth's work.<sup>61</sup> Does this indicate that it was the first drawing she produced – or the last? Why did he reject the drawing now held by the private collector? Such questions are impossible to answer, yet it does appear that something occurred in 1854 between the creation of the two drawings which would account for the major differences, and more significantly for the portrayal of Pippa.

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<sup>60</sup> See "Portrait of Elizabeth Siddal," *Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery*, n.d., accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.preraphaelites.org/the-collection/1904P256/portrait-of-elizabeth-siddal/>. Note: This link is now obsolete. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery have a new collections website which is not yet fully functional.

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 2.

Taking the traditional art historical view, the variance between the drawings would be read biographically. If the Ashmolean version were the first to be created, this could reflect the several months of 1854 that were spent in Hastings. As previously mentioned, Gabriel produced a series of very personal drawings of Elizabeth during that period. The two artists were working hard and becoming romantically involved. Therefore, the change between the two versions of *Pippa Passes* could reflect the same change in the relationship that Marsh notes in Gabriel's drawings, from acquaintances to lovers. Stretching the interpretation to its limits, the changes could be said to represent Elizabeth losing her virginity before changing Pippa's hair, thus viewing the prostitutes in a different light in the private collector's copy.

Conversely, and from a more feminist perspective, the loose-haired version may well have been created first. As Cherry stated, Elizabeth often revisited her ideas. In this case she may have felt that her first attempt did not adequately represent the social divide between Pippa and the 'Poor Girls' so she corrected her failings. Presenting Pippa in a more refined manner certainly highlights the difference between them. Or did she simply follow Gabriel's example in refining her original ideas? Unfortunately, Elizabeth's intentions are never likely to be known, so the interpretation of the changes between the two versions must remain open to the speculation of art historians.

Further examples of apparent 'working together' on the same theme can be found in depictions of the biblical narratives of the *Annunciation* (Fig. 62) and the *Deposition from the Cross* (Fig. 63). Gabriel's *Annunciation* is dated 1855, whereas Elizabeth's is undated. Gabriel confirms Elizabeth was working on a nativity scene in July 1854, and Marsh believes her production of works on a

biblical theme coincided with John Ruskin's mention of his ecclesiastical friend as a prospective buyer after his patronage had begun.<sup>62</sup> In both works Mary is positioned standing in the garden to the left hand side, with trees filling the left margin. Mary leans forward, turning her head to the right as the Angel Gabriel approaches. The similarity of the figure poses can hardly be coincidental as it is unusual for an *Annunciation*. The traditional depiction shows Mary positioned to the right, either seated or kneeling at a *prie-dieu*, such as in works by Hans Memling (1465-75, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and Fra Angelico (1438-45, Museo di San Marco, Florence, Italy). Gabriel had previously tackled the subject in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, (1849-50, Tate Gallery, London), casting aside convention to depict Mary on a bed, the traditional location associated with conception, and in virginal white instead of traditional blue. Elizabeth's new idea therefore may have appealed to him. A closer reference to the same figure pose can be found in Gabriel's *Mary Nazarene*, (1857, Fig. 64) which may demonstrate his re-visitation of Elizabeth's drawing during its creation.

Likewise, there are characteristics in the two depictions of the *Deposition from the Cross* (Fig. 63) which suggest that each artist's work may have informed that of the other as they worked together. Gabriel's drawing is dated 1857-8, while Elizabeth's is again undated. The compositions are strikingly similar. Both artists have focused on the activity at the foot of the cross, including enough of the upright to give a sense of the imposing height. The figures are grouped in a similar (though not identical) manner. Gabriel's figure of Christ is still on the cross; his feet and legs can be seen affixed to the upright. Despite the assumed title *Deposition from the Cross*, Elizabeth's Christ has apparently

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<sup>62</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 363 (item 54.55); Marsh, *Legend*, 183.

not yet been crucified since the verso is inscribed by Gabriel's brother William: 'By Lizzie R / Last Farewell before Crucifixion'.<sup>63</sup> In both drawings the figure positioned centrally extends their right arm to embrace another figure, while drapery folds fill the foreground in front of a high horizon. Close comparison of these two drawings shows similarities that suggest both artists were working on their designs at the same time, or that Gabriel had Elizabeth's drawing in front of him as he worked. These examples show how the two artists may have discussed subjects and compositions as they worked, bouncing ideas off each other, then producing their own drawing on a shared theme. All the time Elizabeth would have been watching how Gabriel worked and learning from him, creating further similarities between their work.

### **Collaborator**

While *Found* and *Pippa Passes* may provide evidence of Elizabeth and Gabriel working together on the same theme, there is one watercolour in which they are believed to have fully collaborated: *Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail* (Fig. A.83). This partnership is confirmed by an inscription at the lower right-hand corner: 'EES inv EES & DGR del'. There is sufficient evidence to substantiate the belief that the design is indeed Elizabeth's, as three known preparatory drawings by her hand relate to this subject. It is not possible to arrange the designs in accurate sequential order, but a progression can be seen towards the final watercolour (see Fig. 65).

The style of the watercolour appears very similar to other drawings by Elizabeth. Motifs which appear in *Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail* are also found

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<sup>63</sup> Auction Results: *Victorian and British Impressionist Art*, Sale 8020, Lot 9, Christie's, Dec 15, 2011, accessed Mar 2, 2022, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/drawings-watercolors/elizabeth-siddal-the-descent-from-the-cross-5521048-details.aspx?from=salesummary&intObjectID=5521048&sid=a8c07d91-bd21-4455-8045-9be77979ae2d>.



elsewhere. For example, the shape of the angels' wings can be seen in *St Cecilia*, and the features and heads resemble those depicted in *Lovers Listening to Music* (Fig. 66). One of Elizabeth's preparatory sketches also shows the crucifix window, Sir Galahad and one of the angels in virtually the same positions as in the final watercolour (Fig. 65 bottom). Gabriel made a couple of sketches on the same theme, but none bears a strong resemblance to the finished watercolour. It therefore appears that most of the credit for this watercolour should be given to Elizabeth.

There is, however, a controversial comment suggesting that Gabriel collaborated with Elizabeth on many of her works. Charles Fairfax Murray wrote a letter which accompanies another of Elizabeth's watercolours, *Clerk Saunders* (1857, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge):

There is no doubt that Gabriel Rossetti himself worked on / this picture as was customary with him, as Mr Burne-Jones told / me long ago. Much of the merit these works have belongs to him / and his aid is frequently visible in the preliminary drawings.<sup>64</sup>

Clearly Fairfax Murray believed that Gabriel's contribution was a necessary part of *all* Elizabeth's works. Yet his note appears to have been written in praise of Gabriel and potentially to increase the perceived value of the watercolour (which he donated to the Fitzwilliam Museum), rather than to expressly malign Elizabeth's work. Whether Gabriel took a brush or pen to this or any of Elizabeth's other works is a matter of conjecture.

As well as both artists physically working on the same painting, there were plans for other collaborative projects. One of the first of these was illustrating

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<sup>64</sup> "Clerk Saunders," *Fitzwilliam Museum*, n.d., accessed Mar 8, 2022, <https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/13598>.

the proposed book of Scottish ballads to be selected and edited by William Allingham, mentioned in Chapter 3. This was already planned by the time the couple were in Hastings in 1854, when Gabriel wrote to Brown about the proposed volume.<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth produced designs for several more of the Scottish ballads, including Walter Scott's *The Lass of Lochroyan* and *The Gay Goss-Hawk*.<sup>66</sup> The planned volume did not come to fruition, but later in 1872 Allingham edited a different collection of British ballads, entitled *The Ballad Book*. The significance of this collaborative proposal, and the work Elizabeth produced for it, lies in the confidence Gabriel placed in his pupil. He clearly viewed her work as exceptional and was inspired by her innovative ideas. This provides further evidence of a change in role having taken place at Hastings.

Another more prestigious collaboration was the preparation of illustrations for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poetry, also discussed in Chapter 3. One of the poems included was *The Palace of Art*, from which *St Cecilia* was illustrated by both Elizabeth and Gabriel.<sup>67</sup> William states clearly that his brother had borrowed his ideas for this design from Elizabeth.<sup>68</sup> A comparison of the two artists' work shows *St Cecilia*, the patron saint of music, playing her organ in the company of an angel (Fig. 67). William asserts 'I have no doubt it [Elizabeth's drawing] preceded Rossetti's design, and therefore this detail of invention properly belongs to Miss Siddal'.<sup>69</sup> This form of incorporating inter-textual references to other work in a new design of their own was typical among members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. As Lynne Pearce proposes, later Pre-Raphaelite representations of popular themes 'owe more to each other and the

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<sup>65</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 354 (item 54.49).

<sup>66</sup> See also Chapter 7.

<sup>67</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 295.

<sup>69</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 295.

iconographic traditions of half a century than they do to their nominal source'.<sup>70</sup> Gabriel's image relies on Elizabeth's drawing rather than Tennyson's poem as its primary source, therefore this visual acknowledgement of her work provides an excellent demonstration of Pearce's suggestion.<sup>71</sup>

This inter-textual relationship has proved a point for much discussion regarding the illustrations for *St Cecilia*. Marsh suggests that Gabriel took one of Elizabeth sketches, moved the Saint outside onto the ramparts and widened the viewpoint.<sup>72</sup> She comments that he also repositioned the figures, placing the saint and angel in an embrace.<sup>73</sup> Cruise adds that this 'central group of saint and angel is provocative',<sup>74</sup> although Surtees suggests the angel's kiss is not erotic but the 'kiss of death'.<sup>75</sup> Gabriel's *St Cecilia* drew immense praise from Ruskin who commented in his tutorial guide *Elements of Drawing* (1857) that this image 'would have been the best in the book had it been well engraved'.<sup>76</sup> Despite Ruskin's patronage of Elizabeth, he offers no praise in her direction. Yet clearly it was the combination of Elizabeth's talent for composition and Gabriel's technical prowess in drawing which provided the ideal example for Ruskin to commend to his students.

## **Muse**

While there is a sense of progression through the roles previously discussed in this chapter, the role of 'muse' appears to have existed throughout, running in parallel with those of model, pupil, artist and collaborator. Elizabeth's progression as a muse lies in the way in which she inspired Gabriel, the origin

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<sup>70</sup> Lynne Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 71.

<sup>71</sup> Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, 71.

<sup>72</sup> Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1999), 169.

<sup>73</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 57.

<sup>74</sup> Cruise, *Pre-Raphaelite Drawing*, 153.

<sup>75</sup> Surtees, *Catalogue Raisonné*, I, 48.

<sup>76</sup> Cook and Wedderburn, *Complete Works*, XV, 224.

of which stems from classical mythology. The Muses are first mentioned by Hesiod (c. 700 BC) in his *Theogony*, a descriptive account of the creation of the ancient world. The Muses were the nine daughters produced from the union of the God Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory), with each Muse presiding over a different aspect of the arts. Hesiod describes how together ‘they breathed into me a divine voice’, beginning the association between the Muses and poetry.<sup>77</sup> The word ‘Muses’ literally means ‘reminders’, and each daughter was gifted with one key to creativity and inspiration.<sup>78</sup>

The Muse Euterpe, who presides over lyric poetry, has a particular relevance to the artistic relationship between Elizabeth and Gabriel. Euterpe’s attributes include the double flute or pipes, two wind instruments which were played as a pair by a single musician. Euterpe is easily identified in ancient Greek images from this attribute (see Fig. 68 left). In 1852 Gabriel drew Elizabeth in the same pose, kneeling and playing the double pipes (Fig. 68 right). The purpose of the drawing is unclear, but Virginia Surtees concludes ‘This drawing and its pair ... both have the appearance of posed studies, perhaps for music-making angels or attendants in a composition’.<sup>79</sup>

McGann suggests it is a study for an unexecuted work of *St Elizabeth of Hungary*.<sup>80</sup> This interpretation is questionable, although the figure kneeling to the left in the preparatory sketch for *St Elizabeth of Hungary* (Fig. 69 centre) does resemble this drawing of Elizabeth. However, the double pipes are missing, and the figure is clasping hands with another female kneeling opposite

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<sup>77</sup> “The Theogony of Hesiod” translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Internet Sacred Text Archive*, 1914, accessed Mar 15, 2022, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm>.

<sup>78</sup> Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 55; 131.

<sup>79</sup> *Rossetti’s Portraits of Elizabeth Siddal*. No. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Jerome J. McGann, “Elizabeth Siddal,” *The Rossetti Archive*, 2008, accessed Mar 15, 2022, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s459.raw.html>.

her. The actual figure poses are virtually identical, but the composition could have been inspired by the drawings Gabriel made of Elizabeth rather than poses for a specific narrative. If the drawings were intended as studies for this work, then why did Gabriel pose Elizabeth with redundant musical instruments? All are dated 1852, but it is not known which was completed first.

There is another possibility which provides an interesting twist. The double pipes Elizabeth is playing could also be representative of the two arts of poetry and painting. These two arts were critical to the unfolding careers of both Elizabeth and Gabriel. It is therefore possible that even at this early stage in their relationship, Gabriel recognised Elizabeth as his 'Muse', and specifically chose to depict her as the Muse Euterpe in this drawing. It is Elizabeth the model who was Gabriel's muse at this moment in time. Her physical presence posing in his studio inspired him to create.

This interpretation may be strengthened by referring to the companion piece mentioned by Surtees (Fig. 69 right), the figure pose of which is also used in *St Elizabeth of Hungary*. This drawing similarly shows Elizabeth kneeling, plucking a stringed instrument which is hanging over her shoulder by a cord. Suzanne Fagence Cooper has been unable to identify the stringed instrument, but she suggests it is different to Gabriel's other 'mash-up medieval objects', such as seen in *The Tune of Seven Towers* (1857, Tate Gallery, London).<sup>81</sup> She feels that Elizabeth is holding a real object because 'this is a difficult pose to maintain, kneeling and twisted, and seems to be a direct life study'. Is it possible that in this image Gabriel has depicted Elizabeth as another Muse, Erato, the Muse of love poetry? Erato's attribute is a lyre, and while this

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<sup>81</sup> Suzanne Fagence Cooper, author and art historian, email message to the author, Jan 6, 2022.

instrument is not a typical lyre shape, it may be Gabriel's interpretation of the instrument he imagined Erato might carry.

Despite feminist interventions, in the twenty-first century the term 'muse' remains synonymous with defining those females (or males) who willingly offer sexual favours in return for satisfying the whims of male artistic creativity. As Francine Prose writes:

... feminism has made us rethink musedom as a career choice. Doesn't the idea of the muse reinforce the destructive stereotype of the creative, productive, active male and of the passive female, at once worshipped and degraded, agreeably disrobing to model or offer inspirational sex?<sup>82</sup>

In Elizabeth's case, the question as to whether she and Gabriel indulged in pre-marital sexual activity is unanswerable. Stereotypes are only created by public perception, and there are always exceptions to generalisation. Elizabeth appears to have been the exception as a muse. While initially Gabriel was attracted to her physical characteristics, as Elizabeth became Gabriel's pupil and progressed to becoming an artist in her own right, her artistic output began to supersede her person as the stimulus for his creative inspiration. Their projects working on shared themes, their plans for collaboration, their discussion of subjects and ideas all induced creativity in both artists. As their relationship developed, Elizabeth's ideas, drawings and sketches became increasingly significant to Gabriel, in effect taking over the role of 'muse' from her persona. Her drawings inspired him, and he strove to achieve the naïve effect in his own work. This intimate relationship with her oeuvre perhaps provided his motivation for creating the photographic portfolios.

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<sup>82</sup> Francine Prose, *The Lives of the Muses: Nine Women and the Artists They Inspired* (New York and London: Harper Collins and Aurum Press, 2002), 9.

## **Conclusion**

From the first time he saw her, Elizabeth inspired Gabriel's creativity. Her early days posing for him in character began to sow the seeds of an artistic relationship that would blossom and grow. Elizabeth's roles were not mutually exclusive; while she was studying as his pupil she was also modelling for him, and likewise when she was working alongside him as a fully-fledged artist and collaborator. Alongside all these roles she emerged as his muse, providing the key to unlocking his creative powers. During her lifetime there was a two-way flow of ideas in the studio, with both artists often working on the same theme or collaborative project. Elizabeth's artistic output took on an increasing significance in providing Gabriel with inspiration. After her death, he needed to retain Elizabeth's presence in some form to provide him with his creative inspiration. He felt her presence in the body of work she left behind, and thus through the photographic portfolios, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 6 – Posthumous Reference

### Introduction

Elizabeth's untimely death from a laudanum overdose on 11 February 1862 had a profound effect on Gabriel, who initially refused to believe that she would not wake again once the effects of the laudanum had worn off. William recalls 'a moment of great agitation' when Gabriel, 'standing by the corpse, was crying out "Oh Lizzie, Lizzie, come back to me!"'<sup>1</sup> Despite the efforts of four doctors the outcome was inevitable. After her funeral, Chatham Place held too many memories for Gabriel, a multitude of 'joys and hopes and griefs of old on which death had set his seal', and in October 1862 he relocated to Tudor House, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea.<sup>2</sup>

Gabriel found both comfort and inspiration in Elizabeth's drawings which he proudly displayed on the walls of the drawing room at his new residence. As Georgiana Burne-Jones recalled, it was almost like a shrine to his dead wife:

No Thames Embankment had reached Chelsea then, and only a narrow road lay between the tall iron gates of the forecourt of 16, Cheyne Walk, and the wide river which was lit up that evening by a full moon. Gabriel had hung Lizzie's beautiful pen-and-ink and water-colour designs in the long drawing-room with its seven windows looking south, where if ever a ghost returned to earth hers must have come to seek him...<sup>3</sup>

Gabriel began to immerse himself in his art as he found 'the inactive moments the most unbearable'.<sup>4</sup> His output immediately following Elizabeth's death included *Girl at a Lattice* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, originally purchased by friend and fellow artist Boyce); designs for stained glass; and perhaps most

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<sup>1</sup> Rossetti, *Family Letters*, I, 224.

<sup>2</sup> Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, 271.

<sup>3</sup> Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, 292.

<sup>4</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 457-8 (item 62.18). Letter to Mrs Gilchrist dated 2 March 1862.



notably numerous drawings and sketches of other women. The faces of Fanny Cornforth, who later became Gabriel's housekeeper, and Jane Morris, wife of Gabriel's good friend William, replace that of Elizabeth on his later large oil canvases. Kirsty Stonell-Walker notes in the introduction to her biography of Fanny Cornforth:

The models have come to define each other; Elizabeth Siddal was pale and fragile, Fanny Cornforth was loud and brassy, Jane Morris was dark and brooding. Elizabeth was too cold for sex, Fanny was only sex, Jane transcended sex. Round and round they go, Elizabeth's spirit, Fanny's body, Jane's soul...<sup>5</sup>

Both Fanny Cornforth and Jane Morris modelled for Gabriel, yet neither ever entirely replaced Elizabeth as his true muse. Elizabeth is elevated to a higher status than Gabriel's other models because she was the only one to take up her brush and pencil to create art on equal terms. Yet with his artistic muse no longer providing the stimulus for his inspiration, was Gabriel afraid of losing his creativity? His feelings of guilt, remorse and loss remained paramount, yet these feelings ensured Elizabeth remained the focus of his attention, and consequently his emphasis turned towards her legacy: her artistic oeuvre.

As time passed, instead of Elizabeth's physical presence and the social interaction of working together in his studio providing Gabriel with inspiration, her drawings began to assume the role she herself had previously filled. Many of his subsequent works reveal how the link between muse and creativity persisted after Elizabeth's death. In this chapter I will examine a selection of Gabriel's works produced from 1863 onwards to demonstrate how he continually incorporated motifs from Elizabeth's drawings into his own work.

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<sup>5</sup> Kirsty Stonell Walker, *Stunner: The Fall and Rise of Fanny Cornforth* ([www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com): Self-published through Lulu Publishing, 2006), 5.

These motifs are characteristic of Elizabeth's idiosyncratic style, which highlights their use in his designs. After close examination of Surtees's *catalogue raisonné*, the works by Gabriel chosen for analysis are the oil painting *A Sea Spell* (1877, Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University); the little-known work *La Castagnetta*, also known as *The Dancing Girl* or *The Daughter of Herodias*, (c.1863, Private Collection); Gabriel's own illustration for his poem *Sister Helen*, (c.1870, Private Collection); a sketch entitled *Three Sang of Love Together* (c.1865, Private Collection); and an illustration for the title page of his sister Christina's volume *The Prince's Progress* (1865, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery). These examples present a good cross-section of his oeuvre and provide the opportunity to explore the posthumous relationship between Elizabeth's work and Gabriel's creativity. I will show that as previously suggested, it is probable Gabriel kept a personal copy of the photographic portfolio for use as a source book, returning to it time and again for inspiration.

### **The Lady Clare Effect**

One of the key works in Elizabeth's oeuvre that appears to have inspired the work of both Gabriel and other artists within the Pre-Raphaelite circle is her vibrant watercolour *Lady Clare* (Fig. A.43). Although held in a private collection, *Lady Clare* is relatively well-known, having benefited from display in many exhibitions including *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* held at the Tate Gallery, London in 2012. Prettejohn singles this work out for close attention in *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, offering two contrasting ways in which the watercolour can be read.<sup>6</sup> These interpretations are key to understanding how influential *Lady Clare* became, both in Gabriel's work and in the paintings of the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle.

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<sup>6</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 76-7.

The first interpretation Prettejohn cites assumes the traditional patriarchal art-historical approach, demonstrating how *Lady Clare* is in every way autobiographical and ‘heavily indebted to the series of medievalising watercolours Rossetti had begun in about 1855’.<sup>7</sup> Illustrating Tennyson’s poem of the same name, the protagonist is about to marry the wealthy Lord Ronald when her nurse reveals a shocking secret: Clare is her own daughter, not the Lady she believed herself to be.<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth has chosen to depict the emotion-filled scene when the nurse is pleading with her daughter to conceal the truth from Lord Ronald, which Prettejohn suggests is perhaps indicative of the class divide between Elizabeth and Gabriel.<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth’s poor technical skill in the depiction of the figures, lack of understanding of the human anatomy and ‘the formless character of the lower draperies’ are criticised.<sup>10</sup> Her use of watercolour rather than oil is also demeaned as ‘less daunting’ for the amateur artist.<sup>11</sup> It must be emphasised that this is *not* Prettejohn’s viewpoint. She has simply included it to provide a typical illustration of the traditional art-historical interpretation of Elizabeth’s work.

The alternative reading of *Lady Clare*, informed by Cherry’s catalogue entry for the Tate Gallery’s exhibition in 1984, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, is then presented.<sup>12</sup> This interpretation immediately highlights the strength of Elizabeth’s composition, and suggests that rather than being derivative, her work may have influenced Gabriel’s medieval watercolours painted around the same time.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Lady Clare* (Online: Project Gutenberg, 2004), accessed Feb 3, 2022, <https://ia800309.us.archive.org/1/items/ladyclare06074gut/ldycl10h.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 76.

<sup>10</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 76.

<sup>11</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 76.

<sup>12</sup> Deborah Cherry, catalogue entry 222 (Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, *Lady Clare*), in *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Edited by Leslie Parris, 283 (London: Tate Gallery, 1984), Exhibition Catalogue.

<sup>13</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 76.

Prettejohn asserts that in fact *Lady Clare* is represented by the 'obvious echoes' in Gabriel's *Before the Battle* (1858, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), *St George and the Princess Sabra* (1857, Tate Gallery, London), and specifically Burne-Jones's *The Knight's Farewell* (1858, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Fig. 70).<sup>14</sup> All three works draw on the same medieval theme, perhaps prompted by another of Elizabeth's watercolours, *Lady Affixing a Pennant to a Knight's Spear* (Fig. A.42).

Burne-Jones's drawing shows the Knight and Lady embracing each other on the evening before he departs for the battleground. Prettejohn identifies their pose as 'a quotation of Siddal's figure of *Lady Clare*' since the arrangement of the principal figures mirrors her composition.<sup>15</sup> While the incline of the head and neck of Burne-Jones's female figure is visually similar to that of *Lady Clare*, he has transposed the orientation of the kneeling figure so that the awkwardness of Elizabeth's original pose has been lost.<sup>16</sup> The act of embracing is diametrically opposed to the resistance expressed by Elizabeth's figure. Neither of the works mentioned by Gabriel displays the same degree of visual similarity, yet there are parallels between the colour palettes of green, rust and bright ultramarine blue that could denote a subtle infiltration of Elizabeth's ideas. Prettejohn further asserts that the true significance of *Lady Clare* 'may be less in the works it directly influenced than in its initiation of a female figure type much stronger and bolder' than those depicted in earlier Pre-Raphaelite

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<sup>14</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 76-7.

<sup>15</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 103.

<sup>16</sup> See also Chapter 7.

works.<sup>17</sup> The elements she emphasises as innovative in Elizabeth's watercolour are:

the strong neck, often as here inclined in an unconventional curve for expressive purposes, abundant wavy hair suggesting the female character's vitality, and wide eyes indicating introspection or thoughtfulness.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, these characteristics can be easily identified in many of the later Pre-Raphaelite depictions of women, particularly those by Gabriel.

The critical difference between *Lady Clare* and subsequent works by the male members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle is that Elizabeth has chosen to depict a strong female character, not just a pretty face. Like *The Lady of Shalott*, discussed in Chapter 4, *Lady Clare* shows a woman with purpose, facing a potentially life-changing decision. She is in control of her own mind and thus of this decision. The awkward pose Elizabeth has employed for her figure underlines her strength of character. Lady Clare's body is inclined away from that of her mother, resisting her pleading arms. Her mother's face is forcefully pushed away. Prettejohn suggests that this type of figure, when painted by female artists such as Elizabeth, is 'expressing a feminine selfhood that is not obliged to make a full confession to the patriarchal public world'.<sup>19</sup> When executed by a male hand, however, sensuality and eroticism inevitably enter the equation. The figures then become 'beautiful women with floral adjuncts', and the viewer's gaze is often met rather than rejected.<sup>20</sup> There are no narrative elements to the paintings; they illustrate nothing but female beauty.

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<sup>17</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> Rossetti, *Family Letters*, I, 203.

Prettejohn continues that by around 1865, the type of figure originating from *Lady Clare* 'had begun to appear in the work of all the former Pre-Raphaelites who were still working as painters, as well as that of many of their more recent associates'.<sup>21</sup> She offers Holman Hunt's *Il Dolce Far Niente* (1859-66, retouched 1874-5, The John Schaeffer Collection, Sydney, Australia) and Millais's *Esther* (1865, private collection) as further examples (Fig. 71). Here it is the unusual figure pose of *Lady Clare*, rather than the strong female character-type which Elizabeth chose to illustrate, that is highlighted.<sup>22</sup> Once identified, the three characteristics of the *Lady Clare* figure pose she foregrounds – the serpentine neck, wavy hair and wide eyes – are found in abundance throughout Gabriel's later paintings as well as in works by other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. This I have termed the '*Lady Clare* effect' and in this chapter I will demonstrate how it has infiltrated Gabriel's work. I will show how it spread throughout the Pre-Raphaelite circle in Chapter 7.

To assess the extent of the *Lady Clare* effect in Gabriel's later works it is necessary to view a chronological selection of his paintings. His first work in this new 'floral' genre was *Bocca Baciata* (1859, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Fig. 72 left), painted for his friend Boyce. As Prettejohn explains, this was a kind of training exercise for him, as he had spent very little time painting either flesh or using oil paints in the past.<sup>23</sup> Gabriel himself refers to the painting as having a 'Venetian aspect', which was probably a reflection of his love for the work of Titian and Veronese he had seen in Paris.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> See also Chapter 7.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Beautiful Women with Floral Adjuncts" in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Edited by Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn and Edwin Becker (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), Exhibition Catalogue, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 269 (item 59.35).

*Bocca Baciata* simply depicts the head and shoulders of a beautiful woman (Fanny Cornforth) surrounded by flowers. Often seen as the turning point in Gabriel's art, in this instance there does not appear to be any more than a passing similarity with *Lady Clare*. Two of the three key characteristics are missing; the figure's eyes appear natural, and her neck is not contorted. The third characteristic, the figure's hair, shows a slight wave but it is not a pronounced feature. *Bocca Baciata* was painted during a period when little is known about Elizabeth's movements and the relationship between the pair was believed to have cooled. It may have emerged as a reaction to their period of separation. After Elizabeth's death, however, the three key characteristics of the *Lady Clare* effect take more prominence in Gabriel's work. *Helen of Troy* (1863, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany, Fig. 72 right), for example, clearly exhibits wavier hair and much larger eyes than *Bocca Baciata*, yet the pose is still traditional and reminiscent of Venetian portraits.

The first true occurrence of the *Lady Clare* effect does not appear until a few years after Elizabeth's death, in the series of photographs of Jane Morris taken by Robert John Parsons under Gabriel's direction in 1865. Two of the photographs (Fig. 73) provide examples of how Gabriel positioned Jane's body to explore the awkwardness of the principal figure in Elizabeth's *Lady Clare*. Debra Mancoff comments that Jane can be seen 'arching her long neck into one of the uncomfortable, attenuated positions that Rossetti so favored'.<sup>25</sup> She does not, however, explore the origins of these contorted poses. A further standing pose bears some resemblance to Elizabeth's pen and ink drawing for *Lady Clare* (Fig. 74), now held in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. As

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<sup>25</sup> Debra N. Mancoff, "Seeing Mrs. Morris: Photographs of Jane Morris from the Collection of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* Vol. 62 No. 3 (2001): 385.

mentioned in Chapter 2, Parsons was the most likely photographer to have taken the images of Elizabeth's work which Gabriel collated into the photographic portfolios. The pen and ink drawing of *Lady Clare* was among those included. As the photographs of Jane Morris and of Elizabeth's drawings were taken in the same year, 1865, both would have been readily available to Gabriel in his studio when working on his subsequent oil paintings.

Parsons's photographs of Jane Morris seem to have provided Gabriel with further artistic inspiration. Indeed, Mancoff goes as far as to suggest that:

His plan was to have Jane assume a variety of postures that he could use as aides mémoires for future paintings, so as to study Jane's image when she was not able to sit for him.<sup>26</sup>

This shows that Gabriel appears to be both exploring and exploiting the new medium of photography in the production of his art. Mancoff and Michael Bartram agree that one of these images of Jane provided the visual source for Gabriel's 1868 work *Reverie*.<sup>27</sup> Bartram suggests *Reverie* (1868, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) and *The Rose Leaf* (1870, National Gallery of Canada) are 'exercises in prettification of photographs'.<sup>28</sup> He continues that 'Rossetti could not metamorphose her in the photographs, yet maybe she could not escape being 'interpreted' by him'.<sup>29</sup> Gabriel's 'interpretation' of the photographs took many forms. Following *Reverie*, a similar pose appeared in various guises using different models throughout the rest of his life. Fig. 75 shows a timeline sequence from *Bocca Baciata* through *Reverie* and *A Sea-Spell*, the work I

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<sup>26</sup> Mancoff, "Seeing Mrs. Morris," 385.

<sup>27</sup> Mancoff, "Seeing Mrs. Morris," 396. and Michael Bartram, *The Pre-Raphaelite Camera* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985), 135.

<sup>28</sup> Bartram, *The Pre-Raphaelite Camera*, 135.

<sup>29</sup> Bartram, *The Pre-Raphaelite Camera*, 136.



have identified for further discussion, culminating in his last major oil painting *The Day Dream*.

Despite twelve years having elapsed between *Reverie* and *The Day Dream*, the latter still features Jane Morris as a young woman in her prime, hardly having aged at all (Fig. 76). A more realistic image of her at forty years of age can be seen in a photograph taken by Robert Faulkner & Co. in October 1879 for a *Carte de Visite* (Fig. 77). Later, Evelyn De Morgan captured Jane in old age, but still beautiful, in a study for *The Hour Glass* (1904, The De Morgan Foundation). In death, Elizabeth had escaped the ravages of time, which Gabriel erased from the 'Jane' he painted. It would appear, therefore, that in *The Day Dream* Gabriel is recalling his earlier passionate relationship with Jane, which had more or less ended with his breakdown in 1872. This interpretation is perhaps substantiated by his reference to 'Reverie' in the sonnet he wrote to accompany *The Day Dream*, a copy of which he sent in a letter to her dated 3 September 1880:

THE thronged boughs of the shadowy sycamore  
Still bear young leaflets half the summer through;  
From when the robin 'gainst the unhidden blue  
Perched dark, till now, deep in the leafy core,  
The embowered throstle's urgent wood-notes soar  
Through summer silence. Still the leaves come new;  
Yet never rosy-sheathed as those which drew  
Their spiral tongues from spring-buds heretofore.  
Within the branching shade of Reverie  
Dreams even may spring till autumn; yet none be  
Like woman's budding day-dream spirit-fann'd.  
Lo! tow'rd deep skies, not deeper than her look,  
She dreams; till now on her forgotten book  
Drops the forgotten blossom from her hand. <sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, IX, 267-271 (item 80.298).

The poem can be read in isolation, without prior knowledge of the painting. It is only the last two lines of the sonnet that pull the reader back to the woman depicted on Rossetti's canvas and her 'forgotten book'. 'Reverie' in this context presents the reader and viewer with a synonym of 'Day Dream', the title of both poem and painting. This generates an immediate connection with Gabriel's earlier work *Reverie*, and consequently with the photographs taken by Parsons. Indeed, this relationship was noted by H.C. Marillier in his early biography of Gabriel, who concluded:

But there is little doubt that Rossetti, from the sittings which Mrs. Morris then gave him, built up materials for much of his subsequent work, just as he had previously done in the case of Miss Siddal.<sup>31</sup>

It would seem reasonable to suggest, therefore, that Jane's face in *The Day Dream* was not painted from life, but from photographs and memories of youth and passion. It is therefore *Gabriel's* day-dream, not the day-dream of the woman in the painting, and it demonstrates how important the medium of photography had become to the creation of his art.

The next work I have selected for further analysis is *A Sea-Spell* as it demonstrates the *Lady Clare* effect most clearly. Completed in 1877, towards the end of his life, this painting typifies Gabriel's later works of the floral genre. It illustrates a sonnet of the same name, included here for clarity:

Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,  
While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell  
Between its chords; and as the wild notes swell,  
The sea-bird for those branches leaves the sea.  
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she?  
What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,

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<sup>31</sup> H.C Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of his Art and Life* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1899), 149.

In answering echoes from what planisphere,  
Along the wind, along the estuary?

She sinks into her spell: and when full soon  
Her lips move and she soars into her song,  
What creatures of the midmost main shall throng  
In furrowed surf-clouds to the summoning rune;  
Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,  
And up her rock, bare-breasted, comes to die?<sup>32</sup>

At first glance the painting appears to reflect the sonnet accurately. The sea-bird is visible in the apple tree above the siren's head, which is crowned with a garland of apple blossom, and her fingers are playing the strings of her instrument. Yet William felt compelled to elucidate in his accompanying notes when the poem was published:

The sonnet, without the picture, may seem somewhat obscure. The idea is that of a Siren, or Sea-Fairy, seated in a tree, whose lute summons a sea-bird to listen, and whose song will soon prove fatal to some fascinated mariner.<sup>33</sup>

The need for his explanation stems from the fact that the sonnet was written *after* the painting was created, rather than providing the inspiration for the artwork. This unusual scenario, therefore, means that a different source must have inspired Gabriel's original idea for his painting.

*A Sea-Spell* clearly demonstrates all three of the characteristics previously identified as producing the *Lady Clare* effect: the serpentine neck, wide eyes and wavy hair. It also shows marked visual similarities with *Reverie* and thus with Parson's source photograph of Jane. While *Reverie* maintains the same figure orientation as the photograph and Elizabeth's *Lady Clare*, *A Sea-Spell* presents the viewer with a mirror image of the position of the figure's head and

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<sup>32</sup> William Michael Rossetti, ed., *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Ellis, 1911), 211.

<sup>33</sup> Rossetti, *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 668.

neck. Although this awkward pose clearly originates from *Lady Clare*, *A Sea-Spell* develops the idea further, journeying past Gabriel's infatuation with Jane and depicting a different model, Alexa Wilding. Earlier Gabriel had meticulously sketched Alexa in the same pose as he had painted Jane in *Reverie* but viewed from the opposite side.<sup>34</sup> He appears to have referred to this sketch when creating *A Sea-Spell*. When the three images are seen together the similarities are clear (Fig. 78). This makes it highly unlikely that *A Sea-Spell* was created without Gabriel revisiting the photographs of Jane and his earlier chalk drawing *Reverie*. *Reverie* was duplicated, with one copy given to his literary friend Theodore Watts-Dunton and the other to Jane herself, presumably both as gifts from the artist. It was also photographed by Frederick Hollyer, a copy of which was published by Marillier in his biography of Gabriel. It is therefore possible that Gabriel may have even used Hollyer's photograph of *Reverie* rather than one of the original drawings for his inspiration.

Taking the visual similarity further, when the figure pose of *A Sea-Spell* is compared with a mirror image of Elizabeth's drawing for *Lady Clare*, the placement of the figures' heads and necks appears virtually identical (Fig. 79). When viewed in the correct orientation there is also a correlation between the position of the figures' left arms, despite the arm positions differing considerably to allow for each artist's personal narrative to be made clear to the viewer. While Gabriel's siren gently plays her instrument, Elizabeth shows Clare's strength of character in resisting her mother. Treuherz comments that 'mirrors, mirror images and balancing figures recur many times' in Gabriel's work, citing *The Blue Closet* (1857, Tate Gallery, London) among a number of examples.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Surtees, *Catalogue Raisonné*, I, 201.

<sup>35</sup> Treuherz, "The Most Startlingly Original Living," 37.

He continues by suggesting that such motifs 'are not mere compositional devices but have powerful emotional effects that give depth to his art'.<sup>36</sup> This theory could be extended to include Gabriel's appropriation of the mirror images of Elizabeth's work which regularly appear in his own designs.

The correlation between *A Sea-Spell* and *Lady Clare* is remarkable, making it seem unlikely for Gabriel to have simply imagined his figure pose for *A Sea-Spell*. Instead, it appears to have evolved over time from Elizabeth's original figure pose in *Lady Clare*, mediated through Gabriel's repeated use of photographs as source materials, both from the photographic portfolios and from Parsons's photographs of Jane Morris. In the introduction to *Modern Painters, Old Masters* Prettejohn discusses this type of 'borrowing' of ideas from another artist. She suggests that in such cases the artist who copies the ideas of another artist to work into his own design may express 'a willingness ... to learn from the earlier artist's work as the pupil learns from the teacher'.<sup>37</sup>

Applied to the scenario under discussion, it essentially becomes a role-reversal from the teacher/pupil working relationship during Elizabeth's lifetime.<sup>38</sup> Gabriel had always admired Elizabeth's work, produced from her untutored imagination, and after her death the only way for him to retain links with his muse was through her work. If this meant appropriating her ideas to create his own designs, then it was perfectly acceptable, as Prettejohn explains:

That creates the possibility, apparently paradoxical, that through imitation one might discover something that one did not know before – in other words, that imitation may be a genuine road to originality.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Treuherz, "The Most Startlingly Original Living," 37.

<sup>37</sup> Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> See also Chapter 5.

<sup>39</sup> Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters*, 15.

This concept may go some way towards explaining why Gabriel's work is always viewed as innovative, while Elizabeth's lesser known (but earlier) works are classed as derivative. By imitating the characteristics that he admired in Elizabeth's work, Gabriel was able to create his own, original masterpieces.

Prettejohn defines this type of copying as 'generous imitation'.<sup>40</sup> Her examples are drawn from the Old Masters, but it is possible to substitute Elizabeth's work here as the source of his inspiration and imitation. As discussed above, the story of *A Sea-Spell* appears long and complicated, but the trail eventually seems to lead back through the medium of photography to Elizabeth's drawing of *Lady Clare* in the photographic portfolio. The degree of similarity between the two suggests the possibility that Gabriel's original inspiration may have been obtained by perusing the photographic portfolio and chancing upon Elizabeth's *Lady Clare*. In so doing it also offers potential evidence that Gabriel used a copy of the photographic portfolio as a source book of ideas, a possibility which I will return to later in this chapter.

### **La Castagnetta**

The *Lady Clare* effect was not the only aspect of Elizabeth's work that found its way into Gabriel's art. One of the oil paintings he produced during the period immediately following Elizabeth's death, *La Castagnetta* (Fig. 80), offers a different example. This little-known work depicts a flamenco dancer lost in the twirling movement of her dance. The figure pose appears awkward and unusual with the head and shoulders of the figure placed within an almost circular frame. The frenzy associated with flamenco dancing is thus constrained within the frame, intensifying the effect of movement. The

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<sup>40</sup> Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters*, 15.

castanets of the title are clearly visible in her hands and her head is crowned with a wreath of flowers.

A visual similarity with the principal figure in *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* (1858, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) was noted in the catalogue for *La Castagnetta*'s most recent sale at Sotheby's in November 2003.<sup>41</sup> When these two works are viewed side by side, however, the similarity appears to reference the position of the figure's arms only (Fig. 81). Although the placement of the figure's forearms in both works is similar, the orientation of the angle created where hand meets arm is quite different. The Magdalene's head is viewed in profile looking towards the right picture margin, while the flamenco dancer gazes upwards towards the top left-hand corner. This creates a different viewer experience of each figure, particularly when combined with the title and subject matter.

While there is a certain degree of similarity between *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* and *La Castagnetta*, Gabriel's inspiration for the latter may have been found elsewhere, namely in a series of drawings made by Elizabeth. Four of these drawings are now held in the British Museum and were originally attributed to Gabriel before correction by John Gere in 1994 (Figs. A.2-5). The fifth is known only from the photographic portfolio. In his detailed study *Pre-Raphaelite Drawings in the British Museum*, Gere explains that Surtees attributes one drawing to Elizabeth, maintaining the rest are by Gabriel's hand. Gere disagrees with Surtees's attribution, claiming that

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<sup>41</sup> "The British Sale," Lot 316, *Sotheby's*, Nov 27, 2013, accessed Jan 30, 2020, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.316.html/2003/the-british-sale-l03124>. Note: This link is now obsolete potentially due to the closure of the Sotheby's branch.

... in style and handling the group is surely homogeneous, and Rossetti's authorship of the roundel designs can surely be ruled out on grounds of quality. Furthermore, a photograph of a sketch for the same roundel, containing three cymbal-bearing angels preceded by three doves ... is on p.14 of the album in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge...<sup>42</sup>

The 'album' Gere refers to here is the Fitzwilliam Museum's copy of the photographic portfolio. This demonstrates once again how critical these collections of photographs are to understanding Elizabeth's oeuvre. Without the portfolios as evidence, all four drawings would have remained attributed to Gabriel.

It is disappointing to note that the main reason for Gere's reattribution is based on what he terms 'quality'. By this I am assuming he refers to technical ability rather than innovation and originality, since I have already demonstrated these characteristics in Elizabeth's work in Chapter 4. Gere's method of deciding the hand of the artist is wholly unsatisfactory as works by both Gabriel and Elizabeth display very similar characteristics. This closeness of style between master and pupil can be seen in many of their drawings, as discussed in Chapter 5. Another roundel, for example, securely attributed to Gabriel as it has apparently been cut from one of his letters, is simply known as *Sketch of Two Figures* (n.d. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery). When this sketch is placed alongside one version of Elizabeth's *Angel with Cymbals*, the similarities in style are clear (Fig. 82). Both artists have used the same medium: brown ink and wash over pencil. Both have enclosed their drawing in a similar circle. In this comparison, however, it is Gabriel's drawing that is less refined in execution. If Gere's assessment of quality were to be applied as a test of

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<sup>42</sup> J.A Gere, *Pre-Raphaelite Drawings in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), Item 109.



authenticity, it would be easy to claim that in this case Gabriel's drawing was by Elizabeth.

The caption included by Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery suggests the image was inspired by 'some figures on a small oriental dish belonging to Murray Marks'.<sup>43</sup> This is because the verso of the drawing appears to include some text from the letter, possibly in Gabriel's handwriting: 'Received of Mr Mark / December 23 2/6'<sup>44</sup>. The right-hand side of the page has been cropped, removing the letter 'S' which would have completed the name 'Marks'. As Gabriel and Elizabeth frequently used both sides of their paper, the writing on the verso may be totally unconnected with the sketch. There is no signature, monogram or any other identifying feature to confirm this is a drawing by Gabriel, yet it has been firmly attributed to him based on the text on the verso. If it was cut from a letter, what happened to the rest of the letter?

Marks was an art dealer, and there are numerous letters between Gabriel and Marks discussing prospective purchases, including items of blue-and-white porcelain, of which Gabriel was an avid collector.<sup>45</sup> It has not been possible to identify the specific letter in question, but notably, letters from Gabriel to Marks do not begin until 1864, two years after Elizabeth's death.

When *La Castagnetta* is viewed alongside the ink and wash drawing and two of Elizabeth's pencil sketches of the same figure the similarities become more apparent (Fig. 83). All figures are playing percussion instruments. Elizabeth's angels hold a pair of cymbals in outstretched arms ready to be brought together

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<sup>43</sup> "Sketch of Two Figures," Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1840-88, accessed Jan 30, 2020, <http://www.prerafaelites.org/the-collection/1904P324/sketch-of-two-figures/#detail>. Note: This link is now obsolete. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery have a new collections website which is not yet fully functional.

<sup>44</sup> "Sketch of Two Figures."

<sup>45</sup> See for example Fredeman, *Correspondence*, III, 514 (item 67.33 and note 1).

in a heavenly clash, while Gabriel has chosen a different instrument, a pair of castanets, in line with his title *La Castagnetta*. Most notably played by flamenco dancers, each castanet is operated by a single hand, with the fingers clicking the two wooden 'scallop' together. The arms twirl around the dancer's body, clicking rhythmically in time with the music. It would appear, therefore, that Gabriel has simply modified the position of his figure's arms to reflect the twirling movements of her dance. This does not detract from the overall visual similarity of the figure pose and confining circular frame which both artists have employed.

The position of the figure's head, neck and body are almost identical in all four works. Although Elizabeth's figures have no features, there is an undeniable similarity in the figure pose. In addition, the wings of the angel (Fig. 83, second from right) are echoed in the hair of Gabriel's figure. The swirling fabric of the dancer's dress in Gabriel's painting also mirrors the sketchy folds Elizabeth has depicted. These close similarities could not have occurred unless Gabriel had sight of Elizabeth's drawings while working on his own composition. In this case the three of Elizabeth's drawings that are most closely echoed by Gabriel's *La Castagnetta* are *not* included in the photographic portfolio, which may have accounted for the early misattribution. It is reasonable to assume, however, that they were still in his possession in 1863.

The provenance of these drawings by Elizabeth is relatively secure. They were donated to the British Museum by a Dr Robert Steele in 1939. Research shows that Dr Steele was one of the executors of May Morris's will (daughter of William

and Jane Morris) after her death in October 1938.<sup>46</sup> May had inherited her mother's treasures and had given some to Dr Steele as gifts. Dr Steele later donated various items to the British Museum, including drawings by Gabriel and Burne-Jones, and over a hundred letters from Gabriel to Jane Morris (now in the British Library). This suggests that Elizabeth's drawings were probably part of Jane Morris's original collection which passed to Dr Steele and were donated to the museum at the same time as the letters.

It is not recorded how Jane acquired Elizabeth's drawings from Gabriel, but during their relationship he gave her many gifts, including a number of paintings and drawings.<sup>47</sup> He may also have given her a few of Elizabeth's drawings as keepsakes when he presented Jane with the jewellery casket he and Elizabeth had been making (Fig. A.24). As the drawings remained in Jane's possession Gabriel would have maintained unlimited access to them, so it is not known why they were not included in the photographic portfolios. Whatever the reason for their omission, evidence suggests that these drawings provided the inspiration for the figure pose in *La Castagnetta*. This shows how Gabriel had found a way to continue his working relationship with Elizabeth posthumously, with her work taking the place of her physical presence as his muse.

### **Illustrating Poetry**

Elizabeth's drawings appear to have provided the 'muse' for more than Gabriel's oil paintings, and often he did not restrict himself to the simple adaptation of a single drawing to provide the source of inspiration for his own work. The illustration he produced for his poem *Sister Helen* (Fig. 84), included

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<sup>46</sup> "Dr Robert Steele" (biography), *The British Museum*, accessed Nov 30, 2021.

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG47218>.

<sup>47</sup> Anne Anderson, "I thank you so much for thinking me still worthy of making so lovely a present to": Gifts from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Jane Morris, *The Journal of William Morris Studies*, Vol. XXI No. 3: 4,11.

in a volume of poetry published in 1870, offers an example of the appropriation of multiple sources. Gabriel's image depicts a central female figure seated with arms outstretched in front and head inclined towards her left shoulder. Behind her and to the viewer's right a child appears to be climbing up onto a ledge. To the left is a shadowy figure apparently carrying, or tied to, a long stick. The architectural detail suggests the interior of a room. At first glance the image appears very 'Rossettian'; the *Lady Clare* effect of the wavy hair and position of the figure's head are echoed in many of his oil paintings as discussed earlier. Yet a detailed knowledge of Elizabeth's oeuvre suggests this is not an original illustration by Gabriel for his poem, but a compilation of several of Elizabeth's earlier ideas, all of which were included in the photographic portfolios of her work.<sup>48</sup>

Up to fifteen years before Gabriel began his drawing of *Sister Helen*, Elizabeth had made three known illustrations for this poem, two of which are now deemed lost and known only from the photographic portfolios.<sup>49</sup> All her designs are potentially datable to 1854, when Gabriel wrote to Allingham on 23 July that 'Miss S[jiddal] has made a splendid design from that Sister Helen of mine'.<sup>50</sup> It is not known which of the drawings he is referring to, but since he describes it as 'splendid' it may well be the most finished drawing (Fig. A.87), suggesting the rougher sketches may have been completed earlier. This more detailed sketch and another of Elizabeth's drawings (Fig. 85) show a marked similarity with Gabriel's finished design.

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Poems* (London: F.S. Ellis, 1870), 133-44.

<sup>50</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 363 (item 54.55).

Gabriel's poem *Sister Helen* narrates a conversation between the protagonist, Helen, who uses witchcraft to avenge her deceitful lover, and her little brother who reports from the balcony. Both Elizabeth's and Gabriel's images illustrate the seventh stanza where Helen melts a waxen doll in front of the fire. Her brother tirelessly questions her actions and reports what he sees from 'without the gallery door'.<sup>51</sup> The seventh stanza reads as follows:

'Here high up in the balcony,  
Sister Helen,  
The moon flies face to face with me.'  
'Aye, look and say whatever you see,  
Little brother.'<sup>52</sup>

Elizabeth's inspiration appears to derive from these lines. Her drawings depict an aperture representing the gallery door, with a figure showing Helen's 'little brother' climbing 'high up' to reach the balcony and report back on what he can see. It is difficult to accept coincidence was responsible for both Elizabeth and Gabriel choosing to illustrate the identical scene. The version of the poem published in the volume of 1870 contains thirty-four stanzas (238 lines). Gabriel could have selected any other stanza to illustrate, yet he clearly followed Elizabeth's choice. Since all her drawings pre-date his by around fifteen years, it is likely that as William commented in the case of *St. Cecilia*, 'this detail of invention properly belongs to Miss Siddal'<sup>53</sup>.

In all her sketches Elizabeth has depicted the figure of a child climbing onto a ledge in a similar place and pose to that subsequently drawn by Gabriel. Close analysis of the figure of the child shows that although Gabriel has positioned his figure's head differently, there are similarities between all three figures (Fig. 86).

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<sup>51</sup> Rossetti, *Poems*, 135, line 38.

<sup>52</sup> Rossetti, *Poems*, 135, lines 43-47.

<sup>53</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 295.

The child stands on one leg with the other raised as if climbing. In Gabriel's drawing and Elizabeth's more finished sketch (Fig. 86 left and centre), it is the left knee that is raised, but in her rough sketch (Fig. 86 right), the right knee. All three sketches show the child pointing at something with his index finger extended. Despite the limitations of working with photographs rather than original drawings, the figure pose in Gabriel's drawing and Elizabeth's sketches appears very similar, suggesting that he copied Elizabeth's ideas.

Turning attention to the main figure, it is easy to view her as simply another 'Rossetti' female, bearing resemblance to many such as *A Sea Spell*, discussed above. However, there are also striking similarities with two drawings Elizabeth produced to illustrate Keats' poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (Figs. A.33 and A.38). One of these drawings is lost, the other in private ownership, but both are known through the photographic portfolio. As can be seen, both drawings include a male figure which has been omitted from Gabriel's design.

It is immediately obvious that the figure pose is visually similar in all three drawings (see Fig. 87). The female figure is seated on the ground with her body facing the viewer and her knees drawn up to the side. The folds of her skirt disguise the placement of her legs, but a rough indication of her knee position is visible in each drawing. In all three drawings the most striking feature is the placement of the figure's arms, extended straight forward with hands clasped. This motif is unique to Elizabeth, seen only in the two drawings mentioned. While the heads of Elizabeth's figures face the viewer, albeit with downcast eyes and thus not meeting the viewer's gaze, Gabriel's figure's head is inclined towards her left shoulder, echoing the head position of Elizabeth's *Lady Clare* as discussed above (Fig. 88). Elizabeth's figures appear seated

comfortably in their pose, but Gabriel's pose seems virtually impossible for a model to maintain for more than a few minutes. This suggests that rather than drawing from nature using a model, he may have used a pictorial source. Quite possibly this was one of the photographs of Elizabeth's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* in his copy of the photographic portfolio of her work.

Although the limitations of working with photographs of photographs must be accounted for, it is evident that Elizabeth has made various changes to the positioning of some elements between her two sketches. Most notably, the outstretched arms have been rotated slightly in the more refined drawing, making the figure's right arm almost perpendicular. Additionally, the head is also inclined slightly more towards her left shoulder. These two modifications to Elizabeth's drawings are critical to the analysis of Gabriel's figure, since it appears that he has noted them and exaggerated them more. Firstly, Gabriel has rotated the position of the figure's arms further clockwise, so the right arm is at a much more acute angle to the horizontal than either of Elizabeth's sketches. In addition, he has accentuated the incline of the head and neck, emphasising the *Lady Clare* effect. The most significant similarity between all three drawings is the repetition of the straight extended arms and the acute angle created where they meet at the hands. Gabriel's duplication and modification of this unique motif suggests that he had a copy of the photographic portfolio open in front of him while he was working on his own illustration.

A further point of parallelism can be seen in the architectural setting and the shadowy figure Gabriel has positioned to the left of his drawing. This may

represent the 'waxen man' mentioned in the first line of the poem.<sup>54</sup> However the figure also exhibits a strong visual resemblance to one in another of Elizabeth's sketches, this time illustrating Tennyson's poem *St Agnes' Eve* (Fig. A.91). As can be seen, Elizabeth has placed a similar shadowy figure to the left of her *St Agnes*. The shadowy figures in both Elizabeth's and Gabriel's drawings are enclosed in a similar rectangular architectural space and the angle of the incline of both bodies appears very similar (Fig. 89). This drawing of *St Agnes' Eve* was known only from the photographic portfolio until it was sold at Christie's Auction House, London, in June 2014 from Rossetti family provenance.<sup>55</sup> Both the photographic portfolio and the original drawing may well have been in Gabriel's possession when he worked on his design. This would have provided ample opportunity for him to browse through Elizabeth's work for inspiration, and thus still feel her presence with him while he was working.

Another little-known work provides further evidence of his practice of assimilating ideas from multiple sources. Illustrating one of his sister Christina's poems, his preparatory sketch for *Three Sang of Love Together* (Fig. 90) appears to combine features from several of Elizabeth's drawings. Gabriel's sketch is unfamiliar because it was not included in any published volume of Christina's work. Instead, he selected only illustrations for the frontispiece and title page for publication, an approach found in both *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress*. In choosing to illustrate his sister's book Gabriel acknowledges Christina's equal status as a poet, as the members of the Pre-

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<sup>54</sup> Rossetti, *Poems*, 133, line 1.

<sup>55</sup> Auction Results: *Victorian, Pre-Raphaelite and British Impressionist Art*, Sale 1545, Lot 62, Christie's, Jun 17, 2014, accessed Mar 17, 2022, <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/drawings-watercolors/elizabeth-leanor-siddal-st-agnes-eve-5807544-details.aspx>.



Raphaelite Brotherhood had done previously in accepting her poetry for publication in *The Germ*.<sup>56</sup>

*Three Sang of Love Together* illustrates a sonnet called *A Triad*, included as one of the additional poems published in Christina's now famous collection *Goblin Market*. The words 'Three sang of love together' form part of the sonnet's first line. Written in 1856, it describes the characteristics of the three different types of love. These are a love that is all-consuming and passionate; a love that starts 'like a tinted hyacinth at a show' but ends up as a dreary marriage, and a yearning love that is never satisfied.<sup>57</sup> Gabriel's sketch depicts the female personifications of these three characteristics standing in a semi-circle with a musician seated on the ground in front of them. The composition is somewhat reminiscent of his illustration for William Allingham's short ballad *The Maids of Elfen-Mere* (1854, Yale Center for British Art, Connecticut, Fig. 91), first published in *The Music Master, a Love Song and Two Series of Day and Night Songs* in 1855.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, this illustration may have partly inspired his sketch for *Three Sang of Love Together*, but there are also strong correlations with several of Elizabeth's works.

While the three women in Gabriel's sketch appear very similar at first glance, each figure displays her own individual characteristics. The figure to the viewer's left has her head tilted backwards and is almost hugging her shoulders with her hands, perhaps indicating the ecstasy of her passionate love. This figure shows a strong visual similarity with one of Elizabeth's drawings for *The*

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<sup>56</sup> See for example "'Dream-Land' in Pre-Raphaelite Journal, 'The Germ'," (C.59.c.19), *British Library*, accessed May 31, 2021. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/pre-raphaelite-journal-the-germ>. "Dream-Land" was later published under her own name in Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (Cambridge and London: Macmillan and Co., 1862).

<sup>57</sup> "A Triad" in Rossetti, *Goblin Market*, 37, line 1.

<sup>58</sup> William Allingham, *The Music Master, a Love Song and Two Series of Day and Night Songs* (London and New York: G. Routledge & Co, 1855).

*Lass of Lochroyan* (Fig. A.52). The sketch, illustrating one of Walter Scott's ballads originally published in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, is once again known only from the photographic portfolio of Elizabeth's drawings which Gabriel compiled after her death.<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth made a number of illustrations of this ballad, datable to 1854 from a series of letters Gabriel wrote to Allingham. On 26 June he informed Allingham that Elizabeth 'has done some more sketches from the ballads'; he elaborated on 23 July 'Those she did at Hastings for the old ballads illustrate "The Lass of Lochroyan" & "The Gay Goss Hawk"'.<sup>60</sup> It is assumed that these sketches were intended for the volume of Scottish ballads that Allingham was planning to edit.

Elizabeth's drawing depicts the full-length figure of Annie of Lochroyan, standing outside the door of the castle belonging to her lover Sir Gregory, the father of her infant son. Her head is inclined backwards as she clasps her hands to her breast pleading for reconciliation. Since its current location is unknown, this drawing has received very little scholarly attention, yet there is evidence to suggest it was one of the most important sketches of the period.<sup>61</sup> When a mirror image of Elizabeth's *The Lass of Lochroyan* is compared with the left-hand figure in Gabriel's sketch *Three Sang of Love Together* the similarity is more pronounced. The incline of the figure's head and the position of her arms are alike in both drawings (Fig. 92). This close parallel extends to the overall shape of her dress, the folds in her skirt and the tie around her waist. The visual similarity is undeniable, suggesting once again that Gabriel may have returned to his copy of the photographic portfolio for inspiration.

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<sup>59</sup> The photographic portfolios are discussed fully in Chapter 2.

<sup>60</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 363, Item 54.55.

<sup>61</sup> See also Chapter 7.

The central figure may represent the second characteristic, the love that turns into a dreary marriage. The position of the figure's head and arms in this instance seem to portray the despair of her hopeless situation. Her raised left hand is almost symbolic of the blessing at her fateful marriage service. This motif originates from religious imagery such as the *Salvator Mundi*, where Christ is traditionally depicted in the act of blessing. However, it is normally the figure's right hand that is raised, and it is unusual to see it in a non-religious context.

Both Rossettis have previously depicted figures with raised hands. Gabriel sketched Anna Mary Howitt with both hands raised in c.1853. Alexandra Wettlaufer describes the sketch as 'a passionate but affectionate drawing' which highlights Anna Mary's 'passionate intensity'.<sup>62</sup> In a more religious context his *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* (1857, Tate Gallery, London) shows the figure with her right hand raised, blessing the Holy Grail of Arthurian legend. A similar motif also appears in a couple of Elizabeth's drawings, the first being a sketch for *Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail* (Fig. A.86), where one of the angels raises her hand in the same manner to bless Sir Galahad, while in the second Christ raises his hand in blessing in *The Maries at the Sepulchre* (Fig. A.64). In all the drawings depicting a single raised hand, none show the figure's left hand raised as in *Three Sang of Love Together*. The meaning therefore remains unclear. However, it may well be that a mirror image of one of Elizabeth's drawings provided the inspiration for this unusual gesture. The incline of the figure's head and the position of her right hand may stem from one of Gabriel's own sketches for *Monna Rosa* (1862, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) (see Fig. 93). It

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<sup>62</sup> Alexandra Wettlaufer, "The Politics and Sisterhood of Anna Mary Howitt's 'The Sisters in Art'," *Victorian Review* Vol. 36 No. 1 (2010): 130.

is more difficult to assign any specific source of inspiration to this central figure. Perhaps Gabriel simply created the left- and right-hand figures first, then completed the central figure in a suitable pose.

The third figure however, on the right of the drawing, provides another example of the 'Lady Clare' effect. When viewed alongside Elizabeth's sketch for *Lady Clare* the visual similarities are evident (Fig. 94). The angle of incline of the figure's body is almost identical in both drawings. The shape of the shoulders and the circular neckline of the dress closely resemble each other. On this occasion the head of Gabriel's figure displays even more of the characteristic backward tilt that is so often seen in Elizabeth's drawings, while Elizabeth's figure's chin is dropped towards her left shoulder. The right arm of Gabriel's figure encircles her waist, almost mirroring the position of the left arm of Elizabeth's figure. Both figures wear a similar style of dress, but in this case Elizabeth's drawing is technically more finished than Gabriel's sketch. It is interesting to note that all three of Gabriel's figures share similar hair, features and clothing. This suggests either that they were drawn from the same model at the same time in three different poses, or that there was no model at all but another source of inspiration. As this design was to illustrate one of Christina's poems rather than to produce an oil painting which would be purchased by a wealthy patron, it seems likely that Gabriel would not have felt the expense of hiring a model was justified. Therefore, it is probable that once again he has returned to a copy of the photographic portfolio for his inspiration.

The final figure in this composition is the winged figure, possibly representing Cupid, seated on the ground in front of the three women. This figure is reminiscent of the seated figure in *The Maids of Elfen-Mere* and as previously

mentioned, that drawing may have provided Gabriel with some ideas for this sketch. However, the incline of the figure's head and neck also demonstrates the *Lady Clare* effect (Fig. 95 top). Similar Cupid-like figures occur throughout Gabriel's work, including for example his early drawing *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice (Dante Drawing an Angel)* (1849, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery), but they do not resemble this figure pose.

Conversely, the incline of the body and head and the seated pose may have been inspired by two other drawings found in the photographic portfolio of Elizabeth's work. The first possibility is Elizabeth's well-known drawing, *Pippa Passes*, discussed fully in Chapter 5. A mirror image of the figure seated on the bottom step, nearest to Pippa, displays the same incline of the body, although the position of the head is less similar (Fig. 95 bottom right). The Cupid's legs are positioned differently to allow for playing his musical instrument, but his left thigh follows the same line as that of Elizabeth's prostitute. The second drawing is virtually unknown since it is deemed lost. Details are scarce but it is another sketch for *The Lass of Lochroyan* (Fig. 95 bottom left) and is only known from the photographic portfolios of Elizabeth's work. Again, when a mirror image of this drawing is viewed alongside Gabriel's Cupid the similarity of the figures is more pronounced. In this case the angle of the head appears identical while the body in Elizabeth's drawing shows less of an incline than either *Lady Clare* or *Pippa Passes*. These are subtle differences, but their existence is sufficient to show that Gabriel did not simply copy Elizabeth's work, he assimilated her ideas to create new 'original' ideas of his own. Once again it is the drawings which were included in the photographic portfolio that are showcased, providing further evidence that Gabriel kept a copy as a source

book. His continued reference to her drawings forms a critical part of her legacy.

Further evidence is provided by another series of drawings included in the photographic portfolio, which may have inspired Gabriel's designs for the title page of his sister Christina's volume of poetry *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866). Naturally Gabriel's drawing is technically more polished, but there are unquestionable similarities with Elizabeth's designs for *St Agnes' Eve*. According to Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, the 'degree of cooperation between Christina and Dante Gabriel on the title poem...is probably unprecedented not just in the poet's career but also in the history of Victorian publishing'.<sup>63</sup> She suggests that Gabriel had begun work on the illustrations before Christina had actually finished the poem, suggesting the reason for his many iterations of the title page illustration simply stem from the fact that he was illustrating a work in progress.<sup>64</sup> She fails to consider any external visual source as a potential inspiration for his designs.

'The Prince's Progress' has often been read biographically, as Marsh suggests:

those who knew the Rossettis would have found it hard not to read oblique references to the long-postponed marriage and untimely death of the author's sister-in-law<sup>65</sup>

The poem recounts the story of a bride-to-be waiting for the return of her prince who is journeying back to marry her. The first two stanzas alone focus on the waiting bride, which Gabriel chose for the title page illustration. The remainder of the poem narrates the prince's circuitous journey and his eventual arrival at

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<sup>63</sup> Lorraine Jansen Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002), 76.

<sup>64</sup> Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, 76.

<sup>65</sup> Marsh, *Legend*, 11.

the palace, only to find he is too late as his bride-to-be is dead. Rather than a biographical stance, Kooistra simply touches on the fact that Gabriel's journey to completing the drawings for the woodcuts was a long and arduous one, but that Christina was more than willing to wait for her brother to finish.<sup>66</sup> Christina wrote: 'Your woodcuts are so essential to my contentment that I will wait a year for them if need is'.<sup>67</sup>

Gabriel did not illustrate Christina's words, but instead portrays the bride-to-be's sense of endless waiting. Christina offers little description of how the bride passes her time; she simply 'sleepeth, waketh, sleepeth'.<sup>68</sup> Gabriel accompanied his illustration for the title page with the line 'The long hours go and come and go', the third line of the first stanza of the final poem which was completed in 1865.<sup>69</sup> Despite the collaboration with Christina, the lack of descriptive detail in the poem suggests that the visual idea for the title page must have emerged from a different source. This was potentially from Elizabeth's sketches for *St Agnes Eve* (Figs. A.91-4) which are included in the photographic portfolio.

Gabriel's illustrations date from 1865-6, exactly the period when he was having Elizabeth's work photographed and creating the portfolios. Elizabeth's sketches, together with the final watercolour, date from the previous decade. The series of sketches demonstrates her habitual working practice, repeatedly modifying her ideas until she was happy with the design, which she then produced in watercolour. As discussed in Chapter 5, this practice may well have been learned from her mentor, Gabriel. Rather than making changes

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<sup>66</sup> Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, 76.

<sup>67</sup> Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, "Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)," in Elizabeth Pettejohn, *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 177.

<sup>68</sup> "The Prince's Progress," Line 4.

<sup>69</sup> Crump and Flowers, *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*, 913.

following discussion with Christina as she edited her poem, Gabriel's drawings for the title page show the progression from an initial sketch echoing Elizabeth's work to a finished design which emanates his own style (Fig. 96). Fortunately, all his drawings survive in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, enabling his series to be viewed as a single unit.

The development of Gabriel's figure pose highlights some interesting changes and shows how closely he originally mirrored Elizabeth's final figure pose before modifying the position of the hands and head for the later versions. This close correlation between Elizabeth's watercolour and one of Gabriel's initial designs is clear (Fig. 97). In this drawing he shows the figure of the bride-to-be facing the viewer's left, gazing out of a window. Her arms are outstretched along the window-sill, and her hands are crossed at the wrists. This pose echoes the figure of St Agnes in Elizabeth's watercolour, although her figure's arms appear stiffer and more wooden than Gabriel's. The head of Elizabeth's figure is tilted backwards in her customary manner, which is not reflected in Gabriel's initial drawing. Nor do his garment sleeves flow downward in the same way as on St Agnes's dress. This difference, on the other hand, recalls Elizabeth's earlier sketches which also lack such sleeves (Figs. A.91-4). Notably in subsequent versions of Gabriel's drawing the sleeves have been changed. The progression from initial sketch to final drawing in both cases is very similar; both artists work through their ideas on paper, adjusting and modifying elements until they are satisfied with the result.

Another motif that is prominent in both Gabriel's title page and Elizabeth's *St Agnes's Eve* is the use of medieval crown glass windows, which resemble bottle bottoms due to the glass-blowing process used to create them. Elizabeth also



used this type of glass in another of her works, *Lady Affixing a Pennant to a Knight's Spear* (Fig. A.42). Although it is not possible to date Elizabeth's sketches for *St Agnes' Eve* accurately, it is likely they were done around the same time as the illustrations for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems. Gabriel's letter to Allingham dated 23 January 1855 proposing that Elizabeth should be included in the list of illustrators is perhaps the best estimate of an approximate date.<sup>70</sup>

It is interesting to note that this type of glass is not visible in Elizabeth's earlier designs for *St Agnes' Eve*, but only in the final watercolour, and it is the watercolour that Gabriel's earliest sketch most resembles. In three of Elizabeth's drawings the figures face the opposite direction, and their hands are not clasped, with only the watercolour and one ink and wash drawing showing the same orientation subsequently used by Gabriel. However, as previously mentioned, Gabriel often used mirror images when appropriating Elizabeth's ideas. On this occasion though it may suggest that it was Elizabeth's watercolour which provided Gabriel with the ideal figure pose for his patient bride-to-be, even though it was not included in the photographic portfolios because reproduction of colour images using the wet collodion process was unsatisfactory.<sup>71</sup> The provenance of the watercolour shows it was at one time owned by Christina, then passed to her brother William on her death. Given the visual similarity with Gabriel's illustration for the title page, it is possible that she chose it as a memento after Gabriel's death because of its importance in the production of the illustration for *The Prince's Progress*.

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<sup>70</sup> See also Chapter 3.

<sup>71</sup> See also Chapter 2.

## **Conclusion**

The evidence I have presented in this chapter, as well as the analysis from Chapter 2, suggests that Gabriel kept one copy of the photographic portfolio for himself for use as a source book. In Chapter 5 I established how much he admired Elizabeth's drawings and demonstrated how her work developed into replacing her person as his muse. Throughout this chapter I have analysed a selection of the works Gabriel created after Elizabeth's death to reveal how he continued his working relationship with his muse – by using the photographic portfolio as an easy point of reference to her designs. By frequently returning to this book Gabriel was able to develop Elizabeth's powers of innovation and compositional skills to provide the inspiration for many of his later works. The photographs of her drawings would also have given him a much-needed sense of continuity, and even the feeling that she was still in his studio with him. In the next chapter I will show that it was not only Gabriel who was inspired by Elizabeth's designs. I will explore how her innovative ideas and figure poses spread throughout the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle, leaving a hidden artistic legacy.

## Chapter 7 – The Spread of Ideas

### Introduction

It is not surprising to find evidence that other members of the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle used and developed Elizabeth's ideas in much the same way as Gabriel himself did. The social interaction within the group provided ample opportunity for them to access her drawings and watercolours. Since she was accepted as an artist by her contemporaries, it is entirely feasible that individual elements such as figure pose, subject matter or techniques were discussed at gatherings when sketches were viewed and critiqued, leading to the dissemination and later recollection of her ideas.

From the early days of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood members were expected to attend fortnightly meetings and the proceedings were recorded in a journal by William.<sup>1</sup> The format of these meetings encouraged members to read their own poetry, discuss other readings, and comment on their fellow members' sketches and design ideas. The Cyclographic Society was founded in 1847 for this purpose, but Gabriel's tardiness in contributing caused it to disband almost before it had started.<sup>2</sup> The idea was revived in 1854 as a sketching club called *The Folio*, with an expanded list of participants.<sup>3</sup> As Prettejohn proposes, it was not just the overall aims of the group that influenced the work produced, it was the 'contributions to each other's efforts: by sitting as models, suggesting motifs [...], trading technical tips, and offering criticism of

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<sup>1</sup> Fredeman, *P.R.B. Journal*, 88.

<sup>2</sup> Millais, *Life and Letters*, I, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 321-2 (item 54.15 and note 1). See also Chapter 5.

work in progress from the initial design stage to final details of execution' which demonstrated the cohesive collaboration between the members.<sup>4</sup>

Members also collaborated by painting elements on each other's canvases. Gabriel is said to have helped Deverell by painting the hair of Viola in *Twelfth Night* (1849-50, private collection),<sup>5</sup> and Millais took his brush to the baron's head in Holman Hunt's *The Eve of St Agnes* (1848, Guildhall Art Gallery, London), whilst the favour was returned by Holman Hunt on certain drapery folds in Millais's *Cymon and Iphigenia* (1847-8, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool Museums).<sup>6</sup> This form of collaboration perhaps also references the medieval workshops, associated with the 'Pre-Raphaelite' name, which produced art before the status of the artist gained importance.<sup>7</sup> Although as Cherry suggests, it was initially viewed as a 'homosocial, class-specific association', as the Brotherhood metamorphosed into a wider circle, the underlying collaborative ethic remained unchanged.<sup>8</sup> These principles, together with Gabriel's admiration for Elizabeth's work, facilitated the dissemination of her original ideas throughout the group and ultimately resulted in further interpretation of those ideas by her contemporaries.

In Chapter 6, I demonstrated how the characteristic features of Elizabeth's *Lady Clare* had been interpreted and repeatedly borrowed by her husband Gabriel. These same visual attributes can also be found in popular works by other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. In this chapter I will evaluate the transmission of the *Lady Clare* effect, viewing Elizabeth's watercolour alongside

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<sup>4</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, 99.

<sup>7</sup> Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Chapter 14.

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London: Routledge, 2000), 14.

more celebrated compositions by other members of the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle. I will explore how other artists, including Holman Hunt and Burne-Jones, copied and manipulated elements of Elizabeth's innovative work to create their own 'original' masterpieces. I will also examine the afterlife of some of Elizabeth's lesser known drawings by comparing works such as Arthur Hughes's *April Love* (1855-6, Tate Gallery, London) and John Roddam Spencer Stanhope's *Thoughts of the Past* (1858, Tate Gallery, London) with one of Elizabeth's sketches for *The Lass of Lochroyan* (Fig. A.52). These examples will be used to demonstrate how Elizabeth's original ideas have been quietly integrated into the better-known compositions of her male colleagues and have thus shaped the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite Art.

### **Lady Clare**

As noted in Chapter 6, Elizabeth's watercolour *Lady Clare* is a significant work which potentially changed the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art. Other artists rapidly followed Gabriel's appropriation of Elizabeth's unique figure pose, creating their own masterpieces from the seeds she had sown. Perhaps most visually similar to *Lady Clare* is Holman Hunt's *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1866-8, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne). This similarity, however, appears to have bypassed scholars of art history. As one of the original members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Holman Hunt was initially very close to Gabriel and would have been a frequent visitor to Chatham Place, where Elizabeth's watercolours graced the walls of the drawing-room.<sup>9</sup>

Illustrating the later verses of Keats' poem *Isabella*, Holman Hunt depicts the solitary figure of the heartbroken heroine cradling the basil pot which contains

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<sup>9</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 278.

the skull of her dead lover. The awkward curve of Isabella's body appears clearly indebted to Elizabeth's *Lady Clare* as the position of the head and neck are almost identical (Fig. 98). The position of Isabella's right arm is almost a mirror image of Clare's left. As well as emulating her figure pose, Holman Hunt has even created white drapery folds on Isabella's dress which echo those on the white veil worn by Lady Clare's mother. Ignoring the differences in technical ability, the similarity between the two figure poses is undeniable.

Despite *Lady Clare* and *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* being exhibited together at the Tate Gallery's previously mentioned blockbuster exhibition in 2012, Barringer's catalogue entry for Holman Hunt's painting suggests that: 'Hunt's choice of figure and drapery forges links to sultry, Aestheticist studies such as Frederic Leighton's *Odalisque*' (1862, Private collection).<sup>10</sup> Barringer apparently rejects Prettejohn's evidence that Holman Hunt had previously used a similar pose for his first female figure, *Il Dolce far Niente* (1866, Private collection). In this work too the figure is depicted full-face, displaying the wavy hair, serpentine neck and doe eyes that became typical of later Pre-Raphaelite works. Naturally reference is made to Leighton's earlier work since he was eminently the more celebrated artist. Elizabeth's *Lady Clare* is ignored, but the similarity between all three can be seen in Fig. 99.

Leighton became acquainted with the Pre-Raphaelites in 1860, and both he and Holman Hunt were members of the Hogarth Club. This was an all-male group within the Pre-Raphaelite circle founded in the late 1850s by Gabriel, where the familiar collaboration and sharing of ideas took place. Elizabeth's work was on display in Gabriel's house and would have been accessible to all visitors. Even

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Barringer, catalogue entry 131 (William Holman Hunt, *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*), in *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 173.

a passing glimpse may have been absorbed subliminally and unconsciously recalled at a later date. It is more likely, however, that the idea for both Holman Hunt's and Leighton's figure poses was transmitted second-hand from Elizabeth through Gabriel, who made frequent use of the serpentine neck motif.<sup>11</sup> Since Elizabeth's watercolour pre-dates these celebrated paintings, her proficiency in composition and innovation should be rightfully acknowledged as the source and inspiration for them all. This places her right at the centre of the Pre-Raphaelite circle and demonstrates how her work formed an integral part of the group's collaborative practices. The unusual figure pose Elizabeth created in *Lady Clare*, and the way in which it was adopted by her contemporaries, undeniably changed the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite depictions of the female figure. This clearly shows the '*Lady Clare* effect' in action.

Burne-Jones is another significant member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle whose work appears to have been inspired by *Lady Clare*. Like Elizabeth, he was 'tutored' by Gabriel, and placed his mentor on a pedestal, as his wife Georgiana recalled:

As long as Edward lived he said that he never did anything without wondering what Gabriel would have thought of it, "whether he would approve it and be pleased with it, or whether he'd say it was rubbish".<sup>12</sup>

Many of Burne-Jones's works echo the 'Rossetti' style; for example, the resemblance between the pendant pair *Sidonia von Bork* and *Clara von Bork* (both 1860, Tate Gallery, London) and Gabriel's *Lucrezia Borgia* (1860-1, Tate Gallery, London) is undeniable. Working on these pieces at the same time, both artists have chosen to depict fifteenth/sixteenth-century characters whose

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>12</sup> Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, 149.

extraordinary lives received further literary embellishment.<sup>13</sup> According to Burne-Jones's biographer, Fiona MacCarthy, the pattern for Sidonia's dress was 'apparently derived from a picture at Hampton Court, which the Rossettis and Burne-Joneses had visited together'.<sup>14</sup> The paintings viewed on that visit would probably have been a subject for lively discussion.

Burne-Jones had a keen eye for detail and an astute way of assimilating what he had seen into his own art. In the same way that he noted the fabric design from the work seen at Hampton Court, he observed and sketched, among various items, the Madonna's crown from the centre panel of the *Ghent Altarpiece* (Jan and Hubert Van Eyck, 1432, St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent). Van Eyck's work was hugely admired by the members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle who benefited immensely from first-hand observation of *The Arnolfini Portrait*, which was on display in the National Gallery, London, from 1843. Burne-Jones employed Van Eyck's convex mirror motif on several occasions during his long career, including his portrait of his daughter *Margaret Burne-Jones* (1885-6, Private collection) and *Fair Rosamund and Queen Eleanor* (1862, Tate Gallery, London). Neither of these is a direct quotation from Van Eyck, but a subtle re-working of a borrowed theme, which became his trade-mark way of effecting 'generous imitation'.

Burne-Jones's re-working of a theme or figure pose was widespread. As previously noted, the figure group to the left of his drawing *The Knight's Farewell* offers a direct correlation with Elizabeth's *Lady Clare*.<sup>15</sup> This confirms that as early as 1858 Burne-Jones was fully aware of *Lady Clare*, and perhaps

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<sup>13</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2011), 121.

<sup>14</sup> MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite*, 121.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 6.



of Elizabeth's work in general, as a potential source of inspiration. The *Lady Clare* effect, however, extends beyond quotation from the innovative figure pose, and this is perhaps best demonstrated in another of Burne-Jones's works, the monumental *The Golden Stairs* (1880, Tate Gallery London). Often cited as 'the defining painting of the Aesthetic Movement', Burne-Jones began work on sketches for the painting in 1872, but it was not finally completed and exhibited until 1880.<sup>16</sup> The inspiration for the painting is unknown, but there is a strong possibility that Burne-Jones's creative ideas may have originated from Elizabeth's *Lady Clare*.

Close observation of the background of Elizabeth's watercolour reveals a small stairway towards the left-hand picture margin (Fig. A.43). This zigzag stairway is subordinate to the principal narrative as the viewer's attention is focused on the activities of the figures in the foreground. Could this have been Burne-Jones's source of inspiration? In both works the stairs descend first to the right, then turn to the left; neither the beginning nor the end of either staircase is visible. Burne-Jones's figures take on a variety of different poses, many of which appear awkward, as if the artist is simply experimenting with the incline of head and neck originally seen in *Lady Clare*.

Tate curator Alison Smith describes Burne-Jones's painting as depicting 'eighteen young women holding a variety of instruments [...] descending a winding flight of steps', an image more concerned with atmosphere than narrative.<sup>17</sup> She compares *The Golden Stairs* to the work of James McNeil Whistler (1834-1903) and Albert Joseph Moore (1841-1893), as well as to art of

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<sup>16</sup> MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite*, 285-6.

<sup>17</sup> Alison Smith catalogue entry 168 (Edward Burne-Jones, *The Golden Stairs*), in *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 218.

the Italian Renaissance.<sup>18</sup> Curiously, Stephens suggests Burne-Jones was honouring Piero della Francesca, commenting that the ‘deep set, narrow eyes and their fixed look, even the general contours and the poising of the heads on the shoulders, plainly tell of the influence of that lovely painter and poetic designer’.<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth’s *Lady Clare*, however, has received no scholarly mention as possibly providing the source of Burne-Jones’s inspiration.

MacCarthy suggests the primary effect achieved by *The Golden Stairs* is one of harmony, ‘not just in the actual musical instruments carried by the maidens but also in the pale and subtle harmony of colouring and the flowing rhythms of the composition as the girls descend the stairs’.<sup>20</sup> This ‘subtle harmony of colouring’ is also evident in the zigzag stairway found in *Lady Clare*, but with an added injection of vivid ultramarine. Enlarging the relevant portion of the background reveals two tiny figures clad in blue descending Elizabeth’s staircase in the same direction as those subsequently painted by Burne-Jones (Fig. 100). Georgiana comments that her husband left no clues as to the work’s meaning, but specifically intended it to be ambiguous: ‘he wanted everyone to see in it what they could for themselves’.<sup>21</sup>

The angle of descent of the two staircases differs slightly. Elizabeth’s stairway appears to turn sharply from left to right, but the viewer is led to assume there is a half-landing out of view to the right in order to make the descent achievable. Burne-Jones eliminates the need for any landing by floating his stairs downwards in a smooth curve. He accentuates this by placing a young maiden towards the right of the painting in the centre of the curve, directly facing the

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 218.

<sup>19</sup> Frederic G. Stephens, “The Grosvenor Gallery,” *The Athenaeum*, Issue 2741 (8 May 1880):604.

<sup>20</sup> MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite*, 286.

<sup>21</sup> Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, 297.

viewer but not making eye contact. The figures descending the stairway in *Lady Clare* are positioned on the central horizontal line, while Burne-Jones's central horizontal bisects the chest of the maiden facing the viewer. These subtle changes show how Burne-Jones appears to have taken and then re-worked Elizabeth's original idea. The difference in scale is phenomenal, yet there is an undeniable correlation between the two stairways. This correlation, together with Burne-Jones's easy access to Gabriel's studio, provides sufficient evidence to suggest that the original idea for this monumental piece may have been derived from Elizabeth's vibrant watercolour.

The motif of the stairway also appears to have been transmitted to Hughes in his painting *The Heavenly Stair* (1888, Russell Cotes Gallery, Bournemouth), either by seeing *Lady Clare* in Gabriel's drawing room, or second-hand via Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs*, as suggested by Hughes's biographer, Stephen Wildman.<sup>22</sup> Although not one of the original seven members of the Brotherhood, Hughes was an integral member of the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle, having first encountered Walter Deverell and Alexander Munro at the Royal Academy Schools.<sup>23</sup> Munro introduced Hughes to Gabriel early in 1851 and a close association was formed between the pair.<sup>24</sup> Fellow artist Boyce notes in his diary that when he arrived at Gabriel's studio in Blackfriars on 13 March 1854, Hughes was already there working on his painting *Orlando*, which subsequently became known as *The Long Engagement* (1854-9, Birmingham

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Wildman, "Introduction," in Leonard Roberts, *Arthur Hughes, His Life and Works: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors Club, 1997), 33.

<sup>23</sup> Wildman in Roberts, *Arthur Hughes*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Ford Madox Hueffer, *Rossetti; a critical essay on his art* (London: Duckworth & Co, 1902), 69.

Museums and Art Gallery).<sup>25</sup> Thus Hughes had unrestricted access to Elizabeth's work.

In Hughes's painting the staircase has been transposed to descend first to the left, then turn to the right (Fig. 101). The stairway, constructed as 'a very solid piece of English carpentry', curves gently in a similar manner to Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs*.<sup>26</sup> A group of five maidens, identified by Wildman as 'ethereal female angels', can be seen descending the stairway.<sup>27</sup> These figures also resemble those in Burne-Jones's painting, but the golden tones Hughes has chosen glow more warmly. At the foot of the stairs Hughes has placed the figure group of a man, woman and baby, reminiscent of the Holy Family. Wildman confirms the religious association, suggesting this is 'the first and largest of his religious subjects'.<sup>28</sup> Hughes himself describes the subject as 'a mother kneeling at the foot of stairs having just received a small baby from angels who linger on the landing above; the father just entered doffs his cap reverently to the new baby'.<sup>29</sup>

The lines from a poem by George MacDonald accompany the catalogue entry for the Royal Academy exhibition in 1888: 'Little one who straight has come / down the heavenly stair', which gives the painting its title. Perhaps this was Hughes's attempt to suggest the painting was his own original idea and not borrowed from anyone. In this instance it is likely that Wildman's assumption is correct: Hughes derived his inspiration second-hand from Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs*. Whatever the source that prompted Hughes's design, the visual

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<sup>25</sup> Sue Bradbury, ed., *The Boyce Papers: The Letters and Diaries of Joanna Boyce, Henry Wells and George Price Boyce* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), 133.

<sup>26</sup> Wildman in Roberts, *Arthur Hughes*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> Wildman in Roberts, *Arthur Hughes*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Wildman in Roberts, *Arthur Hughes*, 33.

<sup>29</sup> Roberts, *Arthur Hughes*, Appendix A, Letter 14, Arthur Hughes to William Bell Scott, 5 April 1888.

similarity with the stairway in the background of Elizabeth's *Lady Clare* once again provides evidence of how ideas are transmitted in the process of 'generous imitation', and how her true legacy lies hidden in the work of others.

### **The Lass of Lochroyan**

*Lady Clare* is not the only design of a female figure created by Elizabeth to have spawned a number of 'generous imitations'. Her sketch for *The Lass of Lochroyan* (Fig. A.52), as mentioned in Chapter 6, is equally as important in terms of creating a new figure type in Pre-Raphaelite art. Both the unusual figure pose, and the composition of the background, appear to have been appropriated by fellow artists such as Hughes and Stanhope. The striking combination of greens and purples have ensured Hughes's *April Love* has become his best-known painting. The foliage was painted in a garden in Maidstone, Kent, in 1855, while the figure of the girl was subsequently added in Hughes's studio.<sup>30</sup> As noted above, Boyce's diary confirms Hughes working in Gabriel's studio in 1853-4, during which period Elizabeth was also sketching there.<sup>31</sup> Gabriel himself notes one such occasion in a letter to Brown of 29 March 1854: 'Lizzy is sitting by me working at the most poetical of all designs'.<sup>32</sup> Hughes, therefore, would have had every opportunity of working alongside Elizabeth in Gabriel's studio and discussing the designs with both the artist and her mentor.

Hughes's *April Love* displays a marked visual resemblance to Elizabeth's most complete study for *The Lass of Lochroyan* (Fig. A.52). Barringer suggests that

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<sup>30</sup> Wildman in Roberts, *Arthur Hughes*, 134.

<sup>31</sup> For example, see Bradbury, *The Boyce Papers*, 133.

<sup>32</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 334 (item 54.29).

*April Love* 'bears very clearly the imprint of Pre-Raphaelite influence'.<sup>33</sup> By this he references Hughes's close attention to detail in his depiction of the ivy-clad bower and flagstones strewn with rose petals, and using his wife, Tryphena Foorde, as the model. Neither composition nor figure pose earns mention in his discussion. Marsh simply comments on Hughes's 'trademark use of brilliant green and purple', failing to reference this back to the earlier jewel-like watercolours painted by both Rossettis.<sup>34</sup> By ceasing to look superficially and engaging instead with the structure of the composition, the similarities begin to emerge.

Both *April Love* and *The Lass of Lochroyan* focus on a single, full-length, female figure, with long hair and a floor-length gown. In the original orientation, Elizabeth's figure faces to the viewer's left, towards the vertical centre, while Hughes has transposed his figure to face the right-hand picture margin. Comparison with a mirror image of *The Lass of Lochroyan* highlights the similarities (Fig. 102 right). Both figures have their dominant arm raised with the elbow bent at a similar angle, their hand placed identically across their breast. A corresponding movement in the folds of the dress fabric is also evident. The figures are placed in roughly the same position in relation to the central horizontal. Each figure's full-skirted garment creates a wider shape in the bottom half of the image. This has the desired effect of adding weight to the lower part of the figure and making it appear heavier, as noted by Arnheim.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, it grounds the figure solidly in the pictorial space. In the original orientation, both figures are placed to the right of the central vertical line. This

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<sup>33</sup> Tim Barringer catalogue entry 43 (Arthur Hughes, *April Love*), in *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 68.

<sup>34</sup> Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Circle* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2011 [2005]), 57.

<sup>35</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 20.

again adds the visual perception of weight, stressing the figure's importance as the focus of the composition.<sup>36</sup>

To counteract the directional pull exerted towards the picture frame, the head of Hughes's figure is turned to look back over her shoulder towards the vertical centre. Her facial features are well-defined, and her emotion is clearly visible; a tear is beginning to trace its vertical path down her left cheek. Hughes's more complex figure pose thus appears to create a deliberate feeling of unease and restlessness rather than the simple acquiescence of Elizabeth's figure.

Similarities can also be noted in the background elements of both works. For example, the curve of the stone doorway in *The Lass of Lochroyan* is echoed by the ivy-clad arbour in *April Love*. While Hughes has depicted the protagonist's lover as a shadowy figure, readers of the proposed anthology of ballads would have known the Lass's lover, Sir Gregory, was out of sight behind the castle door. Elizabeth's work may only be a small sketch, while Hughes's *April Love* is a sizeable oil painting, but when the underlying structure is analysed, the similarities are illuminated. Hughes may have been impressed by Elizabeth's simple figure pose but felt it did not convey the full depth of emotion he was aiming to portray, thus he modified certain elements to suit his own requirements. It is the 'idea' of the figure pose that Hughes has adopted most effectively, an idea that originates from Elizabeth's sketch. Again, this could be construed as 'generous imitation', and demonstrates the hidden nature of Elizabeth's artistic legacy.

It is worth noting that Hughes employed this successful figure pose in various guises throughout his artistic career. Possibly the first instance was in *Fair*

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<sup>36</sup> Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 20.

*Rosamund* (1854, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne). This work was produced later in the same year that Elizabeth worked on *The Lass of Lochroyan*, a time when both she and Hughes were frequently found in Gabriel's studio. Hughes's later version of *Ophelia* (c.1865, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio) modifies the figure pose even further, extending the figure's right arm upwards and increasing the angle at which the left elbow is bent. It seems that once Hughes had found the successful formula, he repeated it, re-working each painting in a slightly different way to produce a new variation of the basic pose, all of which appear to stem from Elizabeth's original sketch.

Hughes's *April Love* was on display at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1856 and many other artists would have seen it there. One of these was possibly Philip Hermogenes Calderon, whose painting *Broken Vows* (1856, Tate Gallery, London) appears to replicate elements of Hughes's work (Fig. 103). Calderon was born in Poitiers, France, but began his artistic training at Leigh's Academy, London in 1850.<sup>37</sup> He subsequently returned to France, studying under Monsieur Picot in Paris for a year. Thus, his work is said to combine the best of both styles, as W.W. Fenn, the author of Calderon's only biographical article, writes: 'Of his *technique* one may say that, in addition to admirable colour, it displays the best traditions of the French school, grafted on to the originality of the English manner'.<sup>38</sup>

Calderon first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1852 but became a regular contributor from 1857 onwards, being elected as a full member in 1867.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> W. W. Fenn, "Our Living Artists: Philip Hermogenes Calderon," *The Magazine of Art* (1878): 197.

<sup>38</sup> Fenn, "Our Living Artists," 202.

<sup>39</sup> Fenn, "Our Living Artists," 198-9.



*Broken Vows* is perhaps his most famous work. It became popular as an engraving, as Fenn explains:

The canvas which in that year came from Mr. Calderon's hand at once established him as a favourite with the public. Those who missed seeing the picture, entitled "Broken Vows", in the Royal Academy, were speedily made familiar with it by the engraving, which appeared in the chief printsellers' windows; and the tall, graceful figure of the girl, with her hand pressed to her heart, in an agony of despair, as, leaning against some rustic palings, she overhears her lover on the other side breathing tender words into the ear of a rival...<sup>40</sup>

This description hints at the original aims of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as documented, especially that of being true to nature.<sup>41</sup> Calderon's ivy-clad background is reminiscent of that painted by Hughes in *April Love*. In addition, in many ways his figure pose presents a mirror image of Hughes's figure, although the position of the head and arms have been modified to amplify her feelings of despair. These differences can be seen when Calderon's painting is viewed alongside that of Hughes (Fig. 103). Fenn praises Calderon's depiction of the woman, saying 'no painter in the present day has ever brought out more fully on canvas all that is best in the gentler sex'.<sup>42</sup>

Although Fenn's article in *The Magazine of Art* does not specifically mention any contact between Calderon and the Pre-Raphaelites, he had doubtless seen their work. An excerpt from Tennyson's poem *The Miller's Daughter* was included in the Royal Academy exhibition catalogue when *April Love* was exhibited there:

Love is hurt with jar and fret,  
Love is made with vague regret;

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<sup>40</sup> Fenn, "Our Living Artists," 198.

<sup>41</sup> See also Introduction and Chapter 4.

<sup>42</sup> Fenn, "Our Living Artists," 198.

Eyes with idle tears are wet,  
Idle habit links us yet.  
What is love? For we forget:  
Ah, no ! no !<sup>43</sup>

Hughes's catalogue entry was mirrored by Calderon in the 1857 exhibition, when *Broken Vows* was accompanied by this verse from Longfellow:

More hearts are breaking in this world of ours  
Than one would say. In distant villages  
And solitudes remote, where winds have wafted  
The barbed seeds of love, or birds of passage  
Scattered them in their flight, do they take root,  
And grow in silence, and in silence perish.  
Who hears the falling of the forest leaf?  
Or takes note of every flower that dies?<sup>44</sup>

Despite Calderon not exhibiting in the 1856 exhibition it is extremely likely that he was a visitor, viewed *April Love* there, and known that Burne-Jones had purchased it on behalf of William Morris.<sup>45</sup> He would also have noted the catalogue entry and the use of poetry to convey the additional meaning or back-story to the painting. Conversely there is no record of him ever having met or associated with Gabriel or Elizabeth. In this instance, it therefore seems reasonable to suggest that Hughes's *April Love* was the inspiration behind Calderon's *Broken Vows*. This shows how Elizabeth's ideas could easily have flowed from artist to artist and onwards without anyone in the chain being aware of the process that was taking place. Again, Elizabeth's artistic legacy remains concealed beneath these layers of transmission.

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<sup>43</sup> "The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. MDCCCLVI." *The Royal Academy of Arts. Exhibition Catalogue*, 25. Item 578, accessed Jan 17, 2022. <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/exhibition-catalogue/ra-sec-vol88-1856>.

<sup>44</sup> "The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. MDCCCLVII." *The Royal Academy of Arts. Exhibition Catalogue*, 28. Item 601, accessed Jan 17, 2022. <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/exhibition-catalogue/ra-sec-vol89-1857>.

<sup>45</sup> Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, I.,132.

The same sketch for *The Lass of Lochroyan* also appears to have provided the inspiration for Stanhope's *Thoughts of the Past* (1858, Tate Gallery, London). Stanhope was born into the aristocracy, the grandson of the Earl of Leicester.<sup>46</sup> After an education at Rugby school and Christ Church, Oxford, he entered the wider Pre-Raphaelite group as Watts's apprentice. Stanhope became part of the Holland Park Circle and worked with Gabriel, Burne-Jones and Morris on the Oxford Union Debating Chamber murals.

Stanhope is known for his 'generous imitation' of figure poses, a prime example being his painting *Love and the Maiden* (1877, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco).<sup>47</sup> The female figure to the left of the image bears a strong resemblance to a similarly placed figure in Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* (c.1485, National Gallery, London). Botticelli's painting was acquired by the National Gallery in 1874, giving Stanhope ample time to study the figure in detail before completing his own painting.

Simon Poë cites another example where Stanhope appears to have reproduced the idea for a figure pose from a colleague within the Pre-Raphaelite circle. The pose in question is identified as Morris's *Aphrodite* (c.1870, Kelmscott Manor, Oxfordshire).<sup>48</sup> Poë comments that Stanhope used this same basic pose for several other figures, including *Flora* (n.d., Private collection) and *Venus Rising from the Sea* (early 1870s, Private collection). Stanhope's niece, Anna Marie Wilhemina Stirling, offers a personal view:

"Stanhope was not an originator, he was an imitator," complain certain critics, and because Burne-Jones was Stanhope's

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<sup>46</sup> Simon Poë, "Penelope and her Suitors: Women, War and Widowhood in a Pre-Raphaelite Painting," *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* Vol. 11 Spring (2002): 75.

<sup>47</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 126.

<sup>48</sup> Simon Poë, "Venus Rising from the Waves: Morris, Stanhope, Botticelli and 'Aphrodite Anadyomene'," *The British Art Journal* Vol. 7 No. 3 (2006): 54.

lifelong friend, and because the same ideal actuated both, in Stanhope's work, wherein these critics have already laboriously traced the influence of all his contemporaries, they finally discover a replica of Burne-Jones.<sup>49</sup>

This suggests the close relationship between members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle was critical to the osmosis of ideas. While Stanhope appears to have copied Morris's figure pose, the origin for both may yet again have been a work by Botticelli. Stanhope had purchased the Villa Nuti near Florence in 1873 and was visited in the same year by Burne-Jones and Morris.<sup>50</sup> All three would certainly have visited the Galleria dell' Accademia to see Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*, which probably provided the inspiration for their works. This could simply be viewed as another example of the form of collaborative working enjoyed by members of the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle, but it confirms that Stanhope was not averse to copying figure poses he admired from any source.

Boyce's diaries provide evidence of the way in which Stanhope may have accessed Elizabeth's drawings. Boyce describes visiting Stanhope in 1858, firstly on 21 June, and again on 16 December, and finding his fellow artist working on *Thoughts of the Past* in his own studio situated on the floor below Gabriel's at Chatham Place, Blackfriars.<sup>51</sup> Although most of the diary entries for the years 1854-6 are missing, there is sufficient evidence throughout Boyce's journals to suggest that Stanhope would have had more than enough opportunity to have seen Elizabeth's *The Lass of Lochroyan* in Gabriel's studio prior to commencing work on *Thoughts of the Past*.

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<sup>49</sup> A. M. W. Stirling, *A Painter of Dreams and other Biographical Studies*, (London: John Lane, 1916), 342.

<sup>50</sup> Stirling, *A Painter of Dreams*, 338.

<sup>51</sup> Bradbury, *The Boyce Papers*, II, 1024; 1026.

Curator Alison Smith suggests that Stanhope's work was most probably influenced by Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* and Gabriel's *Found*, but she also proposes 'the pose and features actually share greater affinities with Gabriel's drawings of Elizabeth Siddal'.<sup>52</sup> Although Professor Lynda Nead selected *Thoughts of the Past* for the cover image of *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (1988), she accords it only passing mention in the text, again linking it to *The Awakening Conscience* and *Found* because in all three 'the prostitute is confronted with memories of her lost innocence'.<sup>53</sup> Potentially the repeated association with *The Awakening Conscience* stems from art historians concentrating on an iconographical interpretation of the painting rather than a straightforward visual comparison. Yet when viewed side by side, Stanhope's composition is clearly informed by *The Lass of Lochroyan* (Fig. 104). Although the details have once again been modified, Stanhope's basic composition mirrors Elizabeth's sketch.

Unlike Hughes, Stanhope has maintained the same figure orientation as Elizabeth, but has altered the direction of the figure's gaze between his preparatory sketch and the final painting. In the drawing the figure's head is depicted in profile with her eyes looking upwards and her chin slightly raised in a manner which alludes to Elizabeth's sketch (Fig. 105). In the final painting, however, the figure meets the viewer's gaze, altering the alignment of the body and increasing the visibility of the bent elbow. As in *Love and the Maiden*, Stanhope has modified the position of the figure's arms. In *Thoughts of the Past* the figure's straight arm is dominant, since it is closest to the viewer,

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<sup>52</sup> Alison Smith catalogue entry 104 (John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, *Thoughts of the Past*), in *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 144.

<sup>53</sup> Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 130.

whereas Elizabeth's focus is on the bent arm. The placement and alignment of the figures, however, is very similar.

The figure in *Thoughts of the Past* also bears a striking visual resemblance to another of Elizabeth's works, the watercolour *The Ladies' Lament (Sir Patrick Spens)* (Fig. A.40). In Elizabeth's small painting the main figure, thought to be a self-portrait, stands in the foreground with her hands clasped behind her. The incline of the figure's head and its position in relation to the centre vertical are similar to *The Lass of Lochroyan*, but also share an equally strong visual resemblance with *Thoughts of the Past* (Fig. 106). In both works the figure's left arm, closest to the viewer, takes visual priority. Stanhope has turned the figure's face slightly more towards the viewer to make critical eye contact. As well as the physical pose of the figure, the flow of the drapery folds on Stanhope's skirt mirror those of the main figure in *The Ladies' Lament*, including the corded tie around the figure's waist.

The composition of the background demonstrates strong visual similarities between *Thoughts of the Past* and the sketch for *The Lass of Lochroyan*. Stanhope has re-worked the background elements to suit his own purpose. To the left of the vertical centre, Elizabeth's view over the castle parapet becomes Stanhope's view of the River Thames, seen through the window of his studio in Chatham Place, Blackfriars. The balustrade in *The Lass of Lochroyan* changes into a net curtain and a dying pot plant in *Thoughts of the Past*, indicative of the fallen woman's current predicament. The castle door to the right in *The Lass of Lochroyan* is transformed into a dark corner of the room in *Thoughts of the Past*, where clothing can be seen hanging from a coat rack. While the elements of the composition are different, the basic construction is very similar. The

angle of the castle parapet in *The Lass of Lochroyan* is much wider in relation to the horizontal centre than that of the window curtain in *Thoughts of the Past*, possibly indicating Stanhope's greater awareness of perspective.

From close analysis of *Thoughts of the Past* it becomes clear that this, like many other works by members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, was not a new piece created by its artist-maker, but rather an assimilation of ideas, many of which originated from Elizabeth's drawings. Living in the same apartment block as Gabriel, Stanhope would often have been socialising with him and therefore benefitted from almost unlimited access to Elizabeth's drawings. There are many factors which may have inspired Stanhope to paint *Thoughts of the Past*: the view from his studio window overlooking Blackfriars Bridge may have contributed, as well as the popularity of the subject of the 'fallen woman'. Nevertheless, the construction of his composition is clearly indebted to Elizabeth's *The Lass of Lochroyan*, yet again demonstrating how her artistic legacy lives on surreptitiously.

### **The Gay Goss-Hawk**

Another illustration taken from one of the ballads in Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders*, perhaps also intended for inclusion in the planned collaboration with Allingham, is Elizabeth's *The Gay Goss-Hawk*. In the poem the goshawk, a bird of prey, takes on the role normally attributed to a dove to transport messages from the squire to his lover. The girl's father refuses to give his permission for the two to marry so she takes a sleeping potion in order to feign death.<sup>54</sup> *The Gay Goss-Hawk* perhaps provides an example of a three-

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<sup>54</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1807), III, 151-8.

way sharing of ideas, identified by Prettejohn as a 'triangulation'.<sup>55</sup> Elements of Elizabeth's drawing are visually similar to two of Gabriel's later drawings and Burne-Jones's impressive canvas *Laus Veneris* (1873-8, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Fig. 107). *Laus Veneris* is painted on an epic scale, but is nonetheless filled with minute detail, such as the gold patterning on the queen's scarlet dress which is only visible at close hand. Burne-Jones's initial inspiration was probably Algernon Charles Swinburne's poem of the same name, written in praise of the goddess Venus and love. Yet various elements of this work exhibit visual similarities with works by both Rossettis.

To the left of Burne-Jones's painting sits a group of four maidens who are supposedly singing to cheer up the love-sick queen. The proximity of heads placed together in a circle is reminiscent of Gabriel's *King Arthur and the Weeping Queens* (1856-7, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery). In both works one female sits with her back to the viewer; a second, to the left, is seen in profile, while two are depicted almost full-face (Fig. 108). None of them make eye contact with the viewer. Gabriel's drawing has further female figures to complete the circle, while Burne-Jones adds five knights on horseback to increase interest. Both works show the figure to the left holding something in her right hand; Burne-Jones's female holds a musical instrument, a pipe of some description, while the item held by Gabriel's figure is unclear, possibly a sponge or cloth to tend the dying Arthur's brow. Gabriel's drawing was one of the illustrations published in the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poetry in 1857 and was well-known to Burne-Jones. Georgiana recalls: 'The illustrated Tennyson was an excitement, but a very mixed pleasure, for he hated some of

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<sup>55</sup> Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters*, 8-9.



the pictures in it as much as he loved others'.<sup>56</sup> It is reasonable to assume that *King Arthur and the Weeping Queens* was one that delighted Burne-Jones, although there is no firm evidence to suggest it inspired the composition of *Laus Veneris*.

On the opposite side of *Laus Veneris*, it is the pose of the lovesick queen that captures the viewer's attention, instantly drawing the eye with her rich scarlet gown. Although the surrounding figures are lacking, the figure pose is also comparable with one of Gabriel's sketches, *Bonifazio's Mistress* (1856, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Fig. 109). The protagonist in each work occupies a similar position in the picture space, seated to the right of the central vertical, and are both reclining languidly. Given Burne-Jones's close association with Gabriel and admiration for his work, it would be easy to suggest that the inspiration for his figure pose came from this source.

Despite these similarities, the correlation between *Bonifazio's Mistress* and Burne-Jones's principal figure in *Laus Veneris* is weak, and another sketch may have inspired both works. Elizabeth's unlocated drawing, *The Gay Goss-Hawk* (Fig. A.20) pre-dates *Bonifazio's Mistress* and *Laus Veneris* by at least two years. *The Gay Goss-Hawk* depicts the figure of a woman seated on an upright wooden chair. Her head is tilted backwards as if she is unconscious. Elizabeth often used this specific head inclination; further examples can be found in her sketches for *St Cecilia* (Figs. A.95-8). The female figure is attended by two knights trying to revive her, one of whom is probably the squire, her lover. A church is clearly visible through the window to the left, perhaps denoting her desire for marriage or a Christian burial.

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<sup>56</sup> Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, 157.

Gabriel's sketch for *Bonifazio's Mistress* shows several similarities with Elizabeth's design (Fig. 110). His drawing is based on a tale originally written for an issue of *The Germ*, entitled *St Agnes of Intercession*.<sup>57</sup> Gabriel himself describes the drawing as 'a subject from an old story of mine – a woman dying while her lover is painting her portrait'.<sup>58</sup> Although he includes an extra figure, the structure of the composition is basically the same as Elizabeth's, with the unconscious woman surrounded by those trying to revive her. Elizabeth's window is replaced by Gabriel's easel bearing the portrait of the dying woman.

Following on from Stanhope's *Thoughts of the Past*, it is not just the figure pose in *Laus Veneris* but other elements of the composition that show visual similarities with *The Gay Goss-Hawk* (Fig.111). Both artists have placed the chair their figure is seated on in a similar position, with the seat and legs approximately half-way between the central horizontal and the lower picture margin. Elizabeth's chair has carved wooden legs with inset panels, while Burne-Jones achieves a similar arched effect with draped fabric. He also uses fabric to mirror the padded cushion which appears to support the sleeping lady in *The Gay Goss-Hawk*. The extension of both figures' legs is almost identical, and the drapery folds of their garments are also similar. While the left arm of Elizabeth's figure appears to hang limply, Burne-Jones has used a more natural, languid curve. These subtle differences serve to underline how Burne-Jones does not simply copy one of Elizabeth's ideas, but embraces it, digests it, and then produces his own version. He maintains the most striking elements of Elizabeth's composition while blending them with his own characteristic style.

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<sup>57</sup> "Bonifazio's Mistress - Compositional Study," Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, n.d., accessed Jan 4, 2020, <http://www.preraphaelites.org/the-collection/1904P234/bonifazios-mistress-compositional-study/>. Note: This link is now obsolete. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery have a new collections website which is not yet fully functional.

<sup>58</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, II, 354 (item 60.44).

The similarities are undeniable, and this is indeed 'generous imitation' at its best, demonstrating once again how Elizabeth's artistic legacy is frequently obscured.

### **Clerk Saunders**

Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders* provided the inspiration behind many other Pre-Raphaelite works, but Burne-Jones and Elizabeth were the only two members of the circle who chose to illustrate *Clerk Saunders*. MacCarthy notes that the border ballads were very popular with Burne-Jones and his circle, and that *Clerk Saunders* was 'a special favourite' and 'the subject of a small and very eerie Burne-Jones watercolour'. Elizabeth's work is dateable to May 1854, when Gabriel wrote to Brown to advise him about the proposed volume of ballads that Allingham planned to edit: 'She has just done her first block (from Clerk Saunders) and it is lovely'.<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth produced several different designs for *Clerk Saunders*, including a finished watercolour (Fig. A.13) and brown watercolour and gum Arabic study (Fig. A.17) which is very similar in tone to Burne-Jones's later work (Fig. 112). In this instance the two drawings are visually less similar, but other evidence suggests Burne-Jones may have taken his inspiration from Elizabeth's work.

The brown tones of Elizabeth's study are echoed in Burne-Jones's finished watercolour. Marsh identifies Elizabeth's study as a 'finished sketch mostly done in carmine' when in William's possession,<sup>60</sup> however the pigments may have faded over time and the image now appears and is catalogued as

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<sup>59</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 354 (item 54.49).

<sup>60</sup> *Elizabeth Siddal: Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, 64 (item 38).

'brown'.<sup>61</sup> There is, however, notable white highlighting on Margaret's face. In addition, the ghostly figure of Clerk Saunders appears back lit by moonlight emanating from outside of the room. This effectively blocks the light from Margaret, yet her face appears fully lit. Clerk Saunders's face, which should be in deep shadow, is also highlighted with white. Light also falls on the curtain between the two figures, dividing his spiritual realm from her earthly world. The technique Elizabeth has used here, *Sgraffito*, is extremely effective in depicting the glow of moonlight. The full ethereal effect is not evident from reproductions. It can only be obtained by standing back when viewing the original drawing.

A similar form of *Sgraffito* is used in Burne-Jones's watercolour. Smith elaborates on his typical working methods, suggesting that he used 'two pieces of heavy cartridge paper mounted on canvas and wrapped around a stretcher' as a suitable support.<sup>62</sup> She confirms this type of support was used for *Clerk Saunders*, to which Burne-Jones then 'applied zinc white to provide a clean and relatively non-absorbent coating for laying on colour'.<sup>63</sup> She continues 'For further expressive effect he hatched fine parallel lines into the dry paint, adopting a 'scraperboard' technique to expose the underlying white as seen in the rose stalks on the right and the heavy leaden sky'.<sup>64</sup> Although the white highlighting appears in different areas of his work, Burne-Jones appears to have taken the idea and colour palette from Elizabeth's drawing. Elizabeth's study for *Clerk Saunders* remained in Rossetti family ownership until offered for sale at Christies in 2010 when it was purchased by Canadian collector Dennis

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<sup>61</sup> *Beauty's Awakening: Drawings by the Pre-Raphaelites and their Contemporaries from the Lanigan Collection*. Edited by Dennis T. Lanigan and Christopher Newall. Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 2016. Exhibition Catalogue. 154-5 (item 63).

<sup>62</sup> *Edward Burne-Jones*. Edited by Alison Smith (London: Tate Publishing, 2018), Exhibition Catalogue. 28-9.

<sup>63</sup> *Edward Burne-Jones*. 29

<sup>64</sup> *Edward Burne-Jones*. 29

Lanigan. It would therefore have been in Gabriel's possession until his death, meaning Burne-Jones had easy access to the finer details of Elizabeth's original drawing when working on his own version.

Returning to the reddish-brown tones used by both artists, Smith also comments that Burne-Jones's *Clerk Saunders* appears 'dark and muddy' in comparison with the bright, jewel-like watercolours created by Gabriel during the 1850s.<sup>65</sup> Smith claims this was because he followed Gabriel's lead, using colours which were not entirely permanent, thus leading to fading and 'muddying', as seen in Elizabeth's version. Roger Fry also criticised Gabriel's watercolours, suggesting they often appeared 'muddy and indefinite'.<sup>66</sup> This observation appears flawed as most of Gabriel's watercolours, such as *The Blue Closet* (1857, Tate Gallery, London) have retained much of their original brightness, as have Burne-Jones's *Clara* and *Sidonia von Bork*. MacCarthy, on the other hand, does suggest that at that time Burne-Jones 'was moving on from pen-and-ink drawing into a maturer phase of watercolour painting, under Rossetti's influence'.<sup>67</sup>

It should be remembered, however, that Elizabeth used a similar 'muddy' palette of brown ink and wash in several of her drawings, notably *Deposition from the Cross (Last Farewell Before Crucifixion)* (Fig. A.18) and *Study for Lady Clare* (Fig. A.44). The watercolour version of Elizabeth's *Clerk Saunders*, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Fig. A.13), employs similar brown tones, but in this case they are lightened with the addition of pinks, greens, and a vibrant ultramarine blue. This would suggest she carefully chose the palette for

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<sup>65</sup> Edward Burne-Jones. 29

<sup>66</sup> Roger Fry, "Rossetti's Watercolours of 1857," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* Vol. 29 No. 159 (1916): 100.

<sup>67</sup> MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite*, 120-1.

her study, rather than it being the result of fading pigmentation. If carmine was added to the brown wash, then potentially the appearance would have been a warmer, reddish-brown, but the overall monotone effect would have been unchanged. It is this effect that appears to have inspired Burne-Jones's treatment of the subject. This demonstrates the deeper significance of Elizabeth's true legacy to Pre-Raphaelite art. It was not just her figure poses and basic compositional structures that were appropriated by other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, but also her techniques and colour palettes.

### **Jephthah's Daughter**

Scott's work was a popular choice for members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Although not specifically included in the list of 'Immortals', his work probably falls into the category of 'Old English Ballads'.<sup>68</sup> Millais's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1878, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery), depicting a scene from Scott's novel of the same name, is one of his lesser-known works. There are several reasons for this: it is not one of Millais's original Pre-Raphaelite paintings; nor is it one of his later sentimental subjects; and it remains hidden away in the museum's storerooms. The Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives website, whose collection houses the painting, describes the scene:

The subject is taken from Sir Walter Scott's novel 'The Bride of Lammermoor' where Edgar, Master of Ravenswood, has just rescued Lucy Ashton from a wild bull. Lucy is the daughter of his enemy, but she, unaware of his identity, is surprised at his cold manner. The artist's model for Ravenswood perfectly fitted Scott's description: 'A monteso cap and a black feather drooped over the wearer's brow, and partly concealed his features

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<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 3.

which, so far as seen were dark, regular and full of majestic though somewhat sullen expression.<sup>169</sup>

The feeling of conflict in the painting is clear; the couple are not lovers. This is not the first painting by Millais to depict a pair of figures. Other such works include *A Huguenot, on St. Bartholomew's Day, Refusing to Shield Himself from Danger by Wearing the Roman Catholic Badge* (1852, Private collection) and *The Black Brunswicker* (1860, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight). In *The Bride of Lammermoor*, however, the couple face the viewer, not each other. Their arms are linked yet there is no emotional connection between them. While the woman leans her head on the man's shoulder, she turns it away from him. The tension is evident in their faces, a world away from the sickly sentimentality of other works Millais created around the same time, such as *Cherry Ripe* (1879, Private collection).

On a completely different scale, Elizabeth's preparatory sketches for *Jephthah's Daughter* exude the same feeling of tension, despite the lack of finish (Figs. A.25-9). Millais's *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which was painted some sixteen years after Elizabeth's death, shows visual similarities with one of these drawings (Fig. A.25). By this time Millais had been a full member of the Royal Academy for over twenty years, yet this painting appears to revert to a more Pre-Raphaelite style in the depiction of both figures and background, commensurate with *A Huguenot* and other works from this earlier phase of his career. It is impossible to guess why Millais would have returned to the figure pose, theme and style of his Pre-Raphaelite youth unless something had acted as a catalyst.

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<sup>69</sup> "Fine Art, Label for K864," *Bristol Museums, Galleries, Archives*, n.d., accessed Jan 8, 2022, <http://museums.bristol.gov.uk/narratives.php?irn=8280>.

When Elizabeth's drawing is placed alongside Millais's painting it is clear there are differences as well as similarities. It is immediately evident that the female figure in Millais's work is on the opposite side of the man to Elizabeth's drawing. Creating a mirror image of her work enables a more straightforward comparison to be made (Fig. 113). When viewed in this way both works show the left hand of the female figure reaching across her body to hold the man's right hand. The angle of the elbow is slightly more acute in Elizabeth's drawing. This is because Millais's figure pose has been adapted to reflect the unease between the figures. The angle of the female figure's head, however, is very similar in both works. Unusually Elizabeth's figure's head is inclined forward, whereas Millais has adopted her more usual form of the backward tilt with uplifted chin. The central focal point of the two hands clasping at hip level in Elizabeth's drawing is echoed by the angle created with drapery by Millais. Although these differences exist, it is the visual similarity that catches the viewer's eye.

Yet it seems ridiculous to suggest that established Royal Academician Millais would copy untutored Elizabeth's ideas. How would he have gained access to her work so long after the Brotherhood had gone their separate ways? The answer may lie in the paper on which Elizabeth made her drawing. This specific design for *Jephthah's Daughter* is sketched on the reverse of one of Gabriel's sketches for *The Ballad of Fair Annie*, also known as *Annie of Lochroyan* or *The Lass of Lochroyan*, another of the Scottish ballads from Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders* selected for publishing in Allingham's anthology. As has already been noted, Elizabeth illustrated several such ballads, including *The Lass of Lochroyan*. The sheet containing both drawings formed part of the large donation made to the Birmingham Museum



and Art Gallery in 1903 by Charles Fairfax Murray, one of Gabriel's close friends towards the end of his life.<sup>70</sup> This suggests that the drawing remained in Gabriel's possession until his death. Work on the illustrations for Allingham's volume of ballads can be dated by correspondence to May 1854,<sup>71</sup> when the relationship between Gabriel and Millais was still on relatively friendly terms. This is confirmed by Millais's son and biographer, who writes:

The friendly intercourse between Millais and D.G. Rossetti lasted but four years, from 1848 to 1852. From 1852 to 1854 they met occasionally, but after that they rarely came into contact, and in 1856 even these casual meetings came to an end.<sup>72</sup>

When visiting Gabriel's studio, it is inevitable that Millais would have seen numerous sketches lying around. Since Elizabeth and Gabriel worked closely together, sketches by both artists may have been assembled on a table together. Natural curiosity and a history of collaboration and critique of each other's work would probably have led to Millais leafing through the sheets to see what his friend was working on. In his early biography of Millais, Marion H. Spielmann makes an interesting revelation which elucidates how he saw the relationship between the three main protagonists in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood:

Millais' great pictures of that [i.e. Pre-Raphaelite] period – in many qualities really great – are certainly the combination of the influence of others' powers beside his own. His is the wonderful execution, the brilliant drawing; but Dante Rossetti's fervid imagination was on one side of him and Holman Hunt's powerful intellect and resolution were on the other...<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See also Chapter 2.

<sup>71</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence*, I, 354 (item 54.49).

<sup>72</sup> Millais, *Life and Letters*, I, 55.

<sup>73</sup> Marion H. Spielmann, *Millais and his Works* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1898), 24.

It is possible that Millais saw Elizabeth's sketch in Rossetti's studio in 1854, absorbed the striking figure pose subconsciously, and recalled it from the depths of his memory many years later without recollecting the source. Elizabeth's drawing of the two figures may have acted as a subliminal stimulus so that when Millais began work on his painting the figure pose flowed from his brush naturally and instantly. This is a significant way in which many of Elizabeth's original ideas may have been transmitted to other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, and thus found their way into their masterpieces, without the artists having any awareness of the thought transfer process which had taken place. Such examples underline how difficult it is to uncover the full extent of Elizabeth's artistic legacy, and conversely, the two artists may well have arrived at similar ideas for a figure pose quite independently of each other. This demonstrates the challenges faced when studying the visual similarity in artworks without documentary evidence; all interpretation is subjective.

### **The Blessed Damozel**

While Scott and Tennyson were popular subjects with Pre-Raphaelite artists, they also illustrated poetry by members of their immediate circle. Gabriel's poem *The Blessed Damozel* is one such example. This poem first appeared in the second issue of *The Germ*, the short-lived journal produced by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Gabriel began writing the poem in 1847, then commenced a painting of the subject in 1871. He was not the first to illustrate his poem, however, as Burne-Jones had already completed his own work in 1861. Both were preceded by Elizabeth, whose sketch is undated but is most likely to have been completed in the mid-1850s.

In Gabriel's painting of *The Blessed Damozel* (1871-8, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass. Fig. 114 left) the female figure representing the Damozel looking over the parapet of heaven faces to the left. Her hands are placed on the balustrade, below which are the heads of three angels. She holds the three white lilies mentioned in the poem, a symbol of the purity of the Virgin Mary and associated with depictions of the Annunciation. The religious theme is continued as the painting takes the form of a *pala*, or single panel altarpiece, with a *predella*, or small panel, below the main painting. Gabriel's background is filled with pairs of figures embracing, interspersed with more flowers. The *predella* contains an image of the lover she has left behind on earth, separated from the Damozel in heaven by the golden frame. This is a very different depiction to Burne-Jones's earlier work (1856-61, also Fogg Art Museum), therefore in this instance there has been no dissemination of ideas from master to pupil, or vice versa (Fig. 114 right).

Burne-Jones's solitary figure of the Damozel faces right, leaning outwards over the balustrade or parapet. There is also a religious connection as the Damozel's head is encircled by a halo, again reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. Flowers surround her and her feet rest on clouds. Elizabeth's sketch illustrating the same lines of Gabriel's poem probably pre-dates this work (Fig. A.12). When viewed alongside Burne-Jones's painting, the visual resemblance is evident (Fig. 115). In both works the parapet is similarly positioned, and parallel with the centre horizontal. Both artists depict the parapet of heaven resembling a balustrade; a horizontal wooden bar supported by vertical posts. The figures are similarly placed, but Burne-Jones's Damozel dominates the picture space to a greater degree. There are, of course, differences: Elizabeth's figure has her

arms outstretched along the parapet, while Burne-Jones portrays his figure holding something in her hands. The correlation between these two works is weaker than some, but they still display a much stronger relationship with each other than with Gabriel's subsequent work. Elizabeth's original drawing, now held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, was likely to have been in Gabriel's studio at the time Burne-Jones was working on his painting.

Burne-Jones chose *The Blessed Damozel* as the subject for his first commission from art collector Thomas Plint of Leeds. Georgiana, Burne-Jones's wife, recalls his initial thoughts on the composition:

I shall make a lovely Heaven, where the lady stands at the edge of the garden and leans over, trying to count a thick flight of little souls in bright flames, and the garden of Heaven all full of flowers on every side of her and of lovers who have met again.<sup>74</sup>

While the finished painting does not appear to include all the detail he mentions (which seem to describe Gabriel's painting more accurately) the poem was clearly embedded in his memory. On receiving this important first commission, it is possible that sight of Elizabeth's drawing led Burne-Jones to recall his initial reading of the poem, which in turn inspired him to create his painting. Although it is difficult to establish a firm connection between the three works, this example highlights further the sharing of ideas between the three artists; Gabriel's original poem was illustrated first by Elizabeth, then by his friend Burne-Jones, and finally by the poet/artist himself. Could it be that neither of Gabriel's friends captured the essence of his words in a manner that satisfied him, therefore he felt the need to create his own work? Whatever the reason,

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<sup>74</sup> Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, 153.

Elizabeth was the first to illustrate *The Blessed Damozel*, therefore all subsequent renditions will have been informed by her sketch.

### **Sister Helen**

Another of Gabriel's poems illustrated by other members of the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle was *Sister Helen*. Gabriel's own sketch for his volume of poetry and the inspiration he drew from Elizabeth's work is discussed in Chapter 6, but he was not the only artist to adopt Elizabeth's ideas. Frederic James Shields's *Sister Helen* (n.d., private collection, Fig. 116) appears to be entirely based upon one of Elizabeth's sketches. The visual similarity is indeed so strong that it places the attribution to Shields in doubt.

Little scholarship has focused on Shields as he was based in Manchester and for many years remained on the fringes of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. He was, however, very close to Gabriel towards the end of his life in Birchington-on-Sea. A single biography on Shields exists, *The Life and Letters of Frederic Shields*, written by Ernestine Mills and published in 1912, the year after Shields's death.<sup>75</sup> Mills was an artist herself, apprenticed to Shields and working closely with him. She became his trusted companion and friend and was subsequently appointed as one of the executors of his will.

Among Shields's possessions at the time of his death, and of critical importance to my research, was a copy of one of the photographic portfolios discussed in Chapter 2. As previously mentioned, Shields bequeathed his copy to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in his will. The significance of Shields owning a copy of the photographic portfolio lies in the fact that since images of

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<sup>75</sup> Mills, *Life and Letters*.

all Elizabeth's drawings for *Sister Helen* are included within its pages, he had unrestricted access to her illustrations when working on his painting.

It is also clear that Shields was not averse to copying work he admired. During a visit to London in 1864 he records in his diary: 'May 19th – To National Gallery, copied Memling's 'Holy Family''.<sup>76</sup> Since Shields used the word 'copied' himself, rather than a vaguer term such as 'sketched from', suggests that he made a detailed and accurate copy of the painting, purchased by the National Gallery in 1862. During this same visit to London Shields first met Gabriel, having been introduced by a mutual friend, George Butterworth, on 21 May 1864.<sup>77</sup> By June the pair were exchanging photographs of their work, and in January 1865 Gabriel was sufficiently impressed to ask Shields to provide designs for stained glass for the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., which Shields declined.<sup>78</sup> Much later in life, however, he produced many drawings for stained glass, including designs for the windows at Eaton Hall Chapel in Cheshire.

Shields subsequently became integrated into the Pre-Raphaelite circle, dividing his time between Manchester and London. Brown was impressed with Shields's work and offered advice such as previously given to Elizabeth. This included suggesting that Shields should follow his own ideas and not be so indebted to Gabriel:

I saw the chalk studies you sent to the Sketch Exhibition ...  
There was one of a fine-looking girl with laurels which I thought very fine, the throat and head in particular admirably drawn and fine in expression, only the hands seemed too lumpy. It was evident you had Rossetti in your eye, but he obtains such

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<sup>76</sup> Mills, *Life and Letters*, 81.

<sup>77</sup> Mills, *Life and Letters*, 82.

<sup>78</sup> Mills, *Life and Letters*, 83; 97.

beautiful models to work from that the delicacy of their forms compensates for the apparent simplicity in bulk. With this exception, I thought the drawings very fine. I must, however, notice (which I trust you will take well from me) that the works have seen of yours which are most directly under the *Rossetti* influence are not your successful ones. I have told him this also, and he agrees that I am right. No doubt there is a radical difference in your natures, and though the charm of his genius provokes sympathetic emulation in you of quite a legitimate kind, it is still disturbing you in your orbit ...<sup>79</sup>

This letter from Brown to Shields is undated but is believed to have been written towards the end of 1869.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps Shields heeded this advice and turned to Elizabeth's work for inspiration in the same way that Gabriel had done.

Shields's painting most closely resembles the more detailed of Elizabeth's designs for *Sister Helen* (Fig. A. 87). When the two works are placed side by side the similarities are obvious, despite the poor quality of the image of Shields's painting (Fig. 117).<sup>81</sup> The relationship between the arms and the lower legs in the kneeling position form identical triangular shapes on each composition. Both artists have depicted long hair falling over the figure's right shoulder to below her right elbow. The incline of the head is identical in both works, and both have the figure's right hand over her left as she clasps her throat. The waxen man figure occupies the same position on the floor in front of the fire, and despite the lack of clarity in the reproduction of Shields's painting there is a shadowy outline resembling Elizabeth's climbing boy. These close correlations mean it would be very easy to suggest this work is not by Shields at all but is a lost oil painting by Elizabeth.

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<sup>79</sup> Mills, *Life and Letters*, 135.

<sup>80</sup> Mills places it immediately after a letter dated 19 October and before one dated 23 December 1869.

<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, there is no better image of the painting as it was sold at their Olympia branch which no longer exists. Simon Toll, Senior Director, Victorian and British Impressionist Art, Sotheby's., email message to the author Dec.10, 2021.

If Shields's *Sister Helen* is compared to another of his works of similar size and date the difference in quality and detail is immense (Fig. 118). *Study of a Draped Figure* is only half a centimetre narrower than *Sister Helen*, and the same height. It depicts a large central female figure against an interior background. The handling of the drapery, the figure's face and hands and the background detail differ so greatly from *Sister Helen* that the work does appear to have been painted by another hand. Could it be a lost work by Elizabeth?

My research into the history and provenance of Shields's *Sister Helen*, however, suggests the attribution is correct; the painting is indeed by Shields. It was first exhibited as item number 108 in an *Exhibition of Works by Frederic Shields* at Manchester City Art Gallery in 1907, several years before Shields's death. If *Sister Helen* was by Elizabeth's hand and not by Shields, then why was it exhibited under his name at this exhibition? Was he ill towards the end of his life and someone else organised the exhibition? Mills answers that question; yes, Shields was ill, but she confirms that 'the artist's powers of execution and invention were not failing, in spite of continued ill health and sorrow'.<sup>82</sup> Evidently his brain was still in perfect order, thus it is unlikely that he would have permitted a painting to be exhibited if it was incorrectly attributed.

The painting was lent for exhibition by a Mrs Steele Roberts. She loaned nine paintings to the Manchester exhibition (quite unusual for a woman at that time) while Shields himself provided twenty-five works. She again loaned *Sister Helen* for *A Memorial Exhibition of the works of Frederic J Shields* held at the Alpine Club Gallery, Conduit Street, London in the autumn of 1911. What connection did the painting's owner have with the artist? The only mention of a

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<sup>82</sup> Mills, *Life and Letters*, 345.



Mr Roberts occurs in Shields's diary, where he records 'Monday, 17th [August 1874] ... Evening with Mr. Roberts and his family'.<sup>83</sup> It is not known whether this was the same Roberts family that lent the painting as Shields simply referred to his friend by his family name of Roberts.

Further genealogical research has revealed that although Steele was an unusual forename for the period, it was a traditional family name and therefore the first son of several generations was named 'Steele Lambert Roberts'. From the 1881 census records Steele Lambert Roberts the elder was listed as a 'Commercial Traveller, Wine',<sup>84</sup> which would account for him being in a financial position to purchase so many works of art. His death is registered in 1909, so it may have been his wife lending the paintings to the exhibition. No further information on provenance is available between the painting being in Steele Lambert Roberts family possession and it subsequently being presented for sale at Sotheby's in 2003.

It therefore seems highly likely that this is indeed a work by Shields, or at least partly by him. There is the outside possibility that a number of half-finished canvases remained in Gabriel's possession at his death, and that Shields may have decided to finish them. It is not known whether this work was signed by Shields; he used a specific monogram to identify all his works, including watercolours, so the absence of the monogram might suggest it is not entirely his work.<sup>85</sup> Further research is still required, but from the information currently available it is difficult to draw any other conclusion: the work is indeed by

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<sup>83</sup> Mills, *Life and Letters*, 166.

<sup>84</sup> *1881 Census Return* for Registration District: Prescot, 3722/99, page 4.

<sup>85</sup> There is no monogram noted in the Sotheby's examination of the painting prior to sale. Simon Toll, Senior Director, Victorian and British Impressionist Art, Sotheby's., email message to the author Dec. 10, 2021.

Shields, and he blatantly copied Elizabeth's drawing from the photographic portfolio in his possession.

### **Conclusion**

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Elizabeth's innovative ideas have been freely adopted and re-worked by other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. This was mostly first-hand, either through seeing her original drawings, or by owning or having access to a copy of the photographic portfolio. However, ideas were also passed from one artist to another, either via Gabriel's work or that of another artist. This dissemination of her ideas, both directly from her drawings and subsequently through the medium of photography, has seemingly gone unnoticed throughout the course of art history. Instead, the credit has been showered upon the male members of the circle for their 'originality'. It is interesting to note that it appears to have been *only* the male artists who borrowed from Elizabeth; the female members of the circle all seemed to have sufficient inspiration of their own! My research in this, and the preceding chapter, has shown that Elizabeth's true artistic legacy lies hidden in the work of others.

## Conclusion – Beyond *Ophelia*: Elizabeth’s Legacy

Why is it important to study Elizabeth’s oeuvre? Can we rewrite Elizabeth’s artistic history to become *her* story? How can we ensure her true legacy is understood both by scholars and by the general interested member of the public? How can we preserve this legacy for future generations? In my conclusion I will draw together the significant points I have made in this thesis. My research demonstrates that Elizabeth’s oeuvre was critical to the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art and must not be ignored, therefore I will conclude by outlining my future plans for a scholarly publication, a popular novel and an online *catalogue raisonné* project to ensure her true artistic legacy is both publicised and preserved.

I began my thesis with Millais’s portrayal of Elizabeth as *Ophelia*, and demonstrated how this famous painting, together with the many other depictions of her in art, film, television, and literature have shaped the public perception of her through the decades. Although her artworks were exhibited alongside those of her male counterparts, Elizabeth is remembered for her discovery in a milliner’s shop, modelling roles, untimely death and exhumation rather than for her contribution as an artist. However, it is these stories – and their subsequent embroidering – that have kept her in the public eye and brought her to the attention of interested scholars. Elizabeth’s public perception has been shaped by others: those who have written about her, played her in film or television productions, or discussed her in scholarly articles. Exhibitions have displayed her art for all to see – but few have been prepared to stray from the patriarchal path. It is time for change.

To commence this much-needed transformation I began with Elizabeth's oeuvre. I examined in detail the neglected but critically important resource of the photographic portfolios, commissioned by Gabriel after Elizabeth's death. I documented the potential photographers, the recipients, and Gabriel's purpose in creating them. Thirty-one of her drawings are known only from photographs, demonstrating the importance of these albums. The remnants of the board cover from one of the extant copies suggests that Gabriel kept a copy for himself, possibly using it as a source book. In this way he would have easy and immediate access to Elizabeth's work, and to a wealth of ideas that he had not been able to fully exploit during her lifetime. I am proud that my work on the portfolios has ensured that the holding museums now recognise the true value of this unique resource and have recorded their copies digitally for posterity.

With the aid of the photographic portfolios, I analysed Elizabeth's oeuvre to examine the media she used, the subjects she chose to illustrate and her aims as an artist. It became evident that Elizabeth was targeting the blossoming book illustration market with her drawings. Her illustrations for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poetry were praised by the author himself, however, none of her drawings were included in the final volume. She aspired to greatness but was unable to achieve her full potential; her brief career spanned less than ten years.

Ruskin saw her potential and offered Elizabeth his patronage, enabling her to pursue her ambition as an artist. The characteristics of her work most admired by Ruskin and her fellow artists are summarised in the quotation from Gabriel's brother William which I analysed in Chapter 4:

She had much facility of invention and composition, with eminent purity of feeling, dignified simplicity, and grace; little mastery of form, whether in the human figure or in drapery and other materials; a right intention in colouring, though neither rich nor deep.<sup>1</sup>

Gabriel was among the first to be inspired by Elizabeth, firstly by her presence, then subsequently by her artistic output. Perhaps his subtle 'borrowing' of her ideas has gone unnoticed because in many cases he has combined elements from several of her works to create an 'original' illustration for a poetry volume rather than a large canvas painting. Additionally, as the location of many of her drawings is unknown, they are not widely available in the contemporary public domain of the internet and therefore lack the familiarity of the more famous works they inspired.

I have established that Elizabeth's significant contribution to the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art stems from her innovative figure poses and the simplicity of her composition. While adhering to the medieval themes and dress prevalent in the movement at that time, she contorted her figures to form unusual shapes. These expressive gestures, particularly of the figures' arms and head, have now become synonymous with the idea of a 'Pre-Raphaelite' woman. The striking silhouette of Elizabeth's *Lady Clare* was widely adopted by Gabriel and many other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, while her idiosyncratic arm positions have been shown to have infiltrated works now considered to be the epitome of Pre-Raphaelitism. Her simple backgrounds have also been exploited: the stairway from *Lady Clare* has taken on a new significance along with the view over the parapet in *The Lass of Lochroyan*. My

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<sup>1</sup> Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," 278.

thesis has only presented the tip of the iceberg; there is so much more to be uncovered with further research.

John Gere poetically described Elizabeth as being like a pale moon to Gabriel's bright, shining sun, 'merely reflecting his light'.<sup>2</sup> My research, however, has produced evidence to challenge this outdated patriarchal view. I have shown that far from being derivative, Elizabeth's work was original and innovative. Her ideas were still inspiring Gabriel after her death and relegating him to the role of imitator. Rather than simply reflecting the light of her husband, the great 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti', Elizabeth appears to have been the *source* of his light. Her artistic legacy is in some ways masked by the blinding light of his sun, but nonetheless it still shines through. The challenge now is to open the eyes of those who fail to see beyond the traditional patriarchal viewpoint. Elizabeth's true artistic legacy remains hidden in the work of others.

Until now the Pre-Raphaelite story has been the traditional tale of *his*-story, where genius and innovation remain the province of the male members of the circle. To exclude Elizabeth's work from that story is an error of enormous magnitude. How would Gabriel's art have developed if he had not met Elizabeth and been inspired by her drawings? How would his followers, for example Burne-Jones, Hughes and Stanhope, have produced their masterpieces if Elizabeth's sketches had not existed and been photographed? Would there even have been a typical 'Pre-Raphaelite woman'?

Returning to Prettejohn's words:

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<sup>2</sup> *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet*. Introduction by John Gere (London: Royal Academy, 1973), Exhibition Catalogue, 14.

it is not sufficient merely to add some women to the Pre-Raphaelite canon. Instead it is a matter of writing a wholly new, and different, story about Pre-Raphaelitism - a story in which the activities of women are no longer incidental, but necessary to the plot.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly Elizabeth's work must be seen as an integral part of the Pre-Raphaelite story which caused a directional change in its visual development. Her exclusion from the narrative has had a major impact which must be addressed. My thesis is only the beginning, a springboard towards achieving Prettejohn's vision.

The story of Elizabeth's true artistic legacy demands to be told. I await the Tate Gallery's exhibition on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's work with eager anticipation, not least because my research has contributed to the curation of one of the rooms. I plan to create a website repository for information which will include an online *catalogue raisonné*, links to galleries and museums holding Elizabeth's work and artefacts, a full exhibition history, a fact-based chronology and the occasional article or update. I hope to rework my thesis into a scholarly publication to inspire further research into Elizabeth as an artist. I also hope to write a novel to tell Elizabeth's new story from her own perspective, that of an ambitious young female artist hindered by the constraints of Victorian society. I even aspire to the novel being dramatized as a film! In essence, I want to pluck Elizabeth from the 'muddy death' of Millais's painting and restore her to her rightful place: an artist whose work had a significant impact on the visual development of Pre-Raphaelite art. Elizabeth has left us a valuable legacy – concealed within the work of her male counterparts. Her contribution must be brought out of the shadows.

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<sup>3</sup> Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 69.

To paraphrase Prettejohn's words:

It is not enough merely to research and write this thesis. Instead, it is a matter of changing public perception by publicising the true extent of Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti's artistic legacy.



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