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Beata Beatrix
Pre-Raphaelite Studies

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Ileana Marin is born in Constantza Romania in 1963. She read the Romanian –English at the Faculty of Letters – University of Bucharest between 1986 and 1991. Since her graduation, she has been teaching comparative literature at Ovidius University Constanta, first as a teaching assistant, then as a lecturer. The challenging doctoral thesis - *Narrative Dimensions in the Works of the Pre-Raphaelites* - which she defended in 2000, is a comparative study concerned with the Raphaelites' work of the Italian Renaissance and its nineteenth century influence on the English Pre-Raphaelite movement. She later extended her research to the American response and contribution to the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

She has also published numerous articles and has written three books that are forthcoming at prestigious publishing houses. She has been deeply involved in the life of the Faculty of Letters both as Chancellor, for over five years, and as Associate-Dean, a position that she has been holding for over two years now.

Contents

Introduction

Beata Beatrix is one of the most famous paintings Dante Gabriel Rossetti did. He began working on *Beata Beatrix* before Siddal's death in 1862 and completed the portrait of Elizabeth Siddal from memory in 1870 as a *memento*. This picture represents a turning point in Rossetti's style: the narrative enclosed in symbolic figures would prevail over the explicitly expressed narrative, almost always based on narrative texts.

That is why *Beata Beatrix* seems to me a suggestive title for the volume, which contains five studies that aim to define Pre-Raphaelitism as an aesthetic category. It stands for the dissemination of the Italian patterns in the English poetry and painting of the nineteenth century, primitive aspect of the spiritualised figures, and uppermost, the endless hermeneutic process generated by complex relationships between pictorial image and literary text. In spite of the minutely painted details specific to the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, their profound sense is constructed by subtle narrative techniques. Narrative becomes a compositional strategy that captures the viewer's sight the same way it captures the reader's attention when reading a story. In fact, the Pre-Raphaelites' art, especially Rossetti's, invites its receptor to combine the two channels of reception: reading and viewing. This dialogic situation also complicates the narrative thread:

the literary text, which the pictorial image evokes, is always a challenge for another original work of art. At the same time, the painting illustrates a double series of identifications: Elizabeth Siddal was perceived as an extension of Beatrice by Dante Gabriel while he himself considered an extension of Dante Aligheri. Their works, both literary and pictorial, reveal the prolongation of art into history and the insertion of real life into artefacts. Muse, model, beloved and/or wife were the roles Elizabeth Siddal experienced in reality under the pressure of culturally induced *dramatis personae*: Beatrice, Ophelia, Leah, St. Katherine, Delia. As regards Dante Gabriel, poet and painter, translator from Italian into English, he created a world in which phantasms come true. Finally, phantasms mastered the artist's thoughts and substituted the real object. *Beata Beatrix* was such a phantasmal image that haunted Rossetti's life and art. Having transgressed the limit between fiction and non-fiction, anecdotal aspects of life became narrative elements in the picture. Thus, Rossetti elaborated his own series of icons that identified his works and his influence elsewhere.

Burne-Jones is actually Rossetti's disciple. Close affinities with his master's style such as the same type of hermetism, spiritual postures, concern with female beauty could be followed in his entire work, but their classical mythic *mise en scene* differ.

The fame of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as

an artistic association crossed the ocean and inspired the American painters who were interested exclusively in the poetics of detail and made it their own stylistic feature.

Beata Beatrix has lately become a Pre-Raphaelite artistic and commercial token characterized by a large circulation and permanent contextualizing. Not only the Pre-Raphaelite painters would reproduce Siddal's ecstatic expression and reconsider its hermetic meaning but also their followers: Symbolists and Art Nouveau artists, to name the most important ones.

CHAPTER I

The Phantasmal Language in Rossetti's Translations

In the chapter *Sign vs. Text*[1], Umberto Eco quotes Barthes, Derrida, and Kristeva in order to prove that signification is located exclusively in the text. He also argues that the textual capacity to manipulate pre-existing sign-functions depends on their previous possibility of producing different texts.

As regards the most representative Pre-Raphaelite works one cannot say that the locus where signifying practice takes place is only the poetic Pre-Raphaelite text. Even in the case in which poems, either epic or lyric, do not have a pictorial materialization they make the reader construct mentally the visual image of the poem by means of specific literary devices[2]. As they almost always refer to another literary subject or pictorial representation, Pre-Raphaelite texts function as an artificial artistic memory for either the image in the picture (the real art of memory)[3] or the piece of literature they start from. The themes of the Pre-Raphaelite painting are literary to a great extent, as well. Thus, the medieval or renascent pictures and literary sources represent referents of the second order for Pre-Raphaelite art. The poetic text becomes a **phantasm**, a mental image in

the process of the mediated **pneumatic** knowledge, transferred in a pictorial image to facilitate or support the interpretation of the poem.

Pre-Raphaelite Subject

Dante Gabriel Rossetti inherits his father's capacity of interpreting the world as a universe of signs that lead the interpreter to another series of signs which, in its turn, signifies something else. While his father Charles Gabriele Rossetti has got lost in semiosis commenting Dante Alighieri's **Divina Commedia** as an all-inclusive parable of morality, medieval history, theology and art, Rossetti the son tries non-programmatically to limit this semiosis by an ingenious artistic procedure; he encloses literature into painting and painting into literature. Either his literary or pictorial works reflect Rossetti’s cultural Italian background, more precisely the medieval patterns in poetry and the medieval and later renascent technique in painting.

In his twenties, Dante Gabriel Rossetti translates Dante's **Vita Nuova** from Italian into English, and the thirteenth century Tuscan and Sicilian poets: Guido Cavalcanti, Cino da Pistoia, Dante da Maiano, Cecco Angiolieri da Siena, Guido Orlandi, Gianni Alfani, Carnino Ghiberti. According to George Steiner:
«Poetic translation plays a unique role inside the translator's own speech. It drives inward.

Anyone translating a poem, or attempting to, is brought face to face, as by no other exercise, with the genius, bone-structure and limitations of his native tongue.»[4]

In Dante Gabriel Rossetti's case, the two languages may be considered native and his translations reveal the confrontation between two poetic realms. In search of his own poetic language he penetrates another cultural tradition and makes it his own.

Translation - cognitive activity

Analysing Rossetti's translations one can notice the setting up of a new enunciative instance round which an enunciative level separated from the enunciative level of the initial Italian text revolves. This new enunciative instance of the translated English poem will be called **enunciative instance of the second order** and the enunciative instance of the initial Italian poem will be called **primary enunciative instance**.

The second enunciative level with specific marks (brackets, the first-person deixis) represents the metatextual matrix of the initial text, a reading that controls and directs its own reading. The English version seems to be a new text with two enunciative levels. In this new text, the 'Sign-I' is the means by which the **I** of the initial poem can be retrieved and the 'Pre-Raphaelite I' can be controlled.

Rossetti proposes an English enunciate[5]

equivalent to the Italian enunciate; the first sends back to the initial one, but, at the same time, the English equivalents for the characteristic concepts of Dolce Stilnuovo proceed from the Old English and occur in the neighbourhood of the marks of this foreign enunciative instance.

I shall apply this scheme to one of the most literal translations Rossetti made: Guido Guinizzelli's canzone *Al Cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*, translated as *Of the gentle heart*; nevertheless, his **print** is evident. Rossetti's version reduces the two specific attributes of Sun and Fire, heat and light, respectively, to one specific attribute: light for sun, heat for fire. This remark leads the reader to the conclusion that Rossetti tries to express a more abstract idea than Guinizzelli did: sun is the first celestial body in the hierarchy and reflects the divine essence. In the last stanza the relevant marks of the **enunciative instance of the second order** appear clearly: brackets, and the first person possessive within the brackets, elements absent from the Italian poem:

> «Donna, Deo mi dirà: «Che presomisti?»,
> sïando l'alma mia a lui davanti.
> «Lo ciel passasti e'nfin a Me venisti
> e desti in vano amor Me per semblanti:
> ch'a Me conven le laude
> e a la reina del regname degno,

per cui cessa onne fraude».
Dir Li porò: «Tenne d'angel sembianza
che fosse del Tuo regno;
non me fu fallo, s'in lei posi amanza».»[6]

«My Lady, God shall ask, 'What dared'st thou?'
(When my soul stands with all her acts review'ed);
'Thou passed'st Heaven, into My sight, as now,
To make Me of vain love similitude.
To Me doth praise belong,
And to the Queen of all the realm of grace
Who endeth fraud and wrong'.
Then may I plead: 'As though from Thee he came,
Love wore an angel's face:
Lord, if I loved her, count it not my shame.'»[7]

Having read Rossetti's original poems it is easy to notice that he uses brackets whenever he wants to draw attention to the limits of the text. This device is recurrent in his own poems to mark the distance between the instances of the texts. The poem *The Blessed Damosel* is interrupted four times by four stanzas written in brackets that function as a medieval refrain that checks the audience's attention. These four intrusions of the **enunciative instance of the second order** break up the text that otherwise

bears no mark of the **primary enunciative instance** recognizable as sign:

«The blessed damosel leaned out
From the gold bar of heaven;
[…]
Albeit, to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.
(To one, it is ten years of years.
...Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me- **her hair**
Fell all about my face...
Nothing: the autumn fall of **leaves.**
The whole year sets apace.)

or:

And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.)»[8]

The text seems to be a dialogue between two enunciative levels:

- the first is the locus where the enunciative instance does not manifest itself as sign but can be recognized as an organizer of the text and of the stylistic isotopies;
- the second can be located in the text and revolves around the signifier **I**.

Taking into account the definition of the **poetic subject** as an intentional mark in which the **poetic I** is projected, further in my paper, I shall name the first enunciative level **primary poetic subject** and the second enunciative level **poetic subject of the second order**. The **poetic subject of the second**

order becomes the first commentator of the **primary poetic subject** from an exterior point of view, from outside the story that the text tells. This divided **poetic subject** is assumed by Rossetti whenever he rewrites and paints *Dolce Stilnuovo*.

Coming back to the translation mentioned above the same dialogue is to be seen but in a rudimentary form. One might say that the better the translation the less visible the translator's I is. This sort of translation seems to anticipate what T. S. Eliot writes about Ezra Pound's translations:

«...good translation like this is not merely translation for the translator is giving the original through himself, and finding himself through the original».[9]

The peculiarity of this type of translation consists in the fact that the **translator's I** does not hide behind the **primary I** but appears detached from the latter, indicated by graphic signs: brackets, and the specific signifiers, as the verse «**(**When **my** soul stands with all her acts review'd**)**» proves. The English version keeps the idea of the Italian line but adds a double ambiguity: the Lady in the poem reflects the virtues and the angelic appearance of the Virgin Mary; the **poetic I** assumes and transcribes **God's** I.

I consider **my soul** in the brackets as a mark of **the enunciative instance of the second order** which does not simply translate the Italian words «l'alma mia». According to the

Dolce Stilnuovo theory of Love, the Lady in the song, a phantasm that dominates the activity of the soul, is the object of poetic Love. Guinizzelli precedes and anticipates Dolce Stilnuovo with this very song that can be considered the first *ars poetica* of *Dolce Stilnuovo*. As long as man is soul in front of God, and his soul is absorbed entirely by a phantasm, the phantasm will function as man's soul. The subject without soul is no more a subject due to the fact that phantasm annuls it. At the same time, the subject overlaps its phantasm which is the image of the other, of the beloved Lady. Metaphorically speaking, the subject has already become its own object of Love. Rossetti's translation adds to the mystic of Love expressed by the Italian poem, the mystic of poetry making the poetic subject the object of the text.

As cognitive activity, the text changes from figurative to abstract and finally changes the relationship between subject and object: cognitive subject becomes its own object of research.

Translation - semiotic activity

In his preference for the decorative aspects of light, on the one hand, and for the poetic subject of the second order, on the other, I read his option for an 'Icon – Subject'. In fact, Rossetti's translations represent not only a simple cognitive activity but also a semiotic one

as long as the translated texts exemplify an **interpretative doing** of the **ab que text** and a **productive doing** of the **ab quem text**[10].

Having analyzed the **interpretative doing** in Guinizzelli's poem, I shall now comment upon the **productive doing** considering the translation of **Vita Nova**. The most productive stimulus for Rossetti is Dante Alighieri's work and personality. It is necessary to throw light on the *Dolce Stilnovist* conception of EROS since this theory - based on sight, mirroring, and eye as vehicle of Love, - is the starting point for the materialization of the poetic text in a concrete painted image. Love is not only a recurrent theme both in Dolce Stilnuovo and in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's art but also a creative principle. Dante Alighieri defines it in Purgatorio (XXIV, 52-57):

> "I'mi son un, che quando
> **Amor mi spira**, nolo, e a quel modo
> che' e' dita dentro vo significando"
> «O, frate, issa vegg'io» diss'elli, «il nodo
> che'l Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne
> di qua dal dolce stil novo ch'i' odo!»[11]

Dante Alighieri's lines evidenced the new type of relationship established between the poetic style and the source of inspiration which was Love. Love is the uttermost authority dictating the poems to Dante Alighieri, who, in his turn, becomes a text generator for Rossetti.

Eros, either physical or spiritual, may be

converted into intellectual contemplation: on the one hand, Eros that is not under the domination of the soul is similar with the sense perception; on the other hand, Eros is the vehicle between soul and body. The spirit (**pneuma**) is consubstantial with the stars, and that is why one of its most relevant attributes in the Dolce Stilnuovo poetry is *celestial*. Celestial spirit, *sensus interior*, or phantasia, transforms the messages brought by senses into phantasms easily perceived by the soul/anima. Otherwise the soul is not aware of the exterior sensible world.

Soul and body are inapt to communicate with a non-congenial entity. These two categories of Eros express themselves in appropriate languages: the soul uses a spiritual language whose signs are phantasms; the body appeals to gestural, musical, verbal language whose signs are audible and visible, but, sooner or later, all of them become phantasms when recorded by intellect. I draw attention to the absolute primacy of soul over body and the primacy of its phantasmal language over the word.[12]

The *Dolce Stilnuovo* imposes this erotic/ phantasmal theory in poetry: poets describe the penetration of the woman's image into man's spirit through the eyes. Having translated Dante Alighieri's *New Life*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti succeeds in mastering the code of phantasmal discourse and in rendering the phenomenology of **Love**. From a statistic point

of view, the most translations Rossetti made are from Dante or Dante is the central figure in the sonnets and songs translated by Rossetti from: Giovanni Quirino, Cino da Pistoia, Guido Cavalcanti, Dante da Maiano, Cecco Angiolieri, Giovanni Boccaccio.

If Love may be considered a text generator for Dante, Dante Alighieri, in his turn, becomes a text / painting generator for Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Dante Alighieri's poetic formula is taken up as a model in *House of Life*, *The Blessed Damosel*, e.g., while events in Dante's life make up poetic themes in other poems: *Dante at Verona***,** *On the Vita Nuova of Dante*, *Dantis Tenebrae*.

His paintings have the same subject: *Dantis Amor*, *Dante drawing an Angel on the First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*, *Paolo e Fracesca*, *Beata Beatrix*, *Dante's Dream*. Thus, translations from Dante represent a productive and an interpretative doing in Rossetti's poetry and art.

Whatever the Dolce Stilnovist elements are, they enter the Pre-Raphaelite text as graphic signifiers[13], textual components. The poetic subject is captured in language alongside the chain of signifiers. Acts, emotions, thoughts, desires, perceptions of the Subject recuperate themselves at the level of signifiers and the relationship among them. As soon as they are expressed in language they are no more consubstantial with the Subject but with Language[14].

In this respect, one can notice that the Pre-Raphaelite artistic language is based on the two aspects: literary and pictorial, proceeds from the translation exercise Rossetti made at the beginning of his career.

Notes

[1] Eco, Umberto, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984, p. 19.

[2] Pearce,L.,in *Woman Image Text* discusses in the chapter seven images produced by appropriate metaphors.

[3] Culianu, I.P., *Eros et magie à la Renaissance*, 1484, Flammarion, Paris, 1984.

[4] Steiner, G. ed., *The Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*, Middleesex, 1966, p. 27.

[5] Greimas, A.J., Courtés, J., *Semiotica Dizionario Ragiondo della teoria del linguagio*, Casa Usher, Firenze, 1986, p.123-124.

[6] Marchese, R., Grillini, A., *Scrittori et opere 1 Dalle origini al Quattrocento*, La Nouva Italia, Firenze, 1990.

[7] Rossetti, D.G., *Poetry and The Drama*, Everyman's Library, London, 1930, p.178.

[8] Kermode, F., Hollander, J., *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, v.II, Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1973, p.1406-1409.

[9] Eliot, T.S., Introduction to Pound: Selected Poems, London, 1928, p.13.

[10] Greimas, A.J., Courtés, J., *Semiotica Dizionario Ragiondo della teoria del linguagio*, Casa Usher, Firenze, 1986, p. 365

[11] Marchese, R., Grillini, A., *Scrittori et opere 1 Dalle origini al Quattrocento*, La Nouva Italia, Firenze, 1990, p. 158.

[12] Culianu, I.P., *Eros et magie à la Renaissance*,

1484, Flammarion, Paris, 1984.

[13] Agosti, S., *Critica della testualità*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1994, p.357-373.

[14] Idem.

CHAPTER II

Poetry, or Individual Reading and Painting or Public Sharing

The sonnets “Body's Beauty” and “Soul's Beauty” were initially written for two pictures Rossetti did in the 60's: *Lady Lilith* [oil on canvas, 31,1/2 x 32 inches, now exhibited in Delawere Art Museum, Wilmington] and *Sibylla Palmifera* [oil on canvas, 37 x 32 inches, now exhibited in Lady Lever Art Gallery,Port Sunlight]. Then they were included in the cycle *The House of Life* of which the first 50 sonnets were buried together with Elizabeth Sidall in 1861 and exhumed in 1870, when Dante Gabriel Rossetti decided to publish the poems.

He actually juxtaposes literature and painting - in fact, transfers the unlimited hermeneutic process of the poem to the picture within the frame that encloses the polysemy of words in a unique image with a unique significance. This attempt proves to be illusive, since painting and text mirror each other, generating an endless self-reflectiveness. The two artistic manifestations stand for parallel specular surfaces that deepen the perspective, reveal the true nature of Rossettian art.

As regards the ideal reception Rossetti

projected for his sonnets and paintings, I shall try to analyze the historical facts that lead to an interesting hypothesis.

The Reception of Poetry

Most of his drawings, ink or pencil sketches, and water colours depict Elizabeth Siddal - Lizzie, Guggum, Gum, etc. - who seemed to be the ideal reader of Rossetti's poems. She was portrayed while reading a volume[1] melancholically or attentively.

Taking into account the point of view Fritz Nies affirms in his book *Imagerie de la lecture*[2] works of art contain heuristic indications about literary reception. Two famous drawings present her as an initiated reader: she leaned against a pile of thick books that stands for her literary background (a similar pile is placed in front of the Virgin in *The Girlhood of Virgin Mary*, 1849, suggesting that "her soul is rich"[3]) and the book she was reading could be seen by the viewer. The graphics of the written lines, rhythmically interrupted by blanks, suggests the form of a poetic text. In the other drawing Siddal is again visually compared with the Virgin. The typical image with the open book on the reader's knee belongs to the medieval iconographical tradition. Seated saints, numbers of the clergy, emperors and kings had the privilege to be portrayed in this position;

the only female figure accepted among them was the Virgin. Drawing Siddal, the same noble and saintly circumstance, both a poetess and a paintress herself, Rossetti identified her with The Virgin Mary and made her apt to read/understand his mystical poetry.

Unfortunately Siddal died on 11th February 1862 of an overdose of laudanum before Rossetti published his original poems in a volume. Hall Caine told the episode minutely in *Recollections of D.G.Rossetti*:

"The poems he had written, so far as they were poems of love, were chiefly inspired by and *addressed to her*. At her request he had copied them into a little book presented to him for the purpose... He spoke to his dead wife as if she heard, saying, as he held the book, that *the words it contained were written to her and for her, and she must take them with her, for they could not remain when she had gone*. Then he put the volume into the coffin between her cheek and her beautiful hair, and it was... buried with her in Highgate Cemetery."[4]

This fragment points out the importance Siddal had for Rossetti as a unique and perfect reader during her lifetime. In Iser's terms, she participated in the *process of interaction*: Siddal versus Rossetti's text. *Asymmetry* between the reader and the text is balanced in this very case: Siddal filled all "the gaps and the constitutive blanks" with her/Rossetti's projections. As long

as she was intellectually trained by Dante Gabriel, she became a female alter-ego for Rossetti, and obviously her literary or pictorial projection did not contradict Rossetti's. For Siddal his text did not provoke “continually changing views”; on the contrary, she assumed the unique Pre-Raphaelite view. Siddal represented the hypostasis of the culturally emancipated female public, the mirror of the creative power of male artists. The dichotomy male poet - female reader that functioned at the middle of the nineteenth century supposed a certain poetic strategy.

Trying to piece together those early poems from memory, Rossetti found himself unable to do it. In 1869 he decided to accept the disinterment of the manuscript and in 1870 the volume was published. Another 51 sonnets were added to *The House of Life*, and among them the two mentioned above. Having appeared the cycle, the two sonnets became a constitutive part of it. Nobody reading *The House of Life* asked about the corresponding pictures. At that time, they belonged to their buyers and only few could enjoy them.

The Reception of Painting

Rosseti problematized the relationship between painting and literature, experimenting with all possible combinations: he *illustrated*

narrative poems; scenes from Shakespeare's plays; scenes of Dante's life or work; he composed sonnets for famous pictures signed by Botticelli, Leonardo, Mantegna, etc; he composed sonnets for his own pictures; finally, he painted the sonnets in his pictures. This effort was significant for the interrelation art-poetry that demanded a different process of reception. The usual context for the reception of the painting during the Victorian age were the public exhibition and the private studio. Instead of large and crowded art galleries where he lost control over his works, Rossetti preferred the restricted circle of his friends and buyers as well, already prepared to face his canvas. *The legendary man* "who never exhibited after his initial Pre-Raphaelite exhibition in 1849"[5] and could not stand "the effect of rancorous criticism... that he resolved never again to exhibit in public, and he adhered to this determination to the end..."[6] was the only painter conscious of the power that art critics had over the audience. Having noticed this peril at the very beginning of his career, Rossetti almost always refused permission to exhibit his works as he emphasized in a letter to William Graham:

"Pardon this long-standing mood of reticence but the position of an Artist at my age, and who has preserved hitherto one rule of non-exhibition needs the greatest

circumspection as to any step in the other direction. I consider that much depends for me on the privilege of retaining control over the public production of my picture."[7]
Thus, Rossetti limited the number of viewers: patrons, buyers, friends who could admire his works in his or their own studios. Painting was protected by this limited access against misreading; painting was no longer shared with the others; painting was contemplated in privacy. In order to prevent inconvenient critical articles, no large exhibition could be organized during his lifetime, although Rossetti disseminated his aesthetic ideas to important art critics such as F.G. Stephens, W.M. Rossetti, J. Ruskin. Changing the status of two artistic phenomena, Rossetti deliberately introduced a sort of *connectability*[8] between poem and picture. As he was concerned with their interrelationship and supervised carefully from the distance the process of reception, it is certain that he was aware of devices that enabled him to change the common situation of reading/viewing.

Picture versus Sonnet

Mention should be made that Rossetti painted "Body's Beauty" and "Soul's Beauty" in 1866 and 1868, and wrote the corresponding sonnets before publishing the volume of poetry.

These two sonnets *translate* into a lyrical form the pictorial syntax of the pictures. In fact, the juxtaposition picture and sonnet annuls the frame between these two artistic manifestations and facilitates the dialogue between them: picture becomes lyrical while poetry becomes pictorial and assumes two distinct voices. Both poems and pictures prove the dichotomy of the poetic subject: that I shall call the 'Icon I' and the 'Sign I'. These parts of the poetic **I** correspond to two different categories of receptor (reader and viewer) and two different types of reception (private and public). It is also important to notice that the iconicity always constructs a female instance while the linguistic sign covers a male one.

The Icon-I in "Body's Beauty"

Meyer Schapiro defines the pictorial sign - iconic sign - as an image (icon) of an existent referent outside the system of the picture. The iconic sign is a concept of representation, the support for the representation painting. This sign does not represent reality but [one of the mimetic images of reality; Kristeva considers that it functions as a vehicule between the world and the human language and defines it as "un simulacre - entre - le monde - et - le – langage"[9]. In its turn, the picture representing something (reality or text)

is a structured code. This code starts a significant process which reminds the viewer of the artistic convention he should take into account. The picture *Lady Lilith* (1868) is a simulacrum of phantasm that the text attempts to propose (figure 1). The poetic text, in its turn, becomes a phantasm, and, at the same time, transfers the pictorial image in an *ekphrasis* in order to facilitate or support the interpretation/reception of that portrait.

According to Pollock: "The picture indeed plays with mirrors and gazes. Lilith is represented captured by her own image in the mirror which contains a look at the viewer."[10] Lilith, the first witch that weaves her spell and enchants the snake, then Adam, illustrate the equation *Magic is Eros*. In fact, Eros causes the attraction among things, and this is considered to be a magic technique.[11] The spell, the web, magic plants (rose, poppy), "sweet tongue" are the means by which Lilith creates a network to ensnare her object of Love which in the myth are the snake and Adam. Her attitude in the picture is relevant, and there are two important elements that are missing from the poem: Lilith's gaze and the mirror. Only considering the picture, one can say that the real object of Lilith's love is her own image. She is contemplating herself in the mirror and probably practises the effects of her magic on herself.

Lady Lilith is a magic manipulator; she is able to direct the fantasy to be immune from Love, Good and Truth or any other exterior element. In order to manipulate the others, the magic manipulator has to be independent, and thus avoid becoming an instrument controlled by the others. First, the sonnet describes an act of pure perception (*to see*) where the signifier I is absent. In *The sign as difference* Eco, following Saussure admits that:

"the elements of the signifier are set into a system of oppositions in which [...] there are only differences. [...] From a metaphysical perspective, it may be fascinating to see every oppositional structure as based on a cognitive difference which dissolves the different terms. Still, in order to conceptualize an oppositional system where something is perceived as absent, something else must be postulated as present, at least, potentially. The presence of one element is necessary for the absence of the other."[12]

Body's Beauty

(The witch he loved before the gift of Eve),
Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
And her enchated hair was the first gold.
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,

And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.
The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?
Lo! As that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent
And round his heart one strangling golden hair."

The poetic subject is materialized in the image the sonnet creates, the image in which the **I** projects itself. This 'Icon–I' appears in the picture as a self-sufficient image that obliterates Lilith's sight towards the other beauties around her. Her "body's beauty" was, is and will be the absolute object of magic and Eros since she looks at her own image in the mirror. The viewer of the picture may suppose that some of the magic elements reflect in the mirror, too. Her hair stands for web and spell, roses for Love, poppies for spell, her own portrait for "Body's Beauty". The specular surface offers the possibility of the reflected beauty to communicate with the 'signifier I' in the mirror but it does not materialize as a sign in the picture or in the sonnet.

To a larger extent than the text, the symmetry in the picture depicts Lilith's hair and

the branches of the tree. The landscape in the frame of the mirror is a natural background that functions in the same way as the brackets in the poetic text: it represents a metavisual matrix of the initial Eden, that controls and directs the one's entire reading of the picture. The same analogy between hair and leaves (see the lines within brackets from the *Blessed Damosel*) appears in the painting. The frame of the mirror is the limited painted space in which the absence of the 'signifier I' is present.

The 'Icon–I' has no signifier, but reflects itself into the image that hides it behind the hand-mirror in the painting. Thus, this type of **I** projects itself into a painted image. The physical Eros symbolized by Lilith manifests itself as sense perception: everything in the sonnet is visual perception.

This physical Eros needs the 'Icon–I' to be expressed, either in a poetic manner, or by an elementary *ekphrasis*, or in a pictorial one. The presence of the 'Icon – I' focuses on the corporality described by the sonnet and illustrated by the picture. Through the 'Icon–I' Eros declines its active principle and receives a contemplative aspect as long as the viewer of the picture contemplates it and meditates upon the image created by the sonnet and the painting.

In fact, only the viewer of the picture, who is also the reader of the sonnet, is the

receptor of artistically created connectability. This complex artefact, even exhibited in a public gallery, makes its receptor experience the poem publicly by means of the picture it accompanies and the picture in the solitude of a personal intimate reading of the sonnet.

The Sign I in “Soul's Beauty”

In this text, the ‘Sign-I’ is the means by which the ‘Icon-I’ of the first poem can be retrieved and the Pre-Raphaelite I can be controlled. In this sonnet the signifier I is present: “I saw / beauty enthroned”; “I drew it [her gaze] in as simply as my breath”. The image in the picture is the image which the ‘Sign-I’ declares to have seen and drawn. Soul's Beauty is “hieratic and static”, her gaze has no sensible object. Contemplating her own image in the mirror, Lilith is looking at herself as at an outer image belonging to the sensible world. Sibylla Palmifera is gazing melancholically, but her look is inwardly oriented.

Sibylla Palmifera (figure 2) could be the allegorical figure of the soul: “I am an image, Chiaro, of thine own soul within thee. See me, and know me as I am.” (*Hand and Soul*). Intellectual Beauty is the virtue of Queen of Heaven, Madonna Intelligentza, or Donna Angelicata. One of the ornaments behind *Madonna Intelligentza*[13] is the Blind Cupid, the

sign of inferior soul characterized by irrational passion. Cupid is blindfolded and that is why he cannot play the role of the erotic/magic manipulator. In the picture there are two antithetic decorative elements: Cupid - symbol of Love, and the skull - symbol of Death, which appear in the first lines of the sonnet:

Soul's Beauty

Under the arch of Life, where love and death,
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw
Beauty enthroned; and though her gaze struck awe,
I drew it in as simply as my breath.
Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,
The sky and sea bend on thee, - which can draw,
By sea or sky or woman, to one law,
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.
This is the Lady Beauty, in whose praise
Thy voice and hand shake still, long known to thee
By flying air and fluttering hem, the heat
Following her daily of thy heart and feet,
How passionately and irretrievably,
In what fond flight, how many ways and days!

Cupid, roses and poppies are ornaments of the bas-relief and although they are carved in stone in a fixed, immutable attitude, they appear vivid. Looking at the painting attentively, one can notice the two distinct levels: of the bas-

relief in the background and of Sibylla Palmifera detached from the background and lacking its corporeal attributes. This stands for the idea that she is conceived as the icon of pure spiritual love, source of the inner fire cast out by her glittering eyes. Ignoring the symbols of the mortal imperfect realm, she becomes a generator of spiritual light. Sibylla Palmifera circumscribes the semantic field of enlightment. The painter meant her to have fascinating eyes so that they should penetrate deeply into the mind of the beholder. The instrument of fascination is precisely her spirit reflected by her sight. Sibylla Palmifera could be a hypostasis of the divine beauty through spiritual knowledge. As she consumes the subject, she demands it to make her the unique image for the Spirit's eyes. The desperate need of the subject to retrieve a certain form of visual existence is satisfied by mastering the imaginative faculty and the possibility to produce and perceive the Beauty of the sensible world.

The poetic rossettian subject creates the portrait of a lady who holds in her right hand the palm, an instrument of writing. She is a sort of enunciative instance that writes the sonnet “Soul's Beauty”. The ‘Sign-I’ in the sonnet corresponds to the palm in the picture. According to Jung,[14] palm means eternity, victory, soul. The graphic ‘Sign-I’ is the result of Sibylla Palmifera's writing. In the sonnet she

projects the subject's spirit into Signifier I. Whenever the 'Sign-I' appears in the text as signifier and in the picture as iconic sign, the 'Icon-I' is embedded in the poem / picture. The sonnet represents a text that overtextualizes the picture. There are two distinct solutions Dante Gabriel Rossetti offers:

1. the text does not narrate the story in/of the painting but it narrates the image of the story (to narrate means to describe the Subject minutely)'Icon-I';
2. the text itself is embedded in he story in/of the painting (to paint means to write) 'Sing-I'.

This aspect reveals the degree of abstraction specific for icon, on the one hand, and sign, on the other. Rossetti's *sonnets for pictures* are verbal complementary works that double, repeat and support the visual code. His poetic language is deictic, as its signs refer to a certain object: the image created by narrative means. The iconic sign becomes reflexive as soon as it represents the first level of reading the poetry. The icon has a poetic dimension: it ceases to be specific only for a traditional visual art, as poems were written in the *ekphrasis* technique and constitute another type of visual art. In this context the visual becomes discursive, while the verbal becomes iconic, combining their specific channels of reception.

Notes

[1] Surtees, V., *Rossetti's Portraits of E. Siddal*, Scholar Press, Oxford, 1991.

[2] *Imagerie de la lecture. Exploration d'un patrimoine millénaire de l'Occident* PUF, Paris, 1995.

[3] Rossetti explained the subject and symbolism of *The Girlhood of Virgin Mary* in the two sonnets that accompanied the picture at the Free Exhibition. This line is quoted apud. *Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Leslie Parris, Tate Gallery Publications, London, 1996, p. 64.

[4] apud. Evelyn Waugh, Rossetti: His Life and Works, Duckworth, London, 1975, first edition 1929, p. 111.

[5] *The Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, apud. Alicia Craig Faxon, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, London: Phaidon Press, p. 19.

[6] Hunt, W.H., Pre-Raphaelitism, vol I, p. 204.

[7] Doughty, O., Wahl, J.R., *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, vol. 4, p. 1634-35.

[8] "connectability of the schemata" is defined by Iser, Wolfgang, in *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1994, p. 186.

[9] Kristeva, J., *Le langage, cet inconnu*, Seuil, Paris, 1981, p.309.

[10] Pollock, G., Vision and Difference: Feminity, Feminism and the Histories of Art, Routledge, London, 1991, p.144.

[11] Culianu, I.P., *Eros et magie à la Renaissance*, 1484, Flammarion, Paris, 1984.

[12] Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*,

Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984, p. 23.

[13] Panofsky, E., *Essais d'iconologie*, Gallimard, Paris, 1967, p.151-185.

[14] See Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles. Mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, couleurs, nombres*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1969.

CHAPTER III

The (Self)Portraits of Elizabeth Siddal

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall is the famous Dante Gabriel Rossetti's beloved, *discovered* by Walter Deverell in a milliner's shop between the end of 1849 and the beginning of 1850. Her gracious and spiritualised features, red-haired *aura*, elongated forms made her the most interesting model of the Pre-Raphaelite group. During the first years of the Brotherhood she represented the ideal image of an angelic hieratic figure. Her recurrent portrait is the emblematic figure for the entire movement and she still is - together with Jane Morris - the effigy of the Pre-Raphaelite painting.

Pre-Raphaelites on Siddal

Nevertheless, her name is not mentioned in **The P.R.B. Journal** that William Michael Rossetti wrote in order to record the main artistic events from May 1849, *Tuesday 15th*, to January 1853, *Sunday 23 to Saturday 29*. In the entry from Friday 29th March 1850, "Miss Love" could stand for Elizabeth Siddal, who is said to be the other model for the *Ecce*

Ancilla Domini! as Rossetti was looking for a red-haired model:

"Gabriel painted at the feet and arm of the Angel from White. He has Miss Love to sit for the Virgin's hair, and is also repainting the head entirely."[1]

The conventionalised relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite artist and his model defines both the status of the active scrutinising viewer - the painter - and the status of the viewed passive object - the model. Having considered Siddal in appreciations expressed in *ekphrasis* as if she were an object fixed in an immutable reflection of beauty, Walter Deverell described her in 1850:

"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. [...] She has grey eyes and her hair is like dazzling copper."[2] William Michael Rossetti also recalled her in his memories in 1895:

"She was a most beautiful creature, with an air between dignity and sweetness, [mixed with something which exceeded modest self-respect, and partook of disdainful reserve]: tall, finely-formed, with a lofty neck, and regular yet somewhat uncommon features, greenish-blue unsparkling eyes, large perfect eyelids, brilliant complexion, and a lavish heavy wealth of

coppery-golden hair. [...] She seemed to say – 'My mind and my feelings are my own, and no outsider is expected to pry into them.' That she had plenty of mind is a fact abundantly evidenced by her designs and water-colours and by her verses as well. Indeed, she was a woman of uncommon capacity and varied aptitude."[3]

In the early Pre-Raphaelite pictures she modelled for Viola in Walter Deverell's *Twelfth Night*; for Sylvia in William Holman Hunt's *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus*; for Ophelia in John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*; for both Beatrice and Francesca in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Dantis Amor*, *Beatrice Denying Her Salutation*, *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*, *Beata Beatrix*, and *Paolo e Francesca* respectively.

Certainly she met their artistic expectations, experiencing for the first time in the group the effects the reversed classical myth of Pygmalion had on a woman. Having refined the statue to perfection, the Cypriot sculptor fell in love with his own ivory work of art and asked Aphrodite to breathe life into his statue in order to make her his wife; the Pre-Raphaelites polished/modelled a human being according to their livresque and artistic perspective and captured each detail of the real woman into precisely elaborated object of art. In her article **Pre-Raphaelite Women** Elizabeth Lee considers that:

"In art and in life, some of the Pre-Raphaelite woman felt pressure to abandon humanity to become an archetype. They were dreams coming to life in paints, and it was this living dream which the artists could not help but fall in love with."[4]

In fact, all her pictorial roles are characterised by spiritual values: innocent purity, abstract virtues, contemplative life, and religiosity. As regards her contribution to *Ophelia*, art critics consider that she assumed that hypostasis as if she acted the corresponding part in Shakespeare's play. Her experience of posing for Millais seems to be transferred into a suggestive poem entitled *A Year and a Day*. Gradually she became the exclusive model for Rossetti, who initiated her in the arts he mastered himself: writing and painting.

Most of Rossetti's works of the 50's depict Elizabeth Siddal: the catalogue **Rossetti's Portraits of E. Siddal**[5] contains several drawings that portrayed her as an ideal reader that emotionally responded to the text. During that period she became an artist herself who was able both to write a poem and to paint a picture under Dante Gabriel supervision who directed her exclusively to the primitive style of the medieval age. Between 1857 and 1858 she decided to attend the Art School in Sheffield and in Derbyshire, but even after that period, she continued to mirror the creative power of the

male artist and behave as his emulating counterpart. From the reception theory point of view the dichotomies: male poet - female reader, male painter - male/female viewer (cf. Chapter 2) were changed into another series of dichotomies in this very case: female poet - male reader (as the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were the only readers of Siddal's poetry), female painter - (hostile) male viewer. In fact, there was a single opportunity for Siddal to exhibit her paintings in public in 1857 in the Russell Place Pre-Raphaelite salon. Although an evidently hostile attitude towards her works was not recorded, the reason for which Moxon did not introduce Siddal's drawing for an engraving on *The Lady of Shalott* in the Tennyson edition he published in 1857 is not known.

"The other day Moxon called on me to do some blocks for the new Tennyson. The artists already engaged are Millais, Hunt, Landseer, Stanfield, Maclise, Creswick, Mulready, and Horsley. The right names would have been Millais, Hunt, Madox Brown, Hughes, a certain lady [Elizabeth Siddal], and myself."[6]

The fragment of Rossetti's letter addressed to William Allingham on 24 January 1855 indicates the names of the artists selected by Moxon to illustrate his edition. Although Tennyson accepted Siddal's version and rejected Hunt's version ***for The Lady of Shalott***, Moxon

finally preferred the latter.

Anyway her constant admirers were the members of the Pre-Raphaelite group and John Ruskin, whose esteem she gained in 1855 when he offered to buy all her works. Rossetti and Ruskin supported and encouraged her artistic efforts to become an authentic artist. As the PRB had ceased to function as a medieval guild in which each member had to contribute anonymously to the others' works, and the preliminary meetings of the Cyclographic Society founded in 1848 to analyse from a critical point of view the preparing drawings on a certain theme were suspended, Rossetti shared this medieval ideal with Elizabeth Siddal. They both worked in the same studio, painted together transferring pictorial motifs, compositional schemes, and narrative sequences from each other's canvas in a continuous intertext. Art historians have evidenced several examples of intertextuality between Siddal - Rossetti: *The Weeping Queens* (Rossetti's drawing for engraving was inspired by her drawings on the Tennysonian theme), the position of the angel in her *Saint Cecily and the Angel* was transferred into Dante Gabriel's drawing with the same subject; and *vice versa* Rossetti - Siddal: ladies' green dress in the group of Beatrice from Rossetti's picture *Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, Denies Him Her Salutation* (1852) is borrowed by Siddal in

her watercolour **Clerk Saunders** (1857). Their close friend, the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne affirmed:

"Gabriel's influence and example [were] not more perceptible than her own independence and freshness of inspiration."[7]

There are other cases in which no art critic has been able to indicate the intertext (according to Kristeva's definition the intertext is the literal occurrence of a partial or entire text into another), since one of them did not artistically materialise his/her pictorial patterns under his/her signature, accepting that *the other* (the alter - ego) technically objectified her/his suggestion.

They also painted together, for example, *Sir Galahad at the Shrine of the Holy Grail*, signed *EES INV. EES & DGR del.* to indicate the fact that Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal invented the composition and Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal and Dante Gabriel Rossetti did the whole work. Under such circumstances Siddal (was) trained as the most Rossettiean painter of the group.

Rossetti drew a significant portrait of Elizabeth Siddal (figure 3), standing up in front of an easel near the window of the studio at Chatham Place. Undoubtedly there is a painting on the easel, impossible to be seen by the viewer; Siddal's melancholical attitude invites the viewer to presume that its subject descends

from a medieval chivalric story in which a lady is involved. The peculiar gesture of balancing the chair in front of the easel suggests the total detachment from reality inside or outside the studio. Two iconographic motifs in the drawing - window and easel - problematize the two distinct spaces: reality and art.

According to Elaine Shefer's study *The Woman at the Window*[8]: the window is a mark of seclusion, renunciation, and abandon. The confrontation between window and easel, the impossible dialogue between the worlds they stand for is also depicted in Siddal's version *The Lady of Shalott* where the easel is replaced by the loom (1853, pen and black and sepia ink and pencil on paper). The visual schemata combines the same symbolic objects in different formulas: Rossetti's drawing indicates the option for the fictional universe of art, the refuge inside the world controlled by the demiurgic artist, a space beyond history in which the fragmentary images of history depend on the artist's will to be reflected. The closed window, the relaxed informal position of the lady admiring the supposed artefact on the easel, the silent confrontation window vs. easel reflect the seductive pre-eminence of art over reality.

In Siddal's *Lady of Shalott* (figure 4) four rectangular surfaces amplify the compositional axis: the first is the shadow of the loom on *premier plan*; symmetrically placed is the

window; in between the two, the loom itself functions as a filter that restrains the reality outside the window to the reality enclosed in the frames of the window in order to limit it for the tapestry *in fieri.* The forth rectangle, a tapestry, refracts the image in the window horizontally the same way the shadow of the loom refracts the geometrical shape of the loom vertically. The tapestry on the wall is, in its turn, a mirror of a world in the window that, time ago, froze the irrepetably changing images characteristic to reality in the threads and knots of the tapestry. The intrusion of the outside world is imminent and the branch of the tree is its sign.

Siddals' drawing selects to illustrate the very moment when the lady of Shalott looked out of the window and thus accepted the interference with reality (window) that annulled the other three screens: the loom, the tapestry, the mirror. Since what is seen through the window represents a fragment of reality *in fieri,* inside the limited frame of the window the drawing is a "representation of representations"[9].

These four plane surfaces encapsulate a tridimensional image: the Lady of Shalott *alias* Elizabeth Siddal accomplishes a series of mirrorings of the mirror in an allegory of the most realistic transposition that contains the perfect simulacrum of the physical universe. The Lady of Shalott suddenly becomes aware of

the infidelity of her mirror and, at the same time, of her isolation. Abolishing mirroring supremacy for a direct immediate perception of reality, even if this decision is tragic, the lady should assume her inconvenient choice: reality means imminent death (the lady will die), unlike art's eternal life; reality is unlimited and impossible to be rendered in its endless forms, while art uses limited devices to comprise an insignificant part of reality in the most mimetic work (the mirror will break). *Mimesis*, the Greek term for "imitation", expresses the idea of reducing reality to the scale of art through the process that minimises reality to the human dimensions. Sidall *reflects* (in Latin *reflectere* means "to send back") the poem into a poliptical drawing, "a pictorial poem" of mirroring the two options the artist can choose programmatically.

Similarities between Rossetti's *Portrait of Siddal* and Siddal's *The Lady of Shalott* plead for their permanent collaboration. Rossetti's perspective on Siddal identifies her with a Modern Lady of Shalott. In both drawings the light comes through the window from behind the lady weaving a tapestry (the Lady of Shalott) or behind the lady looking at/reading a picture (The Portrait of Elizabeth Siddal). The protagonist's position reading with the back turned to the source of light (looking at a picture and weaving the image of reality

reflected in the mirror are equivalent to reading) belongs to an iconographical tradition that started about the fifteenth century. This position offers a double advantage, according to Fritz Nies: from a pictorial point of view, the light falling on the tapestry/picture/book facilitates the reading; from an iconological point of view, it grants the adequate reading of the text. In *Imagerie de la lecture*[10], he analyses the position of a reader looking out of the window while reading and considers that the reader has the opportunity to censor or to reject the exterior reality. In Rossetti's drawing of Siddal the same pictorial circumstance made her apt to read/understand the picture on the easel as she masters *l'éclairage de la lecture*, in Nies's terms.

In 1856, Christina Georgiana Rossetti wrote a sonnet apparently dedicated to Siddal that focused on the importance of an obsessing/ haunting face in her brother's pictorial works:

'One face looks out from all his canvasses,
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
A nameless girl in freshest

summer-greens,

A saint, an angel; - every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
Not wan with waiting, nor with sorrow dim;
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
Not as she is, but as she fills his dreams.'[11]

Taking into account Georgiana Christina's sonnet, the viewer of *The Portrait of Siddal* could presume that the picture Siddal is looking at is her own image, another portrait of hers painted by Rossetti.

Siddal poses for Beatrice in the drawing *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante* (1852), which is the emblematic work elaborated on the artist-model theme in the *picture in picture* formula: Dante poses for the portrait Giotto is making at Bargello - Florence, discovered in 1840. The presence of Beatrice is confirmed by the second text annexed to the drawing that explicits the pictorial intertext. Dante's sight is

fixed on Beatrice, his *donna angelicata*, consequently Giotto should paint Dante's gaze, actually the spiritual love it reflects. Rossetti, assuming the role of the artist who is drawing an artist who, in his turn, is painting an artist illustrates the complex relationship artist-model-muse in the drawing and artist-model/muse outside the drawing.

He justifies in a letter the juxtaposition of the two literary fragments without connection with the drawing:

"For the introduction of Beatrice... I quote a passage from the **Vita Nuova**. I have thus all the influence of Dante's youth - art, friendship and love - with a real incident embodying them. The combination is, I think, the best which has yet occurred to me in illustration of this period of the poet's life."[12]

The first one denounces the masters in painting and in poetry who influence him; the second exposes his favourite theme: Dante's love for Beatrice:

"Vede perfettamente ogni salute
Chi la mia donna - tra le donne - vede." (*Vita Nuova*, XXVII, 10-11)

D.G.Rossetti's translation: "For certain he hath seen all perfectness / Who among other ladies hath seen mine."

Another image of Siddal is painted in *Dante's Vision of Rachel and Leah* (1855, watercolour) where she models Rachel, the

allegory of contemplative life. *Purgatorio*, XXVII, 100-108, is his poetic source:

> ”Sappia qualunque il mio nome dimanda
> ch'i' mi son Lia, e vo movendo intorno
> le belle mani a farmi una ghirlanda.
> Per piaceremi a lo specchio, qui m'addorno;
> ma mia suora Rachel mai non si smaga
> dal suo miraglio, e siede tutto giorno.
> Ell' è d'i suoi belli occhi veder vaga,
> com'io de l'addornarmi con le mani;
> lei lo vedere, e me l'ovrare appaga”[13]

Rachel stares at her own image captured by the water in the stone basin, a receptacle for the natural divine beauty while Leah makes a wreath. The contemplative and its counterpart, the active life, sit side by side in a perfect equilibrium. The chromatic harmony completes the reading of this watercolour: the colours of the garments - purple and green - are combined in Dante's garment; the hues of green in the veil of Rachel induce the idea that this figure is another hypostasis of Beatrice (green is the symbolic colour of Beatrice in *Beatrice Denying Her Salutation*, *The Meeting of Dante and Beatrice in Paradise*). Rossetti's mystical art displaces fragments that are put together in another context to create a new image of a

famous character. His series of isotopies makes possible that Siddal poses for Beatrice and Rachel at the same time; she is the one who contemplates in order to be contemplated.

The triptych *Paolo e Francesca da Rimini* (1855, watercolour) presents Siddal as Francesca, story is concentrated in two moments: the initial kiss that starts their love affair and the final punishment the adulterous wife of Malatesta. The Dantesque, the restless vortex in Hell. Siddal's image changes: ecstasy is the other element in her visual paradigmatic entity. Extatic experiences are rendered portraying Siddal in *Dantis Amor*, *Beata Batrix* and in the study for *Delia*.

Most of the works inspired by Dante Aligheri or medieval cycles use the rudimentary perspective as an anachronism that functions on the temporal scale to mark the distance between the time of events and the time of the story.

As regards the primitive *perspective* in D.G. Rossetti, it is the means by which he corroborates the sacred and profane dimensions, history and fiction. Considering the etymology of the term (Latin *perspicere* meant "to see through"), the illusion of tridimensionality in painting records the way in which the divine grace descends into the human material world. Adapting the to his model, specific for Dante, Beatrice, Rachel.

Siddal as a Pre-Raphaelite artist

The Pre-Raphaelite technique of painting on the white ground that covered the lines of the design necessitated a rapid and sure touch of a small brush. Working on a dried canvas allowed the painter to use transparent colours and disperse the light all over the picture. Besides, Pre-Raphaelites elaborated each part of a canvas as if it were the essential part of the composition, effacing their initial scheme.

Considering Siddal's entire work, mention should be made that the most numerous artefacts are drawings and watercolours and the less numerous are oil paintings. This global inventory of her pictorial attempts or experienced species proves her interest in the process of creation (drawing/painting) rather than in polishing or finishing the object of art. The lines of her drawings (1853 - 1854): *The Lady of Shalott*, *Pippa passes*, *Sister Helen*, *Lovers Listening to Music* seem to express the speaker's *utterance*.

The analytical instruments to read Siddal's drawings were offered by the chapter *The Gaze and the Glance* of the *Vision and Painting*. The time of the utterance becomes the time of the pictorial text that contains each sign marked on the paper. Whatever the artist is trying to erase remains recorded on the paper

and his/her final work is a complex *summa* that keeps visible all the stages of the artefact. Thus, Elizabeth Siddal's drawings could be view as documents of an artistic, elaborate processuality. Her pictorial enunciation re-actualises the literary enunciation of the literary text she *performs*. For example, *Sister Helen* (first published in 1851), an illustration to Rossetti's poem, plays with three portals: the first portal functions as an interior frame, stratagem that includes the viewer of the drawing in the pictorial space. The viewer is a witness to the scene performed in front of him. Near the second arched portal Helen is knelt, staring at the cursed wax doll on the threshold. This architectonic element separates the outside world from the inside world. Helen's brother climbing the stairs to see and hear the messengers sent by Keith of Ewern for his sister occupies the third portal on the left. Each of the three messengers' discourse: Keith of Eastholm, Keith of Westholm, Keith of Keith could be resumed by her brother's mimicry in Siddal's illustration. The act of poetic utterance (consisting in the three almost identical repetitions of the brother's words) is enclosed in a unique pictorial image. What is successively registered in the poetic sequences and gradually prepares the climax of the text (Keith of Ewern's death) becomes simultaneously viewed in the drawing. The illusion of temporal

transience/lapse of time is suggested by the frequentative actions performed by the two characters: while supervising her magic, Helen is tormenting herself (action in progress); while climbing the stairs (action in progress) her little brother is telling her the news messengers transmit (action in progress).

The repetition of the utterances in the dialogical form of the poem is arrested in the drawing by means of the insistent lines of the nib that one by one cover the white surface of the paper. The motion resided in the motionless pen supports the interior struggle of the personages. The time of events overlaps the time of the enounced (poem) and the time of the drawing (illustration).

This technique is characteristic for Siddal's drawings and watercolours, as well. Touches of the brush form stylised compositions of bright colours that remind the viewer of the illuminated medieval manuscripts. Expressive attitudes of protagonists in her watercolour *Lady Affixing a Pennant to a Knight's Spear* (1856) display a transitory moment of privacy before the knight's leaving. The Lady's silent hug is measured in the knight's repetitive gesture of hammering; correspondingly, traces of the narrow brush measure their passion symbolised by the red pennant between the two. The conflicting spaces: interior vs. exterior are meant to

polarise elements of the couple again. The exterior is the male's unlimited world, which he is expected to come from, and which he will exit eventually, while the interior is the female's limited world where she is imprisoned. Art is the only solution for Siddal to escape from the Victorian ideology and each touch of brush freed her from social conventions. Her heroines carry the burden of their incapacity of acting outside their secure rooms, in the male's world (figure 5). The Lady of Shalott and Helen are Siddal's discrete *dramatis personae*.

Siddal on Siddal

Her *Self-Portrait* (1853, an oil painting on canvas) differs substantially from Rossetti's series of portraits. Siddal's portraits signed by Rossetti can be classified in two distinct categories: the first contains those works in which she stands for “angelic beings” such as: Beatrice, St. Catherine, Rachel, due to her deliberately dematerialised figures, thus corrected by the artist in order to suit his aesthetic idea of transcendental world, metaphysic reality; the second one includes all drawings, sketches, that could be entitled *Portraits of Siddal*, in which her features are more sensuous: carnal lips, dishevelled hair, langurous eyes, prominent nose, long neck. In fact, the works in the first category are either

oil-paintings or watercolours, overelaborated works of art, while the drawings and sketches in the second category are not intended to be considered finished works, as they are only moments of a historical existence fixed on a sheet of paper that renders the lascivious attitude, meditative pose, ecstatic figure, nonconformist actions for a Victorian woman. The only finished work in this category is the oil painting on canvas *Beata Beatrix* (1863).

Siddal paints herself in semi-profile as if she were watching the void (figure 6). The position of her head anticipates the position in *St.Catherine* of Rossetti (1857); her self-portrait was painted in 1853, four years before Rossetti's *St. Catherine*. She assumed the seriousness expressed in Rossetti's first series of pictures and the impersonal non-active hypostasis. Having preferred to paint herself in the most traditional formula of the mimetic bust portrait, she recommended herself as a domestic wife. The white collar of her dress reminds the viewer Millais's drawings on the married life theme, or of the decent photographs of Christina Georgiana and Mrs. Gabriele Rossetti. Only one significant detail pleads for her corporality: the dimple in her chin, an element of physiognomy almost always effaced in Rossetti's versions. In *St. Caterine* he stresses the angularity of the saintly features, on the one hand, and in *Elizabeth Siddal*, pencil on paper,

1860, this characteristic seems to be a shadow on a relaxed dreamy face that functions as an individualising detail that completes the other provocative features.

In spite of Rossetti's manipulative works and drawings, Siddal tried to reflect Elizabeth ***Siddall***'s real appearance.[14] Comparing this self-portrait with *the self-portrait in the drawing presenting her painting her self-portrait* in the drawing of Dante Gabriel Rossetti entitled *A Parable of Love* (*Love's Mirror*), a pen and black ink with ink wash drawing, dated 1849-1850, the viewer perceives the differences between the two artefacts (figure 7). Although the image on the easel is an image *in fieri*, it differs both in the way of looking at the real world where the virtual viewer should have been as a supposed participant and in the head dress; the hair is undone but carefully combed to fall on the back and on the shoulders of the woman, who looks tense as if she were afraid to move it while she were posing for someone else.

Apparently, Siddall's eyes in the self-portrait are staring at the exterior world, when actually the sight is inwardly oriented; her hair is combed the same way it is in *Beata Beatrix*, in fact, this head dress is the sign for Beatrice. An innocent viewer is impossible to find, since Rossetti's works mainly perverted the receptor through their cultural instruments. He is misled by aesthetic devices and literary subjects

whenever trying to make *Siddal*'s or *Siddall*'s authentic portrait. As regards her own creative personality, *Siddal* or *Siddall* herself supported a process of mystification: Rossetti's impact on her was extremely powerful and induced modification of her own image both for the others and for herself.

Conclusion should be met: *Siddal* or *Siddal* is a Pre-Raphaelite artistic construct.

Notes

[1] Rossetti, William Michael, *The P.R.B. Journal*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, p. 67.
[2] Hunt, William Holman, *Pre-Raphaelitism and The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,* vol.1, London, 1905 – 1906, p. 198, apud. Faxon, Alicia Craig, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Abbeville Press Publishers, New York London Paris, 1994, p. 74.
[3] Apud. Pollock, Griselda, *Vision and difference: Feminity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art*, Routledge, London, 1991, p. 101 –102.
[4] Lee, Elizabeth, in WebMagick's Pre-Raphaelite Collection: Elizabeth Siddal.
[5] Surtees, Virginia, *Rossetti's Portraits of E. Siddal*, Scholar Press, Oxford, 1991.
[6] Doughty, Oswald &Wahl, John Robert, *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, vol. I, Clarendon Press, Oxfors, 1965, p. 238.
[7] apud. Faxon, Alicia Craig, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Abbeville Press Publishers, New York London Paris, 1994, p. 83.
[8] Shefer, Elaine, *Birds, Cages and Women in Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite Art*, Peter Land, New York, 1990, p. 127.
[9] Stoichita, Ieronim Victor, *Efectul Don Quijote*, Humanitas, Bucuresti, 1995.
[10] *Imagerie de la lecture (Exploration d'un patrimoine millénaire de l'Occident,* PUF, Paris, 1995, p.111-112.*)*
[11] Rossetti, Georgiana Christina, *Poems and Prose*, ed.

Jan Marsh, Rhe Everyman Library, London, 1994, p. 127.

[12] Doughty, Oswald &Wahl, John Robert, *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, vol. I, Clarendon Press, Oxfors, 1965, p. 123.

[13] *Dante Tutte le opere,* introduzione di Italo Borzi, commenti a cura di Giovanni Fallani, Nicola Maggi, Silvio Zennaro, Grandi Tascabili Economici Newton, Roma, 1993, p. 394.

[14] *Siddall* (with double 'll') is her name in her papaers; *Siddal* is spel in the Pre-Raphaelite documents, a sort of the Pre-Raphaelite identity.

CHAPTER IV

Burne-Jones: Re-visitation of the Renascent Italian Patterns Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo

During his last creative years Burne-Jones explored classical themes, and elegant, massive Italian forms in a pictorial universe embracing Ovidian myths: Cupid and Psyche, Pygmalion, Orpheus and Eurydice, Circe. The works of this period prove his interest in the patterns specific of Botticelli and Michelangelo, and in the scenery inspired by Leonardo's.

Although Ruskin attacks in a conference held in1871 at Oxford, the devotedness for *panneggio* and "the black flesh" which he recognizes in Michelangelo's works, Burne-Jones continues to paint according to this formula. Ruskin, in his turn, reconsiders his statements at the opening of Grovenor Gallery in 1877 where Burne-Jones exhibits his pictures; finally, the aesthetician will appreciate Burne-Jones as a "modern painter of mythology".

Both Swinburne and Bune-Jones discover Botticelli's most significant works at the same time – *Primavera* and *Nascita di Venere* – that substantially influence Burne-Jones's paintings of the 1860s and 1870s.

The group of the three enigmatic figures in *The Mill* (1870) reminds us of the three Graces in Botticelli's *Primavera*. Unlike the image that renders their ballet (*Castitas* stepping with the left foot and the right one suspended; *Voluptas* drawing the others towards herself as if they had been performing a ritualistic dionysiac dance expressing erotism; *Pulchritudo* celebrating the physical beauty of the body), Burne-Jones' group is just standing. The character in the right corner, who has just finished playing a Renascent lute, a rhythmical apollinical song, could be Apollo. He paints a version of the Greek mythologic *Harite*: *Aglaie* – The Splendour, *Euphrosine* – The Merriment, *Thalia* – The Happiness, allegories of beauty, grace and charm. They are Apollo's companions and the water behind them, interpreted as an allusion to their divine genealogy (they are descendent of Zeus and Eurynome – the oceanide), reflects the image of the figures in the background. The Graces form the procession of Aphrodite Urania. Accompanied by Flora who bears Pallas Athena's icons in *Pallade ed il Centauro* and Aphrodite Pandemia's icons in *Nascita di Venere*, they reveal the concept of essence or emanation of ideas which manifests itself into an allegorical representation. According to the Ficinian point of view, allegorical key leads to the sanctification of the mythological world.

This process becomes a figurative mannerism in Burne-Jones's entire work, also is announced by this painting. The motionless figures seem to emanate from the archetypes carved in marble, reflected in the water that functions as a mirror of ideal beauty. In fact, the painting (figure 8) contains few narrative elements later developed in other pictorial versions of the same theme that proceed from the mythological material reconsidered in the Renaissance.

Two of the thirty-eight *tondi* in *The Flower Book*: *Rose of Heaven* and *Marvel of the World* show the same influence; the formal model of Botticelli and the theoretical support of the neoplatonic philosophy. Burne-Jones pretends to return to the initial harmony of things and language by means of the classical themes and neoplatonic perspective, following the same patterns of the Renaissance. He himself admits that he paints *The Flower Book* in order to illustrate suggestive names of flowers:

"I want the name and the picture to be one soul together, and indissoluble, as if they could not exist apart."[1]

Both *Rose of Heaven* and *Marvel of the World* (figure 9) concentrate the characteristic aspects for Aphrodite in the two Botticelli's pictures mentioned above: Zephyr is blowing the goddess' hair, Aphrodite's position, the seascape where the waves are painted as pigeons in

conformity with the medieval scheme of illustrating the myth. On the one hand, *Rose of Heaven* sub-entitled *Venus and her doves amongst the stars* also refers to the miniature *Venus and her doves* in *Roman de la Rose*, while *Marvel of the World* or *Birth of Venus* assimilates other elements of Botticelli's picture into the scenery: Zephyr is metonymically replaced by its effect – the storm -; Flora who is to veil Aphrodite would have been a redundant presence since Venus is veiled in Burne-Jones's watercolour; the Mediterranean scenery substituted by a northern one is suggested by the roses on the shore. The narrative dimension of the painted image enriches through the commentary:

"this suggestion of a storm that has just passed away may be a hidden reference to the fact that the birth of Venus followed a violent battle between the Titans."[2]

The emblematic cipher – mirror – is artistically decoded in *Rose of Heaven*, *Venus's Looking Glass* in *The Flower Book*, and in the picture *The Mirror of Venus* (1898). They represent three different functions of the mirror which could derive from *Corpus Hermeticum*, translated for the first time by Marcilio Ficino. In the first case, the mirror stands for the essential attribute of the goddess whose perfect beauty floods the dantesque universe. The object of mirroring and contemplation is the full moon

in the second watercolour where the moment of a double perception becomes the subject of the picture: Venus admires herself and makes the celestial body her own mirror and this specular process is perceived by the viewer through a complete communication between microcosm and macrocosm.

The narcissistic temptation of mirroring is more evident in *The Mirror of Venus* (figure 10) where the act of reflection turns into a mystic contemplation which Hermes controls. Water becomes the surface of the narcissistic mirroring, the symbol of illusion: it makes visible what does not really exist but as a reflection, as a shadow of an image. The water-mirror means the receptacle of Venus's world as Aphrodite Urania who presides over the Muses' suite and artistic knowledge. The reflected image mirrors only the figures who recreate the group of Graces and a fourth apart from them. *The Mirror of Venus* does not reflect the goddess's image but the image of her beauty, pictorially transfigured into the discourse inspired by the Muses.

Three Renascent formulas combine in the same work support this interpretation: the source of the background is Leonardo's *Santa Anna, la Vergine e Gesù bambino*, *La Gioconda*, *La Vergine e il bambino*. *Panneggio* and colouring proceed from Michelangelo, and positions and attitudes from Botticelli. The

landscape creates the relief effect, focusing on the sinuous line of the shapes that enclose the world of ideas and essences, the sensitive world and the world of the artistic beautiful shapes in the frame of the picture. Following Botticelli's pattern, which starts from the abstract notion or image of things and refines, spiritualizes, sublimates it until things are annihilated and become idea, Burne-Jones also focuses on the very figure representing the idea of artistic beauty. He builds a composition combining Botticelli's conception with Leonardo's perspective which rejects the abstract notion but accepts "the pure phenomenon which can be seen before realizing that there are trees, rivers, or rocks, transcending *natura naturata* in order to render *natura naturans*."[3]

Like Michelangelo, Burne-Jones transfers the matter of the picture into colour: in Michelangelo's paintings the colour works as a sublime matter able to become space and light without disappearing behind forms. Each colour is pure, "archetypal": yellow, red, blue; colours do not mix each other. At the figurative level, where volumes are suspended in an empty space towards which things turn in a unique and permanent rhythm, the figures sunk into self-contemplation form a vortex. Appropriating the conception of Botticelli, considered to be "a mystic of the ideal beauty, an aesthete"[4], Burne-Jones tries to impose his pictorial programme:

"I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be – in a light better that any light that ever shone – in a land no one can define or remember, only desire…"[5]

The defining aspects of Quattrocento are spread in a new pictorial puzzle that claims a double reading: on the one hand, an analytical reading of each element excerpted from its original context, on the other hand, a synthetic reading of the whole work in which these fragments narrate their own cultural story in a modern perspective.

The canvas *The Golden Stairs* (1880) programmatically expresses the hermetism of the Florentine Academy (*Accademia Fiorentina*) through the agency of Botticelli; Leonardo's typical intrusions lack in this picture. Burne-Jones expands Botticelli's mannerism who rejects the concrete thing, the tangible sensation to enclose the statuary formalism of p*anneggio*, characteristic of Michelangelo, but arresting the cult of motion "of studied eurhythmics, filled with the musical grace of the spirit haunted by supreme harmony."[6]

The eurhythmics of Botticelli's work seems to be the subject of Burne-Jones's painting. *The Golden Stairs* (figure 10) renders the neoplatonic idea in a pictorial allegory. The Ficinian idea is not the platonic archetype but a

vague entity *to be beyond* nature (the physical space), beyond history (time). Even *beauty* identified with the *idea* is an *aliquid incorporeum* and distrusts the sensitive world. The themes of antiquity propose a certain kind of nature: the appearance of things is simple allegory.

Burne-Jones paints the allegory of artistic beauty: the suite of the eighteen figures descending eighteen steps is divided into two groups. The nine maidens upstairs remind the viewer of Flora's position in *Primavera* (the left foot one step ahead, the right, one behind), while the other nine downstairs have already changed the step. The space between the girl playing tambourine and the girl playing *viola d'amore* separates the two groups of nine Muses. The symbol of stairs supports this argument:

"Stairs represent the axis of the world, vertically and volute. When the stairs are volute, send to the origin of an axial development which could be God, principle, love, art, conscience or the I of a being in progress, entirely based on the same origin the volutes are built on."[7]

Taking into account the *descensus* sense ant the platonic conception about the soul crossing the sensitive world to reach the intelligible world, one may state that Burne-Jones pleads for art as an ideal image of reality. Three of the figures

downstairs are crowned with laurels, the sign of the poetic triumph (crown of laurels) and the others form a semicircle around the laurels under the stairs. The group upstairs seems to have already lost the artistic capacity since none of them bears the emblem of the artistic glory and two twigs of laurels are abandoned on the steps. This picture may be interpreted as a Pre-Raphaelite *ars-poetica*: the urge "go to [divine] nature" corresponding to the medieval stage, is replaced by the urge "go to [real] nature" that points out the option for the Renascent source of inspiration: the Renascent Pre-Raphaelite stage in which divinity is epiphanically represented in the natural forms of being.

The picture contains a *summa* of arts: poetry suggested by laurels proceeding from Petrarchan tradition, music vibrating in the musical instruments excerpted from *Archeologia musicale*, in perfect harmony with the *decorum*, the circumstance *all'antica* and the classical laws of the descriptive geometry.

Michelangelo's influence starts with the *Pygmalion Cycle* (1868 - 1870), of which most famous are *Pygmalion and the Image* and *The Godhead Fires* (figure 11). *The Godhead Fires* marks a stylistic change: Burne-Jones decides to use Michelangelo's pattern instead of Botticelli's as regards the structure of the work. The story of the artist in love with his own work of art proceeds from Ovid's

Metamorphosis, which is given a more complex meaning in *Roman de la Rose*. At the end of the poem, the protagonist, member of Amor's procession, tries in vain to enter the castle of Love. He asks for Venus's help. The image of the goddess with the bow prepared to fire the Love Castle interrupts the narrative discourse to introduce a digression about Pygmalion, that is not a simple rhetoric artifice, but a pretext to expound the theory of *fol amour* characteristic of the courtly poetry. The miserable sculptor laments about his love for "une ymage sourde et mue/ qui ne se crole ne se mue". His passion mixing hope and despair manifests a morbid perverse desire for "image". In his monologue, Pygmalion compares himself with Narcissus, in love with his own person / image; he, in his turn, falls in love with his own work. Nowadays, one may say that he is in love with a fetish. The myth of Narcissus represents another recurrent theme in medieval poetry: a man admires his image reflected in a mirror identified with The Fountain if Love. In the Middle Ages this myth associates the narcissistic love with the love for image. Miniatures and illustrations reveal the perverted aspect of his love; Pygmalion is presented either as an affectionate lover that is stroking the naked "image" lasciviously or as a devout admirer knelt in front of his artefact and absorbed in an extatic adoration. Jean de Meung returns to the moment when Venus had

stretched the bow shooting at a window between the two pillars that support the statue of a woman. The fired arrow gets in the castle through the window. This statue - a woman's bust, two columns as legs and the window in between – seems to be both the object of the knight's love and the object of Pygmalion's love.

Unlike the narrative line in *Roman de la Rose*, Burne-Jones's painted figures are repressed. In *The Godhead Fires* the suggestive details such as: roses, sculptor's tools, the tower in the background, pigeons, the column on the left, implicitly refer to the medieval source of the cult for image *Roman de la Rose* is. The English artist confronts the two evident patterns in an elaborate composition: the sublimated image of the goddess, born spiritually in the waters of the sea (Venus has no mother, so she has no direct connection with matter), sends to Botticelli's work *Nascita di Venere*, while the image of the massive muscular statue that draws attention to the physical weight and corporality of the matter, is reminiscent of Michelangelo's pictorial formula. This statuary volume transmits an impulse that destroys the inertia of the matter. This position means an irresistible attraction to Venus, who gives life to the statue from a neoplatonic perspective. In fact, the plastic relief in-forms the statue. According to Michelangelo, the image is

virtually kept in the marble block and the artist should carve it removing what he considers to be useless for the artistic formal aspect. Burne-Jones's picture hints at Michelangelo's statement: he paints the moment of releasing the shape from the statuary into pictorial technique that uses volumes as expressive elements of drawing: composition and line.

The most relevant painting inspired by Michelangelo's sculptural patterns, subjects and idealism is *The Wheel of Fortune* (1883). The suspended figures, as the ones in the Sistine Chapel, seem to move and arrest, due to a spiritual principle, Apollo's divine power. The painter focuses on the process of carving, which is the noblest artistic manifestation for Michelangelo (*Schiavo che si ridesta*, an unfinished version of Giulio the Second's tomb – 1530 -34), since it annuls the matter to allow the concept – *disegno* – to materialize aesthetically. Thus, Burne-Jones declines the naturalistic manner that dominates the painting of the nineteenth century and chooses the sculptural expressive modality transferred into painting. The structure of his pictorial composition is based on a formal mass, which revolves around *Moira* (the Greek term for fortune'). He does not imitate the *antico*; he synthesizes the ancient, classical spirituality and the modern one in a more complex and dramatic way.

The sexual ambiguity of the faces, characteristic of his works, descends from the neoplatonic tradition, as well. The androgynous motif has been considered the most suitable one to embody the angelic pure "substance" in painting. This motif, essential in the works of Verrochio, Botticelli, Gozzoli, Filoppo Lippi, Leonardo, and Michelangelo, expresses the confusion between sexes that is solved through celestial love. In the Greek mythology, Zeus corrects this double being and offers it the possibility of sharing love. Burne-Jones's faces suggest the renaissance of the initial harmony by means of the self-sufficient perfect being, uninvolved in search for the other.

Starting from the artistic conventions of the Italian Renaissance, Burne-Jones creates an original pictorial universe and a model for the European art at the end of the nineteenth century.

Although the Pre-Raphaelites together with Ruskin resent artificiality and technical procedures, classical rules and renascent conventions, they follow the renascent orientation. Moreover, trying to legitimate a famous genealogy, the Pre-Raphaelites always seek to demonstrate their connection with a great cultural tradition, either medieval or renascent, that leads their artistic mannerism to a formal composite exploration, which plays a paradigmatic role in Modernism.

Notes

[1] Apud. *The Flower Book*, Taschen, Düsseldorf, 1991, p. 10.
[2] Ibid., p. 68.
[3] Argan, G.C., *Storia dell'Arte Italiana*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1989, vol. 2, p. 234.
[4] Argan, G.C., *Storia dell'Arte Italiana*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1989, vol. 2, chapter about Botticelli.
[5] Spalding, F., *Mahnificent Dreams: Burne-Jones and the Late Victorians*, Phaidon, Oxford, 1978, p. 42.
[6] Baconsky, A.E., *Botticelli*, Meridiane, Bucuresti, 1975.
[7] Chevalier, Jean and Gheerbrant, Alain , *Dictionnaire des symboles. Mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, couleurs, nombres*, (our translation), Robert Laffont, Paris, 1969.

CHAPTER V

The Poetics of Detail in the American Pre-Raphaelite Painting

The reception of Pre-Raphaelites' pictorial art and aesthetic ideas in the American cultural space coincides with the publication of the first editions of Walt Whitman's poems: *Leaves of Grass*, no mention of the author's name, New York, Brooklyn, 1855; Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 1856, with an excerpt from Ralph Waldo Emerson's letter to Whitman on the back cover ("I greet you at the beginning of a great career") and the whole letter inside as appendix; Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 1860 that contains 154 poems among which "A Word Out of the Sea" (later renamed "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking") and "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" are the most famous of the added texts. Thayer and Eldridge in Boston published this third edition.

Mention should be made that a Pre-Raphaelite exhibition took place in 1857 in the United States. Taking into account that in July 1857 Brown organized a Pre-Raphaelite exhibition in 4 Russell Place – London, it is possible that many paintings and watercolours displayed there were selected to represent a trend of the English

painting when the *American Exhibition of British Art* was sent to New York. In 1857-58 an exhibition of British art containing Pre-Raphaelites' works was in Philadelphia. By that time the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, founded in 1848 by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, Frederick George Stephens, James Collinson, Thomas Woolner, William Michel Rossetti, had been officially dispersed for four years. Their idea of a circle whose members shared the same aesthetic conception, scale of value, pictorial and literary models was inseminated in America and, in 1863, the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art was founded. Its members and adherents: Charles Moore, Thomas C. Farrer, Clarence Cook, William Stillman, John W. Hill, John Henry Hill, William Trost Richards reconsidered the leading principles of the British brotherhood: although the medieval

structure of a guild was maintained, the medieval narrative cycles, chivalric characters, escapist atmosphere, primitive perspective, angular shapes, specific of the stage of medieval inspiration, were abandoned. The American Pre-Raphaelites were obviously interested in nature as soon as it expressed the divine glory of God. More than their British fellows, the American artists preferred to express their theories mainly by writing articles, studies, critical responses, editorial replies in their magazine - *New Path* - rather than painting original works of art. The British artistic programme exposed in the first two issues of the

Pre-Raphaelite magazine, *The Germ – Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art* and the last issue entitled *Art and Poetry – Being Thoughts towards Nature* had pleaded for "an entire adherence to the simplicity of nature" in 1849 –50[1]. A similar urge appeared in the *New Path* where it also reflected a strong religiosity:

"seeing God and hearing His voice in every golden-hearted star that bends before the wind, in every blade of grass, in every rosy clover head, and every golden dandelion, think you we would dare to draw or paint any of these things, bent into grace and loveliness by God's finger, carelessly or coarsely, and give a […] daub of paint […] as the truth of mullen, thistle, or dock leaf?"[2]

The doctrinal similarities between the British Pre-Raphaelitism and its American version could be explained by the articles signed by F.G. Stephens and William Michael Rossetti in the American magazines which promoted Pre-Raphaelite art, on the one hand, and John Ruskin's works, on the other. Clarence Cook wrote in the *New York Daily Tribune* about the great influence Ruskin had on the American artists (1863); Charles Moore presented him as an apostle of the truth (1864); Thomas C. Farrer called him "glorious consciousness"; all of them read *Modern Painters*[3] and painted accordingly.

Their constant interest in landscapes, seascapes, rocks, streams, lakes descends both from the Pre-Raphaelite artistic programme and

Ruskinian thought. Considering that the *high art* should address the human intellect through the most elevating ideas, Ruskin rejects the mimetic work of art as long as its aim is mere hedonism. Art based on imitation eludes invention while its pleasure annihilates the didactic mission. In the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843), he affirms the superiority of *imaginative truth* that results from a complete comprehension of the objective reality. Consequently, the artist should be faithful to his own *visions* that determine *aesthesis* to become *theoria*. According to Ruskin *theoria* is an exalted perception and the unique possibility of expressing the illimited, the incomprehensible, the ineffable.

"[Artists] should go to Nature in all singleness of heart […] rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth. Then, when their memories are stored, and their imaginations fed, and their hands firm, let them take up the scarlet and the gold, give the reins to their fancy, and show us what their heads are made of."[4]

Since Ruskin subordinates expression to idea, sense to intellect, art is valued axiologically from a teleological point of view. He meets the conclusion that the term *aesthesis* should be replaced by *theoria* in the discourse on art and Beauty. Even if Beauty seems to lack its sensitive aspect, it reaches a moral and spiritual finality. He asserts that Beauty should be contemplated and understood as a divine gift only by means of the

theoretical faculty in order to elevate human existence. The sensible element is accepted if and only if it leads to the revelation of Divinity. Generating an aesthetic joy, sensitive Beauty becomes a theoretical faculty. The receptor's aesthetic emotion emerges from his moral nature, ignoring both sense and intellectual perception. In the third volume, Ruskin defines "the real nature of greatness of style" resuming his own arguments in Volume I: a painter should "accept nature as she is"; reveal the beauty of all things and forms; render "the largest possible quantity of Truth".[5] In 1856 when the fourth volume was published, Ruskin devoted important passages to the Alpine austere landscape.

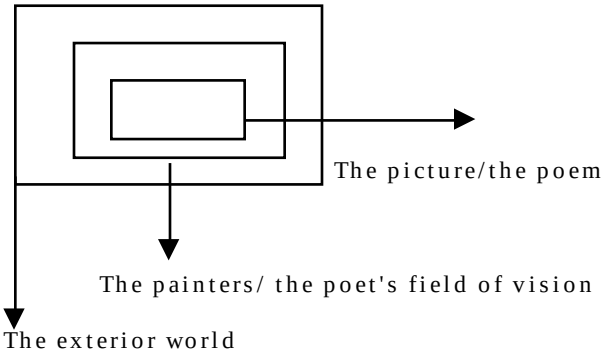
The Pre-Raphaelites and their disciples transfer these theoretical principles into a pictorial poetics: to be true to nature means to paint each detail, each element, no matter how minor it is in the whole composition, no matter where it is placed in the picture. Center or margin, in the light or in the shadow, protagonist or episodic character, fictional or real image is the same. Everything seems emblematic for another transcendental reality, visualized through these material forms. Paradoxically, minutely painted details suppose a superior spiritual level towards which the viewer is transgressed by its visual/*objective correlatives*.

Nature had represented the main American theme before, precisely in the first half of the nineteentyh century: Thomas Cole, the leader of the Hudson school, Asher Brown

Durand, Thomas Doughty, John F. Kensett painted natural sceneries with a great interest either in the overwhelming majesty and idyllic primitivity or in the "topographic description"[6].

American Pre-Raphaelite paintings indicate the preference for nature, realistically perceived, nature which is the perfect setting of direct communication with divinity. This is the starting point of a comparative approach between Walt Whitman's poetry and American Pre-Raphaelites' works. They express sincere admiration for the American vast surfaces that are viewed from a high perspective: from the distance, above the scenery that stretches before the painter's or the poet's eyes.

The unique point of view from which the panoramic sights are seen and painted always suggests a privileged position of the artist. A binary visual schemata evidences spatiality: above vs. below, near vs. in the distance. It is on the opposite peak, on the top of a mountain, on the other bank of the river, on the shore of the ocean the position where the painter places his easel (figure 12). This apparent opposition between the place of the viewer and the viewed scene proves to be an all-inclusive expanded space that is supposed beyond the limits of the vision field and the picture sides.



Selecting the infinite exterior world as referent, American painters assume a certain position inside this world that permits them to arrest a large fragment of space. No motion disturbs the calm of the atmosphere; the image is exclusively static. The viewing subject contemplates the fragment enclosed in his field of vision and then recreates it as faithfully as possible in order to fix a divine epiphany. To suggest the varied beauties of nature, the painter pays much attention to those elements that require a specific technique of recording the minute details as if they were magnified by powerful lenses. Thus, foliage, branches, ferns, geological configurations, blades of grass make visible/put into light each touch of the brush. Clarity – a characteristic for all these paintings – objectifies the repeated strokes of the brush in large

landscapes. The time of viewing is the time of painting since it is well known that these artists painted in the open air. An eloquent example is John W. Hill who spent up to ten hours a day to paint his: *Trap Rock* (1863), *View from High Tor, Haverstraw, New York* (1866), *Bird's Nest and Dogflowers* (1867). Time becomes another aspect of spatiality. The painted surface imitates a certain natural background at a certain moment that becomes an iconic attribute of a certain place, in its turn. These exhaustive depictions determine the receptor to notice the successive juxtapositions, superpositions, and interference of the insignificant elements to reveal gradually an enormous image. Leaves and branches of trees, foliage, seeds in William Trost Richards's *Landscape* (1860) display the invasion of the vegetation *in praesentia*. Nature performs its own show (figure 13). This visual explosion seems to be in progress at the very moment of reading the picture.

The eternal present in Walt Whitman's poetry functions similarly. The poetic subject always assumes the hypostasis of a perceiver of the American land:

"I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear" [7] (*I Hear America Singing*)

"See, vast trackless spaces […][8]

……

See, in arriere, the wigwam, the trail, the hunter's hut, the

flat-boat, the maize-leaf, the claim, the rude fence, and

the backwoods village,

See, on the one side the Western Sea and on the other the

Eastern Sea, how they advance and retreat upon my poems

as upon their own shores,

See, pastures and forests in my poems – see, […]"[9] (*Starting from Paumanok*)

Statistically speaking, Simple Present Tense dominates the verbal forms in Whitman's poems. The reader confronts with long series of various components that construct a progressive image of the American continent while reading. Although rather conventionalized as a poetical image, the American decorum is identified by geographical indications:

"Land of the eastern Chesapeake! land of the Delaware!

Land of Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan!

Land of the Old Thirteen! Massachusetts land! Land of Vermont and Connecticut!

Land of the ocean shores! Land of sierras and peaks!"[10]

Ocean, fields, large forests, huge mountains reflect the earthly splendour and the divine grace from a quantitative perspective. This option for the huge

natural dimensions expressed in long enumerative invocations is a characteristic feature of the Whitmanian denotative poetry. Endless enumerations based on syntactical parallelism reflect the same temptation of comprising/covering vast areas. No figure of speech, trope or poetical epithet interrupts the successive series of nouns and their geographical determinants. Only few epithets define dimension of the American space: *vast*, *immense*, and *enormous*. The reviews of that time pointed out his severe style. In *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of 15 September 1855, the critic insisted on the directness and unelaborated language:

"[…] we have the free utterance of an untramelled spirit without the slightest regard to established models or fixed standard of taste. His scenery presents no shaven lawns or neatly trimmed arbors; no hot house conservatory, where delicate exotics odorise the air and enchant the eye. If we follow the poet we must scale unknown precipices and climb untrodden mountains; or we boat on nameless lakes, […] or we wander among the primeval forests, now pressing the yielding surface of velvet moss, and anon caught among thickets and brambles. He believes in the ancient philosophy that there is no more real beauty or merit in one particle of matter than another; he appreciates all…"[11]

Another article in the *New York Daily Tribune* drew attention to the new poetic formula of the free verse that matched the natural *ruggedness*:

"They [*Leaves of Grass*] are certainly original in their external form, have been shaped on no pre-existent model out of the author's own brain. […] They are full of bold, stirring thoughts – with occasional passages of effective description, betraying a genuine intimacy with Nature and a keen appreciation of beauty – often presenting a rare felicity of diction […]."[12]

Literariness, specific for the fragments that refer to the American landscape corresponds to clarity, naturalistic detail, "sharply focused style"[13] in the American Pre-Raphaelites' paintings. In fact, both contemporary artistic manifestations express the American divine beauty by means of the most adequate poetic/pictorial devices. The pictorial equivalent of this rythmicity of the free verse is the absence of an arhitectonical structure: imitating Nature both the poet and the painter mirror God's perfect creation. They refuse to intrude imperfect human precepts into the divine work: natural disposal prevails over any kind of hierarchies. Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" underlines the equality of the worldly elements:

"All truths wait in all things,

They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,

……

The insignificant is as big to me as any,

(What is less or more than a touch?)

[…]

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,

And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand and the egg of the wren,

And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,

And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven…"[14] (*Song of Myself*)

The American Pre-Raphaelites raise the detail to the level of completion: John W. Hill paints *Bird's Nest and Dogflowers* (1867), William Trost Richards *Red Clover, Butter-and Eggs, and Ground Ivy* (1860), Aaron D. Shattuck *Leaf Study with Yellow Swallow Tail* (1859). Their compositional space breaks its unity: in Whitman's poetry no stanzic unit, prosodic scheme, poetical form can be identified; American Pre-Raphaelites' paintings and watercolour do not obey classical pictorial formulas. Their relevant titles always send to a real place that becomes a pictorial subject rejecting artistic laws, chromatic principles, balanced proportions, and axial configurations. Whitmanian poetry and American Pre-Raphalite art are organized syntagmatically, in Jakobson's term. Poems and paintings are an artistic metonimic proofs of the divine consubstantial Beauty. Imitative pictorial occurrences start a process of association that sends back to the natural referent. Natural contiguity transformed into a compositional

conduct serves as a substitute for the famous European traditions:

"The artists are nearly all young men; they are not hampered by too many traditions, and they enjoy almost inestimable advantage of having no past, no masters and no schools."[15]

The British Pre-Raphaelites' naturalistic experiments were accepted as they met the Americans' expectations. Nevertheless the British artists used natural details to support their main subjects, to confer them an exquisite background. Their studies or pictorial essays devoted exclusively to naturalistic theme remain peripheral by comparison with the rest of their works. Unlike them, the American Pre-Raphaelites challenged themselves trying to arrest the marvelous image of Creation into a detailed epiphanic picture and to set the process of viewing in a frame.

Notes

[1] The Germ. A Pre-Raphaelite Little Magazine, University of Miami Press, 1970.
[2] apud. Casteras, P. Susan, *English Pre-Raphaelitism and Its Reception in America in the 19 th Century*, Associated University Press, London & Toronto, 1990, p. 149.
[3] idem.
[4] Ruskin, John, *Modern Painters*, apud. Christian, John, *"A Serious Talk": Ruskin's Place in Burne-Jones's Artistic Development*, in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, Paris, Leslie, ed., London, 1984, p. 185.
[5] apud. Christian, John, *"A Serious Talk": Ruskin's Place in Burne-Jones's Artistic Development*, in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, Paris, Leslie, ed., London, 1984, p. 188-89.
[6] Grigorescu , Dan, *Istoria artei americane*, Saeculum I.O., Bucuresti, 1997, p. 146.
[7] Whitman, Walt, *The Complete Poems*, Penguin Books, London, 1986, p. 47.
[8] ibid. p. 51.
[9] ibid. 62.
[10] ibid. 59
[11] *Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass – an Extraordinary Book*, in *Daily Eagle*, Brooklyn, 15 September 1855.
[12] *New Publications: Leaves of Grass*, in *New York Daily Tribune*, 23 July 1855.
[13] Treuherz, Julian, *Victorian Painting*, Hudson and London, London, 1997, p. 94.
[14] Walt Whitman, op.cit. p. 93.
[15] *The New Path*, the opening statement apud. Adam, Steven, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, Grange Books, London, 1996, p. 36.

Figures

FIGURE 1
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Lady Lilith* (1868), Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington

FIGURE 2
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Sibylla Palmifera* (1866 - 70), Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight

FIGURE 3
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Drawing of Siddal at Chatham Place* (1854)

FIGURE 4
Elizabeth Siddal, *The Lady of Shalott* (1853),
Jeremy Maas

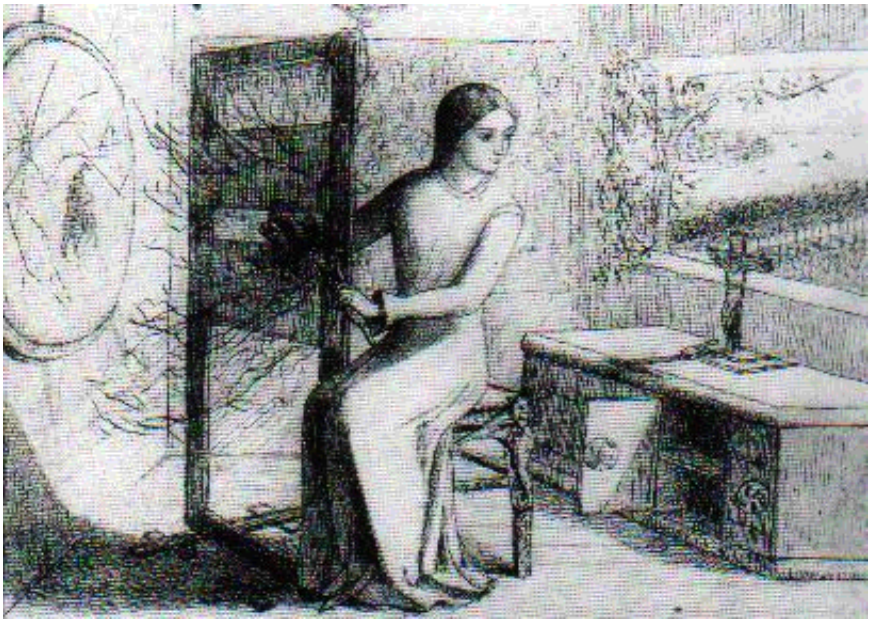


FIGURE 5
Elizabeth Siddal, *Lady Affixing a Pennant to a Knight's Spear* (1856), Tate Gallery, London

FIGURE 6
Elizabeth Siddal, *Self-Portrait* (1834 - 62),
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FIGURE 7
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *A Parable of Love (Love's Mirror)* (1849 - 50)

FIGURE 8
Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mill* (1872 - 80),
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FIGURE 9
Edward Burne-Jones, *Rose of Heaven*, in *The Flower Book*

FIGURE 10
Edward Burne-Jones, *The Golden Stairs* (1872 - 80), Tate Gallery, London

FIGURE 11
Edward Burne – Jones, *Pygmalion and the Image – The Godhead Fires* (1868 - 78), Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

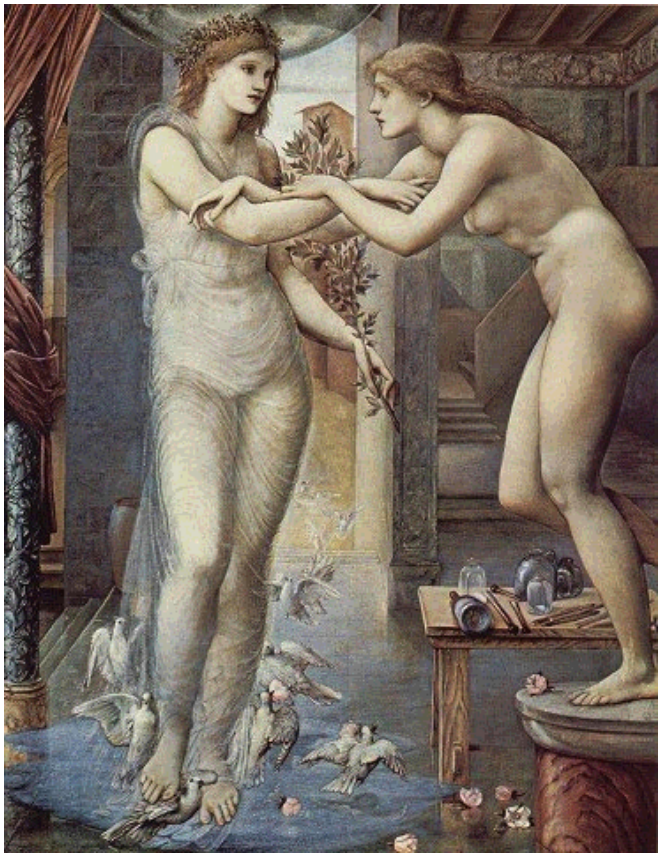

FIGURE 12
Thomas C. Farrer, *Mount Tom* (1865)

FIGURE 13
William Trost Richards, *Landscape* (1860)

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