

# Changing the Victorian Habit Loop: The Body in the Poetry and Painting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris

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CHANGING THE VICTORIAN HABIT LOOP: THE BODY IN THE POETRY  
AND PAINTING OF DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI  
AND WILLIAM MORRIS

by

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ABSTRACT  
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Founded in England in 1848, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood rebelled against Victorian artistic convention and sought to recapture a medieval style of painting believed by its members to have existed before Raphael. That style was a significant departure from the prevailing Royal Academy style, however, and—as many critics note—ahead of its time. Among the Pre-Raphaelites, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris were unique for their creative output as both poets and painters. This dissertation examines the representation of the body in some poems and paintings by Rossetti and Morris and analyzes the impact of the Pre-Raphaelites on habits of thinking about the body.

The mainstream Victorian habit of thinking about the (especially female) body was generally to respond negatively: the body was dirty, shameful, sinful, and not a topic for polite society. Victorian responses to the body—in the flesh or represented—tend to be restrictive, moralistic, and didactic. Using recent discoveries in the study of habit formation and habit change, this dissertation analyzes how the poems and paintings of Rossetti and Morris keep what one researcher calls the same cues and rewards but substitute a different routine in the habit loop. That different routine enables thinking about the body in more positive ways: the Pre-Raphaelite body can be seen as natural, active, dynamic, and worth seeing as it is.

Tracing how the body is represented in the poems and paintings of Rossetti and Morris as well as in their creative context, this dissertation establishes seven categories for describing the representation of the body: narrative gaze, privileged body parts, clothing and drapery, color, gesture, posture, and facial expression. Rossetti and Morris typically use the last six corporeal categories to defamiliarize the body and surprise the audience, bringing readers and viewers to the “inner standing point.” When that surprise wears off, readers and viewers are led to re-evaluate their view of the body from a more distanced, critical perspective. The process traced in this dissertation often results in acceptance of the new Pre-Raphaelite idea of the body by readers and viewers, at least on the individual level.

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Bryan D. Gast, B.A., M.A.

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## Chapter I – Introduction

My interest in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was sparked in a roundabout way my first year of high school. On a family vacation in London that included many museum visits, I found myself in what was then called the Tate Gallery (later renamed the Tate Britain in 2000 with the establishment of the Tate Modern). As I wandered room after cavernous room, I took mental note of paintings that resonated with me. After making my way through the galleries, I browsed in the gift shop and found some posters of a few of the pictures that had struck me: *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais, *Proserpine*<sup>1</sup> by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *April Love* by Arthur Hughes, and *The Lady of Shalott* by John William Waterhouse. An advertisement plastered liberally at Underground stops led me to a traveling exhibit and a souvenir poster of *Flaming June* by Frederic Leighton. Only later did I discover that these artists were to varying degrees part of the English Pre-Raphaelite movement—or influenced heavily by it—in the mid to late nineteenth century.

In each case, I was drawn to the lush colors and the striking quality of the women in the paintings. At that age, I had trouble putting words to the concept, but these paintings were in the vein of Rossetti’s “stunners.”<sup>2</sup> They were different from the Royal Academy-approved pictures of women. The Academy preferred more technically proficient but less distinctive representations of the human body. Despite their

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<sup>1</sup> I will discuss *Proserpine* in detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Marsh explains that “stunner” was “the slang term for a good-looking woman” (22), and Lucinda Hawksley adds that this “Rossettian word for any beautiful woman” was “a term quickly adopted by all the Pre-Raphaelites” (4). Rossetti’s models included his wife, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Siddal; Fanny Cornforth; Alexa Wilding; and Jane Morris, née Burden, the wife of William Morris. Hawksley’s *Lizzie Siddal: Face of the Pre-Raphaelites* provides an in-depth biography of Lizzie Siddal and examination of her influence on the Pre-Raphaelites.

sometimes angular and awkward features, the Pre-Raphaelite women exhibited an ineffable beauty and an intense focus on the senses. They were more interesting to me precisely because they were different from the conventional Victorian art I saw so much of in London's museums, while keeping within the broad realm of the conventional. Unlike the obvious radicalism of, say, abstract impressionism a century later, these Pre-Raphaelite paintings made subtly radical changes to the Royal Academy's style of art.

I discovered the appeal of Pre-Raphaelite poetry as an undergraduate student. While my first discovery was Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," it was an upper-level seminar that opened my eyes to the poetry of William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. As with my experience at the Tate Gallery, I immediately understood that the Pre-Raphaelites were working within the scope of Victorian literature, but doing something quietly radical. I was drawn to the way Rossetti and Morris told modern stories in medieval settings, to the way they chafed at convention, and to the way they appreciated beauty and truth—as if they were channeling the end of John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" for the Victorian age and beyond. That undergraduate seminar, which I took in the winter term of my junior year, culminated in a major research project. As a class, we organized a library exhibit of our work and gave an evening colloquium open to the public. I researched William Morris's ideas about the so-called Ideal Book. My partner and I visited Carleton College's rare book library and carefully explored an original Kelmscott Press edition of Keats.<sup>3</sup> While we felt strange treating the book so gingerly,

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<sup>3</sup> Kelmscott Press, of course, was founded by William Morris in 1891, five years before his death. In *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*, William S. Peterson details the history and style of the press. Peterson explains that the press, based in part on a letter from Ruskin to Morris, was "rooted in the assumption that all the arts—even the so-called minor or applied arts—have a common basis in the human creative faculty, and that the excessive honour paid to painting in the



our appreciation of the book's contents and its rare beauty made extreme care inevitable. We began to understand the amazement Dante Gabriel Rossetti must have felt when he discovered a copy of Keats's poems.

While the seeds of my interest in the Pre-Raphaelites were sown on that family trip in the 1990s, they were cultivated by studying abroad in London during the spring term of my junior year as an undergraduate. Living, reading, and writing about English literature in the midst of London's bustle, I found myself spending days in the British Museum Reading Room. I was naturally drawn back to the Tate to admire the art that had inspired me in high school. The experience was more meaningful the second time because I could connect the visual and verbal Pre-Raphaelite experience. The intersection of visual and verbal is compelling in a multimedia age and has a limited number of literary figures to draw from.<sup>4</sup>

To understand my central argument, it is necessary to set the ideas in historical context, beginning with the main players and their aims. Founded in England in 1848, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood rebelled against Victorian artistic convention and sought to recapture a medieval style of painting believed by its members to have existed before Raphael, who died in 1520. Among the founding members of the PRB, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt focused on what John Ruskin called a return to nature; they frequently painted outdoor scenes. In a different sense of a return to nature (and my focus), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's faction, including William Morris, preferred more

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nineteenth century was unwholesome" (73). This assumption explains Morris's interest in making limited-edition print books with an elaborately detailed visual style.

<sup>4</sup> William Blake comes to mind as a Romantic forebear of the Pre-Raphaelite poet/painter. In his mystical and esoteric work, however, he is less interested than the Pre-Raphaelites in the world outside his own mythology.

medieval scenes, which were “natural” in that they were less artificial than contemporary art and represented human figures without idealizing them. This second group believed that the older setting held a creative and cultural power that had been lost in the intervening centuries. Rossetti and Morris are unique among the Pre-Raphaelites, however, for their dual interests in painting and poetry—a pairing which makes them the main focus of this project.

While their frequently medieval settings allow Rossetti and Morris to juxtapose new and old, it is what Rossetti and Morris do with the figures in their poems and paintings—primarily female figures, although with some attention to how those females affect male figures—that forms the core of this study. I explore the nature of how “the body,” especially the female body, is represented in the artwork and, more importantly, the poetry of Rossetti and Morris. Why does an artist choose to use either the page or the canvas to express a particular vision? Of course, Rossetti both wrote and illustrated some of his own work; his visual accompaniments for “The Blessed Damozel” or for his sister Christina’s “Goblin Market” complement the poems. How and why does the artist make such choices, and how do these choices tie together with the Pre-Raphaelite movement as well as the broader 19<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetic and fin de siècle movements?

To establish how Rossetti and Morris shape and are shaped by their Victorian context, a brief overview of the period’s representation of the body is valuable. Art history critic Susan P. Casteras examines Victorian womanhood in art, arguing that a unifying theme is that art reveals the Victorians’ preoccupation with protecting women and controlling their behavior through confinement and restrictions. In poetry, Coventry

Patmore is a touchstone for confinement and restriction.<sup>5</sup> Patmore's long narrative poem *The Angel in the House* praises the embodiment of a Victorian feminine ideal: the selfless mother and submissive wife. Although later critics often view Patmore as cloying and restrictive, the idea of the "angel in the house," who dealt with the domestic tasks given by her husband, was immensely popular in the Victorian era. Both limited and inspired by this cultural context, Rossetti and Morris navigate the murky waters of what is acceptable artistic expression to their Victorian audience. In this artistic context, Rossetti's and Morris's painting subverts Victorian conventions by showing a less restricted body, a body instead blessed with dynamism and activity. After establishing this subversion, my dissertation will show how their poetry attempts a similarly revolutionary task working against Victorian conventions.

Much recent criticism of the body in literature has been focused primarily through a feminist lens. Important issues have certainly been raised—for example, how gender is constructed and played out, or who gazes at whom, often through the "male gaze" at a female subject. Carol Christ analyzes what she calls the "feminization of poetry" in Victorian England, arguing that, particularly in the work of Tennyson, male heroes attribute to the image of the female a power over self and world. Christ is concerned with how male figures in Tennyson's poetry commit "erotic theft" of the females' power (386), an act which is described in visual terms. As Christ must be aware, however, study of the body in poetry and painting must cast a wider net than gender. She writes, "To trace the implications of Tennyson's feminization of the poetical, one would turn next to the Pre-Raphaelite movement, where we can find a rich and interesting

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<sup>5</sup> Millais painted an 1851 portrait of Patmore's wife, Emily.

development of Tennyson's concerns" (395-6). But she does not do so herself, leaving an inviting avenue for further exploration. In any case, to see representations of the Victorian body primarily from a feminist position is to emphasize masculine fantasy and a drive toward androgyny—and it is also to de-emphasize other important ideas, such as how Rossetti and Morris work within the virgin/whore dichotomy as they take it apart, or how their male figures are affected as they reconceptualize the female body.

While the critical fascination with Pre-Raphaelite poetic descriptions of physical art objects has been largely left by the wayside since the early 1990s, in *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris* (2008), Elizabeth Helsinger leans on such ekphrastic criticism<sup>6</sup> while simultaneously updating it. She focuses less on comparing poems and paintings as “objects that look or sound in some way alike,” preferring to examine “the thought processes, the imaginative acts, [and] the historical and conceptual strategies that Rossetti's and Morris's experience in more than one medium made especially visible to them” (ix). She argues that “their most interesting discoveries [...] come through the insights that the practice of more than one art form allowed” (ix). Helsinger is keenly aware that translation is at the heart of Pre-Raphaelite creativity; Rossetti's translations of Dante into English, for instance, were an exercise in adapting one poetic language into the sense and sounds of another. Moving seamlessly between visual and verbal texts is another method of translation. So, too, is criticism: Helsinger argues that criticism has “its own challenges of preserving the strangeness—to critical prose—of poetic language, or painting's line and color, or the

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<sup>6</sup> Ekphrasis is the rhetorical exercise of describing a physical, inanimate artwork in words. The classical example is Homer's ekphrastic description in *The Iliad* of the shield of Achilles. (W.H. Auden retells Homer's story in his 1952 poem “The Shield of Achilles.”) Other poets known for using ekphrasis include Keats and Rainer Maria Rilke, as well as the Pre-Raphaelites in particular.

‘thing-ness’ of the material forms of both poems and pictures. Of course criticism must do much more: provide analytic, conceptual, or historical perspectives” (x). Helsinger’s work has limitations, however. She writes from a cultural critic’s perspective, with a special focus on class. Furthermore, in describing three important strategies she traces in the Pre-Raphaelites—acts of attention, repetition, and translation—she limits her discussion of each strategy to either Rossetti or Morris. In furthering her work, I will focus not on class but on how the Pre-Raphaelites subtly revolutionized the Victorian conception of the body.

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Building on these principles, questions, and criticism, I argue that Rossetti and Morris are subtly but significantly shaping Victorian habits of thinking about the body, particularly the female body. From rigid, stylized portraits by Royal Academy artists to others portraying extremes of femininity in the “virgin/whore” dichotomy, much Victorian art employs imagery that, as Casteras notes, confines and restricts women.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Rossetti and Morris work—often within these conventions—to complicate the representation of the body. They push for a more Ruskinian naturalness through a distinctly Pre-Raphaelite dedication to minute detail. They represent figures more realistically as they look, permitting imperfect figures<sup>8</sup> to see the spotlight. And they

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the recurring motif of the wall or similar “architectural barrier, be it brick, rustic, or wooden” (Casteras 87), holds particular importance as a signifier of a metaphorical separation. The meaning of the wall alters, however, depending on the particular circumstances. When placed between a courting couple it symbolizes one thing; beside a fallen woman in the corrupt city, as in Rossetti’s *Found*, it means another.

<sup>8</sup> Pre-Raphaelites paintings were frequently attacked for their awkward bodies.

open cultural doors and allow new narratives of identity to be told and retold, particularly that the female body is invested with dynamism and particular expressive force. By making the Pre-Raphaelite body a locus of attention and even fascination, Rossetti and Morris free Victorians to rethink confining and restrictive codes of morality, sexuality, independence, and assertiveness.

One critical challenge in analyzing word and image together is to develop a common vocabulary for discussing the representation of the body in poetry and paintings. Each medium carries expressive power, and while that power does not always translate easily from verbal to visual and back, there is common ground for analysis. To that end, I will trace seven categories of the body's representation in the paintings and poetry of Rossetti and Morris. Taken together, these seven of what I call "corporeal categories" form a representational anatomy that can be applied to each major work analyzed in detail in this dissertation.

The first corporeal category, narrative gaze, controls the other categories and requires the most detailed explanation. The term narrative gaze includes distinct narrative focuses: the viewpoint of the writer/artist mediating the work and of the reader/viewer who attends and follows its directions. Helsinger details what she calls "acts of attention" in the work of Rossetti and Morris. By "acts of attention," she refers to an "aesthetic consciousness" or "mode of perception demanded by poetry and the arts" (2). This mode of perception "require[s] a particular kind of attention, an open sensory alertness and active imaginative projection that attend to the ordered complexity of poem, picture, or well-designed room" (3). Furthermore, Helsinger explains that "the attention cultivated by poems and works of art strives to expand receptivity in order to foster

unexpected or novel connections” (3). In this dissertation, then, what Helsinger calls “acts of attention” I will construe as intentional acts of painting and writing that Rossetti and Morris perform with the goal of transforming the conventional Victorian representation of the body. The two poet-painters draw the attention to and within their works by using either an “inner standing point” or an “outer standing point.”<sup>9</sup>

Because Rossetti and Morris employ both inner and outer standing points to accomplish their aims, a brief explanation of the difference will suffice here. The distinction between the two narrative gaze subtypes is that in the former case—the inner standing point—the reader/viewer projects the imagination into the work itself, giving it a sense of presence and timelessness. Helsinger sees evidence of the inner standing point in “acts of imaginative projection into the space-time of paintings or imagined scenes” (xii). In the latter case—the outer standing point—there is a “more distanced, critical aesthetic perspective based in a modern present” (xii). In other words, the inner standing point brings us to what Julie Codell calls the “inner life of the figures” (264), while the outer standing point allows us to step back from the work and see it with the calculating eyes of a critic. Some works are more prone to one or the other of the narrative gaze subtypes. Rossetti and Morris manipulate the narrative gaze, helping their readers/viewers to see their poems and paintings from both standing points, sometimes simultaneously. As a result, they subtly redirect the audience’s perception of the body in

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<sup>9</sup> The distinction may be related to—but predates—the distinction Roland Barthes draws in *S/Z* between the “readerly” text and “writerly” text. For Barthes, “readerly texts” are like most texts: they are linear and informative, with largely pre-determined meanings, and are consumed by the reader (4). This parallels the received perspective of an outer standing point or the conventional Victorian idea of the body. On the other hand, Barthes argues that “writerly texts” defy expectations and make the reader “a producer of the text” (4), an active participant in the making of meaning (4-5). The inner standing point also requires the reader/viewer to make meaning actively based on cues in the poem/painting.

their work from a conventional view, to a more complex understanding of the body as natural and dynamic—and something worth reconsidering.

I derive the term “inner standing point” directly from Rossetti’s response to “The Fleshly School of Poetry,” Robert Buchanan’s October 1871 attack in *The Contemporary Review*. Briefly, Rossetti used the term “inner standing point” to defend himself against a frequently expressed Victorian opinion of Pre-Raphaelite writing. Buchanan’s attack on what he termed the “fleshly school of poetry” centered on his perception that adherents of the “school,” including among others Rossetti and Morris, held an “unwholesome” fixation on the body, thereby imbuing it with too much freedom and valuing form over substance (Buchanan 335). While Chapter 5 will expand on the Buchanan controversy, for now it is sufficient to understand that Rossetti’s public reply established his critical position that “the motive powers of art [...] demand first of all an *inner* standing-point” (“Stealthy” 337). To change the Victorian conception of the body, then, Rossetti had to examine the “inner life” of his subjects before leading his audience to examine their own inner life and conception of the body.

Observers and readers of Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry can see the inner and outer standing point vividly in a few familiar and less familiar works. The inner standing point is a defamiliarizing filter that interrupts the critical distance of the outer standing point. For example, Mary’s oddly shaped figure and shrinking posture in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* draw attention to the “inner life of the figure,” as does the eponymous woman’s liminal position between heaven and earth in “The Blessed Damozel.” In the poem “Jenny,” the repeated emphasis on the placement of the prostitute Jenny’s head on her patron’s knee challenges Rossetti’s audience to view the woman in an unconventional



way, thereby compelling the reader to see his work afresh. In Elaine Scarry's language, Rossetti forces the audience to grasp what is "there for the taking" ("On Vivacity" 19) *at* the inner standing point, rather than what might conventionally be brought *to* the experience of the painting or poem from the outer standing point.<sup>10</sup> In these examples, then, Rossetti engineers the inner and outer standing points so his audience is unable to rest in conventional views. Thus, narrative gaze becomes a filter that allows us to see familiar scenes—the Christian Annunciation or a sleeping woman—as with new eyes. The artist defamiliarizes the body so that the audience might reconstruct it without—or at least with fewer—preconceptions.

How does an artist use narrative gaze to control the audience's way of seeing the body? An analogy with film is valuable.<sup>11</sup> A movie director, who can reshoot a scene until everything is just right, has complete control over what the camera captures: people, lighting, costumes, background objects, and so on. The camera pans or zooms to emphasize details in support of an artistic vision. In much the same way, the artist controls the viewer's way of seeing the body. Although a painting is stationary, the act of viewing it requires movement analogous to a film: the action of the eye as it looks around a canvas produces a sense of chronology and importance, like a scene unfolding in a film. The narrative gaze acts like a camera, drawing the viewer's attention to particular details

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<sup>10</sup> Although Scarry's phrase "there for the taking" could be read out of context as implying an objectification of the women in these examples, that is not her intent. Rather, for Scarry, what is "there for the taking" is created by the poet/painter and given to the reader/viewer, and it exists independent of the audience's imagination ("On Vivacity" 19). In other words, the inner standing point can be grasped consistently by the audience precisely because evidence of it is given by the poet/painter, rather than created independently by different interpretive communities.

<sup>11</sup> An alternative metaphor, Gestalt, is problematic to use. Although the whole of the seven corporeal categories is indeed greater than the sum of their parts, thinking in terms of Gestalt obscures the importance of their hierarchy. Narrative gaze is the controlling force for Rossetti and Morris.

in turn, sometimes emphasizing an inner standing point and sometimes an outer standing point. It is the same for the poet, who chooses details and places emphasis in a way that leads the reader's attention.<sup>12</sup>

That attention is drawn to the inner standing point through surprise, which by definition runs contrary to convention. The use of unexpected ways of seeing the body, such as the peculiar posture of Mary in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, exemplifies what Helsinger calls an "act of attention." Mary's shrinking away from Gabriel contrasts starkly with the typically radiant way she is portrayed in Renaissance art of the Annunciation, and that difference is what calls the attention to her inner life. By way of contrast, in a conventional or unremarkable Victorian painting or poem, the narrative is firmly rooted in an outer standing point—take Augustus Egg's triptych *Past and Present* as an example. Such a work shows what is familiar and expected; it may be technically proficient, but it fails to make a transformative impression.

The genius of Rossetti and Morris lies in how they control their audience's perception of the body. They begin with surprise, forcing the audience to see their work first from an inner standing point. Once the shock of the unexpected wears off, the artist cues<sup>13</sup> the audience to familiar features—seen through the lens of the outer standing point—but with a new awareness of their conventionality. As a result, the reader/viewer thinks about those conventions themselves and reassesses them critically and

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<sup>12</sup> Parallel to the film analogy, Scarry describes how a writer's words are like instructions on the page that cue the reader to enact a performance in the imagination. Scarry's theoretical approach will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>13</sup> I use the word "cues" here in part to anticipate the discussion of habits later in this introduction.

objectively—or even replaces those conventional Victorian ways of thinking with the Pre-Raphaelite idea of the body.

For Rossetti and Morris, narrative gaze controls the other six corporeal categories. The second category is limbs and other parts of the body that are privileged—for example, the long neck in Rossetti’s painting *Proserpine* or the repeated hand imagery in Morris’s poem “The Haystack in the Floods.” Paired with privileged body parts is the third corporeal category: clothing and drapery that hides, disguises, or de-emphasizes particulars about the body. An example is the flowing clothes in Rossetti’s *Astarte Syriaca* that obscure the body and sexuality of the fertility goddess. Repetition of privileged or hidden body parts within a work or across works (for example, the long necks frequently found in Rossetti’s paintings) draws attention to the physical.

The fourth corporeal category is the use of color, which can intensify and highlight the body, whether the hues are pale or vivid, or even absent. Naturally, an emphasis on color is particularly useful in analyzing the visual, but it is also fruitful for poetry as well. Helsinger describes how Morris uses color to achieve what she calls “lyric intensity” (10), particularly in the collection of poems called *The Defence of Guenevere*. An emphasis on color might appear to be an overreach for discussing the printed word because of the complexity of color as perceived by the eye rather than the ear, but color is actually a powerful signifier. Helsinger argues that it is the “relations among colors, or between color and its absence” that Morris uses to “explore the erratic space and time of a lyric poem” (xii). Thus, while the emphasis shifts when discussing color in paintings and poems, it remains a compelling category.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh corporeal categories—gesture, posture, and facial expression—also defamiliarize the body. An example of gesture is how Morris's titular *Guenevere* (also called *La Belle Iseult*) moves her hands to fasten her belt, an action that shows her taking possession of herself taking responsibility for her sins with Launcelot. An example of posture is the fallen woman in Rossetti's *Found*, as she slumps away from the male figure in shame. Finally, facial expression is influenced by the angle from which the body is seen; a direct or head-on view contrasts with a side view or even the back of the head. In Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*, the damozel's facial expression as she leans out from heaven indicates longing and excitement for her love still on earth.

These last three categories are loosely linked as the most detailed ways of looking at the body. Codell explains that Pre-Raphaelite painters in general use these last three categories to emphasize "the inner life of the figures" (264). Codell, then, sees that these three categories in particular help bring the audience to an inner standing point. While Codell discusses Pre-Raphaelite art, the poems, especially Rossetti's, are often trickier and filled with ambiguous, liminal figures full of "inner life." That ambiguity also serves at times to emphasize the "more distanced, critical aesthetic perspective based in a modern present" (Helsing xii) that is the hallmark of the outer standing point. Furthermore, narrative gaze controls the other six categories of analysis in an almost symbiotic relationship. It certainly controls what we see at the inner standing point, but the details found in the other six categories lead the audience for Pre-Raphaelite work to change the narrative gaze itself from an outer standing point. In other words, while the artist privileges narrative gaze as his way of slowly unfolding what the audience sees at the inner standing point and later, after surprise, the outer standing point, it is the details

seen in the final six corporeal categories that lead to a change in how the audience thinks about the work. Narrative gaze is then changed through those details, especially when looking at the work from that “distanced, critical [...] perspective.”

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The structure of this project mirrors my own experience for two reasons. First, my own discovery of the Pre-Raphaelites began with their paintings and then continued to their poetry. For the general audience, Rossetti and Morris may be more widely known as artists than as poets, and it is revealing to see them together. Secondly, my recent scholarly focus has included the corporeal categories for analyzing the representation of the body, and these categories are rooted in sensory experience. Their application is simpler in a visual medium, so starting with painting is the most logical structure. The chapters about Morris’s and Rossetti’s poetry build on visual analysis while expanding the complexity of the corporeal categories.

In structure, I will begin with the context of Victorian painting in Chapter 2, showing how Rossetti and Morris fit into and react to the representation of the body in their contemporary visual art, especially the style of the Royal Academy. A selection of conventional Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite art is followed by Morris’s *La Belle Iseult* (also known as *Queen Guenevere*) and major works by Rossetti—*Ecce Ancilla Domini*, *Found*, and *Proserpine*. Chapter 3 is a critical transitional chapter that translates my central argument from art into poetry through a discussion of paired works—that is, paintings and poems created on the same subject and, for Rossetti, often accompanying

each other. The major pairs are Rossetti's *Astarte Syriaca* and its accompanying sonnet, *The Blessed Damozel* and its longer poem, and Morris's *La Belle Iseult* and his poem "The Defence of Guenevere." This chapter introduces how the corporeal categories work in poetry, setting up the analysis of the literature in the second half of the dissertation. The focus in Chapters 4 is Morris's poetry, with particular attention to "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire," "The Haystack in the Floods," and "King Arthur's Tomb." Finally, Chapter 5 analyzes the Rossetti poems "The Blessed Damozel" independent of the painting, "For a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione," and "Jenny." Emphasizing the close reading of corporeal elements in painting and poetry helps to trace Victorian habits of thinking about the body and how they relate to ways of representing the body creatively. This process will highlight and analyze the ways in which Rossetti and Morris subtly transform conventional Victorian habits of viewing the body.

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To understand the transformation that comes from the work of Rossetti and Morris, it is important to understand the prevailing Victorian idea of the body. The mainstream Victorian habit of thinking about the body was generally to respond negatively: the body was dirty, shameful, sinful, and not a topic for polite society. Queen Victoria's conservatism surely played its part. In *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism*, J.B. Bullen further establishes the negative ways of thinking about the Pre-Raphaelite body by examining the cultural reaction to Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism at the time. He chooses to "focus on the language which has been developed to account for the representation of the body" by Victorians

themselves rather than by more modern critics. He finds nineteenth-century social concerns by “deconstructing [Victorian] responses to images of the ‘Pre-Raphaelite body’ in both painting and literature in order to reveal underlying stresses and neuroses which were not, strictly speaking, pictorial or even aesthetic in their origins” (5). Bullen concentrates on the heightened language of physical and mental distress, hysteria, and unease which Pre-Raphaelite art seemed to trigger.<sup>14</sup> He examines the language of disease and deformity that was used to describe Pre-Raphaelite paintings, finding cues in public health and sanitation debates. Especially with Rossetti, he finds psycho-sexual anxiety almost everywhere, but often it can be traced to the concerns of the age—the anxiety is not necessarily specific to Rossetti.

Having established the frequently negative Victorian idea of the body, I turn to the question of how Rossetti and Morris change that habitual way of thinking. To explain briefly the fascinating science behind habit formation and habit change, I build on the work of Charles Duhigg, an investigative reporter for *The New York Times* who wrote *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (2012).<sup>15</sup> Duhigg’s central argument is that habits, defined as “the choices that all of us deliberately make at some point, and then stop thinking about but continue doing, often every day,” can indeed be changed (xvii). Duhigg compares the human brain to an onion, with primitive

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<sup>14</sup> While Bullen uses Victorian responses and analyzes the language used, he is not simply a textual detective. He relies heavily on Freud and Foucault in a primarily psychoanalytic reading of those documents.

<sup>15</sup> While Duhigg is not an academic, his in-depth research is thorough and has earned him a Pulitzer Prize. *New York Times* reviewer Timothy D. Wilson notes Duhigg’s credibility in his review of *The Power of Habit*: “Duhigg has read hundreds of scientific papers and interviewed many of the scientists who wrote them, and relays interesting findings on habit formation and change from the fields of social psychology, clinical psychology and neuroscience. This is not a self-help book conveying one author’s homespun remedies, but a serious look at the science of habit formation and change” (Wilson).

structures like the basal ganglia near the center, and more complicated layers added around the outer edges (30). The basal ganglia is found in less developed animals' brains as well; experiments on rats, for example, reveal the same patterns of habit formation and change that people do. Case studies of people with damage to the basal ganglia indicate that even if they lose the ability to store long-term memories, they can create new habits of behavior that they are not even aware of.<sup>16</sup>

What Duhigg calls the “habit loop” has three simple steps (Figure 1), which can be visualized as a circle or oval.

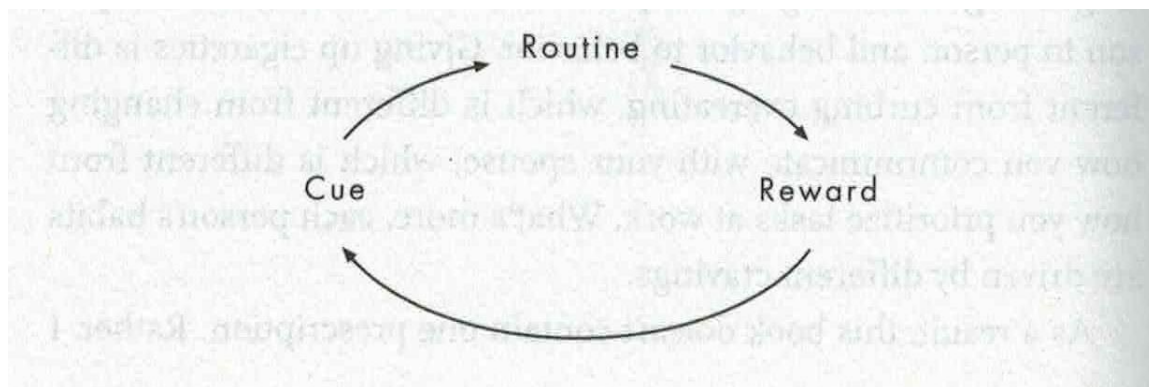


Figure 1: General Habit Loop (Duhigg 288)

<sup>16</sup> Duhigg tells the story of such a man, Eugene, who suffered such brain damage. Eugene could remember his life prior to the trauma, but he lost the ability to remember anything for longer than about a minute. There were days when he would get out of bed to make bacon and eggs, then return to bed and play with the radio—then repeat the same process less than an hour later. To keep him healthy, Eugene’s wife started taking him on a walk along the same route in their neighborhood each day. He developed a habit, stored deep in his basal ganglia: walk the same path, collect souvenirs like pinecones along the way, and return to watch television. One day when she was in another room, he unconsciously repeated the habit and went for a walk by himself—frightening his wife. Frantic, she ran outside to look for him. Eventually she returned home, only to find Eugene watching the History Channel, his hands sticky with pinecone sap. He had no memory of leaving the house, and could not even say where he lived; nonetheless, his basal ganglia had stored the pattern of the walk and allowed him to repeat the same actions (10-12). He did not have to know or remember what he was doing; he did it simply because the behavior had become ingrained.



First, there is a cue, “a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use.” Second, there is a routine, “physical or mental or emotional,” the actual behavior that is repeated in the habit. Third, there is a reward, which “helps your brain figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future” (19). Every habit, no matter how complex, involves these three components. Duhigg gives an example of the habit loop from the early 1900s, when Claude Hopkins was advertising Pepsodent to an American public resistant to tooth-brushing (Figure 2).

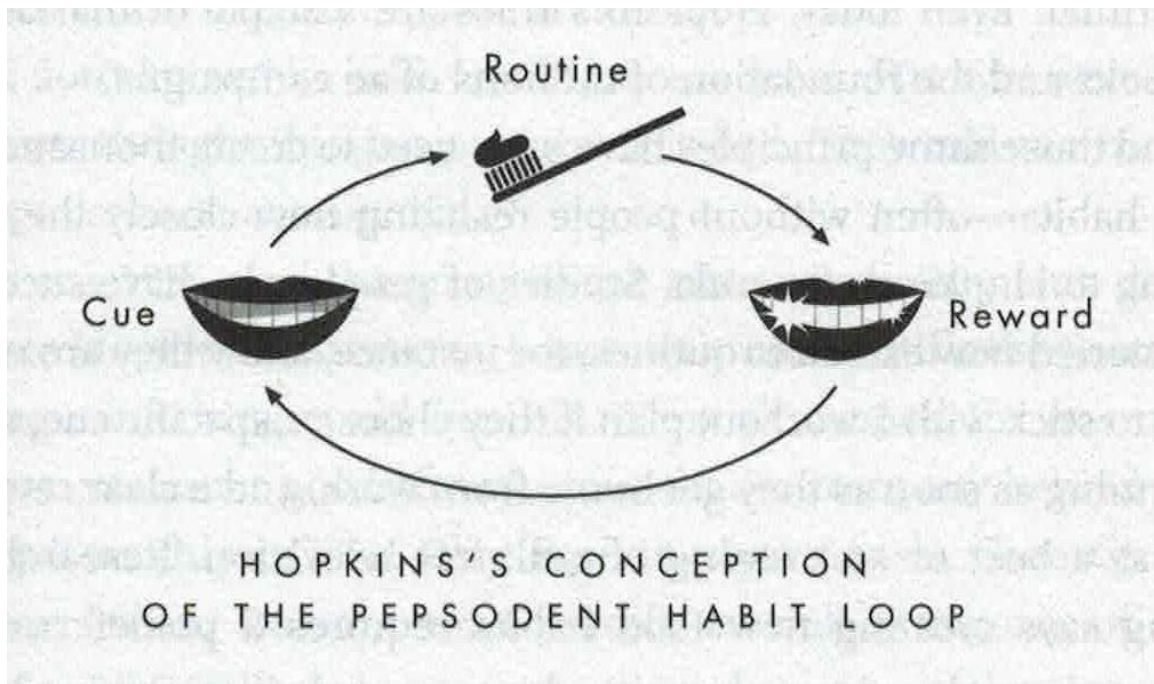


Figure 2: Hopkins's Conception of the Pepsodent Habit Loop (Duhigg 35)

He discovered that people noticed a film on their teeth when they had not brushed—that became the cue. The routine was brushing their teeth with Pepsodent. The reward was the minty, tingly feeling after brushing, which felt clean and pleasant. People began to crave that reward, so they brushed with Pepsodent and sales soared (31-5). The process

became a repeating loop as customers anticipated the minty, tingly feeling and the clean teeth that it signified.

Habits become permanent when they play on this craving and build a sense of anticipation. As Duhigg puts it, “The cue, in addition to triggering a routine, must also trigger a craving for the reward to come” (51). Habits can devolve into addictions—drinking, smoking, gambling, and so on—quite easily because they “never really disappear” (20); the same pattern of cue, routine, and reward remains in the primitive parts of the brain, which “stops fully participating in decision making” (20). New habits can, in effect, be written over old habits, but the old habits do not simply disappear. That is why people with addictions can relapse: they sometimes revert to old habits in the face of a familiar cue. Habits are a double-edged sword: they allow people to perform mundane tasks without having to engage valuable brain power,<sup>17</sup> but they also can lead to bad or undesirable behavior.

Changing those undesirable habits is possible through what Duhigg calls the “Golden Rule of habit change.” The rule is this: “If you use the same cue, and provide the same reward, you can shift the routine and change the habit. Almost any behavior can be transformed if the cue and reward stay the same” (62). Old habits can never be extinguished (62), only replaced. For example, a smoker who feels a craving for a cigarette usually has to substitute a different routine when hit with the craving to smoke.

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<sup>17</sup> Duhigg cites a 2006 study that “found that more than 40 percent of the actions people performed each day weren’t actually decisions, but habits” (xvi). That includes simple morning routines of showering and eating, and more complex ones like driving to work. If people find themselves at work without remembering the details of how they drove there, it is because they have written the complicated pattern—accelerate when the light turns green, brake at the stop sign, turn into the parking lot, and so on—into their basal ganglia. Occasionally, instead of driving to the grocery store, surprised people find themselves on the way to work.

Maybe the reward is social—talking with friends during a break. In that case, when the cue appears and the desire for talking with friends becomes strong, the smoker can substitute a different routine by socializing indoors. It is not quick or easy to rewrite the habit loop, as addictions show, but it can be done.

In the context of Victorian England, habits are a powerful way of understanding the conception of the body. Because the science of habits is relatively recent, there are no nineteenth-century writers using Duhigg's language. Nonetheless, we can hypothesize about the habit loops driving the Victorians. In Duhigg's terms, when polite Victorians were faced with a cue of a body, their routine was to denigrate it, to devalue it, and to denounce it. The reward part of the habit loop requires some speculation. It is quite likely that at least part of the reward was the benefits of social conformity—a self-righteous feeling of belonging to the “good” people who concerned themselves with matters of the mind and soul rather than the body. If so, then to follow the Golden Rule of habit change, the Pre-Raphaelites had to maintain the same cue and reward while substituting the routine. When faced with a body in a poem or painting, the reader or viewer had to experience some sort of pleasant social conformity as a reward.

The difficult task Rossetti and Morris undertake, then, is to encourage social conformity to the radical idea that the body is natural, active, dynamic, and worth seeing as it is—the body for the body's sake, to riff on the Aesthetic Movement's mantra of art for art's sake. Directly pushing this idea would backfire on a hostile audience like Buchanan. Instead, Rossetti and Morris lead their readers and viewers through a series of steps that will lead them to change their habit loop, either subconsciously or as if it were their own idea. Starting with surprise, the audience sees the defamiliarized poems and

paintings from the inner standing point. Then the other corporeal categories work together to make the Pre-Raphaelite body seem preferable and normal, as if the audience is associating itself with the figures seen from the inner standing point. If the readers and viewers take the time to think critically from the outer standing point, they will re-examine the now-strange conventions of their former routine. When enough people in the habit loop substitute a favorable reaction instead of Victorian disgust for the body, they can experience the same reward as before: a pleasant social conformity, just to a different societal norm. How well Rossetti and Morris succeed in their enterprise will be explored in the following chapters.

## Chapter II – Painting

Before the PRB, the prevailing style in Victorian painting, especially of the body, as opposed to landscape, was based on 18<sup>th</sup> century Royal Academy portraits. Conventions are a form of habit, not interchangeable but certainly related. Given the Duhiggian cue of an Academy-approved Victorian body, the routine is seeing an idealized form that does not offend, and the reward is conformity to social and artistic norms. The Academy, in a sense, represents a monolithic, institutionalized habit loop: bodies that fit the Academy style are appropriate cues, producing polite routines of artistic appreciation and resulting in a group mentality few mainstream artists and critics stray from. A different habit loop, whether it is offered by the Pre-Raphaelites or anyone else, is a threat to the stability of the Academy's habits.

In this chapter, I take the seven corporeal categories outlined in Chapter 1—namely narrative gaze, privileged body parts, hidden body parts, color, gesture, posture, and facial expression—and apply them to a series of paintings with prominent human figures to see how the Pre-Raphaelites change the Victorian habit loop about the body. The works analyzed begin with the 18<sup>th</sup> century Royal Academy influence of Reynolds and Gainsborough that still permeated Victorian art in the 1840s and 1850s, then proceed to a typically didactic Victorian triptych by Augustus Egg, tracing the rigid, formal, constrained, and static style of conventional art of the body in the early Victorian era. The chapter then shifts to the Pre-Raphaelite response to established habits of representing and reacting to the body, showing how the Pre-Raphaelites—starting with Hunt and Millais before moving to Morris and Rossetti, the central creative forces in this

dissertation—usher in a bold, confident style of painting that emphasizes naturalness, informality, freedom, and dynamism.

To understand the Pre-Raphaelite body and how the habit loop of thinking about it in the Victorian era changed, we need points of comparison, starting with conventional art from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which favors an outer standing point. An early example of the Royal Academy style was Figure 3, 1775's *Miss Bowles* by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), who was something of a *bête noire* for the Pre-Raphaelites.<sup>18</sup> In terms of this dissertation's corporeal categories, the titular young girl is the focus of the picture as she locks eyes with the viewer. The painting privileges her face and arms while covering the rest of her body in a stiff and formal dress that contains elaborate folds in the outer layer.<sup>19</sup> Dark greens and blacks fade into the outdoor background, effectively framing the contrast of her bright, light-colored garments. She appears happy but unsettlingly vacant, her personality muted: her large eyes, sharp chin, and tiny mouth give her a doll-like appearance. Both she and the dog she holds stare straight outward, making eye contact directly with the viewer—but it is a formal, distant connection. While technically proficient, it is a conventional portrait: formal, rigid, static, and confined. I look at *Miss Bowles* and feel compelled to move on; nothing in the picture arrests me or invests me in the scene or the young girl's thoughts. I maintain a distinctly outer standing point. Lacking the surprise that brings us to the inner standing point, the portrait gives no reason

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<sup>18</sup> In fact, Rossetti refers to Reynolds pejoratively as “Sir Slosua,” or “Slosh” for short, in his letters. He explains that “Slosh” is “the monosyllable current amongst us which enables a PRB to dispense almost entirely with details on the subject” (Fredeman 655) when expressing his disdain for Reynolds. Marsh indicates that the “Sir Slosua” moniker was coined by Millais (17).

<sup>19</sup> Reynolds does effectively represent the cloth and stitching, although it still lacks the typical detail of Pre-Raphaelite paintings by Millais and others.

to critically examine its conventions or change the habit loop for viewing the body. Reynolds gives us a comfortably familiar but unchallenging painting.



Figure 3: *Miss Bowles* (Reynolds); Wallace Collection, London<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See the Appendix for details on the rights of all images used in this dissertation.

Another Royal Academy painter whose style was still emulated during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788). Figure 4, his 1785 painting *The Morning Walk*, exemplifies the conventions of the time and the outer standing point that comes with them. In this picture, also occasionally referred to by the names of the couple shown, Mr. and Mrs. William Hallett take a leisurely stroll through a nature setting, a friendly white dog trotting alongside and looking up at the couple. As in Reynolds's *Miss Bowles*, the presence of the dog is a symbol of status: this is a couple with money for fine clothing and a pet, as well as the time for walks through the woods. Their finery, from the woman's elaborate hat and dress to the man's jacket and apparent wig, serves to stress that the couple is generically well-to-do, but they do not much stand out from other portraits in the same style. In fact, their posture carries an air of studied conventionality: he pauses mid-step, carefully holding his hat in one hand and cocking his other elbow to allow his wife to take his arm; she does so while stiffly maintaining her height. They seem indifferent to the dog as well as the viewer, glancing away from all eyes. All the details of the painting unite to make Mr. and Mrs. Hallett objects to be seen from outside their world, while they maintain their distance.<sup>21</sup> While the man's unbuttoned jacket implies a certain casualness in formal standards, the viewer is not invited to join the couple or to see things from an inner standing point. After examining the bodies in the picture, the eye then moves to the natural landscape; and the light colors of the woman's dress quickly blend in to the dog's fur and the bright clouds on the left. As with Reynolds, Gainsborough preserves the static conventions of formal portraiture: the

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<sup>21</sup> Perhaps because of distance, and except for the gauze over her arm, the treatment of fabric/stitching is less "skillful" than Reynolds.



viewer looks *at* the figures but does not interact *with* them. Without surprise, the audience is not led to critically examine the outer standing point.



Figure 4: *The Morning Walk* (Gainsborough); National Gallery, London

Academy art did change with time, of course. The rigid and stylized days of the 18<sup>th</sup> century passed, although their echo was still felt in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1840s, conventional Victorian art was often didactic, serving to instruct the moral character as well as please the eye. The triptych *Past and Present* (1858) by Augustus Egg<sup>22</sup> (1816-1863) is a touchstone for didactic and topical Victorian art, which generally might be called “unrealistic” insofar as it depicts conventional character types who fit a

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<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, Egg was a friend of Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt, although their circles were largely separate. Egg was a member of a group of artists known as The Clique, which frequently opposed what it saw as Pre-Raphaelite primitivism and eccentricity. The Clique also tended to paint genre paintings rather than conform to the Academy style. However, genre paintings have their own conventions and habit loops against which the Pre-Raphaelites rebelled.

moralistic narrative, rather than dynamic individuals. Figure 5 takes place in the past and suggests the origin of the rest of the triptych's desolation, while Figures 6 and 7 are concurrent in that present.



Figure 5: *Past and Present*, No. 1 (Egg); Tate Britain, London



Figure 6: *Past and Present*, No. 2 (Egg); Tate Britain, London



Figure 7: *Past and Present*, No. 3 (Egg); Tate Britain, London

As Lionel Trilling and Harold Bloom describe the three paintings, the series

deals with the highly sentimentalized Victorian theme of the fallen woman, here shown in a bourgeois version of the more dynamic and mythologically powerful Rossettian prostitute. The adulteress is an upper middle-class mother; her infidelity is discovered in picture I, while her daughters are only distracted from building their house of cards (such is the instability of the family when threatened by sexual passion) by their mother's collapse. The paintings on the wall are of the Expulsion from Eden and of a shipwreck. Pictures II and III (now a decade later, in the present) are supposed to be simultaneous (note the configuration of moon and cloud), showing the motherless and miserable girls and, elsewhere in London by a bridge near the Strand, the fallen mother as she clutches to her unwarming bosom a young child, another mark of her infamy. The "reading" of the narrative and emblems in pictures like this and Holman Hunt's *The Awakened* [sic]

*Conscience* was frequently aided, in exhibition, by descriptive catalogues and commentary. (picture inset no. 7)

The sequence, then, clearly warns against the adulterous path of the mother. But these are stock characters—the adulteress, the husband, and the suffering daughters—whose story is told more prominently through the objects around them than through a depiction of their *bodily* individuality. Trilling and Bloom point to the house of cards, the paintings on the wall, the night sky, and the bridge as significant, but they largely ignore the details of the figures.<sup>23</sup> In effect, the people in the triptych become no different from the objects around them. They exist as flat objects to tell a story, not as the dynamic individuals we will see in Pre-Raphaelite art.

The representation of the figures in Egg's *Past and Present* reinforces the didactic conventions of the Victorian body and its habit loop. In terms of corporeal categories, in the first picture, detailing the past, the mother slumps across the floor in a diagonal posture of shame. She hides her face from her husband as well as from the viewer. Positioned at the bottom of the painting, her figure is below eye level, forcing the viewer to look down at her literally and figuratively. Her arms stretch out, hands clenched tightly as if pleading for forgiveness, with her face obscured and her body turned away from her husband. This supplication seems directed out at the world in general. In contrast with the bright red walls and tablecloth, the vibrant green floor, or one daughter's bright pink and blue dress, the mother wears relatively drab clothing: the brown skirt particularly foreshadows the muddy colors of the final picture, and a light-colored blouse with a few hints of red—perhaps the color of adultery. Moving to other

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<sup>23</sup> These objects contrast with Hunt's in *The Awakening Conscience*, discussed shortly: Egg's symbolic objects dominate the paintings, whereas they are relegated to the background for Hunt.

figures in the room, the husband's left hand clutches the partially crumpled note that presumably has just informed him of her infidelity, while his right hand is clenched in a fist. Although he slumps in his chair under the weight of the news, his face appears strangely blank. On the far left, one daughter continues to play dangerously with the house of cards, while the other looks at her mother. She has the same doll-like appearance as *Miss Bowles*, her small, flat mouth betraying no emotion. From position and gesture through color and facial expression, the first of Egg's pictures, representing the past, bespeaks the didactic conventions of Victorian painting.

The two pictures showing the present continue to develop the conventional themes of the first picture, illustrating the downfall of the family. Grown up now, the two daughters are the only figures of the second picture. One, dressed in a full-length dark dress, connoting grief and mourning, sits up straight in a chair, gazing out the window. The other daughter, dressed in a shapeless gown of a contrasting light color, crouches on the floor, her head in her sister's lap. Their hands touch, but it is clear that their mother's absence pains them. Colors are difficult to distinguish: gone are the vibrant red, green, pink, and blue of their childhood home, replaced with dirty yellow and shadowy brown. The mother's picture contains similarly muted colors. She, too, wears large, shapeless, and drab clothing. Perhaps she is pregnant again, the result of a fallen woman's continued shame. As Trilling and Bloom note, she holds a young child, visible only by its small feet. In both pictures, the three women look out at the same sky, their facial expressions impossible to read because their heads are turned mostly away. Their sad and defeated postures indicate that they no longer belong in the world that existed before the triptych. The wife's infidelity is strongly implied to be the primary cause of

the husband's recent death.<sup>24</sup> Egg develops a narrative that the fallen women's shame has brought down her whole family and poisoned Victorian society at large.

Of course, the moralizing narrative Egg paints is nothing out of the ordinary for the Victorian period. Ruskin, one of the foremost social critics of the time, saw art as a wholly moral affair. But other artists approach the fallen woman differently: less from a position of superiority—as viewers are forced to look down literally on Egg's adulteress—than from a place of equality, or more precisely inquiry into the real individual wearing the scarlet letter.

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While *Past and Present* models the conventional Victorian fallen woman, Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt provides a strong, dynamic contrast with *The Awakening Conscience* (1853), seen in Figure 8. Whereas Egg's fallen woman slumps in the corners of her two pictures, relegated to a supporting role, Hunt immediately puts the focus on his leading lady and surprises us with her inner standing point. Even the title implies a dynamic, individual event; the woman's conscience is awakening *within* her—in contrast to the external events in Egg's triptych. Centered in the painting, Hunt's kept woman takes up a large portion of the canvas. In terms of corporeal categories, her prominent face and awkwardly clasped hands draw attention to her physical presence.

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<sup>24</sup> According to Frances Fowle at the Tate, "The set of pictures was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858 with no title, but with the subtitle, 'August the 4<sup>th</sup> - Have just heard that B - has been dead more than a fortnight, so his poor children have now lost both parents. I hear she was seen on Friday last near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been!'"



Figure 8: *The Awakening Conscience* (Hunt); Tate Britain, London



Indeed, her hands appear to be engaged in conventional hand-wringing (unlike her lover's hands, of only one is prominent). While four rings adorn her fingers, none is a wedding ring, implying an out-of-wedlock affair. She appears to have risen quickly from her lover's lap, her attention on something of interest outside the window, which can be seen reflected in the mirror behind her. But she is also starting up, as the wringing hands indicate, because of internal upheaval—the painting is about her awakening conscience, after all. Ruskin's analysis of the picture in *The Times* in 1854 shows how all the details work together to show her fallen state: "There is not a single object in all that room—common, modern, vulgar, but it becomes tragical, if rightly read" (qtd. in Casteras 140). For example, a cat toys with a dying bird on the floor, a clear metaphor for the woman's perilous situation.

Despite the similar didactic message that Egg and Hunt express, however, Hunt's fallen woman is much freer. Her conscience may be awakening, but her face does not register Eggian shame; instead, her expression is one of intense vitality. The viewer must look up to see her prominent face and eyes, effectively putting her above, in a superior position. The room is awash in colors: the bright greens, blues, and reds of the wallpaper and rug, the rich wood of the piano and furniture, the golden metallic borders of the framed picture, mirror, and window. Her white dress stands out among all the colors, and its elaborate embroidery shows a peculiarly Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail.<sup>25</sup> The corporeal categories in Hunt's painting combine to emphasize the dynamism, activity,

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<sup>25</sup> While Reynolds displayed more attention to detail in *Miss Bowles* than Gainsborough in *The Morning Walk*, both Academy artists' works pale in comparison to the lush and vibrant details Hunt brings to *The Awakening Conscience*. The Pre-Raphaelite attentiveness to detail and color, interestingly, in some ways undermines attempts to paint didactically. As the artist becomes minutely involved with a subject like a fallen woman, even the negatives can start to seem positive when rendered in so much detail. Familiarity can breed sympathy with Pre-Raphaelite subjects.

and individuality of the fallen woman. As we will see with other Pre-Raphaelite work, the viewer is drawn in through an inner standing point and gently guided to a reassessment of the outer standing point.

Another Pre-Raphaelite painter who contributes to the bending of artistic conventions and the re-writing of the habit loop surrounding the Victorian body is John Everett Millais (1829-1896). Among his paintings that include prominent female figures are *Isabella* (1849), *Mariana* (1851), *Ophelia* (1851-2), and *Autumn Leaves* (1855-6). For brevity's sake, I will focus on *Isabella* in Figure 9.<sup>26</sup> The painting has a literary subject; it is based on John Keats's 1818 poem "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil," itself an adaptation of a story in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. To understand Millais's version, let us briefly review the poetic source material. In the poem, Keats establishes the budding love between young Isabella and Lorenzo, who works for Isabella's merchant brothers. The jealous brothers judge Lorenzo unworthy of their family—they hope to marry Isabella to a wealthy nobleman instead—so they murder him in a nearby forest. The ghost of Lorenzo visits the pining Isabella in a vision, prompting her to dig up his body. She cuts off his head and places it in a pot of basil and waters it with her tears, wasting away as the plant thrives. Her brothers eventually steal the pot to see what makes it special; upon finding Lorenzo's head, they flee from Florence, driven by guilt and shame. Isabella dies, forlorn without her pot of basil and the love it represents. The poem proved popular for other painters as well, including Hunt (1868), John White Alexander (1897), and John William Waterhouse (1907). Pre-Raphaelite painters frequently reinterpret

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<sup>26</sup> Occasionally the painting is referred to as *Lorenzo and Isabella*, but I prefer the simpler and more common title.

older stories—here, Boccaccio and Keats—as they participate in what Helsinger calls “acts of translation,” which seek to recreate and renew their artistic medium.



Figure 9: *Isabella* (Millais); Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

In Millais’s interpretation—or act of translation—of the story, three supporting figures capture the viewer’s attention and illustrate that Isabella is the dynamic focus of attention. The first such figure is Lorenzo, the pink-clad man on the right-hand side, staring intently at Isabella, the woman in the foreground. While every other person in the picture is seen in profile, Lorenzo is fully turned toward the woman and the viewer, highlighting and privileging his face and intense gaze. His expression builds on the intensity of his eyes; his head tips down slightly, and he concentrates on Isabella beneath furrowed brows. As he offers her a plate of cut blood oranges, a symbol of his

decapitation in the poem, everything in his posture is directed toward her, especially his eyes, nose, and hands. While the bright color of his tunic distracts from Isabella, it makes the viewer look at all the lines of his body that concurrently emphasize how completely his attention rests on her. Through Lorenzo, Millais teaches his audience to read Isabella as the painting's focus. A second figure on the left of the painting, Isabella's angry brother who will murder Lorenzo, also literally points to Isabella. His large, muscular leg stretches horizontally across half the painting, his toe pointed at her like an arrow; he has just kicked a lanky dog. Even as the brother tips forward in his chair and peers intently at the nutcracker in his hands, the angular and awkward posture of his leg makes him stand out in a typically Pre-Raphaelite manner. A third figure, the dog, falls awkwardly onto Isabella's lap, having been kicked a moment before by Isabella's brutish brother. The dog's legs jut out diagonally, as if it is falling into her lap. Unlike the conventional canines in Reynolds's *Miss Bowles* or Gainsborough's *The Morning Walk*, Millais's dog stands out for its extreme thinness and awkward positioning. The unusual lines of the two men and the dog—indeed, all the significant diagonal lines in the painting, including the table's sharp edges—point to Isabella.

Isabella, then, is the focus of the picture, highlighted by the other figures, but she does not herself command as much attention as the two men who bracket her. Indeed, much about her is signaled through absence.<sup>27</sup> As such, while *Isabella* places less emphasis on the female body than other paintings analyzed in this chapter, it draws attention strongly to the body in general, both female and male. Isabella's dress, composed of folds, obscures much of her body, leaving visible only her hands, her head,

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<sup>27</sup> As we will see in Chapter 4, Morris uses the absence of color in his poems to similar effect.

and her characteristically long Pre-Raphaelite neck, which is often seen in the paintings of Rossetti and Morris. The length and shading of Isabella's bright, sunlit neck surprises because we might expect her to be covered like the women in paintings by Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Egg. Her long and severely braided hair stretches down the length of her back. Because the light originates behind her and she gazes toward the plate of oranges, her face lies in shadow. Indeed, once the surprise of the awkward bodies diminishes, Isabella herself is not as immediately interesting a figure as the men whose bodies point awkwardly toward her. However, the mystery of why she is so compelling to them makes her more intriguing. Maybe the answer will surprise us; the craving to know her better is central to seeing her inner standing point. In terms of the Pre-Raphaelite habit loop, that craving is also what drives the habit loop to repeat.

Millais's typical Pre-Raphaelite attention to even the smallest details of composition and design in *Isabella* anticipates the work of William Morris. Examples can be seen in the detailed wallpaper, the fabric and design of the clothing, and the "PRB" signature in the bottom right corner. In this early Pre-Raphaelite painting, the letters "PRB" on Isabella's seat serve as a signature for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The letters also form a meta-comment that breaks the verisimilitude of the work, in the style of some high medieval paintings that included the artist's signature—similar to Albrecht Dürer's monogram. Like Dürer and others in the high medieval and early Renaissance tradition, Millais here shows a degree of Pre-Raphaelite reflexivity, bringing current codes into a medieval situation.

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While one of the most striking things about Isabella is Millais's attention to detail, he is not the only Pre-Raphaelite with this focus. William Morris's most significant painting, *La Belle Iseult* (Figure 10), also known as *Queen Guenevere* (1858), is replete with extreme, Millais-esque detail in the dress, curtains, tapestry, and background objects. The painting is typical of Morris and anticipates the Arts and Crafts movement beginning later in the nineteenth century. Nearly every fabric in the picture, from the elaborate cloth covering on the table in the foreground to the richly colored tapestry in the background, exemplifies the characteristically Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail.



Figure 10: *La Belle Iseult* (Morris); Tate Britain, London

While Morris may be as interested in the details and patterns as he is in the titular woman, however, this dissertation's focus is the evolution of the Pre-Raphaelite

conceptions of such women.<sup>28</sup> For this project, *La Belle Iseult* stands as a sample of Morris's style and anticipates the detailed discussion of his poetry in Chapter 4.

Like many Pre-Raphaelite and medieval paintings, the entire canvas of *La Belle Iseult* is fraught with meaning. Ironically, Morris chose to paint his wife, Jane, as Guenevere, a role she embodied in her complicated and intimate relationship with Morris's close friend Rossetti. Filling the vertical space, Guenevere is the center of attention amid all the delicate background details. As she ties—or unties—a girdle around her waist, she gazes down at a mirror that reflects the detailed blue tapestry on the wall behind her. But this stereotypical female gesture suggesting vanity, which echoes the Lady of Shalott, also shows her reflexivity. Her eyes appear dark, and large creases are visible under her eyes and mouth. She does not smile; she appears lost in thought, her expression inscrutable. She appears in partial profile, in the distancing style of medieval portraits. Her neck angles sharply, like Isabella's or many of Rossetti's women, as if struggling under a tremendous weight. Perhaps her dark curls weigh her down, like the weight of hair in Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*—or perhaps her own awakening conscience. Given Guenevere's adulterous affair with Lancelot, the ruffled bed and unclasped girdle certainly imply infidelity. Combined with her elongated neck, her fingers appear stiff and unnatural, lending a mood of tension. The stiffness of her posture and her hands contrasts with the relaxation implied by undoing her girdle. Like the woman in Hunt's *Awakening Conscience*, she may be temporarily torn between her adultery and her conscience. The picture contains striking primary colors: reds and deep

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<sup>28</sup> An extended discussion of Morris's significant contributions to other artistic domains could occupy volumes.

blues that contrast with the stark white fabric of her dress and various cloths in the background. While the contrasts are not as sharply drawn as we will see in Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, Morris's primary colors develop the seemingly simple, medieval style. On the bed, a sleeping dog is curled in a ball; unlike the prominent dogs in paintings by Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Millais, however, Morris's dog blends into the background, a supplementary detail to the focus on Guenevere.

Like Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti in Figure 11, *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850), places striking emphasis on the female body.<sup>29</sup> The painting, whose title means "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," illustrates the Annunciation, the theological moment when the angel Gabriel informs the Virgin Mary that she will conceive a son to be named Jesus. The Annunciation was one of the most common subjects in European medieval and Renaissance paintings, often filled with puffy-winged angels, smiling cherubs called putti, and ecstatic or contemplative versions of Mary. Rossetti certainly knew the conventions of Annunciation art, and he invokes several in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* to establish an outer standing point: the arriving angel, here signaled not by wings but by his floating above the floor, flames surrounding his feet; the halos ringing the heads of Mary and Gabriel; and the lily in the angel's hands.

In contrast to more typical Annunciation scenes, however, Rossetti's picture emphasizes the awkwardness and strangeness of the moment from Mary's perspective. Rossetti counters the expectation that Mary will accept Gabriel's news as Luke's Gospel presents it. The surprising inversion, in which Mary reacts negatively to Gabriel as

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<sup>29</sup> The model for *Ecce Ancilla Domini* was the painter's sister, Christina Rossetti.





Figure 11: *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (Rossetti); Tate Britain, London

though she were the victim of assault, helps lead viewers to her inner standing point. Rossetti's Mary sits up, shrinking away from the angel who has suddenly appeared at her bed. Her posture radiates surprise and even fear: her legs are bent, drawn up slightly as if to protect herself. She shrinks against the wall, her left arm nearly hidden as she retreats and half turns away. Her neck is hidden as she pulls her head back into her shoulders. Not smiling, her face betrays discomfort. Lost in thought like Morris's Guenevere, her eyes are lowered to the proffered lily in grudging submission, as if she does not want to take the flower but has no choice. Gabriel gestures, holding out the lily with a muscular arm that indicates his power over her; the flower even points directly to her womb. Typically a symbol of purity, in this painting the lily is somewhat subversive: it has the effect of making Mary's experience seem ominous and unwanted. The sharp diagonal line of the flower contrasts with the otherwise straight vertical and horizontal lines of the tall angel, the bed, and indeed most of the room. Mary's right arm hugs her body strangely; it appears too long, reaching down well past her knee. The awkward arm further highlights the surprise in the painting that Rossetti uses to draw viewers in to the inner standing point.

Rossetti also employs color to emphasize the inner life and inner standing point of Mary. The painting contains stark primary colors—a red stand by the foot of the bed, a blue cloth hanging at the head of the bed, and yellow or gold both in the halos and in the flames surrounding Gabriel's feet. Each color in turn evokes religious visual tropes. Among other things, red indicates Christ's Passion, blue connotes the Virgin Mary,<sup>30</sup> and

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<sup>30</sup> In most Annunciation pictures, Mary typically wears blue, not white. Here, the fact that Mary is shown in her nightclothes underlines the symbolic invasion that has caused her fear.

yellow/gold signifies holiness. Even more than the primary colors, however, white dominates the scene. The clothing worn by Mary and Gabriel is all white; the proffered lily is white; the bed, walls, and floor are white. While the abundant white connotes virgin purity, it also effectively decreases the appearance of space, drawing in the focus more narrowly on the two figures. All the white makes Mary look paler and more nervous through lack of contrast. The narrative that results from all these details is that an already frightened young woman is being given disturbing news of her impending pregnancy—quite a different story from typical Annunciation art. Once the viewer grows accustomed to the shock of Mary’s dynamic inner standing point, seeing her from an outer standing point—by comparing typical treatments of the Annunciation to Rossetti’s—calls into question how Mary’s body is represented in a conventional Annunciation scene.

While *Ecce Ancilla Domini* focuses on a virginal figure, Rossetti’s painting of *Found* (begun 1853 or 1859, but never finished) in Figure 12 offers a fallen woman—but one with an inner life not seen in the moralistic pictures discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Casteras notes that *Found* was “the artist’s modern-life equivalent to the magdalen theme” (133), or the reformed prostitute. The female figure in the picture is the man’s former fiancée (133), shown in the “cowering physical and mental posture of the defiled woman” (133). She slumps away from the standing man, closing her eyes and hiding her face from him in shame. Her face may be the most striking feature of the painting: a ghastly shade of gray-green exudes defilement and sickness, whether of the body or soul. She slumps against a cemetery wall that Casteras argues “evokes the courting wall of a more innocent relationship as well as separates the living from the dead

while pointing up analogies between the two states of being” (135). It is, in part, this unnerving amalgamation of living and dead that draws the viewer to the inner standing point.



Figure 12: *Found* (Rossetti); Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington

If *Found* were in the moralistic style of the Royal Academy or Augustus Egg, it would be far different; however, *Found* is more than a simple, conventional, didactic narrative of a fallen woman. The painting requires us to consider the woman as an individual. The typical symbols of confinement are here—for example, the calf bound in a net and the rigid wall—but in this painting, the fallen woman stands out; the focus is on her. Rossetti's fallen woman stands out because of her shocking appearance. Egg's fallen woman could not be redeemed; the die was cast when she committed adultery. For Egg, the two pictures showing the present lack a male presence, as the husband/father has been separated from his family. The implication is that Eggian shame is irredeemable. Rossetti's fallen woman in *Found* may not be redeemed either, but her former fiancé literally grabs her wrists and attempts to lift her out of her low situation. In this regard, she is akin to the title character in Rossetti's poem "Jenny," while her fiancé may parallel the complicated narrator. Beyond simplistically showing the narrative arc of sin and punishment, as in Egg's *Past and Present*, Rossetti—like Hunt in *The Awakening Conscience*—requires his audience to consider the individual woman involved, as well as the larger societal issues of prostitution and its causes. After seeing the fallen woman as a dynamic individual through her inner standing point, the audience can then critically re-examine the outer standing point. Put another way, Rossetti is substituting a new habit loop: given the cue of a fallen woman, the routine changes. Instead of judging her as irredeemable as in Egg's habit loop, Rossetti would have us see the chance of redemption—the fiancé is at least attempting to save her.

Not all Rossetti paintings contain women at the common Victorian "extremes of femininity" (Casteras 12) as virgins or whores. In Figure 13, *Proserpine* (1874), one of

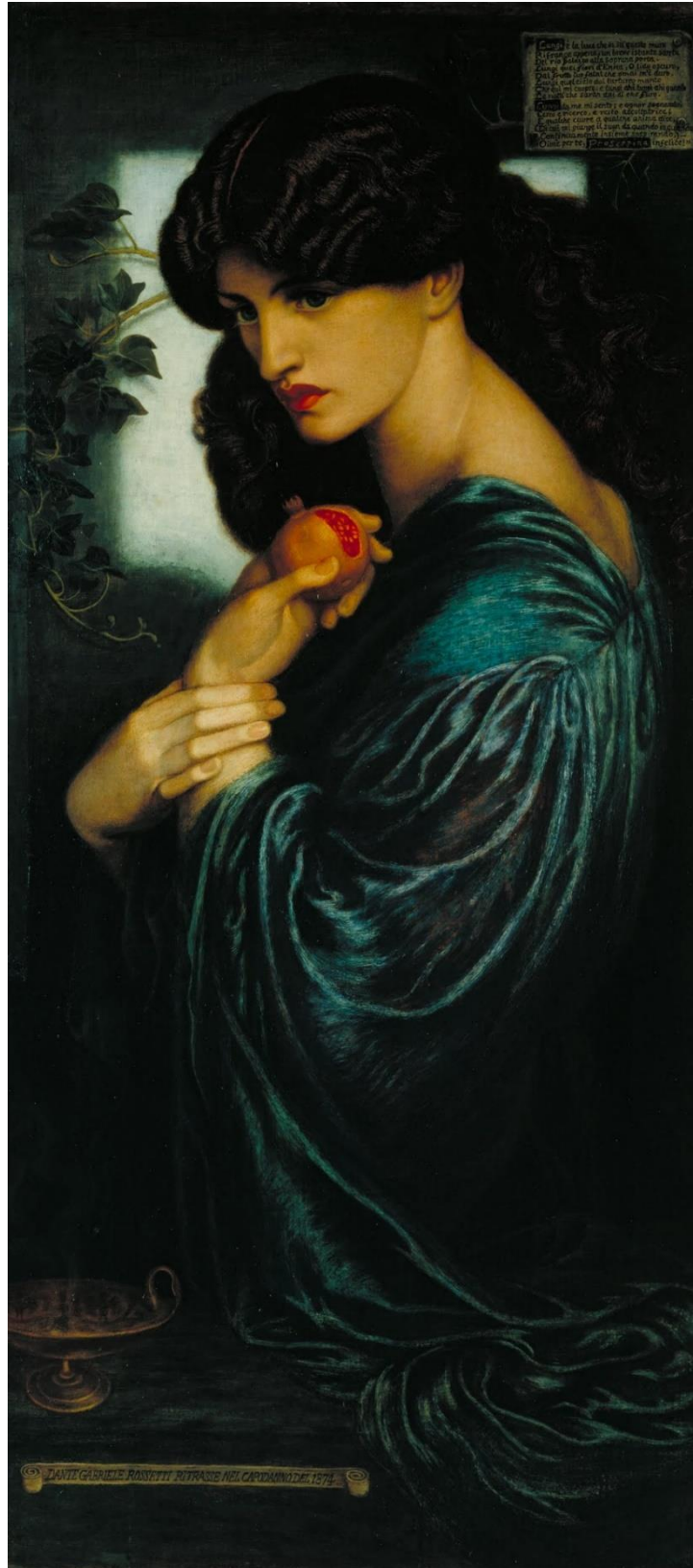


Figure 13: *Proserpine* (Rossetti); Tate Britain, London

the paintings that enchanted me at the Tate Gallery,<sup>31</sup> the woman is caught between two worlds. She is not entirely of this world or the underworld, and she exists somewhere between the extremes of femininity. The conception of the body is further transformed by her complicated, liminal figure—perhaps one caught between old habits and new. In the picture, a Rossetti sonnet composed in Italian fills the upper right corner and establishes themes of distance and woe that echo the mythological basis of the painting. Proserpine, the Roman equivalent of the Greeks' Persephone, was the daughter of Ceres. Pluto abducted her to the underworld to marry her and make her his queen. Jupiter interceded, striking a deal with Pluto to let her go if she had not eaten any fruit in the underworld. Because she had eaten several pomegranate seeds, however, she was forced to spend part of each year in the underworld with him, giving rise to Ceres's sadness and, consequently, the seasons. Rossetti's Proserpine brings out the beauty and tragedy of Jane Morris, the model for the painting, and their relationship. Jane was torn between her husband and her lover, as Proserpine was torn between Pluto and her earthly life.

Rossetti describes the painting:

She is represented in a gloomy corridor of her palace, with the fatal fruit in her hand. As she passes, a gleam strikes on the wall behind her from some inlet suddenly opened, and admitting for a moment the sight of the upper world; and she glances furtively towards it, immersed in thought. The incense-burner stands beside her as the attribute of a goddess. The ivy branch in the background may be taken as a symbol of clinging memory. (qtd. in Maxwell 36)

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<sup>31</sup> Rossetti painted eight versions of *Proserpine*. I am referring to the seventh, which was the 1874 copy housed in the Tate. The final oil painting was not completed until 1882. In addition, Rossetti made several pencil, watercolor, and chalk versions of *Proserpine*, collected at the Rossetti Archive, suggesting the importance of the painting to him.

All these symbols highlight Proserpine's liminal status, caught between life and death, summer and winter, virgin and whore. Like Rossetti's Blessed Damozel, she is realized as a physical presence between worlds.

In *Proserpine*, Rossetti brings viewers to the inner standing point through what I have pointed out Helsing calls acts of attention. In terms of corporeal categories, he privileges, for example, the long neck typical of his major figures, the voluminous dark curls<sup>32</sup> that Morris had played down in *La Belle Iseult*, the angular nose and chin, and the bright red lips. Furthermore, Proserpine's large hands clutch the partially eaten pomegranate in a strange, awkward posture: her left palm appears strangely puffy, while her right hand curls at an angle around her left wrist; her right pinky appears too short as well. Her eyes are also arresting: Rossetti describes her as "glanc[ing] furtively" at the "upper world [...] immersed in thought," and her cool blue eyes communicate that feeling of loss and distance. They contrast with the vacant, doll-like eyes of Reynolds's Miss Bowles, instead positioning Proserpine as a liminal figure, pausing between earth and underworld, thought and action, and inner and outer standing points. Proserpine exemplifies the Pre-Raphaelite emphasis on the eyes and face, which allows more individuation than conventional paintings like Egg's *Past and Present*, in which the fallen woman stands for an entire class of people. Just as the Pre-Raphaelites situate themselves on the threshold between convention and invention of the Victorian body, so too Proserpine's thoughtful look contributes to her liminality, and thus the re-conception of the body. In terms of the virgin/whore dichotomy, Proserpine falls between the

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<sup>32</sup> Her hair appears in different shades in different versions of *Proserpine*. The eighth and final version (1882) transformed Proserpine's hair from Jane Morris's dark shade to a striking auburn. I have chosen the version in Figure 13 to analyze because it is exhibited in the Tate and is the most commonly seen version.



extremes, but her sensuous lips and underworld associations may push her towards the fallen woman. Rossetti shifts Proserpine from a childlike role as daughter (of Ceres) to a more adult role as wife (of Pluto); the recognition that Proserpine is an adult woman reflects the Pre-Raphaelite project to reinterpret the Victorian body. Proserpine certainly has less in common with the awkward virgin Mary in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*.

Neither virgin nor whore, Proserpine is an enchantress, in the general manner of *Astarte Syriaca* and *The Blessed Damozel*, although the latter also occupies a complex in-between state, more in heaven than in hell.<sup>33</sup> Proserpine's aloof eyes stare away from, or even past, the audience, lost in thought like other Pre-Raphaelite women in this chapter. Proserpine's facial expression contributes to a general mood of pensiveness that captures the attention. Through this mood and through sensual details, Rossetti draws viewers into her inner standing point, making us wonder what she is thinking. We focus on her as an individual. No longer is she simply the captured mythological daughter or even the reluctant wife; instead, she is a unique woman, indulging her secret thoughts, portrayed alone, unaccompanied by other figures like Ceres or Pluto. By presenting us with Proserpine's partial inner standing point but not indicating what her mysterious thoughts are, Rossetti compels us to wonder about the possibilities and mull over what might be—in effect, we must attempt to flesh out what she is thinking and give body to her mind. To supply a narrative for her preoccupied thoughts, we look to the details of the painting, especially Proserpine's body. As with other Pre-Raphaelite art, when the surprise of the inner standing point wears off, we see Proserpine through the more distanced, critical

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<sup>33</sup> These two Rossetti paintings will be discussed in Chapter 3, as each has a corresponding poem that will be read alongside the painting.

lens of the outer standing point. Through this series of moves, Rossetti subtly steers his audience to see the body as it relates to Victorian convention, and ultimately his work demands that we appraise those conventions critically. Revised conventions give rise to a revised habit loop.

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Before concluding this chapter, let us reorient ourselves with respect to critics of Pre-Raphaelite art. Such critics help prove that paintings by Rossetti and Morris had the effect of revising the conventional Victorian habit loop about the body—and that the Pre-Raphaelites met with substantial resistance at first. Robyn Cooper, Julie Codell, and John Ruskin inform the following discussion of common criticisms of Pre-Raphaelite art, as well as a more detailed explanation of the ideal of a “return to nature” broached in Chapter 1.

In focusing on the contemporary response to Pre-Raphaelite painting of the late 1840s and 1850s (primarily by Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti), Robyn Cooper argues that the discussion about the relationship between the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Pre-Raphaelite painters and the earlier painters before Raphael “was neither clear nor straightforward” (405) for two main reasons. First, Pre-Raphaelite paintings contained ambiguous features, which were seen in contradictory terms as both archaic and naturalistic. Second, the style of Pre-Raphaelite paintings showed a “slightness of resemblance” (405) to the painters before Raphael, sometimes referred to as “primitives” (406).

Although the Pre-Raphaelite painters were seen as “reformers seeking to elevate and purify English art” (413), their pictures became controversial and aroused hostile critics in 1850 and 1851 for a number of reasons. The revelation that “PRB” on the paintings—as we see in *Isabella*—stood for “Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood” explicitly drew attention to older art. The apparent connection to the “primitives” smacked of revivalism or retrogression, associated at the time with medievalism, Young England, the Oxford movement, and Catholicism. The young painters were not attacked merely for copying the supposed style—“supposed” because other critics found little stylistic resemblance at all, preferring a comparison to Flemish and German painters rather than Italian—of the earlier artists; they were attacked further for copying the defects in the earlier art, in effect “reject[ing] all the progress made by art in the previous four-and-a-half centuries” (413). Other hostile critics, however, accused the Pre-Raphaelite painters of having copied too little from the earlier artists with whom they shared a name. In effect, the Pre-Raphaelites were accused of “perverting the pure art of the early masters” (424). According to such critics, then, either they copied the defects or they failed to copy what was excellent in the “primitives.”

One of the “most offensive” problems for these critics of the early Pre-Raphaelite paintings was the “unidealized figures” (421) that we have seen repeatedly in this chapter. Julie Codell explains that some early critics of the Pre-Raphaelite painters “found the body language deformed and grotesque, and the faces ugly, exaggerated, even caricatured” (255). An example of this complaint is the sickly face of the fallen woman in Rossetti’s *Found*. Clearly, the public was initially resistant to the Pre-Raphaelite body and the habit routine offered by its painters.

It was John Ruskin who helped to turn critics toward a more favorable view through an 1851 letter to *The Times*, along with a later written defense of Pre-Raphaelitism. He argued in essence that the Pre-Raphaelites were not imitators and had nothing to do with modern revivalism. Instead, he argued that the Pre-Raphaelites and the earlier masters were linked by “their passionate adherence to the truths of nature or of the incident they were representing” (qtd. in Cooper 428).

It is this idea of “nature” or what is “natural” that the Pre-Raphaelites used as a defense against their critics. If people naturally look unattractive, then painting them as they truly are is no sin. In fact, Codell explains, “[a]ttention to anatomical fact was fundamental to the PRB reaction against the theatricality of conventional painting” (255-6). Angular figures, sometimes of mundane people, mesh with this naturalistic approach. So, too, did the painters’ “preference for psychological characterization through the expressions and gestures of unprofessional models” (257). Such psychological characterization complements and highlights the inner standing point, as in Mary’s unmistakable aversion in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*.

To elaborate on Ruskin’s idea of “nature” or “the natural” as a central Pre-Raphaelite defense, we must consider more deeply what those terms mean. Cooper usefully divides “nature” into four distinct definitions in mid-nineteenth century art: referring first to “illusionistic techniques”; second, to the “artless (as opposed to the artificial)”; third, to the “individual and specific (as opposed to the general)”; and fourth, to a usually pejorative concern with the material world over the transcendent, especially the naked body (429). Cooper posits that when discussing a “return to nature,” Ruskin held the second and third of these definitions in mind: a seemingly artless simplicity, not

to be confused with childlike naivety; and a sense of the “exactitude of imitation of individual aspects of inanimate and human nature” (429). Ruskin found in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood a return not to “archaic *art*” but to “archaic honesty” (428). Later, Pre-Raphaelite painting came to be seen, in the 1859 words of Thomas Gullick, as a “protest against the conventionality into which the English school had fallen” (qtd. in Cooper 435). This “protest against ... conventionality” is central to the Pre-Raphaelite reconception of the body, as we have seen in the ways that Hunt, Millais, Morris, and Rossetti rebel against the examples of Reynolds and Gainsborough, and later Egg.

Codell locates a moral compass in Pre-Raphaelite painting’s protest against conventionality that strongly supports my argument. For example, “[t]he depiction of the body in transitional postures is consistent with the frequent theme in many PRB paintings of psychological or moral transformation” (264). Paintings like *Isabella* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* contain such transitional postures. Codell indicates that the PRB also played with scale to emphasize the “inner life of figures.” Enlarging the body, as in *The Awakening Conscience*, where the woman is centrally located and takes up much of the canvas’s vertical space, “emphasizes the face and consequently the character revealed through facial expression” (264). In rejecting conventional body language, the PRB “challenged the epistemology of painting by suggesting new sources of knowledge, both naturalistic and imaginative, for painters” (266).<sup>34</sup> Building on Codell, I argue that the “epistemology of painting” reveals a broader epistemology of culture: the Pre-Raphaelite

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<sup>34</sup> Codell traces numerous influences on the PRB painters. Hunt and Millais were particularly influenced by Sir Charles Bell’s *Anatomy*, in which Bell “argues for a new approach to anatomy aimed at expressiveness rather than beauty to develop an awareness of the unified interactions of body and mind” (269). Other subject interests included psychology; physiognomy; phrenology; and pathognomy, the study of fleeting emotion.

body is a new—or at least rediscovered, redefined, and reconceived—source of knowledge in Victorian England. The conventional body shows the road the culture had taken until the mid-nineteenth century, seen especially in Academy-style art; by contrast, the Pre-Raphaelite body indicates where the culture was headed.

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In this chapter, I have analyzed a series of paintings dated from the eighteenth century to the end of the Victorian era. I traced how seven corporeal categories—narrative gaze, privileged body parts, hidden body parts, color, gesture, posture, and facial expression—contribute to the Pre-Raphaelite reconceptualization of the Victorian body and the habit loops of thinking about it. I have focused on paintings to illustrate the corporeal categories, which are more readily traced in a visual medium. The paintings also establish themes that will resonate in the poetry of Morris and Rossetti, especially the naturalness, informality, freedom, dynamism, and psychological inner life<sup>35</sup> invested in the body, especially the female body. Taken together, the unique Pre-Raphaelite employment of the corporeal categories results in a focus on individuality—the uniqueness of the person on the canvas—and a sense of presence, especially through an inner standing point. The way the people, especially the women, are represented in the art of Morris and Rossetti is distinctly different from the conventional way the body was previously represented.

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<sup>35</sup> As discussed in *Iseult* and *Proserpine*, for example.

By transforming conventional portrayals of the body and offering an alternative habit loop, Morris and Rossetti may indeed establish what might be called a newly “conventional” Pre-Raphaelite body, with common characteristics. These characteristics include a focus on the inner standing point, awkward posture, and surprising or unattractive body parts. Real-life people are generally not like ideal models sitting for a painting: they have imperfections and inelegance that are part of human nature. In the Pre-Raphaelite re-conception, recognizing such flaws leads conversely to strength; art can exist for its own sake rather than for the purpose of meeting existing convention. As a precursor to the Aesthetic movement, the Pre-Raphaelite body illustrates Walter Pater’s controversial words in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*: “to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life” (319). For Pater and the Pre-Raphaelites, the habits of Victorian art meant failure because they snuffed out the “hard, gem-like flame.” Pater appears to depart from the Pre-Raphaelites, however; he argues that every moment should involve striving for perfection, so he would not approve of awkward bodies in art. The paradoxical Pre-Raphaelite move is to find Pateresque perfection *in* imperfection—or if not quite perfection, at least an ideal. I might call the concept “idealized imperfection.” Instead of the Academy’s dominant, but limited, portrayal of the body, the Pre-Raphaelites employ what Cooper refers to—channeling Ruskin—as the “artless” and the “natural.” Thus, Morris and Rossetti offer a competitive alternative to the usual Victorian portrayals, instead requiring viewers to reevaluate, and even replace, their ideas of the body.

### Chapter III – Linking Painting and Poetry

As discussed at the end of the previous chapter, the Pre-Raphaelite version of the Victorian body demonstrates an adaptation of Walter Pater’s ideal of intensity through what I am calling “idealized imperfection,” as well as what Robyn Cooper refers to as the “artless” and the “natural.” These same qualities found in paintings by Rossetti and Morris are also found in their poetry. The next logical path of further inquiry is to explore the Pre-Raphaelite body in works that address both the visual and the verbal arts. While the idea of illustrating one’s own literary output was certainly not new in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—William Blake springs to mind—the uniquely Pre-Raphaelite intensity found in the paintings of Rossetti and Morris also appears in their poetry. Before delving into Pre-Raphaelite poetry in Chapters 4 and 5, I want to explore here the important theoretical and practical links between the visual and verbal arts. This link is especially important for Rossetti and Morris, the Pre-Raphaelite masters of dual creativity.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I raised the question of why an artist chooses the written word or the painted canvas. I want to expand the question to include the mechanism for translating<sup>36</sup> one imaginative form to another. I will also explore how the seven corporeal categories contribute to a distinctly Pre-Raphaelite understanding of the Victorian body in the dual forms of painting and poetry by narrowing the discussion to paired works: specifically Rossetti’s *Astarte Syriaca* and its accompanying sonnet, *The*

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<sup>36</sup> Translation is a significant concept for Helsinger. It works both literally, as with Rossetti’s translations of Dante from the Italian, and figuratively, as with ekphrastic criticism that connects the poetic and the visual.



*Blessed Damozel* and its longer poem, and Morris's *La Belle Iseult* (also known as *Queen Guenevere*)<sup>37</sup> and his poem "The Defence of Guenevere."

To help address these issues of translation from one medium to another, and better to understand the connection between painting and poetry for the Pre-Raphaelites, I will employ the ideas of reader-response critic Elaine Scarry to deepen the analysis of the seven corporeal categories and habit loops. In "On Vivacity: The Difference between Daydreaming and Imagining-Under-Authorial Instruction," Scarry explains how the written word prompts readers to enact a performance in the mind, and I will explain her relevant ideas before applying them to the paired Pre-Raphaelite works in this chapter. For Scarry, words on a page are, in a sense, instructions or a blueprint the reader follows to construct something in the imagination.<sup>38</sup> In terms of a Duhiggian habit loop, the cues are the written words on the page, the routine is the process of translating those words into the imagination, and the rewards are (among other things) comprehension and enjoyment.

While any poet relies on the reader's habitual mechanism of translating the written word into the imagination, the process is complex and important in understanding

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<sup>37</sup> Lynne Pearce details the history of the painting's title: "John Christian in the TGC accounts for the mixed attribution thus:

The records speak of three oil paintings that Morris worked on, and they have often been confused. In addition to no. 94 [*Guenevere*] there were two stories inspired by the story of Tristram and Iseult. . . . He chose another incident from it for his contribution to the famous murals illustrating Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* that Rossetti and his followers painted in the Oxford Union in 1857; and in fact no. 94 has sometimes been called 'La Belle Iseult', thereby adding to the confusion between Morris's easel paintings. All the earlier records, however, refer to the subject as 'Guenevere', King Arthur's Queen whose adultery is one of the central themes of the *Morte D'Arthur*. (p. 169)

Christian adds: 'In a sense the title of the picture is unimportant since it is essentially a portrait in medieval dress of Jane Burden, whom Morris married in 1859' (p. 170)," although Pearce takes issue with the term "portrait" in this context (127).

<sup>38</sup> With a touch of mythological whimsy, Scarry puts it this way: "the verbal arts at every moment address the reader as a Hephaestus who is to undertake an explicit work of construction" ("On Vivacity" 19).

the relationship of the verbal and visual for Rossetti and Morris. With a paired poem and painting, the poem indicates what we should “see” as we read. Given the accompaniment of a physical painting, we can compare what the artist-as-painter shows us visually to what the artist-as-poet describes in the verbal text—or, in Scarryian language, what the poet instructs us to re-enact in our mind’s eye.

To explain this mimetic process, Scarry analyzes how the words on a page can take the reader beyond simple or everyday imagination. As Scarry explains it, her purpose is to trace how “in the verbal arts [...] images somehow *do* acquire the vivacity of perceptual objects” (“On Vivacity” 2). In other words, she examines the problem of how literature can re-create—in the imagination—the process of perception in the material world. When done effectively, this re-creation takes readers from what Scarry terms “daydreaming” or “ordinary imagination,” in which mental images have a quality called “feebleness” by Aristotle and “essential poverty” by Sartre (qtd. in Scarry, “On Vivacity” 1), to a deeper kind of imagination. This second kind of imagination more closely approximates the “vitality and vivacity of the perceived” (“On Vivacity” 1). For Scarry, vitality and vivacity seem to have everyday definitions; thus, what I might call “true” or “vivid” imagination has a vividness of perception that ordinary daydreaming lacks.

Scarry argues that “imagination is an act of perceptual mimesis” (“On Vivacity” 3); it is, after all, a mental act rather than something inherent in the object. To be effective, vivid imagination must mimic “the deep structure of perception” (4). In other words, not just the “sensory outcome” of seeing is reproduced, but also the “actual structure of production that gave rise to the perception[;] that is, the material conditions

that made it look, sound, or feel the way it did” (4-5). For example, consider a tree. If a poet mentions an oak, the reader will have a hazy sense of how the tree might look, and that is the level of “daydreaming” or “ordinary imagination.” To achieve vivid imagination in the reader, however, the poet may describe the “material conditions” of perception, especially some or all of the five senses: perhaps the tree looks unusual, with a thin trunk and wispy branches like fingers; the wind rustling the leaves sounds like a song from childhood; or the bark feels sharp to the touch. Because the poet has copied the “deep structure of perception” by detailing the sensory input or “material conditions of perception” of a real tree, suddenly the imagined tree seems much more vivid.

Of the five senses, touch is the most challenging to reproduce in the imagination, Scarry claims. Creating a mimesis of solidity in a written text can effectively give readers an imagined object to “touch,” thereby helping them to achieve vivid imagination. An example from the corporeal categories in this dissertation is the multiple moments in Rossetti’s “Jenny” when the narrator feels the young woman’s head on his knee.<sup>39</sup> Given the importance of touch and the mimesis of solidity, the line of inquiry logically highlights the following question: How exactly does a writer create a seemingly solid surface in the reader’s imagination? Scarry details three main “solutions to the mystery of how the verbal arts enlist our own imaginations in mental actions that in their vivacity more closely resemble sensing than daydreaming” (“On Vivacity” 8). In other words, Scarry offers three general strategies for how a text can move closer to perceived experience.

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<sup>39</sup> In “On Vivacity,” Scarry offers an extended example of an imagined room that achieves a mimesis of solidity, complete with walls and a floor. While her example does not deal with the body, the impressive detail of Scarry’s description is instructive for readers wanting to know more.

The first strategy for moving a text closer to perceived experience is “the specification of the material antecedents of the perception to be produced” (8). As with the classical example of the shield of Achilles in *The Iliad*, or indeed all manner of ekphrastic literature, the objects present in the imagined scene must be identified. Logically, a “mimesis of perceptual acuity” (11) requires a previous description of the perceived object. There follows a step-by-step process of construction, almost a how-to guide to re-creating perception. We could, for example, reconstruct the perception of Millais’s painting *Isabella*, given a written description of the material objects: the walls, the people in the scene, the awkward dog, Isabella’s ornate dress, the food on the table, and so on.<sup>40</sup>

The second strategy for moving a text closer to perceived experience stems from the realization that vivid imagination is most successful—most “strikingly accomplished” (“On Vivacity” 9)—when using the Aristotelian “feebleness” of ordinary imagination as a tool. For example, a ghost story told around a campfire produces in listeners a common sense of knowing exactly how the ghost looks, despite never having seen one. Other indistinct things can have a similarly powerful effect on the imagination: film, gauze, rain, mist, fog, light, and shadow, to name a few that “more closely approximate the phenomenology of imaginary objects” (12). Scarry explains that J.J. Gibson, in an important study of perception, observes that “the four key ways in which light ordinarily exposes the structure of the material world—slant, reflectance, intrinsic color, illumination—are absent or ‘indeterminate’ in fog” (Scarry, “On Vivacity” 12-13). As

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<sup>40</sup> While Scarry’s approach starts with the text and follows the mental re-creation of an image—here a poem by Keats and a painting by Millais—I am focusing the example on the Pre-Raphaelite artist.

both a corporeal category and one of the ways in which light reveals the “structure of the material world,” color is important in understanding the Victorian body. For example, in Rossetti’s *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, the use of stark primary colors, the play of light and shadow, and the abundant white throughout the painting highlight Mary’s body and her reaction to the angel’s message.

For Scarry, one of the most powerful ways this strategy acts is to pass a transparent or otherwise indistinct surface over another object—for example, gauze passing over a wall. The wall undergoes what Gibson calls “kinetic occlusion,” in which a moving object “progressively covers and uncovers the physical texture of [the object] behind it” (qtd. in Scarry, “On Vivacity” 6); the moving gauze temporarily covers and then uncovers the wall. In the simple example Scarry gives, as a hand moves over a face, the hand temporarily blocks parts of the face and then restores them to view after the hand passes. Consequently, kinetic occlusion lends depth and durability—in Gibson’s words, “the continued existence of a hidden surface” (qtd. in Scarry, “On Vivacity” 6)—to the object being occluded, whether it is a wall, a face, or something else entirely. More than just identifying the material antecedents of perception, the *interaction* of two objects produces a sense of enduring solidity.<sup>41</sup>

An example from late in Rossetti’s poem “Jenny” will make this second strategy clearer. As dawn approaches, the speaker returns his attention to Jenny, still fast asleep with her head on his knee:

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<sup>41</sup> In a later essay building on her work, Scarry notes that the “filmy object confer[ing] solidity on the surface beneath” is often “a flower” (“Imagining Flowers” 111).

310

So on the wings of day decamps  
 My last night's frolic. Glooms begin  
 To shiver off as lights creep in  
 Past the gauze curtains half drawn-to,  
 And the lamp's doubled shade grows blue, —  
 Your lamp, my Jenny, kept alight, 315  
 Like a wise virgin's, all one night!  
 And in the alcove coolly spread  
 Glimmers with dawn your empty bed;  
 And yonder your fair face I see  
 Reflected lying on my knee, 320  
 Where teems with first foreshadowings  
 Your pier-glass [...]. (lines 310-22)

In this passage, we see the early morning light creeping through the window, illuminating the gauze curtains, passing the lamp left on all night, and glimmering on Jenny's empty bed. Paradoxically, the gauze curtains can be imagined vividly through their very indistinctness. The creeping light draws the speaker's attention, and ours in turn; the light passing over surfaces provides the interaction of two objects that lends solidity to the scene. Kinetic occlusion from the shifting light and shadows makes everything in the room seem permanent even when not in sight. As a result, when the speaker turns his attention back to Jenny's sleeping form when he sees her face in the mirror, she carries the same solidity and vividness in our imagination. Thus, the employment of the Aristotelian "feebleness" of ordinary imagination in this passage helps translate the speaker's verbal account into an imagined scene that lends an apparent corporeal reality to the poem generally and to Jenny specifically.

The third strategy for moving a text closer to perceived experience is to employ the relative weights of objects, although I will expand the idea to include other contrasts, such as the relative temperature of a warm object and a cool one. Scarry gives an example of a man holding a leaf in one hand and a book in the other. All three material antecedents of perception—the leaf, the book, and the man—are imagined and weightless. But if we picture the man raising and lowering each hand in turn, we get the sense that the leaf and book are not the same weight. The man also becomes more real by having the leaf and book rely on him for their apparent existence. As Scarry puts it, “[t]he mimesis of weight is soon achieved, even though one piece of fluff, the man, is somehow verifying another piece of fluff’s weight, the book’s, as well as his own” (“On Vivacity” 16). Relative weight, and through it a mimesis of solidity, is achieved by the man’s report. Scarry refers to this as the “astronaut principle” (17); it is analogous to how an astronaut on the moon explains his or her perceptions to the distant audience in mission control on Earth. This third strategy is most noticeable in prose and long poems because short works generally do not linger on descriptions of the relative weight of objects.

For a text to achieve the “‘vivacity’ of the material world,” Scarry argues that it needs two further qualities: “persistence” and “givenness” (“On Vivacity” 17). Persistence means that the object must remain the same. For example, if I pass my hand over my face, parts of my face fall out of sight, but they still exist and become visible again when my hand moves on. As an example from “Jenny,” the poem’s speaker states five times that Jenny’s head rests on his knee (lines 3, 19, 66, 320, 338), and the repeated disappearance and reappearance of those objects, her head and his knee, achieves

persistence. In other words, as the speaker passes in and out of his meandering reverie, these physical moments ground him—and readers, by extension—in persistent, corporeal reality.

The second quality, “givenness,” is more difficult to define precisely. Scarry calls it “the sense of something ‘received’ and simultaneously ‘there for the taking’” (“On Vivacity” 19). The first part of the definition is straightforward: a perceived object in a text is received from the author. For the second part of the definition, I defer to Scarry’s example:

Philosophers of perception and psychologists of perception—J.J. Gibson most strikingly—give elaborate accounts of the way sensory perception allows us to “lay hold of” the world, as in a library reading room one may direct attention now to the lights, now to a neighbor’s whispered comments, now to a noise from the courtyard outside, and one may leave the room and so at once eliminate all the perceptible attributes. But were one to look back at the reading desk, it would be there, it would be there for the taking, and it is this “there for the taking” quality that is key. (19)

Givenness, as Scarry describes it, works for perceptual objects, but also for “imaginary-objects-specified-by-instruction and hence arriving, as it were, from some outside source” (19)—that is, the objects and persons described in a poem. While Scarry’s concept of givenness is nebulous, a reasonable paraphrase might be that we do not look around the material world, free to invent or create what we see; instead, we must grasp the perceptions that are given by external stimuli. These stimuli are “given” to us as they are, and we grasp them only as they are “there for the taking.” When we daydream, we control the objects we perceive because we have created them, and as a result, they quickly disappear, lacking any lasting perceptual data. In contrast, objects in the imagination only have this sense of permanence and “givenness” if they come from an external source.



This external source is often the author, and we must surrender to the author's instructions for imagining if we are to re-create the intended process of perception. Without this surrender, we maintain too much control of the process of perception and are unable to be truly surprised. But as Scarry explains, "the verbal arts at every moment precisely *do* take us by surprise, one of many indications *not* that we have stopped voluntarily producing images"—as Sartre believes—"but that our awareness of the role of our volition has been suppressed" ("On Vivacity" 18). In the real world, the image we actually see of an object changes or remains the same regardless of how we interact with it in our minds; but in the realm of imagination, an object changes based on what we will to happen to it. If we are aware of that willing, it becomes our own image-making—and thus simple daydreaming that lacks vivacity. But if, instead, we suppress that awareness of the voluntary and allow authorial instruction to guide us, we experience perception from an outside source. As Scarry puts it, the givenness of perception requires instruction or direction because of "the need to suppress our own awareness of the voluntary, which interferes with the mimesis of perception" ("On Vivacity" 18). We cannot "lay hold of" something that is already internal, such as simple daydreaming; the mimesis of perception must come from an external source if it is to create vivid imagination.

Significantly, suppressing volition and allowing the author to direct our imagination are required to achieve surprise and, consequently, reach the inner standing point that is so critical to rewriting habits of thinking about the body. When we are surprised, we temporarily lose our awareness of the author and the process of perception in the text, allowing the author to guide us through a mimesis of perception that may

challenge our previous outer standing point. For example, as we have seen in Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, Victorian viewers would bring to the painting their outer standing point: that this appears to be a simple Annunciation painting, whose well-worn conventions date back centuries. But as those Victorian viewers surrender their volition and allow their process of perception to be guided to the surprising elements of the painting—for example, the awkward bodies and decidedly frightened-looking Mary—they may vividly imagine, among other disruptions that take place, Mary's psychological state and the theological narrative, both of which challenge the usual Annunciation story. Although I have illustrated the concept of surrendering the will to authorial instruction by using a painting familiar from the previous chapter, we will see that it holds for poetry as well.

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In analyzing habits about the body in double works while using Scarry's ideas on vivid imagination, it is necessary to "read" poems and paintings together. The first poem I will discuss in this chapter is Rossetti's 1877 sonnet "Astarte Syriaca (For a Picture)," written to accompany his painting. Jerome McGann explains that Rossetti completed the painting, begun in 1875, shortly before writing the sonnet (*Collected Poetry* 397).<sup>42</sup> Because the painting precedes the poem, the poem becomes a potential guide for "reading" the painting. At the same time, however, the two cannot be entirely separated. Catherine Golden notes that Rossetti inscribed on the picture's frame only the sestet of

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<sup>42</sup> The sonnet was later published in *Ballads and Sonnets* in 1881 (McGann, *Collected Poetry* 397).

the poem—not the octave—thereby “mak[ing] Astarte’s face the focal point of the canvas” (396-7), since the final six lines detail “Beauty’s face” (line 11). In contrast to *Astarte*, Rossetti’s picture for *Proserpine* included the whole poem on the canvas itself (Golden 399). Rossetti’s output of such linked poems and paintings creates an opportunity, rare in literature, to examine their double nature. Golden usefully details the template of a typical Rossetti sonnet for a picture:

The sonnet, readily conveying the meaning and history behind the figures on canvas, directs and organizes the reader/viewer’s response to the mythology of the painting which can only be hinted at on canvas through symbols and meaning-laden details. Reciprocally, the painting, acting as a visual referent for the poem, posits in the reader/viewer a concrete graphic knowledge which strengthens and specifies the visual imagery of the sonnet. (395)

Thus, with double works, each is inextricably bound to the other; painting and poem must be read with extra care in light of each other.<sup>43</sup>

Before examining the poem in depth, a quick overview of Rossetti’s painting of *Astarte Syriaca* (Figure 14) and its scholarship since the nineteenth century is useful. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we know some things that readers/viewers at the time may not have known. The painting presents model Jane Morris in the pose of Botticelli’s *Venus* (Figure 15), copying almost entirely the goddess’s posture, particularly the positioning of the hands.<sup>44</sup> Astarte’s right arm crosses her chest, her hand resting in front of her breast. Her left arm hangs down, like *Venus*’s, simultaneously covering her pubic region and

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<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that for various reasons, the poem in a double work may be in some ways a misinterpretation of the painting. For example, Golden’s template for reading a Rossetti sonnet for a picture could distract the reader from making a connection with the subject of a painting, such as Jane Morris in *Astarte*.

<sup>44</sup> The Rossetti Archive points out the similar “pudic” pose in both pictures (Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* and Rossetti’s *Astarte Syriaca*) but notes that “DGR’s treatment is more imposing than graceful” (Rossetti Archive). Of course, “imposing” is also a way of changing the conceptions of the female body.



Figure 14: *Astarte Syriaca* (Rossetti); Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester

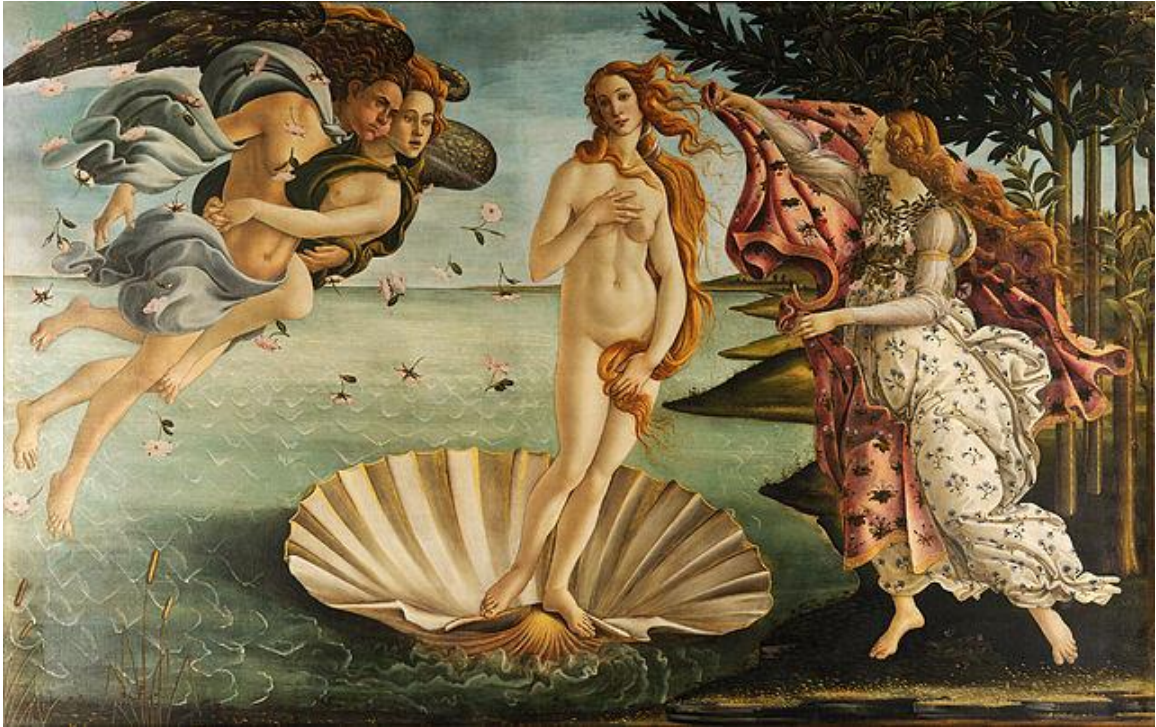


Figure 15: *The Birth of Venus* (Botticelli); Uffizi Gallery, Florence

drawing the eye. Her sexual areas are both privileged and hidden in the same gesture. Golden finds that the painting exudes so much sensuality that it is only saved from erotica by the accompanying sonnet (396). Indeed, many Victorians would have seen it this way; the surprise of the sonnet was thus critical to contemporary viewers' reconceptualization of the body. While Venus's long hair helps to obscure her nude form, Astarte is draped with a flowing dress that evokes *Proserpine* (Figure 13), with a medieval girdle that recalls Morris's *Belle Iseult* (Figure 10). She is sensual and voluptuous, a Pre-Raphaelite muse. Christopher S. Nassaar finds her troubling, more siren than muse. Jan Marsh calls her Rossetti's "tribute to the eternal female principle" (128), expressing "the notion of mysterious, elemental womanhood" that was "part of the general culture of the time" (130).

Yet the typical Pre-Raphaelite awkwardness is clear in the painting of *Astarte*, as Rossetti privileges awkward body parts. As with Proserpine, Astarte's hands and fingers are strangely contorted. For example, her index and pinky fingers jut out of the otherwise smooth lines of her left hand. Also, her long neck appears out of proportion. In terms of my corporeal categories, Rossetti privileges these awkward, exposed body parts, in part by draping Astarte's dress to obscure the more conventionally proportioned parts of her body. Exposing her most surprising features serves to draw attention to them, as we saw with other Rossetti works in the previous chapter.

In comparison to *Astarte*, the background figures appear flat and indistinct, the paint less finely layered on the canvas. Like the man in Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*, they are not the thematic focus. They stand like bookends, their feet fading into obscurity and their mirrored expressions gazing upward, "betwixt the sun and moon," as the poem puts it, secondary to the "mystery" that is Astarte. Their hands and necks do not draw attention like Astarte's.

Turning to the sonnet version of "Astarte," a Scarryian reading reveals how it gains vivacity by using strategies established earlier in this chapter as well as a new one called "erased imperatives" (Scarry, "On Vivacity" 20). These "erased imperatives" are implicit directions from the author to perceive the text in an ordered manner (20). Following Scarry's example, I will supply some erased imperatives in bracketed italics within the poem's text:<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Note that this set of "erased imperatives" highlights certain (chiefly, but not exclusively) perceptual "imperatives" for the reader.

Mystery: lo! [*see the background*] betwixt the sun and moon

[*recognize the figure*] Astarte of the Syrians: [*think of related myths*] Venus Queen

Ere Aphrodite was. In [*notice the color*] silver sheen

Her [*look at her clothing*] twofold girdle [*watch how it interacts*] clasps the infinite boon  
Of bliss whereof the heaven and earth commune:

And from her [*examine her neck*] neck's [*note its shape*] inclining flower-stem lean

[*now take in the details of her face*] Love-freighted lips and absolute eyes that wean

The [*hear the sound*] pulse of hearts to the spheres' dominant tune.

[*Now turn your attention to her companions; see the torchlight*]

Torch-bearing her sweet ministers compel

[*Imagine the angels above*] All thrones of light beyond the sky and sea

The witnesses of [*look again at Astarte*] Beauty's face to be:

[*Look more closely at her face*] That face, of Love's all-penetrative spell

Amulet, talisman, and oracle, —

[*See again how the figure is positioned*] Betwixt the sun and moon a mystery.

In this reading, or more precisely Scarryian re-construction, Rossetti slowly guides us through the process of perceiving the figure of Astarte, dwelling especially on her face. As he specifies the material antecedents of perception, the reader must slow down and take in each as it is mentioned. Rossetti names a place between the sun and moon as the otherworldly setting. As material antecedents of perceiving Astarte, he focuses on her girdle, neck, lips, eyes, and back again to her face. The ministers are torch-bearing, allowing them to supply light that we can imagine flickering on Astarte's face and moving the angelic "thrones of light beyond the sky and sea." The implied torchlight and the shadows of its absence—as Scarry, channeling Gibson and his kinetic occlusion,

would note—give a sense of permanence and persistence to the perceived object (Astarte’s face), which remains the same once the light has passed over it. The ministers’ torches illuminate Astarte so that the “thrones” can be “witnesses of Beauty’s face.”

The ministers’ torchlight further employs Scarry’s second technique, the use of the Aristotelian “febleness” of ordinary imagination as a tool for achieving vivacity. While the poem establishes material antecedents of perception, it also employs nebulous terms that are fraught with meaning. Here, instead of two objects interacting, we have two ideas that are hard to pin down, interacting with each other—instead of kinetic occlusion, perhaps what could be termed verbal occlusion. Astarte’s face, to invert the word order, is the “amulet, talisman, and oracle” (line 13) “of Love’s all-penetrative spell” (12). These terms connote something arcane, spiritual, powerful, and even imposing, without explicitly giving perceptual detail to her face; instead, we supply her face with these connotations, while seeming to perceive her. Astarte is repeatedly called a “mystery”—indeed, that word both opens and closes the poem.

Another example of the “febleness” of imagination occurs in the description of “love-freighted lips and absolute eyes” (7). Love-freighted lips are not particularly surprising for a goddess known in different cultures as Ishtar, Aphrodite, or Venus, as the metaphor suggests that her lips are filled with or weighted with love. But the description of “absolute eyes” provides cognitive dissonance. The phrase is simultaneously concrete—we can visualize eyes—and abstract. What makes them absolute? Perhaps they are absolute as in “complete,” or “free from imperfection,” or “not limited in any way.” The word suggests aloof, unkind power—perhaps absolute power—and an imposing force.



Some of the poem's most surprising lines resonate because they effectively employ Scarry's strategies for lending a text vivacity. The end of the octave is unexpected: "And from her neck's inclining flower-stem lean / Love-freighted lips and absolute eyes that wean / The pulse of hearts to the spheres' dominant tune" (lines 6-8). Literally, the lips and eyes "wean"—a maternal metaphor—"the pulse of hearts." The usual use of "wean" is when a mother accustoms her baby to foods other than milk, and it often takes the form "wean from" something. Instead, Rossetti's language indicates that the lips and eyes wean *hearts*, and in addition he bends the idiom to the disrupting "wean ... to" the Pythagorean tune of the spheres. McGann believes that the word "'to' here all but reverses the idea of deprivation that lies at the heart of the word's meaning" (*Collected Poetry* 397). The linguistic finesse surrounding the word "wean" pushes the limits of language beyond the simple imagination Scarry calls daydreaming; instead, the surprising use of "wean," together with the material antecedent body parts of lips, eyes, and the pulse of hearts, surprises in a way that can only come from an external source—namely, the poet's construction. Rossetti uses the feebleness of imagination as a tool here to illustrate the givenness of perception—that it is received under the author's guidance, and without that authorial instruction we could not be surprised. For readers, the odd use of "wean" with those nouns is "there for the taking" even if we look away from the poem. Because their surprise originates from the author, the lips and eyes that wean hearts will persist in our imagination. In terms of the corporeal category of narrative gaze, when Rossetti surprises us with his use of "wean," we are jolted out of our external standing point and are able to see Astarte's inner standing point.

Furthermore, as Rossetti endows the goddess Astarte with the givenness of perception and engages her inner standing point, he is subtly re-conceptualizing the body as something active and dynamic, offering a habit routine that sees the Victorian female body as potentially strong, beautiful, mysterious, and rather dangerous. Astarte is a strong female figure, full of power and mystery, as well as beauty. As she “wean[s] / The pulse of hearts to the spheres’ dominant tune,” McGann asserts that “[t]he suggestion is thus developed that desire (as a state of longing and deprivation) constitutes as well a condition for realizing an encounter with ideal orders” (*Collected Poetry* 397). In other words, an encounter with Astarte requires that those who seek her “mystery” must feel desire for her. Building on this idea, Scarryian givenness establishes Astarte as a goddess who makes readers feel desire and deprivation that seemingly only “Beauty’s face” (11) can remedy. An element of danger lurks beneath the surface, however. Astarte is simultaneously the embodiment of desire and deprivation, a muse and harlot. As a force of “mystery,” she may not deign to help those who desire her.

One effect of a Scarryian reading with erased imperatives is a slowed-down reading of “Astarte” that gives us time to linger on the level of mythology in the poem. Astarte herself is a liminal figure, as we see with many other Rossetti females. She is situated between different mythological traditions: Rossetti names her “Astarte of the Syrians: Venus Queen / Ere Aphrodite was” (2-3), thereby connecting Syrian, Roman, and Greek myths in one sentence whose appositives confound perception. The poem describes her as “betwixt the sun and moon” twice (lines 1, 14). Furthermore, “the heaven and earth commune” (5) in “the infinite boon / of bliss” (4-5), in a sexualized way beyond Rossetti’s “Blessed Damozel.” However, while her beauty inspires “thrones of

light” in the sestet, she is established from the outset as troubling. McGann explains that the opening line, with its invocation of “mystery,” alludes to Revelation 17:5:

As Clarence Fry (who purchased the painting) observed in a letter to Rossetti, this reference could easily scandalize a traditional Christian, for it refers to “Babylon the Great, Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” (letter to Rossetti of 10 March 1877). In Rossetti’s syncretic, Blakean reading of Revelation, however, this figure is the double of the “woman clothed with the sun” of Revelation 12:1. So the first line announces Rossetti’s revisionary revelation that identifies otherwise demonic and divine orders. (*Collected Poetry* 397)

While Fry was aware of the allusion to Babylon, the “traditional Christian” who would be scandalized by the reference is an example of the audience whose habitually negative conception of the Victorian body the Pre-Raphaelites were trying to change. Nassaar notes that the passage from Revelation illustrates the true nature of the mythological Astarte: she was “a cruel goddess, a vicious, man-destroying siren attended by eunuch priests.” Furthermore, “her powers of illusion are tremendous: she deludes in order to attract and destroy.” Nassaar finds that “behind Astarte’s beautiful face lurks a sinister, morally hideous goddess” (64).

Despite a liminal mythology, Rossetti seeks in *Astarte Syriaca* to embody an idealized sense of femininity. That new and original sense of the feminine is his own ideal. John Pfordresher notes a trend in Rossetti’s work of the 1860s and 1870s, which would later culminate with *Astarte Syriaca*: “an extended series of [...] pictures” whose

object seems to be the search for the same primal goddess. Her presence dominates the pictorial space. Usually we see only the torso, sometimes only the face. Rarely is she seen at full length. Surrounding the women are emblematic details. Sometimes they have a narrative function, filling in elements of the woman’s story; sometimes they symbolically suggest aspects of her character. Rossetti frequently attached sonnets to these pictures, sonnets which return again and again to a few main themes, especially to the destructive power of beauty. (8)

Pfordresher finds a troubling eroticism in the picture, mixed with a series of twins: Astarte mixed with Venus; the androgyny of the goddess, whose face is so feminine but whose arms are muscled and masculine; the two torch-bearing ministers flanking Astarte; the “twofold girdle”; heaven and earth; and sea and sky (12-13). He veers into a biographical reading, as do many critics, noting that Rossetti was caught between love for Jane Morris and paranoia, and Astarte was a symbol for “the simultaneity of erotic passion and death, the possibility that desire leads to both, and can only be fulfilled in both” (13). Pfordresher’s reading of “Astarte Syriaca” underlines what we find by analyzing the corporeal categories with Scarry’s aid: Astarte is an embodiment of liminal power, aloof mystery, and unfulfilled desire. Even without reading intent into Rossetti’s biography, it is clear that Astarte was a symbol of the potentially vast power of the female body in the Victorian age.

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After this detailed application of Scarry to *Astarte Syriaca*, it may not be necessary to spend as much time with Rossetti’s painting of *The Blessed Damozel* (Figure 16), which was painted between 1875 and 1878. In this case, the poem predates the picture. Rossetti wrote the poem’s first version between 1846 and 1847. While four distinct versions were published over the years,<sup>46</sup> I follow the text of the final version, from Rossetti’s 1870 *Poems*; it is closest in time to the painting and thus a more natural

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<sup>46</sup> The first publication was in *The Germ* in 1850. Later manuscripts date to 1855, 1856, and 1870 (McGann, *Collected Poetry* 377). I will not further address the textual history and differences between the versions here, instead addressing them briefly in Chapter 5 when the poem is considered independently from the painting.



Figure 16: *The Blessed Damozel* (Rossetti); Fogg Museum of Art, Cambridge, MA

pairing. At 144 lines, the final version of the poem is significantly longer than “Astarte Syriaca.” Through several viewpoints—the narrator/speaker, the blessed damozel in heaven, and a parenthetical voice that may be her lover still on earth—the poem tells the story of how much the damozel misses her earthly lover and how their imagined reunion will be after he joins her in heaven.

Starting with the corporeal categories of the painting, we see that *Damozel* is more concerned with the body than conventional works, with some variations on Rossetti’s other paintings. The damozel herself is the visual focus of the canvas; she is positioned above the other figures, in a literally superior position. Her awkward hands, long neck, and flowing hair are privileged. In her hair, however, we see six stars rather than the seven noted by the poem’s narrator. As McGann notes, the stars represent the astrological Pleiades, and the different number in the painting indicates that the damozel herself is the “lost Pleiad,” a figure “who was cast from her starry place because she fell in love with a mortal man” (*Collected Poetry* 377). Although the poem describes her hair as “yellow like ripe corn” (line 12), the picture gives her a more reddish hue. The damozel is hidden below the waist, her lower half entirely obscured in the painting’s version of heaven. Unlike Astarte, her erotic potential is cloaked, hidden both behind the bar of heaven and behind her flowing dress. The damozel herself is lit more brightly than the rest of the painting, and the vibrant colors of her clothing, upper body, and face highlight her as the center of attention. As for her posture, her arms rest along the bar of heaven—a significant object in both poem and painting—and her fingers curl around three lilies. She gazes out from heaven, presumably looking down vaguely<sup>47</sup> at the world

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<sup>47</sup> She seems somewhat self-absorbed, as well.

of the living, where her lover rests supine, although she appears not to see him directly. Her facial expression, mouth open, suggests longing and excitement for her earthly lover. Echoes of this expression are clear in heaven's background, where couples embrace, reunited in the next life. This sensual version of heaven is not overtly erotic, but it unquestionably has more to do with the flesh than the medieval Catholic art suggested by the name *The Blessed Damozel*.

The corporeal categories for the other figures in the painting, the angels and the lover, intensify the focus on the damozel and her inner standing point. Three angels appear below the damozel. All three appear to be naked, and the middle angel is obscured by wings except for her face.<sup>48</sup> The angels seem darker and blurrier than the damozel, and the lines of their bodies point toward the damozel. The side angels rest in three-quarters profile, forming a loose triangle whose tip points up at the damozel. The other significant figure, the lover, can be seen in the bottom section of the diptych, which is bifurcated by a physical space in the original frame.<sup>49</sup> In fact, a gold bar with the painting's title literally runs between the two sections of the painting, echoing the poem's demarcation of heaven and earth. The male lover is much smaller than the damozel—taking up only about a quarter of the pictorial space—thereby suggesting his smaller role in the painting. He reclines in a natural setting, resting among trees at the edge of a body of water. He holds his hands above his head in a gesture that might be read as vulnerability, and the sharp line between his elbows points diagonally upward, directly at the damozel. His gaze follows the same path, reinforcing the impression that he directs

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<sup>48</sup> The angels appear to be female, a change from Christian theology, which generally takes angels to be either male or without gender.

<sup>49</sup> The frame is not visible in Figure 16, which only shows the painted areas. Other easily available images include the frame but show a lower quality painting.

his attention wholly toward her. A viewer might infer that he seeks her inner standing point.

Turning to the poem, I will first use a Scarryian reading to explain how Rossetti establishes the damozel as a vividly imagined physical presence, before looking at the corporeal categories in greater detail. As with “Astarte Syriaca,” the erased imperatives guide us in a construction of the damozel’s physical presence. I supply one possible set of implied directions to the beginning lines of the poem, marked in bracketed italics:

[*First notice the woman*] The blessed damozel [*watch how she moves*] leaned out  
 [*Note the physical object on which she leans*] From the gold bar of Heaven;  
 [*Zoom in on her face*] Her eyes were [*compare to nature*] deeper than the depth  
 Of waters stilled at even;  
 [*Look next at the objects she holds*] She had three lilies in her hand,  
 [*Now observe her head*] And the stars in her hair [*count them*] were seven.

[*Examine her clothing*] Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,  
 [*Think of what you might expect to see*] No wrought flowers did adorn,  
 [*See the flower*] But a white rose [*speculate on its origin*] of Mary’s gift,  
 [*Consider the reason*] For service meetly worn;  
 [*Now look at the length of her hair*] Her hair that lay along her back  
 [*Compare to nature*] Was yellow like ripe corn. (lines 1-12)

These opening lines specify the material antecedents of perception—Scarry’s first strategy for achieving the vividness for perception. The first words reveal the “blessed damozel,” lingering on her eyes, her hair, her clothing, the flowers she holds, and the stars in her hair. These lines also employ the “feebleness” of ordinary imagination by



having objects interact and move over one another. The blessed damozel “leaned out / From the gold bar of Heaven” (1-2); as she leans, her arms block sight of the gold bar of heaven in what Gibson terms “kinetic occlusion.” D.M. R. Bentley argues that the narrator—whom Bentley calls the “percipient”—includes comparisons to nature “as if to diminish the distance between Heaven and earth, as well as to emphasize the physicality of the Damozel” (38-9). In these lines, the damozel’s eyes are compared to deep water and her hair to ripe corn. While Bentley recognizes that it is conventional to describe heaven in terms of earth, he claims that “the tropes of the percipient represent clear choices through which the reader understands his awareness to be naturalistic (for Rossetti a medieval characteristic) and, moreover, attuned to the physicality of the Damozel (though not as yet, to the sensual possibilities of that physicality)” (39). While these opening lines are primarily descriptive, setting the material antecedents of perception, they set the stage for a further exploration of the body in the poem. They also establish a vividly imagined, physical damozel, who seems surprisingly real.

Another important moment in which Rossetti establishes a vividly imagined and physical damozel occurs in the much-discussed moment when the damozel warms the bar of heaven. This moment comes after the narrator describes the cosmology of the poem—the damozel is standing on “the rampart of God’s house” (line 25), which bridges heaven and earth—and after a description of the newly reunited lovers we see in the background of the painting. The narrator returns to a vital description of the damozel:

And still she bowed herself and stooped  
 Out of the circling charm;  
 Until her bosom must have made

The bar she leaned on warm,  
 And the lilies lay as if asleep  
 Along her bended arm. (lines 43-48)

The warmth of her bosom on the bar is a key observation that helps re-create her physical presence. The relative temperature serves a similar function to Scarry's strategy of employing relative weights: it achieves the mimesis of solidity. The narrator does not indicate, for example, that the bar is heavy or the lilies light; instead, he indicates a sense of relative *heat*. The damozel's bosom is warm relative to the gold bar of heaven. As she touches the bar, leaning out, it acquires some of that warmth. It is true that the woman and the bar are constructs of the poet; but taken together, her bosom, the bar, and their relative heat make each other seem more real. They subtly verify and lend solidity to each other's physical presence in the poem. For Bentley, the verb tenses are significant (emphasis added): "her bosom *must have made* / The bar she leaned on warm, And the lilies lay *as if* asleep / Along her bended arm." Bentley cites these examples as evidence that the narrator, after starting the poem from a distance, now, "after prolonged exposure to the vision of the damozel and, perhaps also, in sympathy with the parenthetical speaker whose thoughts are a part of his own consciousness, is now preparing to enter more fully into the intense emotional life, the transcendent love, of the damozel and her lover" (40). While Bentley sees details such as the passage's verb tenses as potent signifiers, the damozel's bended arm and the warmth on the bar highlight her body and her physical nature, even as she resides in heaven. In other words, this key moment in the poem demonstrates the significance of the corporeal categories through what Helsinger calls an "act of attention," drawing the reader's consideration, along with the narrator's, to the

damozel's physicality and her inner standing point. These early moves in the poem are precisely what creates an inner standing point for the reader.

It is striking that the most apparently real physical presence in the poem is the body of a woman in the afterlife, but this fact highlights the subtle way in which Rossetti revises the Victorian conception of the body as separate from the soul. Rossetti was concerned with blending the material and spiritual, body and soul. For much of the rest of the poem, the damozel speaks, praying for and imagining her reunion with her earthly lover. She plans to bring her lover into heaven, amid the angels, to

[...] ask of Christ the Lord

Thus much for him and me: —

Only to live as once on earth

With Love, — only to be,

As then awhile, for ever now

Together, I and he. (lines 127-132)

The reunion of souls is also the reunion of bodies. As such, Rossetti's reunion of bodies resembles the goal of what Richard Wagner, at about the same time as Rossetti's poem, was formulating as his idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "complete work of art," in which different parts could be united to form a complete and perfect whole. For Wagner, opera was a *Gesamtkunstwerk* because, as Shearer West explains, "music, painting, sculpture and poetry combined to result in one homogeneous and exalted whole" (140). While Wagner's original idea was a multimedia gala, West explains that it was adapted by later thinkers, especially in "the decorative arts [...] to signify the beauty of an environment that was conceived holistically" (140). This adaptation was less about forms of art coming together in harmony; instead, the revised idea signified that the whole was greater

than the sum of the parts. Nineteenth century “[a]uthors used a neo-Platonic idea of the world as full of people who had been divided from birth from their ‘soul mates’” (West 147). This neo-Platonic idea was often used to justify androgyny—for example, the androgynous figures in paintings by Pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones—because it builds on Wagner’s concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as seen in the decorative arts: the whole of androgyny was greater than the sum of its separate genders. In Rossetti’s poem, the damozel yearns for a reunion with her lover that will make them greater than they can be in their separate realms of heaven and earth: “Together, I and he” (line 132). In other words, she expresses a desire to unite their bodies and souls “for ever now” (131) in a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is more complete and perfect than she or her lover could be alone.

Critics who argue against the damozel as a positive force tend to be less convincing. While Bentley argues that the narrator “inducts the reader-spectator into the medieval-Catholic awareness that he was designed by Rossetti to embody” (36), others argue for ways in which the damozel can be read negatively. Andrew Leng sees the poem as an exercise in male dominance through controlling a female art-object. For him, the central problem of the poem is “how to subordinate the confident[,] decisive Damozel to a weak, passive male” (15), and the two male speakers in the poem—the narrator and the earthly lover—work together to “neutralize her” (16). In this reading, she is neutralized through a combination of moves: the gold bar of heaven becomes “golden barriers” (line 142) that imprison her, she loses her speaking role, and she ends the poem weeping. For Leng, the parenthetical speaker and the narrator converge at the end in what he compares to Browning’s “My Last Duchess”: “total male power resides in the

complete control of a female art-object. The Duke is only happy when ‘all smiles’ have stopped[,] and Rossetti’s earthly lover is happiest when the Damozel smiles contentedly but cries helplessly” (16). This analysis, however, reads too much sinister intent into the words of the narrator and the lover. The change from “gold bar” to “golden barriers” can reasonably be read not as imprisonment, but as the realization by the varying speakers in the poem that, as Bentley says, “between the quick and the dead there can only be visionary communication” (42). In Bentley’s compelling interpretation, then, although the parenthetical lover literally gets the last word of the poem, that fact “bequeaths a final validity on the transcendent love of the earthbound speaker” (42). For Bentley, the poem is furthermore “an unmistakable celebration, not merely of intense emotion, but of the Damozel herself, her meticulously pictorial Heaven, and, above all, of the wise, simple, and visionary consciousness of the percipient,” who leads readers through an awareness of medieval Catholicism (42). While Leng’s interpretation is valuable to a point, Occam’s razor suggests that the simplest explanation has merit—here, that the “blessed damozel” is actually blessed. Bentley’s reading is stronger because it accepts the poem on its own terms. Andrea Henderson supports Bentley by adding that the damozel “speaks prophetically, led by her faith to believe that Mary and then Christ will bless her and her lover, once her lover comes to her” (922).

Another critic who overstates his case against the damozel is Christopher S. Nassar, who argues radically in “In Heaven or Hell? A New Reading of D.G. Rossetti’s ‘The Blessed Damozel’” that, based on Rossetti’s familiarity with Dante, the damozel, “despite all appearances to the contrary, is really damned” (1). Nassar cites the damozel’s sensual dreams and the lovers embracing behind her as evidence that “her

‘heaven’ is the ironic equivalent of the second circle of Dante’s hell, where the lustful are eternally condemned” (1). In this reading, there is only one character in the poem, the earthly lover; the damozel is his symbolic invention as he is “agonized by his erotic longings and memories” (2-3). While there is some merit to the argument, especially in the way Nassar traces earlier drafts of the poem, he overstates the case by portraying the damozel as single-mindedly seeking “a return to the state of erotic joy she knew on earth” (2) in her final lines. As explored above, I argue that in those lines, the damozel seeks togetherness and a *Gesamtkunstwerk* with her lover.

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Continuing from one master of Pre-Raphaelite dual creativity to the other, we look now at Morris’s painting *Queen Guenevere* and the poem “The Defence of Guenevere.” Both date from 1858, suggesting that, like “Astarte Syriaca” and “The Blessed Damozel,” these two works should be examined together for the light they cast on the dual creativity that Morris demonstrates. The poem is the title poem of the longer collection *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, which, as a facsimile of the first edition indicates, Morris dedicated as follows:

TO MY FRIEND,

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI,

PAINTER[.] (Lourie 44)

For Clive Wilmer, this dedication is significant for two reasons. First, Rossetti, who met Morris two years previously in 1856, is not described as a poet, indicating that Morris was influenced more by Rossetti's paintings in their early years. Second, Morris considered Rossetti his friend in 1858, well before their love triangle with Jane Burden, and he painted *Queen Guenevere* under Rossetti's guidance (189-191). The painting (Figure 10) takes after Rossetti in some ways, such as the medieval setting and the long neck, but it also illustrates Morris's own brand, what Wilmer calls a "nervous tension and touch of realism" (190). This brand is evident in Morris's poem on the subject.

"The Defence of Guenevere," based on Thomas Malory's Arthurian account, begins *in medias res* at Queen Guenevere's trial for adultery. Her speech composes much of the poem's 295 lines, written in terza rima except for the last stanza. Although she attempts to defend herself against the charge of adultery, she reveals her guilt through what Carole G. Silver calls her rhetorical "ambiguities and slips" (700). While she is guilty of adultery, she makes the case—perhaps inadvertently—that she was motivated by love for Launcelot, and that her fall into adultery was a choice anyone could have made.

Three passages in the poem describe Guenevere's body. For the first passage, supplying the erased imperatives and analyzing the privileged body parts reveals how Morris emphasizes Guenevere's shame as a way of reaching her inner standing point.

The poem begins:

But, knowing now that they would have her speak,  
 [See *Guenevere*] She threw her [focus on the state of her hair] wet hair backward  
 from her brow,  
 [Notice her hand] Her hand [see where she holds it] close to her mouth touching  
 [see what her hand touches] her cheek,

[*Imagine why she holds it there*] As though she had had there [*imagine her being struck*] a shameful blow,  
 [*Extrapolate her thoughts*] And feeling it shameful to feel aught but shame  
 All through her heart, [*speculate on her sensations*] yet felt her cheek burned so,  
 [*Infer her impulse*] She must a little touch it; [*consider her walk*] like one lame  
 She walked away from Gauwaine, [*see how she holds her head*] with her head  
 Still lifted up; [*look again at her cheek*] and on her cheek [*imagine the heat*] of  
 flame  
 [*Watch the tears disappear*] The tears dried quick[.] (lines 1-10)

These lines emphasize how Guenevere carries herself with a sense of shame. In terms of the corporeal categories, the privileged body parts are her hair—perhaps drenched with nervous sweat—her hand, her mouth, and her cheek. In particular, her cheek is described in terms of blushing: it “burned so,” it is a “cheek of flame,” and it looks as though she has been struck a “shameful blow.” Heavy repetition of the word “shame” and its physical correlative in the second stanza makes the feeling clear, with emphasis added: “As though she had had there a *shameful blow*, / And feeling it *shameful* to feel aught but *shame* / All through her heart, yet felt *her cheek burned so*” (lines 4-6). The burning of Guenevere’s cheek in this line also contrasts with the drying of her tears, suggesting a Scarryian relative heat. This line also suggests that guilt and shame weigh heavily in Guenevere’s inner standing point at the start of the poem, before she has made her impassioned defense.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The awkward, stuttering rhythm of the line “As though she had had there a shameful blow” strikes Wilmer as “the rhythmic equivalent of the Virgin’s angular shoulder pressed into the wall” in Rossetti’s painting *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. Wilmer explains:

The effect in the painting is to increase one’s feeling of presence: no predetermined posture or arrangement is allowed to come between the viewer and the figure on the canvas. In a similar way, in the poem, the sudden and fragmentary opening abolishes the formalities of conventional exposition, so that the woman – very much a woman, hardly a queen – seems to be communicating directly with us. And communicating not so much with words – or not as yet – as with the posture of her body, especially fitting here, given the charge. There is something indefinably erotic about the description. (198)



The second passage shows that Guenevere's shame is gone, replaced with growing strength and confidence. She has just started her defense by telling a tale of an angel who brings two cloths, representing heaven and hell, and makes someone choose without knowing the difference. One is blue, the other red, but she does not know which choice she is making. She chooses the blue cloth, thinking it is "heaven's color" (38), but she has chosen hell. The analogy is that in committing adultery, she has chosen what seemed good, love for Launcelot. She turns to her accusers and says, "Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie" (46). The second passage picks up here:

Her voice was low at first, being full of tears,  
 But as it cleared, it grew full loud and shrill,  
 Growing a windy shriek in all men's ears,  
  
 A ringing in their startled brains, until  
 She said that Gauwaine lied, then her voice sunk,  
 And her great eyes began again to fill,  
  
 Though still she stood right up, and never shrunk,  
 But spoke on bravely, glorious lady fair!  
 Whatever tears her full lips may have drunk,  
  
 She stood, and seemed to think, and wrung her hair,  
 Spoke out at last with no more trace of shame,  
 With passionate twisting of her body there[.] (49-60)

Here, her shame has completely disappeared—she speaks with "no more trace of shame." Instead of a blushing cheek, we see Guenevere standing up straight, speaking loudly, and taking charge of the situation. The final line indicates that shame has been replaced with what Silver calls "the very sensuality of her inner nature" (700). Silver points out further that Guenevere's description of herself occasionally repeats this sensuality, as when she describes the "rising of her breast, 'Like waves of purple sea' [...], the movement and brightness of her hair, the grace of her long throat and rounded arms, and the shadows lying in her hands 'like wine within a cup'" (699-700).

After Guenevere has explained the extent of her moral failing, she indicates her passion for Launcelot in the third passage describing her, which leads the reader to sympathize with her, as a fallen woman at her inner standing point. These lines end the poem:

She would not speak another word, but stood  
 Turn'd sideways; listening, like a man who hears  
 His brother's trumpet sounding through the wood  
 Of his foes' lances. She lean'd eagerly,  
 And gave a slight spring sometimes, as she could  
 At last hear something really; joyfully  
 Her cheek grew crimson, as the headlong speed  
 Of the roan charger drew all men to see,  
 The knight who came was Launcelot at good need. (287-295)

The blush returns to her cheek as she thinks of him and how he will steal her away from the trial, but now it is a mark of passion rather than shame. Even the terza rima breaks down at the end, adding an extra line that mirrors Guenevere's excitement and passion. As Silver argues, "[o]ur sympathy remains with Guenevere and her great but guilty love. The passion in whose name she has transgressed remains more important than her transgression. Guenevere's testimony, looked at in full, is to the awful power of a love that dissolves all—morality included—in it" (702). In this reading, while Guenevere is a fallen woman, in the vein of Rossetti's *Fallen*, her implicit attestation that love is stronger than sin marks her as perversely admirable.

While the painting of *Guenevere* does not depict the trial itself, Lynne Pearce makes a compelling argument that the Guenevere of the painting and of the poem are the

same figure.<sup>51</sup> In the painting, Pearce notes that Guenevere “exhibits a quality rare among Pre-Raphaelite female subjects. Although her attention is directed merely to the apparently trivial action of fastening her belt, she is nevertheless *in control* of what she does” (125). Pearce notes that many other Pre-Raphaelite women are “usually seated” and “invariably inactive,” citing examples of Hunt’s *The Lady of Shalott* and Millais’s *Mariana* (125). But Guenevere is in charge of herself: rather than simply staring passively into space, consumed by a “male gaze” (125), she takes action: she fastens her belt and looks in her mirror.

Accepting that Guenevere is fastening her belt, Pearce draws a connection between the reason for fastening the belt and an implication that Guenevere is also “in control” of more (125), especially her sexuality. If the picture illustrates the poem’s Guenevere, our eyes are inescapably drawn to the bed, the crumpled linen, and the allegations of adultery in “The Defence of Guenevere.” The bedroom becomes a sensual, almost erotic, location. The fabrics on the bed and the furniture are ornately patterned, colored, and textured. The white bedding is not only unkempt but likely still warm, as the dog lies ensconced among the linens, and the softness of the bedding and the other fabrics are suggested in subtle contrast to the other items in the room: the waxy skin of the oranges, the crisp paper of the prayer book, and the sharp coldness of the jug. With these sensual details in mind, the viewer sees Guenevere’s room as not only a domestic space, but a sexual one. To fasten her belt in this context hints that she is, as Pearce argues, “in control of more than [her] wardrobe arrangements” (126). However

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<sup>51</sup> Rather than rehash the painting’s analysis from Chapter 2, I focus here on the implications of reading the painting and poem together.

Guenevere feels now about Launcelot, she is not passive like the women Pearce finds in *The Lady of Shalott* and *Mariana*. Rather, as she looks in the mirror and fastens her belt, Pearce sees in her gestures the suggestion that she is “taking possession of herself” and perhaps also “assuming responsibility” for her actions and words in the poem. Taking the poem and painting together, Guenevere might even be seen as an example of how Morris “produced a female subject with the potential for heroism” (126).

This focus on the belt is the strongest connection between poem and painting. Guenevere’s facial expression is hard to read; nothing can be read as confusion, defiance, irony, rhetorical grace, or any of the other things we might find in the poem. Her painted face is more or less a mask. In her look, however, and in the fastening of her belt, is the subtle suggestion of her defiance in the poem. As she looks into the mirror and sees the impossible nature of her circumstances, it is no great stretch to hear her counter-accusation: “Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie” (line 46, and repeated throughout the poem).

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This chapter’s combination of the seven corporeal categories with a Scarryian analysis of the poems highlights the strategies that both Rossetti and Morris use to translate their dual creativity across art forms and bring about more effective change in the Victorian habit loop of the body. Each poet strives for a mimesis of solidity that lends vivid imagination to the poems, capable of matching and even exceeding the visual effect of the paintings. Analyzing the strategies used forces us to slow down and see the

mechanism for achieving in the poems the vivacity that helps offer the audience an alternative, positive conception of the body in the Pre-Raphaelite habit loop. In short form, the process might be described like this: the corporeal categories surprise us while the Scarryian strategies make the figures in the poems feel solid and real. When we look from the women's inner standing point, then, we see even more vividly how they look and what they can do. In feminist terms, visualizing a mimesis of female empowerment can be a precursor to real-life empowerment. The final step is replacing the routine in the Victorian habit loop with the Pre-Raphaelite alternative.

While the paired works by Rossetti and Morris in this chapter illustrate the uniquely Pre-Raphaelite dual creativity of the Victorian age, the two men's approaches to portraying the body diverge. Rossetti's female figures, Astarte and the damozel, carry a mysterious power and exist in the liminal space between contrasting ideas. For example, Astarte inculcates desire and the simultaneous impossibility of fulfilling it. The damozel resides physically in a place not quite heaven and definitely not earth, yet she is able to interact with the material and spiritual worlds. Each Rossettian woman represents a mysterious female force bordering on the divine, but at the same time, neither is quite capable of changing her circumstances. Astarte remains aloof, capricious, and unattainable goddess; the damozel imagines meeting again with her earthly lover, but she cannot hasten the reunion. Rossetti shows us intense, unfulfilled desires. When we see the paintings and poems from the women's respective inner standing points, we imagine the fulfillment of those desires. Imagining such fulfillment across Rossetti's works becomes habitual, as does looking like those figures and performing the actions they do.

In other words, the habit loop is rewritten, keeping the same cue and reward but offering a new routine.

Morris, on the other hand, changes the conception of the body more directly, by endowing Guenevere with a significant sense of control. Unlike Rossetti's women, Guenevere tries actively to control her situation: in the painting, she fastens her belt, and in the poem, she argues her own case at trial. She is intensely active, responding to shame and rhetorical setbacks by changing tack and trying a different line of argument. Instead of passively accepting her fate, she turns the trial on its head, repeatedly accusing Gauwaine of lying. She demonstrates what Wilmer calls "Morris's blunt physicality" (193), in contrast to Rossetti's more inward and languorous women (192-3). Guenevere's control in Morris's paired works gives her more agency over her fate, her body, and her actions. Morris's approach in these paired works is more direct than Rossetti's.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Wilmer argues that Guenevere demonstrates an "element of realism in Morris [that] connects with his practical concerns and ultimately with his politics, for revolutionary politics is by its very nature a way of turning dream into reality" (193).

## Chapter IV – Morris’s Poetry

At the end of the last chapter, we examined how Morris endows Guenevere with intensity, activity, and control in both painted and poetic versions. In this chapter, I will examine three poems by Morris in greater depth: “Concerning Geffray Teste Noire,” “The Haystack in the Floods,” and “King Arthur’s Tomb.” All three were published in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* in 1858. In each poem, bodies display intensity and activity, and the female characters show more control over their situations and fates than the men do. As we consider how Morris’s work revises the habit loop of how Victorians think about the body, it becomes clear that Morris tends to be more direct than we will see with Rossetti. With the Duhiggian cue of the body, Morris offers a routine of activity that emphasizes his “blunt physicality” (Wilmer 193). That “blunt physicality” stems, in part, from recurring images of hands and color that emphasize the active role and intensity that Morris imparts to his female characters.

While I have previously discussed the idea of intensity as adapted from Walter Pater, it is helpful here to delve deeper, with the particular point that Morris employs intensity as a poetic strategy that highlights the inner standing point and helps create a new routine in the Victorian habit loop for thinking about the body. I have showed how intensity is achieved in painting through what I call “idealized imperfection,” especially for Rossetti. We have seen intensity in the paired works of Rossetti and Morris in the previous chapter, as well as in various Pre-Raphaelite paintings in Chapter 2. Shifting to the verbal arts, Elizabeth Helsinger locates poetic intensity in the tradition of lyric poetry,

particularly the Romantics. In a long passage, she usefully traces the Romantic idea of intensity:

We think of Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow" of strong emotion: powerful feelings impelled to expressive release from inner tension. (This understanding forgets his qualifying insistence on the importance of recollection in tranquility, where thought, governed by habits of association and reflection, modifies the influxes and expressive overflows of feeling.) (55)

It is significant that the Pre-Raphaelite project, which has the effect of rewriting the habit loop about the Victorian body, relies on changing these "govern[ing] [...] habits of association and reflection" surrounding the body. Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow" of emotion is seemingly one strategy for accessing the inner standing point, while "recollection in tranquility" is a way of critically viewing the outer standing point.

Helsingier continues her explanation of intensity:

Perhaps more tellingly, we may remember Keats's assertion that "the excellence of every Art is its intensity." Arthur Hallam, Tennyson's friend and early defender, distinguished between Wordsworth's emphasis on subsequent reflection and Keats's praise of intensity, embracing the latter as closer to the "truth" of poetry: poets of "sensation," like Keats, Shelley, and the early Tennyson, recalled for Hallam heights not reached since the days of Shakespeare and Milton, when "intense thoughts ... did not fail to awaken a proportionable intensity in the natures of numberless auditors." True poets (and Hallam here equates "true" with "lyric") are those whose "whole being [is] absorbed in the energy of the sense" (Hallam 86, 87, 91). To write from or about the condition of absorption, as Wordsworth, Keats, and Hallam all understood, meant attending closely to sensations. (55-56)

In other words, intensity is strongest in poetry via sensation—that is, the use of the senses. As I alluded to in Chapter 3's discussion of Elaine Scarry and vivid imagination, the sense of touch—an impression of solidity—is by far the most difficult of the five senses to reproduce in writing. Consequently, "attending closely to sensations" is a powerful strategy that Morris uses to draw out poetic intensity and highlight the inner



standing point. This strategy, then, helps bring about the process of Victorian habit change.

In quoting Wordsworth, Keats, and Hallam in the passages above, Helsinger emphasizes that poetic intensity was a quality offering some sort of “truth” to be sought. Of the myriad strategies for approaching that truth, these three poets, like Morris, emphasized the senses and sensation.<sup>53</sup> Helsinger usefully traces how Morris builds poetic intensity through the use of color, one of my corporeal categories. In the introduction to her book, Helsinger explains how she sees the relationship between color and intensity:

I pursue the peculiar intensity Morris achieved in these poems [*The Defence of Guenevere*] by looking at how he used color—inspired by Pre-Raphaelite painting and the medieval sources that it recalled for him—as a resource for achieving lyric intensity. My focus is not on the dubious enterprise of representing particular colors in language, but rather on Morris’s use of the relations among colors, or between color and its absence, as a means of exploring the erratic space and time of the mind’s activities and of structuring the space and time of a lyric poem. (xii)

Notwithstanding the vague physics of poetic space-time, this passage contains a powerful strategy for this dissertation. Namely, in looking at color in a poem, it is not always productive to look only at how colors are described. For example, the colors of chestnut and maple syrup are still shades of dark brown, and one does not seem inherently more intense or laden with sensation than the other. Rather, the *relationship* between colors or lack of colors is often most revealing. Just as with the Scarryian strategy of using relative weights or heat to suggest solidity and thereby vivid imagination, Helsinger’s idea of

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<sup>53</sup> Helsinger connects with the Pre-Raphaelites this emphasis on the senses and sensation from Wordsworth, Keats, and Hallam: “From Keats to Baudelaire, Morris, and Rossetti, the ‘energy of sense’ found in sensations of color seemed to promise the aesthetic intensity they sought” (Helsinger 56).

relative colors plays a role in reaching the inner standing point, and consequently re-evaluating the outer standing point. In other words, Helsinger's idea of how color builds poetic intensity highlights what I am proposing as the new routine in the Victorian habit loop, in which Morris takes disgust with the body and replaces it with a positive view of the Pre-Raphaelite body as intense, active, and in more control.

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To illustrate the importance of color in Morris's poetic collection *The Defence of Guenevere*, I will begin with Morris's "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire." A lesser-known poem, "Geffray" is a 200-line dramatic monologue. The title refers to a "Gascon thief" (line 5) and "local marauding warlord" (Helsinger 72) named Geffray Teste Noire.<sup>54</sup> Tracing the influence of medieval French historian Jean Froissart on Morris, John M. Patrick usefully summarizes the poem's context:

It is, as is well known, a ballad cast in the form of a dramatic monologue, spoken by John of Castel Neuf to one Alleyne, a man bound for Ortaise. John tells the story of the campaign against Teste Noire, the siege of Ventadour (where the brother of the listener was slain) under the direction of Sir John Bonne Lance and the Duke of Berry, then the attempted ambush of Teste Noire in the wood of Verville. While waiting in positions of concealment that day, John and his men had found two skeletons, those of a man and a maid, and had reconstructed the story of their deaths. John had later taken the bones down to his castle, buried them, and had a tomb made for them by Jacques Picard. The romantic story of their fate he suggests that Alleyne convey to John Froissart, that he may use it in his *Chronicles*. (425-6)

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<sup>54</sup> The French Tête Noire, or more archaically, Teste Noire, literally means "black head." The poem's speaker refers to Geffray as Blackhead multiple times.

While the poem's title and frame suggest that Geffray is a major character, he is not directly seen and plays a surprisingly small part in the poem. Instead, much of the poem deals with the discovery of the two skeletons and the attempt to fill in how they came to rest where the speaker's men are hidden.

In "Concerning Geffray Test Noire," important flashbacks are triggered by the stark white of the skeletons' bones in Scarryian relief against color, lending Helsinger's idea of poetic intensity. Helsinger points out that these flashbacks are "apparently triggered, in the speaker's mind, by the image of the skeletal white of a woman's bones, thrown into relief against a background of color—gold, grass green, or blood red" (73). Over the course of the poem, the image recurs four times, as the speaker progresses from the surprise of finding the bones while setting up the ambush, to the memory triggered by the bones. He recalls that when he was a young boy during the bloody "Jacquerie" (line 99) peasant revolt, he fainted when he saw women's bones exposed. Returning to the memory of his discovery of the bones during the ambush, he considers them at length. He invents a story about how a lady and her lover were ambushed in this same spot, leading to their deaths:

Over those bones I sat and pored for hours,  
 And thought, and dream'd, and still I scarce could see  
 The small white bones that lay upon the flowers,  
 But evermore I saw the lady [...] (141-144)

Moving from one memory to an earlier memory—namely from the discovery of the skeleton to the bones of women encountered during the Jacquerie—the poem then shifts to what Helsinger calls "the imagined image of the unknown woman at the moment of her death, now itself a memory he is recalling" (73). In this poem, then, color and

memory unite to insert the reader into the imagined inner standing point of earlier characters' bodies.

As the recurring image of bones against color is recalled, it takes on the character of what Helsinger calls "lived experience" (73), which we might further call lived, *bodily* experience. For example, the narrator identifies with the woman whose skeleton has been found, and he imagines scenes from her life. Addressing her bones, he says, "O most pale face, that brings such joy and sorrow / Into men's hearts [...] Your face must hurt me always" (lines 149-150, 153). Continuing to address her in the second person, he notes, "your brow / So smooth, unwrinkled ever" (155-156)—true both literally, as he addresses her smooth skull, and figuratively, as he thinks about her before she died. He feels the "piercing" sharpness of "joy [...] / that [...] marcheth nigh to sorrow" (150-151) of the lover and then the "curved sword / That bites with all its edge" of her red lips observed, or rather imagined, in a kiss (173-174). Gold hair on the pale face tangles him once again as he imagines walking in "green gardens" (162), and suddenly, against the backdrop of what Helsinger fittingly calls "the palimpsest<sup>55</sup> of memories" (73), neither the speaker nor the reader can be certain what is real. Memory and imagination blend together the discovery of the skeleton, the resulting dream of the pale woman with gold hair and red lips whose corpse that may once have been, and the past encounter with a dead woman during the past Jacquerie.

Past experiences and imagined experiences consequently become muddled. The one common thread in each, however, is what Helsinger points out as the same "haunting

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<sup>55</sup> A palimpsest, of course, is a document which has been partially or wholly erased to make room for new text.

image” (73): the contrast of “white (pale face, white bones) against color—green grass, golden coif, and the imagined or remembered red of lips or blood” (73). While the end of the poem briefly notes Geffray Teste Noire’s “anticlimactic death months later in his own bed” (73), it is paired with a final occurrence in the final lines of the poem’s common “haunting image”:

In my new castle, down beside the Eure,  
 There is a little chapel of squared stone,  
 Painted inside and out; in green nook pure  
 There did I lay them, every wearied bone;

And over it they lay, with stone-white hands  
 Clasped fast together, hair made bright with gold;  
 This Jaques Picard, known through many lands,  
 Wrought cunningly; he’s dead now—I am old. (lines 193-200)

In these final lines, the speaker buries the haunting image. He lays “every wearied bone” in a “green nook,” and over the tomb he places statues “wrought cunningly” in honor of the lovers. As Helsinger notes about these lines, “Color—white, gold, green, and red, the red repeatedly banished (bleached bones, stone-white statue) but ever proximate in the mind’s unwilling recall of blood and lips—marks the intensity” of the poem’s central and repeated image (74). The use of color, especially relative to other colors or even their absence, forms a particularly powerful strategy that Morris employs frequently to fuel the intensity of the inner standing point in his poems.

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Before examining color and other corporeal categories in Morris’s better-known poem “The Haystack in the Floods,” a few comments on Morris’s general influences are

illuminating. Influenced by reading Sir Thomas Malory and Jean Froissart, Morris in many of his poems in the volume *The Defence of Guenevere* reflects what Patrick calls “the same imagery of general ruin—an identical *bildlichkeit* of widespread destruction, of blood and rapine lying just beneath the colourful and the fascinating and the legendary in the Froissart account of the Hundred Years’ War, not merely realistic, but majestic in its sadness” (425). In particular, Patrick argues that “Haystack” expresses “the disillusionment of Froissart’s later pages, and Morris’s own dwelling on the darker sides of medieval life, its violence, and terrible ferocity, *haec turba et barbaries*, reach a climax” (426). Patrick locates several parallels between, on the one hand, Morris’s account of Robert of Marny and Godmar, and on the other hand, Froissart’s conflict between Limousin and Louis Raimbaut.

Like many of Morris’s early poems, “The Haystack in the Floods” conveys a medieval narrative in modern style—modern for its time, that is, and distinctly Pre-Raphaelite in its intensity. Set during the Hundred Years’ War and after the English victory at the Battle of Poitiers, it tells the story of an English knight named Robert and his lover Jehane, who are traveling with a small escort through the hostile French countryside on the way to the English-friendly “Gascon frontier” (line 47). Near a dismal haystack in the dripping, wet landscape, they are set upon by a group led by the treacherous Godmar, who Margaret A. Lourie notes, “bears the arms of England but clearly serves the French” (243). Godmar threatens to rape Jehane, offering the alternative of being taken to the Chatelet prison in Paris (lines 50-51), probably to be tried as a witch (Lourie 244). When she repeatedly refuses Godmar’s sexual advances, he beheads Robert in fury. The poem is framed around Jehane and Robert’s “parting [...]”

/ Beside the haystack in the floods” (line 160), whose image both opens and closes the poem.

To establish the physical presence of the main characters, “Haystack” builds poetic intensity through sensations, the use of color and Scarryian “febleness of imagination.” The poem opens with the narrator hinting at the unfelicitous conclusion of the poem:

Had she come all the way for this,  
To part at last without a kiss?  
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain  
That her own eyes might see him slain  
Beside the haystack in the floods? (lines 1-5)

We are then introduced to Jehane in a vivid passage whose use of the Scarryian febleness of imagination develops intensity:

Along the dripping leafless woods,  
The stirrup touching either shoe,  
She rode astride as troopers do;  
With kirtle kilted to her knee,  
To which the mud splash’d wretchedly;  
And the wet dripp’d from every tree  
Upon her head and heavy hair,  
And on her eyelids broad and fair;  
The tears and rain ran down her face. (6-14)

A strong sense of touch can be felt in this passage, as Jehane rides her horse and “the stirrup touch[es] either shoe.” Touch is also suggested by the way Jehane rides “astride as troopers do.” The “kirtle kilted to her knee” is a third example of how the interaction of objects suggests kinesis. Furthermore, Morris uses what we have seen Scarry call the “febleness of imagination” to make the scene more vivid; the sense of wetness everywhere, from trees dripping with rain to mud splashing wretchedly to tears running

down Jehane's face, permeates these lines. As it falls and moves, the water's implied kinetic occlusion of the objects behind lends a sense of permanence and solidity as explained last chapter. Helsinger notes that the colors in this passage share a common thread with other Morris works: "The startling brilliance of color in these poems is often heightened by the contrast with a present-tense background of grey—or the threat of it" (69). As in "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire," later brilliant colors are juxtaposed with a neutral background color—there white bones, here a dreary gray landscape. The bleakness of that background, dripping with dread and dreariness, lends a relentless foreboding and foreshadowing to the terrible choice Jehane must make.

In addition to the drab opening colors and the vividly imagined scene, it is striking how active Jehane is in "Haystack." Soon after Jehane and Robert, along with their small escort, see "[t]hat Judas, Godmar" (34) and his thirty men, Godmar directs his threats of capture, rape, and murder at Jehane:

Jehane, on yonder hill there stands  
My castle, guarding well my lands:  
What hinders me from taking you,  
And doing that I list to do  
To your fair willful body, while  
Your knight lies dead? (83-88)

Rather than meekly submit to Godmar, however, Jehane takes the active role that Morris gives his women. As Guenevere turned the tables at her trial in "The Defence of Guenevere," so does Jehane return the violent threat to her aggressor:

A wicked smile  
Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,  
A long way out she thrust her chin:  
"You know that I would strangle you



While you were sleeping; or bite through  
Your throat, by God's help—ah!" (88-93)

Godmar is undaunted:

'Jehane the brown! Jehane the brown!<sup>56</sup>  
Give us Jehane to burn or drown!' –  
Eh – gag me Robert! – sweet my friend,  
This were indeed a piteous end  
For those long fingers, and long feet,  
And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet;  
An end that few men would forget  
That saw it – So, an hour yet:  
Consider, Jehane, which to take  
Of life or death! (107-116)

Godmar's leering description of Jehane's "long" fingers, feet, and neck, and her "smooth [...] sweet" shoulders carries a sadistic edge, and there is an almost lascivious dwelling on potentially tactile images. Jehane dismounts, "totter[s] some yards" (118) and "with her face/ Turn'd upward to the sky" (119), falls into a dreamless sleep—or perhaps she faints. The kinetic tottering and turning upward of her face suggest dizziness and disorientation. Awakening, she reiterates, in a "strangely childlike" fashion, likely a state of shock, that she will not go with Godmar. She chooses death in Paris over dishonor. Although it is a terrible choice, she is able to deny Godmar, to some extent.

Godmar's violent fury comes suddenly. "With a start" (136) he acts, and she observes how he executes Robert:

The long bright blade without a flaw  
Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand

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<sup>56</sup> Lourie notes of "Jehane the brown":

Jehane and the subject of 'Praise of My Lady' are the only brunettes in [*The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*]. The lady praised i[s] unquestionably Jane Burden. Since "Jehane" is the medieval spelling of "Jane," the dark-haired Jane Burden was probably also the model for the heroine of this poem. On the poetic level, Jehane's brown hair conspires with the other dark colors in the poem to reinforce its dreary inevitability. (244)

In Robert's hair, she saw him bend  
 Back Robert's head; she saw him send  
 The thin steel down; the blow told well,  
 Right backward the knight Robert fell,  
 And moaned as dogs do, being half dead,  
 Unwitting, as I deem: so then  
 Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,  
 Who ran, some five or six, and beat  
 His head to pieces at their feet. (141-151)

This gruesome climax has been foreshadowed from the beginning; three times Morris has repeated some form of the refrain, "Had she come all the way for this, / To part at last without a kiss / [...] Beside the haystack in the floods" (1-2, 5). Morris's language is vivid and active—kinetic, even: the flawless "long bright blade" coming down to sever Robert's head; Robert moaning "as dogs do," half-dead; Godmar's men rushing in to smash the head "to pieces at their feet" in a frenzy. Helsinger finds Godmar's execution of Robert sudden, but "All the more startling are the sudden explosions of light and color: the bright blade and the line of blood we can hardly prevent ourselves from envisioning, as, with Jehane, we are compelled to watch in slow motion" (69). The bright blade and Robert's blood are a sharp contrast to the dull gray backdrop, making this moment particularly vivid. Jehane, hands cold, smiling ruefully and perhaps driven mad, is off to prison in Paris to be burned or drowned as a traitor. The conclusion may seem nihilistic, with a sense of helplessness and hopelessness carried in the final two lines, which recall the poem's opening: "This was the parting that they had / Beside the haystack in the floods" (159-160).

One might wonder if Jehane's activity in "Haystack" is merely the illusion of control. Certainly, she would not choose Robert's death, all things being equal. However, it is a real choice: rather than submit to Godmar, she chooses death, and as far

as the poem is concerned, Godmar does keep his word. Jehane is simply in an impossible position, as with many of Morris's women. We have seen strong tension between difficult choices in "The Defence of Guenevere"; Jehane embodies a difficult choice in "Haystack," and we will see another difficult choice again in "King Arthur's Tomb." Unlike Patmore's titular *Angel in the House*, there is a sense in Morris's poems that these difficult choices have real consequences, and the female characters have the power to choose, at least between two evils.

In "Haystack," Morris also emphasizes Jehane's difficult choice through the repetition of hand images—variously fingers, thumbs, and hands themselves—as privileged body parts. These hand images characterize the difficult position and the suffering of Jehane and Robert, as well as Godmar's aggressiveness. Frequent images of hands signify the present physical and emotional states of the characters, while also foreshadowing future events. The hand images, in a sense, predict the final, deadly moments of the poem and intensify their impact. Of the ten references to hands in the poem, seven refer to Jehane's hands. Two more describe Robert's hands, and the final reference is connected to Godmar's hands. When Godmar first approaches, Robert's first gesture is to calm Jehane by placing his hand on her horse's rein (line 62). After his men abandon him, his thumb signifies his frustration and helplessness, beating "for rage" upon his sword hilt (65-66). Similarly, a gesture of his hand highlights the malice of Godmar, who, with "his hand / In Robert's hair" (142-3), cuts off Robert's head in front of the horrified Jehane.

As the most important figure in the poem for this dissertation's purposes, Jehane is characterized extensively by hand imagery that expresses her inner standing point. In

other words, where her hands move and what they do indicate how her character feels—intensely. That intensity is also established by having seven references to her hands, compared to three combined for Robert and Godmar. The first two images of Jehane’s hands suggest weakness and failure, which seem to render her powerless to save either Robert’s life or her own in the future: “Her slender fingers scarce could hold / The wet reins” (26-27), even before meeting Godmar. Jehane realizes that when she is cast into the Seine for her inevitable trial for witchcraft,<sup>57</sup> her “weak hands” will be unable “[t]o recollect how strong men swim” (54-55). In a third and equally prophetic image, Jehane, confronted by Godmar and the choice which she knows will lead to Robert’s death, places “her hand upon her brow,” then gazes at the hand as if to find blood upon it (76-78), like Lady Macbeth. In a metaphorical sense, she does have Robert’s blood on her hands because of her refusal of Godmar, but her hands are also her defense against Godmar; she threatens to strangle him if he rapes her (91), and he appears to believe her threat. Remarking on the sadness of Jehane’s looming death, whether here or in Paris, Godmar calls it a “piteous end” for her “long fingers” (111). Later, as Godmar kills Robert before her eyes, Jehane’s helplessness and loss are symbolized by the image of her “empty hands / Held out” (139-40). The last hand image related to Jehane comes at the end of the poem, when she has survived Godmar but must soon travel to Paris for her

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<sup>57</sup> Lourie notes that Jehane believes “she will undergo trial by cold water, an ordeal that by the fourteenth century was reserved for suspected witches” (244). The details of the trial by cold water are debated. Dougald B. Maceachen blames anthology editors for mistaking the ordeal as a death sentence, in which a suspected witch “was thrown into a river to determine her innocence or guilt. She was guilty if she swam and was then burned. If she sank and drowned, however, the woman was innocent” (74). Maceachen explains that a rope was available for an innocent woman to survive the ordeal (74). On the other hand, John Hollow argues that while Maceachen’s history may be correct, the poetic evidence in “Haystack” indicates that Jehane’s trial by water would indeed be a death sentence (353). Godmar taunts Jehane, saying that at the trial in Paris, “folks” (105) would cry, “Give us Jehane to burn or drown!” (108), leaving her no chance of surviving.

trial and likely death. At this moment, Jehane's reply is simply to stare "[a]t her cold hands with a rueful smile, / As though this thing had made her mad" (157-158).<sup>58</sup>

Helsingers detects some typical Pre-Raphaelite awkwardness in the hand imagery as well: "[...] strained poses find their counterparts in the gestures of Jehane and Robert" (62); she cites these lines: "he tried once more to touch her lips; she reach'd out, sore / And vain desire so tortured them, / The poor grey lips," (lines 132-35). Taken together, these hand images in the poem bring the reader in to her standing point, which we have seen many times is an important component of the habit change Morris and Rossetti were attempting to bring about.

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The themes of intensity, activity, and women's control over their fate are stronger in the final poem of this chapter, Morris's 396-line poem "King Arthur's Tomb." It appears in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, following immediately after the title poem. A companion piece to "The Defence of Guenevere," "King Arthur's Tomb" tells the post-trial story of how Launcelot and Guenevere meet at Arthur's tomb and she, now a nun, attempts to atone for their sins.<sup>59</sup> The first four poems of the volume—the others being "Sir Galahad, a Christmas Mystery" and "The Chapel in Lyonesse"—form a "coherent drama dealing with secular and religious love," according to Robert L.

Stallman (657). For Stallman, the merits of "The Defence of Guenevere" and "King

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<sup>58</sup> Antony H. Harrison notes, "The 'rueful smile' with which she looks at her cold hands at the end of the poem is an acknowledgment of her impotence to save either herself or her lover" (48).

<sup>59</sup> While the poem's source material is Arthurian legend via Malory, it is one of three by Morris that deal with Rossetti's watercolors. The others are "The Blue Closet" and "The Tune of Seven Towers" (Helsingers 80).

Arthur's Tomb" lie in "the dramatic depiction of personality in the manner of Browning. More specifically" Stallman "believe[s] both poems can be considered an exposition of the woman Guenevere, a figure out of romance that fascinated Morris and drew forth his best energies" (657). While Stallman is right to focus on Guenevere's personality in his analysis, I argue further that Morris' use of the corporeal categories highlights her intensity, activity, and control over her fate—as well as offering these qualities as positive traits of the Pre-Raphaelite body in a Duhiggian habit loop.

"King Arthur's Tomb" begins by introducing the dejected Launcelot on his travels as he thinks about Guenevere. The narrator describes him as "most sad / Of mouth and eye" (2-3) and not knowing "whether good or bad / He was" (4-5). In fact, "he knew nothing now" (9) except that Guenevere was now living in Glastonbury, where his journey led. The narrator corrects himself, pointing out that Launcelot was still taken with Guenevere:

This he knew also; that some fingers twine,  
 Not only in a man's hair, even his heart,  
 (Making him good or bad I mean,) but in his life,<sup>60</sup>  
 Skies, earth, men's looks and deeds, all that has part,  
 Not being ourselves, in that half-sleep, half-strife,  
 (Strange sleep, strange strife,) that men call living; so  
 Was Launcelot most glad when the moon rose,  
 Because it brought new memories of her. (12-19)

In this passage, Guenevere's fingers are emphasized, curling in Launcelot's hair but also metaphorically his heart. Launcelot, meanwhile, is dazed and single-minded—half

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<sup>60</sup> The parenthetical asides are reminiscent of Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel."

asleep and not himself, he feels strife until the moon reminds him of the good times with Guenevere.

The first, brief memory he considers is of Guenevere in a garden, and the poem shifts from the narrator's voice to Launcelot's words. In the garden, Guenevere

Loved to sit still among the flowers, till night  
 Had quite come on, hair loosen'd, for she said,  
 Smiling like heaven, that its fairness might  
 Draw up the wind sooner to cool her head. (25-28)

This brief but pleasant memory matches Guenevere with flowers and heaven, focusing on her flowing hair, her smile like heaven, and her cool head.

Launcelot's next memory of Guenevere includes his love for her and how they spent their time together:

[“]Verily then I think, that Guenevere,  
 Made sad by dew and wind and tree-barred moon,  
 Did love me more than ever, was more dear

“To me than ever, she would let me lie  
 And kiss her feet, or, if I sat behind,  
 Would drop her hand and arm most tenderly,  
 And touch my mouth. And she would let me wind

“Her hair around my neck, so that it fell  
 Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight  
 With many unnamed colours, till the bell  
 Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight

“Through all my ways of being. (38-49)

Launcelot finds tenderness and delight in Guenevere's gestures, like the dropping of her hand and arm to touch his mouth. He twines her hair around his neck, joining them closer. The passionate red of his robe (46) contrasts with the “unnamed colours” of

twilight (46-7)—a moment that invokes the Scarryian “febleness of imagination” and makes Guenevere more vivid in the imagination as she presses her mouth to his cheek in a kiss. The description reveals Launcelot’s simple and oddly pure love for Guenevere; as he lingers in his memory and its sensual details, he finds a simple “delight” (48) that precludes him from thinking beyond her physical presence. The kissing of her feet foreshadows her later prayer to Christ for redemption, although it can also be read as an erotic, Magdalen-inspired gesture. Launcelot continues:

“Once, I remember, as I sat beside,  
 She turn’d a little and laid back her head,  
 And slept upon my breast; I almost died  
 In those night-watches with my love and dread.

“There lily-like she bow’d her head and slept,  
 And I breathed low and did not dare to move,  
 But sat and quiver’d inwardly, thoughts crept,  
 And frighten’d me with pulses of my Love. (53-60)

Like Rossetti’s Jenny, she sleeps on him as he watches her; but unlike Rossetti’s narrator, he feels love and the quivers and pulses of desire. Instead of the generic flowers from the garden memory, Launcelot associates her with the lily. Next, he imagines her in the heavens, in an echo of Rossetti’s “Blessed Damozel”:

“The stars shone out above the doubtful green  
 Of her bodice, in the green sky overhead;  
 Pale in the green sky were the stars I ween,  
 Because the moon shone like a star she shed

“When she dwelt up in heaven a while ago,  
 And ruled all things but God. (61-66)

He imagines Guenevere as dwelling in heaven with God; Stallman notes that he is equating her with the Virgin Mary (667). Launcelot associates her with paleness and the color green, contrasting with his red robe. But the moments of happiness are not always



easy, as the guilty knowledge still lurks that they are betraying Arthur: “I did not sleep long, feeling that in sleep / I did some loved one wrong” (73-74). As Stallman puts it, “The kingdom is in ruins because of this love, and yet the stolid Launcelot continues single-mindedly to make it the center of his world” (667).

As Launcelot continues to remember Guenevere through similar imagery, the narrator steps in to describe how the knight’s “strained heart” feels “wrenched” and “sore” (96) as he realizes the memories are not his present reality. As the memories pass, “A longing followed; if he might but touch / That Guenevere at once!” (98-99). As he feels vexed and anxious, the colors of his horse and the road recede to dull greys, matching his now-colorless mindset. Arriving at Glastonbury at last,

[...] he was now quite giddy as before,  
When she slept by him, tired out, and her hair  
Was mingled with the rushes on the floor,  
And he, being tired too, was scarce aware

Of her presence; yet as he sat and gazed,  
A shiver ran throughout him, and his breath  
Came slower, he seem’d suddenly amazed,  
As though he had not heard of Arthur’s death. (113-120)

Launcelot knows Guenevere is near, and he pictures her again in his mind, “quite giddy as before.” He soon imagines tiredness overtaking them both, and he loses focus on their bodies: he becomes “scarce aware / Of her presence.” He sees her, as it were, without seeing her; he is oblivious to her thoughts, seeming to relive the moment he learned of Arthur’s death. Even as Launcelot’s mind drifts away from her inner standing point, the poem’s description of Guenevere keeps the reader near it. The material antecedents of perception are present and interacting: Guenevere’s hair “was mingled with the rushes on the floor,” lending a sense of solidity to her sleeping form.

As Launcelot rides on, he finds a place to rest, dazed, laying “his head upon a tomb / Not knowing it was Arthur’s” (125-6), and then Guenevere takes over the poem’s focus. After her maidens fetch her, she meets Launcelot in a way that shatters his expectations of a giddy reunion. Whereas before she wore lily-colored garments and had a green bodice, now

[... ] all her robes were black,  
 With a long white veil only; she went slow,  
 As one walks to be slain, her eyes did lack  
 Half her old glory, yea, alas! the glow

Had left her face and hands. (129-133)

Hidden behind dark mourning robes, she has lost the spark, the “glow,” that Launcelot remembered.

Guenevere has changed over the night. She had gone to bed expecting to entwine herself with her lover as before, but instead experienced an epiphany:

As she lay last night on her purple bed,  
 Wishing for morning, grudging every pause  
 Of the palace clocks, until that Launcelot’s head

Should lie on her breast, with all her golden hair  
 Each side---when suddenly the thing grew drear  
 In morning twilight, when the grey downs bare  
 Grew into lumps of sin to Guenevere. (134-40)

Guenevere realizes that her adultery with Launcelot puts them in peril of going to hell, and she has determined over the night to save their souls. Helsinger rightly points to this as a telling passage, particularly noting the colors: “This dulling or fading out of color, and the general incapacity to feel (sometimes sensory as well as emotional) is several times compared to the colorless time before sunrise or at dusk, when color drains from

the world” (70).<sup>61</sup> The passage is followed by a description of the spasms and shaking that overtook Guenevere, before the narrator says God gave her grace and she prayed for forgiveness. She contrasts her two loves:

“If even I go to hell, I cannot choose  
But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot keep  
From loving Launcelot; O Christ! must I lose  
My own heart’s love? see, though I cannot weep,

“Yet am I very sorry for my sin;  
Moreover, Christ, I cannot bear that hell,  
I am most fain to love you, and to win  
A place in heaven some time---I cannot tell---

“Speak to me, Christ! I kiss, kiss, kiss your feet;  
Ah! now I weep!” (173-182)

The image of Launcelot kissing her feet in his earlier memories (line 42) is transformed into Guenevere’s active seeking for repentance and forgiveness. The triple repetition of “kiss” reinforces the intense importance of her new-found need and desire for godliness.

At last meeting Launcelot by the tomb, Guenevere greets him by praising Arthur, leading him into near-madness. He does not understand her cold words and reserved posture, exclaiming, “Do you not know me, are you gone mad? Fling / Your arms and hair about me, lest I fear / You are not Guenevere, but some other thing” (192-3). She explains her change of heart, promising that they will never again “twine arms and lips” (197). He requests a kiss three times, echoing her prayer. She nearly gives in to

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<sup>61</sup> Helsingel elaborates and generalizes on the poem’s changing colors and lack of them:

But in the same poem Launcelot remembers the night spent in the garden with Guenevere before they began their long, passionate affair. He relives the colorless moment before dawn as the ground against which the sudden, renewed sight of her, holding scarlet lilies in the morning sunlight, provoked his awed wonder into love. Colorlessness, or the threat of it, is the background against which action and the blood or brilliant banners that accompany it, or love and its dazzling imagery of red gold hair and scarlet lilies, acquire their startling vividness for both characters and readers. (70-71)

temptation, saying, “Christ! my hot lips are very near his brow, / Help me to save his soul!” (207-208). As he shakes and quivers in agony, she invokes the memory of Arthur and Launcelot returning from battle together, explaining the history of her growing love for him until she found she “could not live a righteous life” (263). As she tells her tale, she nearly loses her focus—“I shall go mad, / Or else die kissing him, he is so pale” (361-362)—but her resolve stays just strong enough. Again invoking Arthur, she imagines Launcelot meeting him in “the other world” (382), which proves to be too much for Launcelot. He faints, and she runs away while she is still strong. When he awakens by himself, he says aloud, “My head and hands were bleeding from the stone. / When I rose up, also I heard a bell” (395-396). Stallman explains that the imagery shows he has been redeemed: “Guenevere has been successful once more, for the symbols of a religious conversion, the stigmatic wounds and the sacring bell,<sup>62</sup> appear to her dazed lover as he symbolically wakens to a new perception” (669).

For Stallman, the poem proves that Guenevere “is the brains of the outfit” (667). While Launcelot has been single-minded in his attempts to return to her and then to continue their illicit but true love, she is the one who “understand[s] the nature of love” and can “take the action that Launcelot cannot take because of his stubborn moral blindness” (667). In “The Defence of Guenevere,” she took up her case and argued for the rightness of her love; now she actively resists the flesh and succeeds in redeeming both herself and Launcelot. In Stallman’s words, she has made the “attempt to save her lover for heaven in spite of his own moral obtuseness” (668). Having decided that both must leave their relationship in the past, she rejects his advances. Launcelot is not the

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<sup>62</sup> The sacring bell is one name for the small bell rung during High Mass when the Host is elevated.

brave knight who can save her; rather, only she has control over her body and her future. That makes her a rare woman in Victorian poetry.

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As we move from the poetry of Morris in this chapter to Rossetti in the next, it is opportune to briefly consider the differences in their respective poetic styles. On the one hand, Morris tends to be more direct in his descriptions—more realistic, more blunt, perhaps more external. As Wilmer puts it, Morris has “a natural vigour that informs his designs as well as the rhythms of his poetry. He has nothing of Dante Gabriel’s languor. When he dreams up an incident in Froissart’s France, his tone is far from dreamy. On the contrary, it is as if, having dreamed it, he knows how to make it real” (192-3). This directness may well be rooted in Morris’s revolutionary socialist politics, which “is by its very nature a way of turning dream into reality” (193). In the poems of this chapter, Morris’s “blunt physicality” (193) appears as a way of pushing readers to the inner standing point and catalyzing the changes to the Victorian habit loop about the body that the Pre-Raphaelites sought.

By contrast, Rossetti is much less direct. He is a dreamer, with a cautious touch and an inward glance. Practical politics do not interest him. Wilmer puts it this way: “For him the whole point of dream was inwardness, the capacity of paintings or poems to reveal emotions and unconscious thoughts” (192). We have already seen the dreamer at work in some of Rossetti’s more mystical figures like the poem-painting pairings “Astarte Syriaca” and “The Blessed Damozel.” Wilmer contrasts Morris’s “blunt

physicality” with Rossetti’s “emotional absorption” (193). Despite being opposites in such senses, the two poets are more like two sides of the same coin. They share the same central project: rewriting the Victorian habit loop about the body.

## Chapter V – Rossetti's Poetry

At the end of the last chapter, we examined some broad differences between the poetic styles of Morris and Rossetti. In particular, while Morris is relatively direct with his characters and their bodies, Rossetti has the indirect quality of a dreamer, concerned with inner narratives and emotions. As we saw with his poem-painting pairs, Rossetti often works in the realms of myth and metaphor when describing the body. These mythic tendencies play out for Rossetti in various ways, but often they involve opposite ends of a spectrum of sexuality, in an oft-discussed virgin/whore dichotomy. Rossetti harbors a dual fascination: on one hand, powerful female figures or even goddesses like Astarte, and on the other hand, the so-called “fallen woman,” like the woman in his painting *Found*. More than with Morris, there is a current of sexual anxiety flowing under, or even directly through, much of Rossetti's work. In terms of the body in his poetry, Rossetti seems less interested in how the body looks and more interested in what it means—that is, what a body signifies for the broader culture. He is willing to confront the complicated social problem of prostitution in poems like “Jenny” as he explores what the body means and how that meaning might change.

We have seen the mechanism of how Rossetti and Morris attempt to change the Victorian habit loop of thinking about the body, but in this chapter I want to dig deeper into the inner standing point. In the framework of this dissertation, Rossetti and Morris use what Duhigg calls “the Golden Rule of habit change,” which describes using the same cue and reward but substituting a different routine (62). I am arguing in this chapter that Rossetti uses the corporeal categories to surprise readers, which has the

effect of defamiliarizing the poems from the inner standing point. As a result, Rossetti gently leads his readers to re-evaluate the outer standing point about the Victorian body—where the old habit loop’s routine resides—and replace it with the new habit loop’s routine of thinking favorably about the Pre-Raphaelite body. In this chapter, I will first flesh out the idea of the inner standing point, using Rossetti’s own context and ideas. Next, I will examine three poems using my framework: “Blessed Damozel” as a poem without its painting, “For a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione,” and finally, “Jenny,” which is arguably Rossetti’s masterwork.

Beginning with Rossetti’s context for the inner standing point, it is important to recognize the significant resistance to a Pre-Raphaelite body as Morris and Rossetti conceived it. Rossetti’s poems were the subject of acrimonious public debate. 1870 brought the publication of the collection *Poems by D. G. Rossetti*,<sup>63</sup> and while admirers were numerous, not all responses were favorable. One particularly scathing attack was published in the *Contemporary Review* in October 1871 by Scottish poet Robert Buchanan, writing under the *nom de plume* Thomas Maitland. Calling his essay “The Fleshly School of Poetry,” Buchanan attacked Pre-Raphaelites Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris generally, and two of Rossetti’s poems particularly: “Nuptial Sleep” and “Jenny.” Buchanan’s main objection to the “fleshly school” was that its adherents treated the human body with undue freedom and preferred form to substance. Buchanan opines:

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<sup>63</sup> “Jenny” has an unusually convoluted and famous publication history. Jules Paul Seigel explains that “Rossetti began the poem as early as 1848 [and] rewrote it in 1858” (677), around the time he was working on *Found*, with the fallen woman as his theme again. Indeed, as McGann points out about lines 304-9 of “Jenny,” the description of the early-morning market recalls *Found* (McGann, *Collected Poetry* 381). When Rossetti’s wife, Lizzie Siddal, died in 1862, he buried the only copy of “Jenny,” along with other poems, in her coffin. Seven years later, in 1869, Rossetti exhumed her coffin and retrieved the manuscripts, which he published together with newer poems the following year (381).



... [F]leshliness ... is a quality which becomes unwholesome when there is no moral or intellectual quality to temper and control it. Fully conscious of this themselves, the fleshly gentlemen have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense. (Buchanan 335)

While the bombastic language is typical of Buchanan's screed, its sentiments echoed the prevailing squeamishness about the body that we have seen in the Victorian habit loop.

In another passage, Buchanan attacks Rossetti's poem "Nuptial Sleep," which deals with a married couple as they kiss and fall asleep. This passage further demonstrates the style of Buchanan's polemic:

Here is a full-grown man, presumably intelligent and cultivated, putting on record for other full-grown men to read, the most secret mysteries of sexual connection, and that with so sickening a desire to reproduce the sensual mood, so careful a choice of epithet to convey mere animal sensations, that we merely shudder at the shameless nakedness. We are no purists in such matters. We hold the sensual part of our nature to be as holy as the spiritual or intellectual part, and we believe that such things must find their equivalent in all; but it is neither poetic, nor manly, nor even human, to obtrude such things as the themes of whole poems. It is simply nasty. (338)

As much as Buchanan's rhetorical extremes might seem silly in the twenty-first century, and his earnest claim that "[w]e are no purists in such matters" laughable, his opinion of the so-called "fleshly school" was not uncommon in 1871. Furthermore, while Buchanan's evaluation of Rossetti and company as "nasty" no longer persuades, he is right, in his fumbling way, to draw attention to how Rossetti offers a positive Pre-Raphaelite body as an alternative routine in the Victorian habit loop.

Buchanan's assault on the "fleshly school" caused Rossetti much consternation. Indeed, the attack probably was a significant factor in Rossetti's 1872 nervous breakdown. In the short term, however—October and November of 1871—Rossetti set

out to defend himself, furiously writing “The Stealthy School of Criticism,” a prose response to Buchanan. The title stems from the pseudonymous, and by implication underhanded, nature of Buchanan’s essay. In “The Stealthy School,” Rossetti denies that his poems in general are “fleshly,” or that they lack a large human theme. His defense draws particularly on his poem “Jenny,” a male speaker’s dramatic monologue as he sits with a sleeping prostitute.

According to Rossetti’s letters, he considered “Jenny” to be one of his most important poems.<sup>64</sup> He was aware of the difficulties the poem might pose for readers, even for careful readers who “might still hold that the thought in it had better have dispensed with the situation which serves it for framework” (“Stealthy” 337). Jerome McGann holds that Rossetti is thinking in this passage specifically of readers like Ruskin<sup>65</sup> who were repelled by Rossetti’s “framework” (“DG Rossetti” 173), specifically the speaker’s extended contemplation of Jenny’s life as a prostitute. These readers led Rossetti to “consider how far a treatment from without might here be possible (“Stealthy” 337). Put another way, Rossetti struggled with the question of why he should write about Victorian prostitution in a poem rather than a prose form. Without explaining why he chose the poem, Rossetti goes on to discuss, as McGann puts it, “what is involved when ‘the thought in’ his poem is cast in an imaginative rather than an expository ‘framework’” (“DG Rossetti” 173). The passage is important enough to quote at length:

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<sup>64</sup> Seigel repeats Rossetti’s assertion that “Jenny” was “‘the most serious thing’ he had ‘ever written,’” then collects other examples of its importance to the poet (678). Seigel also explains that along with “A Last Confession” and the sonnet sequence *The House of Life*, Rossetti most wanted to be known for “Jenny” (678).

<sup>65</sup> In the notes to Rossetti’s collected poems, McGann refers to “Ruskin’s 1860 critique of ‘Jenny’—that it would not be understood by most, and that it would offend those who could understand it” (*Collected Poetry* 382).

But the motive powers of art reverse the requirement of science, and demand first of all an *inner* standing-point. The heart of such a mystery as this must be plucked from the very world in which it beats or bleeds; and the beauty and pity, the self-questionings and all-questionings which it brings with it, can come with full force only from the mouth of one alive to its whole appeal, such as the speaker put forward in the poem,—that is, of a young and thoughtful man of the world. To such a speaker, many half-cynical revulsions of feeling and reverie, and a recurrent presence of the impressions of beauty (however artificial) which first brought him within such a circle of influence, would be inevitable features of the dramatic relation portrayed. (Rossetti, “Stealthy” 337-8)

This difficult explanation requires parsing. As McGann notes, Rossetti casts the speaker in “ambivalent terms” (“DG Rossetti” 174)—he is “half-cynical,” his aesthetic sense is inclined to the “artificial,” and he is plagued by “self-questionings and all-questionings.” The phrase “a young and thoughtful man of the world,” as McGann argues, “sums up the speaker’s problematic character as Rossetti sees him” (174), for each term in that phrase is difficult to pin down. “The dramatic relation[s] portrayed” in the poem demonstrate the young man’s character—that is to say, the cultural background and psychology that “brought him within such a circle of influence” as the poem illustrates.

Another point worth noting is the tone of the passage. Rossetti is careful to use neutral, slightly distant language. The young man is “thoughtful,” for example, without implying that his thoughtfulness is entirely positive. The reverse of the coin is illustrated by the young man’s “impressions of beauty (however artificial)” —the artificiality is not entirely negative, as it would be for a purely Romantic ideology of nature.

Rossetti’s reference to the “*inner* standing-point” as one of “the motive powers of art” carries great significance. In tracing the origins of Rossetti’s concept, McGann notes, “The idea of art at an ‘*inner* standing-point’ clearly represents a theoretical reflection on the dramatic monologue, and especially on Robert Browning’s use of the

form, which Rossetti much admired” (“DG Rossetti” 174).<sup>66</sup> Rossetti’s ideas about the dramatic monologue, however, differ from Browning’s. For Rossetti, an inner standing point<sup>67</sup> is “not simply a feature of a particular genre or poetic form[;] it is a foundational requirement of ‘art’” (McGann, “DG Rossetti” 174). In other words, for Rossetti, an inner standing point is a first principle or “motive power” for *all* art, including the visual and the verbal. That is one reason why the inner standing point is so important in this dissertation’s discussion of both poetry and painting. What separates art from the clinical approach of science—or, perhaps, a poem constructed using a paint-by-numbers approach—is that the inner standing point “must be plucked from the very world in which it beats or bleeds.” The inner standing point gives art its emotional appeal; the outer standing point allows critical, even scientific analysis. Rossetti’s perspective here is quite “modern,” almost phenomenological. Science, for Rossetti, requires an outer standing point, a way of viewing things with objectivity and critical distance. Art, on the other hand, insists on involving its audience at its emotional core, at the inner standing point.

In terms of habit loops, the outer standing point by itself fails to satisfy a craving to repeat a habit. This is why a well-reasoned prose argument in favor of the Pre-Raphaelite body would likely not resonate with Rossetti’s readers. He must hook them

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<sup>66</sup> William Clyde De Vane traces this admiration “from Rossetti’s early idolatry of the elder poet to his complete repudiation of Browning in 1872” (463). Rossetti looked up to Browning for many years, until the 1872 publication of Browning’s “Fifine at the Fair,” which came during the height of the “fleshly school” controversy. Rossetti apparently saw the ending of “Fifine” as a criticism of “Jenny” that linked Browning with Buchanan’s charges of “fleshliness” (483). As Rossetti’s mental health deteriorated, he dropped Browning from his circle of friends.

<sup>67</sup> It is a minor point, but I prefer to drop Rossetti’s hyphen when using the term “inner standing point.” Dropping the hyphen serves two purposes. First, it looks more modern. Second, my use of “inner standing point” is not precisely the same as Rossetti’s; when the hyphen appears, I am calling attention to the term as Rossetti first used it.

with the inner standing point, “and the beauty and pity, the self-questionings and all-questionings which it brings with it.” Only with that emotional resonance can art drive readers to the revised Pre-Raphaelite habit loop—by supplying a craving to repeat the emotion of the inner standing point.

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The first Rossetti poem I will discuss in this chapter is “The Blessed Damozel.” While I addressed the poem, together with Rossetti’s painting, through a primarily Scarryian lens in Chapter 3, here I want to focus more on the idea of the inner standing point, in light of the term’s discussion above. One of Rossetti’s earliest poems about a liminal figure, “Damozel” shares much in common with the other early poems on pictures. It is pictorial, reading as if it were a dramatic narrative poem on a painting by an early Renaissance painter. The poem’s visual details paint an intentionally “simple” style, beginning with the figure of the damozel herself:

The blessed damozel leaned out  
 From the gold bar of Heaven;  
 Her eyes were deeper than the depth  
 Of waters stilled at even;  
 She had three lilies in her hand,  
 And the stars in her hair were seven.

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Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,  
 No wrought flowers did adorn,  
 But a white rose of Mary’s gift,

10

For service meetly worn;  
 Her hair that lay along her back  
 Was yellow like ripe corn. (1-12)

The description of her long robe, three lilies, white rose, seven stars, and corn-yellow hair in a list—a list that places symbolic details and sensuous particulars of her body and clothing on the same plane of unquestioning literalness—provides an analogue to her later naïve speech, as she anticipates the welcome she will provide her lover when he joins her in heaven. Yet her simplicity is presented through a carefully staged series of framing perspectives—a series of shifting narrative gazes—that differ from and comment upon the damozel and her speech, and, moreover, re-create them. Her speech, enclosed by those of the narrator and the lover (who are closely linked, if not identical), is generated by their imaginations striving to bring her to be a felt presence across the boundaries of space, time, and death.

From its earliest version in 1846-47,<sup>68</sup> the poem contained all three of the differently voiced speaking parts of the final 1870 poem: the first-person speech of the damozel herself (set within quotation marks) from her position in heaven, longing for the arrival of her still-living lover; the first-person words (in parentheses) of her lover on earth, which precede and interrupt the damozel; and a framing, unmarked third-person description of the damozel from a beholder's perspective, which includes indirect narration of what the damozel supposedly perceives looking earthward from heaven. I want to focus on the latter two elements of the poem and their relation to each other.

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<sup>68</sup> McGann notes five particular versions, starting with an unpublished and now lost 1846-7 manuscript. The middle versions date from 1850, 1855, and 1856. McGann gives a detailed breakdown of which stanzas appear in each revision (*Collected Poetry* 377). I follow as the main text the final version published in the 1870 *Poems*.

Rossetti expanded and revised the poem over an extended period. Although he added two stanzas to each of these sections, the most significant additions were to the parenthetical words of the lover, whose role in determining the tone of the final poem both grows and changes. In the 1847 poem, the lover's words appear only in stanza four, after three stanzas of opening description of the lady. (This passage comes from the 1850 text published in *The Germ*; changes in 1870 to these lines were minimal.)

The wonder was not yet quite gone 15  
 From that still look of hers;  
 Albeit, to them she left, her day  
 Had counted as ten years.

(To *one*, it is ten years of years:  
 ... Yet now, here in this place, 20  
 Surely she leaned o'er me,—her hair  
 Fell all about my face....  
 Nothing: the Autumn-fall of leaves.  
 The whole year sets apace.) (15-24)

The lover is intensely alert for sensory signs of presence; to borrow from my discussion last chapter, he seeks intensity through sensation. Later in the poem, the lover's short interjections are the body's senses: "(I saw her smile.)" (139) and "(I heard her tears.)" (144). The repetition that marks the transition ("ten years" and "ten years of years") draws attention to the altered relation to time that such heightened attention may seek to produce.

It also establishes immediately a connection between the narrative voice and the lover's. The narrative is a poet's, using style and language in a self-conscious way. It is

also that of the kind of painter-poet that Pater saw in Rossetti, given to particularizing visual and other sensory detail so that liminal figures like the damozel—apparently already in heaven—appear before us with startling visual and corporeal specificity. There is a sense of real presence to her. While the damozel’s distinctive simplicity, her ability to inhabit a Catholic heaven, is evoked through the deliberately archaic, enumerative (“seven stars,” for example), and literal style that is her poetic counterpart, the narrator uses more sophisticated figures when he describes the scene around her. Most of the poem’s more involved visual similes occur in this section: earth “spins like a fretful midge” (36); the “curled moon / Was like a little feather / Fluttering far down the gulf” (55-57). Throughout the narrative parts, style is fitted to subject, and that highly literate and self-consciously craftsman-like relation is itself used to characterize the voice as that of a poet. The echoed phrases in the lover’s parenthetical verses suggest that he is following the poetic narrative, as might a reader; his own words are spoken with the apparent directness of lyric speech. The poem we read proceeds on two temporal levels: a narrative past tense and the present tense of the lover’s interpolated commentary, the difference emphasized by his emphasis on space and time: “now, and in this place” (20).

The two voices/gazes—distinct in style, page layout, and timeline—are linked by more than verbal echoes. Both take the perspective of someone on the earthly side of the human-divine boundary. A critical moment in the poem is when the narrative voice observes that the damozel leaned “from the fixed place of Heaven” (49) “Until her bosom must have made / The bar she leaned on warm” (45-46). Of course, these lines could be read as evidence of Rossetti’s own “fleshly” imagination, or of the damozel’s incomplete translation from earthly to heavenly lover. However, such an interpretation, as much as it



takes after Buchanan, is superficial. This moment in the poem is Rossetti's way of characterizing the narration as that of someone imagining the lady in heaven in a way that marks his location within a modern world of the senses, aware of human bodies. This, for Rossetti, is the location from which art and poetry must now do their work: the inner standing point, as defined in his "Stealthy School of Criticism" essay. It is also, of course, the position of the lover. The detail thus serves as evidence of the kinship of the narrator and the lover. Both the narrator and the lover imagine the damozel as a body—a physical presence—that leaves traces perceptible to the senses through the corporeal categories and comes to consciousness through them. Even the parentheses that enclose the earthly lover's words are akin to the gold bar in heaven: the parentheses and the gold bar are tangible physical barriers or separations, but they also leave the speaker close enough to allow his senses to function. For example, the parenthetical words of the lover in the last stanza include "(I saw her smile)" (139) and "(I heard her tears)" (144). While the parentheses create separation between the lover and the damozel, he can still perceive her smile and tears through the barrier. Similarly, the narrator indicates the likelihood of a Scarryian warmth on the bar.

It can be useful to think of "The Blessed Damozel" and other Rossetti poems as adaptations of the dramatic monologue because it allows us to recognize that the framing perspective of poet or lover is also a fiction. It is a point worth bearing in mind for "Jenny" as well. Yet there are some important differences in Rossetti's take on the dramatic monologue. Although we understand "The Blessed Damozel" to be a speaking portrait of just one fictive consciousness, the dramatic occasion for speech (the "now" and "here" of the lover) is created by the poetic narrative he has perhaps composed

(and/or the picture-like scene he has imagined). And unlike the usually silent characters whose presence prompts the speech of dramatic monologues, the other figure in the poem is realized as a speaking, feeling presence—but only as that presence can be imagined by the earthly poet-lover, who is made painfully aware of his limits, embodied in a human present.

The damozel seeks above all else a reunion on earth with her lover, but that reunion is also the bringing together of body and soul. In her words to Christ, she plans to ask

Thus much for him and me: —  
 Only to live as once on earth  
     With Love, — only to be, 130  
 As then awhile, for ever now  
     Together, I and he. (128-32)

Thus, she seeks to have his body and her soul, together again as on earth. It is a wish from the afterlife for a physical presence in the material world. Even though she imagines them together in heaven, she still yearns, with an undercurrent of sexual anxiety, for the earthly, bodily experience of love. The damozel’s weeping in the final stanza, highlighted by privileging her face in her hands, leaves the result of her plea ambiguous. She may weep with happiness at the thought of her reunion; with frustration at having to wait for her lover, whose sense of time is much different from hers; or with sadness at the impossibility of being with him again. The ending of the poem highlights the difference between the “blunt physicality” we saw in Morris (Wilmer 193) and here, Rossetti’s nuanced, almost elegant, liminal bodies.

“The Blessed Damozel,” like several of Rossetti’s other works, features a modern sensibility that imagines and describes an earlier and different one. The Pre-Raphaelite label itself indicates the same thing, a looking back and reimagining of an earlier era. The word “damozel” itself exemplifies the use of archaic language and deliberate simplicity. A remote figure is depicted attending to the sensed experience of something/someone absent or nearly beyond the senses. The play between the modern mind and the liminal figure emphasizes the distance between them, as well as between the distanced outer standing point and the emotional inner standing point. Bridging the gap between those standing points, of course, is part of how Rossetti’s poem can effectively lead the reader through the process that we see throughout this dissertation for changing the Victorian habit loop about the body.

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The second poem in this chapter, Rossetti’s sonnet “For a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione (In the Louvre)”<sup>69</sup> achieves the inner standing point’s requisite surprise by being entirely occupied by a pause or cessation of actions. Hermeneutically, the poem and the painting on which it is based cannot be separated; therefore, I will draw on both in the following analysis. For reference, Rossetti’s ekphrastic poem describes the painting in Figure 17, which dates from about 1509. The painting was thought to be by Giorgione but is more likely the work of Titian (McGann, *Collected Poetry* 390).

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<sup>69</sup> The painting is generally called *Fête Champêtre* or *Pastorale* (McGann, *Collected Poetry* 390). The poem is sometimes referred to on this basis.



Figure 17: *Fête Champêtre* (Titian); Musée du Louvre, Paris

The painting shows four main figures in a landscape setting. Two nude women—one standing, the other sitting with her back to us, concealing her facial expression—frame two clothed and seated men. One man wears court or urban dress, and the other is garbed as a shepherd. A shepherd and flock can be seen in the middle distance on the right, and in the far distance rest both a simple wooden building and the hint of a marble palace. The sumptuously outfitted man holds a musical instrument, possibly a lute, and shares a close glance with his male companion, while the seated woman, whose back is turned to the viewer, has let the instrument in her hand fall from her lips. Though they



McGann describes the textual history of the poem<sup>70</sup> over the decades. It was “[c]omposed in Paris, 1849, first published in the *Germ*, no. 4 (30 April 1850), much revised for the 1870 *Poems*, [and] collected thereafter” (*Collected Poetry* 390). Like many of Rossetti’s poems, including “The Blessed Damozel” and “Jenny,” he revised “Venetian Pastoral” over the years and published it in the volume decried by Buchanan.

Rossetti’s sonnet speaks in imperatives directed both at figures in the picture and at the reader, highlighting the physical body and its senses. The poem urges the reader toward the divided consciousness of the artist who achieves, through imagination, the inner standing point of the music-making figures. The first five lines of the poem bring a sense of action slowing and voices ceasing:

Water, for anguish of the solstice: — nay,  
           But dip the vessel slowly, — nay, but lean  
           And hark how at its verge the wave sighs in  
 Reluctant. Hush! Beyond all depth away  
 The heat lies silent at the brink of day (1-5)

The sudden stillness, mirrored poetically in the colon following these lines, is an act of attention that brings to greater awareness for both the reader and the unnamed characters the mere sensations of being: the weight of that heat that “lies” on the horizon “at the brink of day,” and the languid gesture of the standing nude woman on the picture’s left,

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<sup>70</sup> As an aside, McGann’s nutshell comment on the poem is instructive:

The sonnet is very Keatsian in its appreciation of art, or aesthetic space, as emblematic of an “immortality” unavailable to flesh and blood humans. As in the “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” here Rossetti suggests that the painting’s figures, in particular the woman dipping the water pitcher, seem half-conscious of their aesthetic condition. To the degree that the woman is conscious, she recalls the Blessed Damozel, whose emparadised state is transacted by a melancholy that arises because her lover is not with her. In this sonnet the woman’s purely imaginative status refines the textual melancholy to an exquisite degree. (McGann, *Collected Poetry* 390)

as she reaches to “dip” or pour water with a clear glass pitcher from a stone well. Other sensations appear in the sestet: the lingering touch of the pipe that has fallen from a mouth that holds its shape as if still feeling the pipe’s presence, and the seated nude woman facing away from us (“from whose mouth the slim pipes creep / And leave it pouting” (9-10), though her facial expression is not visible in the painting) and the “shadowed grass / ... cool against her naked side” (10-11). Through such sensations the music continues to be felt, even after it has ceased—indeed, the music comes to be recognized as the expression of the sensory abundance of which the figures now become aware, while straining to hear what has ceased.

The point, for Rossetti, seems to be that intently focusing on such sensations sharpens the consciousness of what it is to be human, almost to the point where it becomes unbearable. To live through feelings and to be aware that one is doing so seems to confront the power but also the limits of human consciousness. Rossetti proposes that, for the figures in the painting, as for the poet viewing the painting and for the reader of the sonnet, such awareness is the kind of knowledge, itself painfully moving, that art and poetry can provide. Here, that knowing takes the form of the suspended music of the pipe and lute (now, as it were, playing on without the agency of human beings)—as they are felt by the seated woman, the poem’s inner standing point from which the poet’s or the artist’s sensory grasp of the weight of his own work is to be imaginatively re-created. The poem’s concern is with art’s power to bring bodily, sensory experience to consciousness, and hence to realize the peculiar gift and burden of human mortality. As poem and painting suggest, that gift and burden is to know the limits we cannot pass. This is why, in Rossetti’s reading, grief and physical pleasure are so closely intertwined

when they are mediated through some form of art, whether that is music, poetry, or painting:

the hand trails upon the viol-string  
 That sobs, and the brown faces cease to sing,  
 Sad with the whole of pleasure. [...]  
 Say nothing now unto her lest she weep. (6-8, 12)

This early poem on a picture, begun in 1849, helps explain why Rossetti so frequently looked to painting to explore the role of sensory perception in creating works of the imagination, using painting as a way to better understand the making of modern art and poetry. Painting forces the artist to think through the senses and what the body experiences, to pay attention to the concreteness of what can be seen—and because sight often carries with it the suggestions of other sensory experiences, also what can be heard and felt. As we have seen in *Morris*, the intensity of those sensations can be a conduit for the inner standing point and its role in habit change.

On the surface, “Venetian Pastoral” seems to take us somewhat beyond the Pre-Raphaelite reconceptualization of the body, but it is in fact integral. As Rossetti takes a painting from a conventional genre<sup>71</sup> and writes a sonnet about it that transcends those conventions,<sup>72</sup> the body becomes more than a physical presence in one moment in time. Rossetti develops a new sense of temporality: the poem takes us from before the moment of the painting to shortly after it, employing a series of what Helsinger calls “acts of

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<sup>71</sup> While Rossetti’s first draft of the poem predates Manet’s *Le Déjeuner Sur L’Herbe* (1862-3), for example, the poem’s revision and publication came after. Such paintings were common for centuries.

<sup>72</sup> Part of what Rossetti is doing is like Pater’s rejuvenation of Botticelli’s reputation, described by Frank Kermode in his 1985 book *Forms of Attention* (1-31).



attention.” This series of moments in time brings vivacity to the figures in the scene in a more historical way than we have seen with other Rossetti poems, while still retaining a focus on the body’s senses. The intensity of those bodily sensations combines with a strong sense of time to move beyond the conventional body and beyond the conventional pastoral genre, contributing to the unique Pre-Raphaelite habit loop. In this habit loop, when Rossetti’s figures pause the action, the Duhiggian “routine” is that the reader’s imagination lingers on what has just ceased and how it may resume at any moment in a flash of almost Morris-like physicality. In “Venetian Pastoral,” the body becomes a site of potential energy, waiting to be released into movement.

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At the start of this chapter, I detailed the controversy arising from Buchanan’s “fleshly school” attack on the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as Rossetti’s response in “The Stealthy School of Criticism” that laid out his idea of the inner standing point. We turn our attention now to “Jenny,” the final Rossetti poem in this chapter and the most important for my argument. The poem takes the form of a dramatic monologue by a young man who spends the night with Jenny, a prostitute, as she sleeps in her room. He considers her life and career, makes guesses about her thoughts and dreams, invents extended metaphors of Jenny as a flower or a book, compares her to his reputable “cousin Nell,” thinks about the role of lust, and mocks her out of his own sense of shame. Everything that the reader sees is presented through the young man’s field of vision, bringing into question his reliability and trustworthiness, as well as what he says about Jenny, a fallen woman.

In fact, critics writing about “Jenny” disagree about whether the “young and thoughtful man of the world,” to use Rossetti’s description, is offered for our judgment or our sympathy. They also disagree about Rossetti’s biographical relation to his character. Their conflicts reflect Rossetti’s own somewhat distanced descriptions in “The Stealthy School of Criticism.” They also recall Ruskin’s comments on the poem in a letter to Rossetti:

I do not think [“Jenny”] would be understood but by few, and even of those few the majority would be offended by the mode of treatment. The character of the speaker himself is too doubtful. He seems, even to me, anomalous. He reasons and feels entirely like a wise and just man—yet is occasionally drunk and brutal: no affection for the girl shows itself—his throwing the money into her hair is disorderly, and he is altogether a disorderly person. The right feeling is unnatural to him, and does not therefore truly touch us. I don’t mean that an entirely right-minded person never keeps a mistress: but, if he does, he either loves her—or, not loving her, would blame himself, and be horror-struck for himself no less than for her, in such a moralizing fit. (qtd. in Rossetti, William Michael 234)

In this passage, Ruskin says in negative terms what Rossetti himself said of the poem. Ruskin brings a truncated “treatment from without” (Rossetti, “Stealthy” 337) to both Rossetti’s poem and the subject it takes up. Because Ruskin values art that pursues a moral objective, he is uncomfortable with how “Jenny” presents prostitution in the equivocal ways fostered by a poem that depends upon an inner standing point.

“Jenny” has been the subject of highly divergent readings. Treated “from without,” the poem seems full of what Ruskin calls “doubtful” events, feelings, and ideas. Given more space, Ruskin could easily have chosen a litany of further examples. Combining the descriptions by Rossetti and Ruskin, the “young and doubtful man of the world” objectifies this pervasive structure of doubtfulness within the “framework” of the poem. But the poem itself *incarnates* that structure in the sense that it troubles every

effort to judge or understand either the poem or its subject “from without.”

Interpretations of the poem that rely on Rossetti’s biography—alarmingly common as they are—highlight the situation. Many critics are quick to equate Rossetti-the-poet with his “young man of the world” in “Jenny.” This move persists in Rossetti criticism—and it certainly dates back to Ruskin—but it is old-fashioned. Rossetti had probably read Baudelaire, and he was aware of the depths to which even the best minds can sink.<sup>73</sup>

While such negative critics of “Jenny” are common, they frequently make the mistake of taking the thoughtful young man at his word. I argue in the following close reading that his monologue is offered for our judgment, not our sympathy, and furthermore that the poem most effectively rewrites the Victorian habit loop about the body when the young man’s thoughts are read as unreliable and unconvincing.

The poem opens as “Lazy laughing languid Jenny, / Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea” (1-2)<sup>74</sup> sits at the feet of the speaker, resting her head upon his knee. She is tired from an evening of dancing, and over the course of the poem falls asleep. Everything we are told is mediated by the “thoughtful young man,” the only speaking character; he does not even quote anyone else. Professionally, he is a writer who has left his work this night

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<sup>73</sup> There is a long history of attacks on Rossetti, charging him with living vicariously through his speaker. We have already seen Buchanan’s accusation that the “fleshly school” in general, and Rossetti in particular, is guilty of “naughtiness” (337). Over a century later, in 1988 Robin Sheets uses the conventions of pornography to argue in part that Rossetti and his speaker share some of the same “aggressive impulses” (334). Sheets claims, “Nothing in the circumstances of Rossetti’s life would prove that he stood far enough outside that culture to fully understand the connection between a social system which subjugates women in prostitution and an aesthetic system which objectifies them in art” (334). While the claim is purely speculative, it does raise the interesting relationship between the buying and selling of art and prostitution. On one level, “Jenny” comments on the rise of Victorian consumer culture.

<sup>74</sup> This off-rhyme bothered Ruskin. Referring to the whole of “Jenny,” he writes directly to Rossetti in a letter, “in many verses it is unmelodious and incomplete. ‘Fail’ does not rhyme to ‘belle,’ nor ‘Jenny’ to ‘guinea.’ You can write perfect verses if you choose, and you should never write imperfect ones” (qtd. in De Vane 470).

because his “brain / And eyes of dancing seemed so fain” (30-1). He has resolved that his “feet should have some dancing too” (32), thereby meeting Jenny. Later, he confesses to a more careless life led a few years earlier, when harlots’ rooms “were scarce so strange” (38) as Jenny’s now appears to him.

Looking down at the tired girl, the young man is struck by her beauty and freshness. Though he calls her a “poor flower left torn since yesterday” (14) and “Poor handful of bright spring-water / Flung in the whirlpool’s shrieking face” (16-7), he can find little real evidence to back up his metaphors. Instead, she is the

queen

Of kisses which the blush between  
 Could hardly make much daintier;  
 Whose eyes are as blue skies, whose hair  
 Is countless gold incomparable. (7-11)

This is the first of many color references to gold or golden things, especially Jenny’s hair. Combined with the frequent use of silver as well, the references to the color of money indicate that as the young man’s mind wanders, he frequently returns to the idea that Jenny’s body is a commodity to be bought and sold. At the same time as she is monetized, she is a “fresh flower” (12) showing little sign of “Love’s exuberant hotbed” (13). The divided nature of the young man’s judgment is shown in the line “Poor shameful Jenny, full of grace” (18). He makes a moral judgment in a phrase that repeats part of the angel’s greeting to Mary. Unlike the single-minded angel who brings news and provokes Mary’s fear in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, the speaker of the poem is conflicted. He can recognize her fresh beauty, yet call her “thoughtless queen” with more than

reference to her drowsiness, as his later comments show. Thus the thoughtful young man finds his moral expectations of decay unsubstantiated by Jenny's fresh beauty, his sense of her shame followed by a recognition of grace, perhaps even in the religious sense of the word.

In imagining Jenny's thoughts, the young man wonders whether she means to "fit [him] with a lure" (63); but then he decides that she is merely glad to be left alone by one who is "not drunk or ruffianly" (65). She enjoys the rest from the mockery of the street, the "dumb rebuke" of the working girl, the pointing finger of the schoolboy, and the cruel usage of her customers. In spite of the circumstances of her life, Jenny is "handsome" with a "lazy lily hand" (97)—recalling the emblematic lily of purity that the angel extends to Mary in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*—but here a more ambiguous connection between the speaker and Jenny. He notes her

lazy lily hand, more bless'd  
If ne'er in rings it had been dress'd  
Nor ever by a glove conceal'd! (97-9)

Her hand is emphasized, as in Morris's "Haystack," and the speaker explicitly imagines it unconcealed by a glove and unencumbered by rings. The implication is that rings and gloves are artificial adornments of the prostitute that detract from Jenny's natural beauty—a naturalness the Pre-Raphaelites worked hard to portray. Although the young man's attempt to suggest Jenny's degradation is contradicted by the fact of her beauty, he finds himself increasingly at one with the pale working girl, his own occupation as a writer giving him strength that allows him to feel superior to Jenny. Despite his own earlier dissipations, the speaker enjoys playing the prim and proper Victorian.

In that role, he comments on Jenny's loss of innocence, sexual and otherwise; the virgin simplicity of the "lilies of the field" (100) is no longer hers. Her Eden of innocence is now a garden of lust, and the lilies have "sickened unto death" (110). Soon the roses of her passion will also wither to "the naked stems of thorns" (120). But contradiction enters; in Jenny's beauty "nothing warns / As yet of winter" (121-2). The young man imagines her recalling the innocent days of a country childhood, when she would lie in the grass "and wonder where the city was" (132). Looking forward, he adds that the time will come "when, wealth and health slipped past," Jenny will stare at the empty, lamp-lit streets winding away as "a fiery serpent" (154) for her heart. Looking down at the sleeping girl, the young man wonders how she would react were all this said to her. He feels sure that her mind is "sluggish" and corrupted by leading the life of a prostitute:

For is there hue or shape defin'd  
 In Jenny's desecrated mind,  
 Where all contagious currents meet, 165  
 A Lethe of the middle street?  
 Nay, it reflects not any face,  
 Nor sound is in its sluggish pace,  
 But as they coil those eddies clot,  
 And night and day remember not. (163-170)

The images in this section defamiliarize Jenny's mind and body as a place "[w]here all contagious currents meet," echoing the mainstream Victorian idea of the body that Bullen explains: Jenny's body is likely disease-ridden and in poor, "sluggish" health. Having

compared her to a gutter or sewer, the speaker remains fascinated by the peace and beauty of the sleeping girl:

Mouth quiet, eyelids almost blue 175

As if some sky of dreams shone through!

Just as another woman sleeps!

Enough to throw one's thoughts in heaps

Of doubt and horror[.] (175-179)

The thoughtful young man seems on the verge of realizing that his moral attitudes may not fit the case before him: that for all her sordid life as a prostitute, Jenny may yet possess innocence and beauty, that she is as much a victim of society and ignorance and economics—note again the repeated monetary colors of gold and silver in the poem—as she is a willful violator of Christian morality.

But the narrator rejects such a sociological perspective and instead twice attributes Jenny's state to the awful power of God as potter to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor (182-4; 203-5). Imagining two lumps of clay fashioned by God as potter, the young man extensively compares Jenny to his cousin Nell:

My cousin Nell is fond of fun, 185

And fond of dress, and change, and praise,

So mere a woman in her ways:

And if her sweet eyes rich in youth

Are like her lips that tell the truth,

My cousin Nell is fond of love. 190

And she's the girl I'm proudest of.

Who does not prize her, guard her well?  
 The love of change, in cousin Nell,  
 Shall find the best and hold it dear:  
 The unconquered mirth turn quieter 195  
 Not through her own, through others' woe:  
 The conscious pride of beauty glow  
 Beside another's pride in her,  
 One little part of all they share.  
 For Love himself shall ripen these 200  
 In a kind soil to just increase  
 Through years of fertilizing peace.

Of the same lump (as it is said)  
 For honour and dishonour made,  
 Two sister vessels. Here is one. 205

It makes a goblin of the sun.

So pure, — so fall'n! How dare to think  
 Of the first common kindred link?  
 Yet, Jenny, till the world shall burn  
 It seems that all things take their turn; 210  
 And who shall say but this fair tree  
 May need, in changes that may be,  
 Your children's children's charity?  
 Scorned then, no doubt, as you are scorn'd!  
 Shall no man hold his pride forewarn'd 215  
 Till in the end, the Day of Days,



At Judgment, one of his own race,  
 As frail and lost as you, shall rise, —  
 His daughter, with his mother's eyes? (185-219)

As the “good” lump of clay, made “[f]or honour,” Nell matures amid comfortable circumstances, makes a respectable marriage, and enjoys the mutual love of husband and family. Jenny, the “sister vessel” made for “dishonour,” is used and cast aside by her clients, and can establish no foundation for happiness or social acceptance. The narrator realizes that a future generation may produce a harlot in Nell’s family, a girl in need of merciful charity from a future child of Jenny’s family. But he does not seem to recognize that as two sister vessels, Nell and Jenny are separated by a thin line, and their roles and station in life could easily have been reversed. It is only through circumstance that innocent Nell—“the girl I’m proudest of” (191)—is “prize[d]” and “guard[ed] well” (192), while Jenny is left to the streets. The Nell/Jenny pairing is a direct take on the virgin/whore “extremes of femininity” that Casteras locates in Victorian England. The young man repeats his received wisdom on female sexuality, but the reader is not necessarily meant to agree with him in upholding convention.

By this point in the poem, the thoughtful young man moves away from describing the physical and emphasizes the role of chance in making her a prostitute. During this move, the corporeal categories remain implicit, as the objects and roles she is associated with affect how we view her body. Unlike the pure lily offered by the angel in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* or the pomegranate in *Proserpine*, Jenny’s objects include a toad, a sphinx, and an angelic aureole. First is the toad:

Like a toad within a stone  
 Seated while Time crumbles on;  
 Which sits there since the earth was curs'd  
 For Man's transgression at the first; 285  
 Which, living through all centuries,  
 Not once has seen the sun arise;  
 Whose life, to its cold circle charmed,  
 The earth's whole summers have not warmed;  
 Which always — whitherso the stone 290  
 Be flung — sits there, deaf, blind, alone; —  
 Aye, and shall not be driven out  
 Till that which shuts him round about  
 Break at the very Master's stroke,  
 And the dust thereof vanish as smoke, 295  
 And the seed of Man vanish as dust: —  
 Even so within this world is Lust. (282-97)

McGann notes about this passage, "According to the folklore on such fossils, the toad could survive in its earth cell without food or air" (*Collected Poetry* 382). The thoughtful young man, then, imagines the toad in a stone fossil as a symbol of the everlasting nature of lust. It cannot be defeated or "driven out." This passage implies that he must inevitably feel lust for Jenny, despite the apocalyptic nature of the last few lines. If lust survives until the end of the world, then the young man has no hope of avoiding it. He projects his own sexuality onto the sleeping Jenny, remarking on "what strange roads / Thought travels, when your beauty goads / A man to-night to think of toads!" (300-302). Blaming—or perhaps crediting—her beauty for his lustful diversion, he cedes to her the motivation to act.

A second image associated with Jenny is the sphinx, a mysterious creature. The young man muses:

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,  
 The woman almost fades from view.  
 A cipher of man's changeless sum  
 Of lust, past, present, and to come,  
 Is left. A riddle that one shrinks 280  
 To challenge from the scornful sphinx. (276-81)

Here, Jenny “almost fades from view,” becoming a cipher or a riddle, again associated with man’s lust. The young man tries to convince himself of Victorian convention: he wants to see Jenny as the mysterious spark of lust rather than an individual he can understand and appreciate. But he doubts his goal. She “almost fades from view,” but she does not disappear as an individual. The ambiguity of his position seems to undermine the conventional view he attempts to follow.

The third image associated with Jenny is the angelic aureole. The speaker considers body and soul together:

Fair shines the gilded aureole 230  
 In which our highest painters place  
 Some living woman's simple face.  
 And the stilled features thus descried  
 As Jenny's long throat droops aside, —  
 The shadows where the cheeks are thin, 235  
 And pure wide curve from ear to chin, —  
 With Raffael's, Leonardo's hand  
 To show them to men's souls, might stand,

Whole ages long, the whole world through,  
For preachings of what God can do. (230-40)

The young man thinks about how painters like Raphael and Leonardo use a halo over a model's "simple face" to show the glory of God's creation to "men's souls." The text may be read with a touch of irony, as the prostitute Jenny's beauty seems to be so intense that the young man imagines her in Christian iconography. However, when looked at together with the toad in the stone and the sphinx, the historical periods associated with each object grant Jenny an enduring, ageless quality: the toad that represents lust has existed since time began, the sphinx calls to mind ancient Greece and Egypt, and the aureole is redolent of European medieval and Renaissance art.<sup>75</sup> By juxtaposing a prostitute with saintly imagery, Rossetti takes the virgin/whore dichotomy to a new level. Coming after the speaker's reflection on the similarity of Jenny and Nell, the aureole serves as a reminder of how arbitrarily Victorian women like Jenny could be moved away from the virtuous path.

As his musings about Jenny continue to oscillate, the young man laments the scornful hours of shame that "Jenny's clock" (220) must register as it "ticks on the shelf" (220). He also realizes that the "golden sun and silver moon" (224) are her "life-coins" (226) as well as his, and that if some man should cost Jenny her life, "Shall soul not somehow pay for soul?" (229). The young man's frequent use of the colors gold and silver, as well as direct mentions of coins and one act of throwing coins in her hair as she sleeps, are a less than subtle reminder that Jenny's body has become a commodity.

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<sup>75</sup> The toad in the stone and the "shadowy grove" (367) later associated with the love goddess Venus (365-6) call to mind Milton's "Nativity Ode." Perhaps there is some scholarly work to do in comparing the two.

Several times during his monologue, the speaker remarks on Jenny's posture; she sleeps with her head slumped on his knee. Each time, he reminds us of her physical presence, seen from his critical outer standing point, if not ours. He can see sleeping Jenny's face as a fit model for a saint with "gilded aureole" (230), perhaps painted by Raphael or Leonardo—or even Rossetti himself in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*—and it is an image for the world to see God's work in. But God's work, the young man seems hesitant to acknowledge, includes making Jenny a prostitute; he is the potter who shaped her clay. At the same time, mankind—Victorian society at large—is at least partially responsible for her case:

And for the body and soul which by  
 Man's pitiless doom must now comply  
 With lifelong hell, what lullaby 245  
 Of sweet forgetful second birth  
 Remains? All dark.

Jenny is sentenced to "lifelong hell" as a prostitute because of "[man]'s pitiless doom." The young man sees no redemption; the path to a "second birth" is "[a]ll dark" and cannot be found. His conventional Victorian view of the prostitute repeatedly bumps against his sympathetic feelings for Jenny, and he cannot decide whether to praise or mourn her.

The young man believes that Jenny might find forgiveness and understanding in another woman's gentle heart, but her situation would upset gentle eyes. He calls her "a rose shut in a book" (253) of foul content, "in which pure women may not look" (255). The man reflects:

And so the life-blood of this rose,  
 Puddled with shameful knowledge, flows 265  
 Through leaves no chaste hand may unclose:  
 Yet still it keeps such faded show  
 Of when 'twas gathered long ago,  
 That the crushed petals' lovely grain,  
 The sweetness of the sanguine stain, 270  
 Seen of a woman's eyes, must make  
 Her pitiful heart, so prone to ache,  
 Love roses better for its sake[.] (264-73)

Her “life-blood” is “puddled with shameful knowledge” (265), and her beauty a “faded show” (267). The young man sees Jenny as an abstract symbol of all man’s lust, like the “toad within a stone” that has lingered since the world began and will endure to its end. The desire to wall off, to enclose and ignore such a problem as prostitution is a timeworn social reaction—once commonly seen in the frequently enclosing imagery of Victorian literature and art. But the speaker of Rossetti’s poem frequently sees the situation as irremediable. For him, lust and moral recoil are innate within man; there will always be Jennys in the world. While focusing on her individual case helps him to work through the societal problem of prostitution that she represents, he still judges her for it and feels shame for his own role.

Sunrise brings the thoughtful young man back to the present.<sup>76</sup> The sounds of a market wagon and a barking dog come through the morning-lit window. This night, Jenny has kept her lamp “alight, / Like a wise virgin’s” (315-6), and her bed unused. The

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<sup>76</sup> In Chapter 3, I analyzed this passage, with its creeping light and gauzy curtains, as an example of how the “febleness of imagination” can be used as a tool to achieve a mimesis of solidity.

comparison to a wise virgin is ironic, coming from a man who has repeatedly denied Jenny's innocence. A more direct symbol is the "rose [that] now droops forlorn" (324), dying in a season of growth. The clamor of sparrows awakens Jenny's cage-bird to song (328-30), yet another symbol of its mistress's enclosed isolation, and one we saw pictorially in Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*. Both drooping rose and caged bird show that the narrator still sees Jenny as a bedraggled outcast from society.

After placing some coins in her hair, the young man wonders what golden dreams of success she may enjoy, despite her threadbare purse. He imagines that she dreams of being the queen of prostitutes. The speaker's background precludes his thinking that Jenny may have innocent dreams. For all the attractiveness of a Venus or a Priapus, a Victorian could never ignore the hidden moral ugliness of lust that these divinities also represented:

But hide Priapus to the waist,  
 And whoso looks on him shall see 370  
 An eligible deity. (369-71)

And the young man playfully imagines Jenny as Danaë as she rises later in the morning with his coins falling in golden rain from her hair. These three figures—Venus, Priapus, and Danaë—allusively return the reader to the pictorial realm, as each was the subject of numerous paintings, including Rossetti's *Venus Verticordia* (1864-68).

In what may be a moment of sincere realization, the speaker becomes ashamed of his own feelings that have led him to mock Jenny. But the degree of his sincerity and realization is clouded by the conclusion he draws from his nightlong meditation:

Ashamed of my own shame, — aghast  
 Because some thoughts not born amiss 385  
 Rose at a poor fair face like this?  
 Well, of such thoughts so much I know:  
 In my life, as in hers, they show,  
 By a far gleam which I may near,  
 A dark path I can strive to clear. (384-90)

It is not apparent which “thoughts not born amiss” the speaker means—surely not the mockery or the thoughts born of shame. His most sincere moments seem to be those in which he senses that Jenny is, in some way, still innocent, still beautiful. And what “dark path” will these thoughts clear for him? Perhaps he sees himself as torn between the two vessels of the potter’s clay: he sees his thoughts “in my life, as in hers” as a “dark path.” Even though he does not associate himself with Jenny as a fallen woman, he feels some kinship nonetheless. His way on the “dark path” may be cleared, but Jenny remains the lost outcast. For all his attempt at sympathy, a kiss serves to free the young man from his one-night liaison with Jenny, and probably forever: the poem ends with him saying, “Only one kiss. Goodbye, my dear” (391). The lesson is learned, he hopes, and the session is over. He says goodbye and leaves, running away from the problems he has contemplated during the night.

While the young man is running away and leaving the reader less than satisfied, surely the poet sees beyond his narrator. In the context in which the poem was published in 1870, Rossetti could do little other than leave the inconsistencies in the position of his “thoughtful young man” as unspoken criticism of even this approach to sympathy for the fallen woman’s fate. Other professions—scientists or journalists, for example—might



gather evidence about the realities of a prostitute's life, but a literary figure was expected to preserve a Ruskinian moral standpoint. Rossetti preserves this standpoint, but he pairs the expected outer standing point of science with the inner standing point that he argues is required by art ("Stealthy" 337). The imperfect nature of his speaker's understanding of "Jenny's case" permits a deeper, truer realization on the part of the reader.

Indeed, in 1870 the ambiguities of Rossetti's young man were about as far as an artist could publicly dare to go with this subject. Rossetti's sensitivity about his poem and Buchanan's subsequent attack show that even this journey was too far for many readers. By refusing an easy answer, Rossetti is sensitive to the human nature of the problem of prostitution. His speaker's wavering between imperfect sympathy for a fellow human being and righteous condemnation of a social sinner serves as a background for the reader's own apprehension of the difficulty of truly understanding the dilemma, human and moral and social, of "Jenny's case."

The speaker's inconsistency is illustrated by several lines about what Jenny is thinking, and it leads us to imagine her inner standing point. Early in the poem, she is vacuous in his eyes: "the thoughtless queen / Of kisses" (7-8). Later, he muses to her, "I wonder what you're thinking of" (58). By the end of the poem, he is quite certain he understands her: "Ah Jenny, yes, we know your dreams" (364). Over the course of the poem, nothing of substance has changed except his meandering thoughts, and she has not spoken to share her dreams. The young man may be thoughtful, but he is not reliable or trustworthy. The claim that he knows her dreams means that he believes he possesses her mind as well as her body, when clearly he does not. In fact, his unreliable claims about her dreams, which are steeped in Victorian conventionality, offer a possible—but almost

certainly false—inner standing point for Jenny. Recognizing that false standing point leaves an absence that readers will naturally want to fill. The best textually based way to fill that void is to use evidence from the corporeal categories to arrive at Jenny’s inner standing point.

Rossetti’s skillful use of narrative gaze—focusing on privileged and hidden body parts, color, gesture, posture, and facial expression—defamiliarizes Jenny’s body. He uses sexualized metaphors of flowers and books to the same end. As a result, the reader is forced to see Jenny’s body anew, and thereby rethink the Victorian conventions that lie beneath the thoughtful young man’s monologue, such as the portrayal of women as innocent, saintly, or even as Greek goddesses. Rossetti’s unconventional portrayals and metaphors, such as the toad in the stone, circle back and effect change in our viewing of the body. Rossetti offers an alternative routine for the habit loop of thinking about the body. Readers must also recognize Jenny as an individual case highlighting the problem of Victorian prostitution. Despite having no speaking lines, she is no longer a faceless character type, but a particular young woman with her own inner standing point distinct from the speaker’s assumptions. While Buchanan’s view of Rossetti’s treatment as “simply nasty,” full of “naughtiness,” or placing greater emphasis on the body than on the soul may have been shared by a significant portion of the contemporary audience, it is a shallow interpretation.

Rossetti’s project in “Jenny” runs much deeper than a prurient exploration of a prostitute’s life. As McGann argues, “More than anything else, ‘Jenny’ is a dramatic representation of a broadly dispersed and shared set of social attitudes. It is a poem about a society dominated by well-meaning and bad faith” (*Collected Poetry* 381-2). The

thoughtful young man judges Jenny while truly knowing almost nothing about her. It is exactly this kind of reflexive thinking that Rossetti subtly challenges in the poem: yes, Jenny is a prostitute, but she can be much more than a conventional body. McGann posits that “The equivalences between Jenny and the speaker’s ‘cousin Nell’ and between the speaker and the poet emblemize this subject, which embraces the reader as well—a reader assumed to be implicated by the same social nexus” (*Collected Poetry* 382). Put another way, we have seen Rossetti’s subtle hand pushing for Victorian habit change, but in “Jenny,” his strongest tactic is to hold a mirror up to readers and show them the mistakes they make in clinging to their old routine.

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The three poems considered in this chapter each contribute significantly to revising the Victorian habit loop for thinking about the body, especially the female body. Each poem presents a different in-between state that highlights a different facet of the conception of body. “The Blessed Damozel” focuses on physical liminality, moving between earth and heaven, body and soul. The corporeal categories in this poem highlight the damozel’s body, from her eyes and hair to the palpable warmth as she leans out on the “bar of Heaven.” Although she is no longer physically on earth, she looks down on it and interacts with it, and her lover, to a limited degree. She exists between earth and heaven, living and dead, finite and infinite. For Rossetti, she highlights the body’s presence and sensuality.

By way of contrast, “For a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione” illustrates what I will call historical liminality because it unites different eras. The poem brings the artist—probably Titian, despite the poem’s title—into the nineteenth century Keatsian, Romantic tradition. Rossetti’s poetic treatment also brings a before-and-after treatment to the single, frozen moment of the painting, much as Keats does in “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” While the sensations of the body are still significant in “Venetian Pastoral”—from the faces “sad with the whole of pleasure,” to the mouth “pouting” after releasing the pipes, to the “grass . . . cool against her naked side”—Rossetti includes classical and Renaissance art in the intertextual sweep of history. “Venetian Pastoral” implies that changing the Victorian conception of the body necessitates looking beyond the contemporary; we must look to the before-and-after of time to see how the culture can—even must—change. In effect, the poem is a theoretical argument that the Victorian habit loop must change.

Finally, “Jenny” illustrates what I might call societal liminality, as it holds a mirror up to the ugliness of Victorian assumptions about the fallen woman and the body that they associate with her. The poem serves as a detailed exploration of an individual woman’s body, circumstances, and cultural associations. The male narrator privileges certain body parts: Jenny’s head on his knee, her hair, her face, her eyes, her long throat in the aureole passage, and her blood, whether it represents life or puddled shame (l. 265). The colors of the poem reinforce the colors of money, highlighting the commodification of the body inherent in her profession; and sexualized flowers, from blushing roses to snow-white lilies, and including “a rose shut in a book” (253). Kisses, belonging to the corporeal category of gesture, appear in the narrator’s thoughts from the

opening lines—Jenny is “[f]ond of a kiss and fond of a guinea” (2). The corporeal categories bring attention, sometimes shockingly, to Jenny’s body.

While Jenny stands out as an individual through this attention, she still inhabits the delicate space between morality and immorality. The comparison of Jenny and Nell, made virtually the same through “[t]he potter’s power over the clay” (181), indicates that only chance and circumstance lie between the shame of Jenny and the purity of Nell. Cultural shortcuts such as the toad in the stone, the sphinx, and Priapus covered to the waist indicate that the societal problem of prostitution spans nations and centuries. While the Victorian conventional view of the body and of morality would ostracize Jenny, Rossetti pushes for a recognition that she is not so different from the Nells of the world.

In these three poems, Rossetti effectively manipulates the tension between the inner and outer standing points, an essential ingredient in changing the Victorian habit loop. In “The Blessed Damozel,” we see the woman’s thoughts more directly—we see her words physically demarcated on the page through punctuation—giving us more a sense of *her* as an individual. In “For a Venetian Pastoral,” the speaker offers us an inner standing point through which to see the characters and their bodies. Once we examine the poem from the distanced, critical perspective of the outer standing point, however, it is clear that Rossetti has a bigger historical and cultural picture in mind.

Finally, the surprise of Jenny’s body and the elaborate metaphors the narrator uses combine to force us to see things from her perspective, from her inner standing point. At the same time, however, the poem is mediated by a male speaker in a dramatic monologue, so what he claims are her thoughts may be simply a flawed interpretation based on the negative Victorian view of the body. The conflict between what we see of

her—the narrator claims of Jenny, “we know your dreams”—and what she may actually think when awake parallel the tension between her inner standing point and the distanced, critical outer standing point. Seen together, these poems teach us to read Rossetti for the details of the changing Victorian body—and to see their critical role in the revision of the habit loop regarding what that body is, looks like, and means, both in the nineteenth century and beyond.

## Chapter VI – Conclusion

Stepping back from the particular poems and paintings analyzed in the previous five chapters, it is time to examine the main ideas in their wider context. In this dissertation, I have constructed an original framework for analyzing habits of thinking about the body in Victorian England. In this framework, the representation of the body in particular poems and paintings by Rossetti and Morris acts as a Duhiggian “cue” in a habit loop (Figure 1). Mainstream Victorian readers and viewers, craving the “reward” of social conformity, enact a “routine” of behavior which is largely to denigrate the body as dirty, shameful, sinful, or otherwise not a topic for polite society. The work of Rossetti and Morris offers an alternative routine, which is to see the body as natural, active, dynamic, and worth seeing as it is. Following what Duhigg calls the “Golden Rule of habit change,” the cue and reward must remain the same, while a new routine is offered.

To substitute the Pre-Raphaelite routine effectively, Rossetti and Morris make the Pre-Raphaelite body seem normal, even to a resistant Victorian audience. While the reward of social conformity must not change, that conformity itself can—and must. Instead of conformity to a negative view of the body, their work has the effect of seeking conformity to a more positive view of the body. It is also important to note that while Rossetti and Morris did not know about habit loops in any systematic sense, they follow the science nonetheless.

To achieve this more positive view of the body, Rossetti and Morris subtly work to defamiliarize the body and separate it from negative, conventional Victorian reactions.

Seven corporeal categories provide evidence of the process. First and most important is narrative gaze, which takes the audience from a distanced, critical perspective in the outer standing point and pushes the audience toward the inner standing point, where the figures seem to come to life. That inner life is expressed in the other categories: privileged body parts, clothing and drapery that hides (hidden body parts), color, gesture, posture, and facial expression. The last six categories defamiliarize the body, separating it from some of its cultural meaning, and surprise the audience with the Pre-Raphaelite body. When that surprise wears off, the audience finds that the Pre-Raphaelite body, often rendered in exquisite detail, is now familiar. When enough individual readers and viewers find the Pre-Raphaelite body familiar, they can still experience the reward of social conformity; it is now transformed into conformity to the more positive Pre-Raphaelite body.

There seems to be another difference in how the Pre-Raphaelite body is represented between painting and literature. The art tends to focus more on how the figures *look*, which makes sense in a visual medium. The women carry Pre-Raphaelite dynamism, a sense of an inner force or a readiness to act. For example, in *The Awakening Conscience*, there is an implication that something has just happened a moment ago that changes everything. In “For a Venetian Pastoral,” the music has just ceased, as in the painting, and there is the same sense hanging in the air of a tightly-coiled spring, ready to be released into action. In Pre-Raphaelite literature, by contrast, there is more of a focus on what the women can *do*. Morris presents Guenevere and Jehane as strong women with relatively large control over their actions and fates. Rossetti’s enchantresses, like Astarte or Proserpine, possess a dynamic and mysterious



quality, as well as a sense that they have an imposing power that can surprise us at any moment with what they can do.

While surprise is an important element in changing the habit loop, this is not to say that the author needs to constantly “surprise” with new perceptual information. There is a rhythm to surprise, with greater and lesser impacts. In literature, especially—as opposed to painting—surprise is constant, as we cannot “see” where a poem is heading. The static nature of painting means it has less potential for surprise. One implication is that there is a difference between an educated viewer of art and an audience with an untrained eye; educated viewers know the conventions, so they start “reading” a painting in a different place. While surprise is not precisely constant, the more surprise we have, the more vivid is our re-creation of perception—our “perceptual mimesis,” in Scarry’s words. Surprise is not an either/or proposition. Rather, it is a matter of degree, in which the more effective the surprise is, the more likely it is that the author leads us to the inner standing point—and thereby to habit change.

While the framework of the dissertation remains the same through the chapters, new ideas add to the understanding of the Pre-Raphaelite body to keep the analysis fresh. In examining the relationship of poem/painting pairs by Rossetti and Morris, Scarry’s ideas are illuminating, especially her theory of vivacity and how a poem can achieve the mimesis of solidity and touch that makes it come alive at the inner standing point. She gives us the material antecedents of perception, the feebleness of ordinary imagination, and relative properties of objects—like weight—as tools for explaining the vivacity of imagination guided by the poet. Pulling out the unstated directions in a text, or “erased imperatives,” is one way of seeing how the writer cues the reader to enact a performance

in the mind. Another useful technique is Helsinger's way of highlighting the relationships—including the absence—of colors. This technique is particularly fruitful when bright colors splash across a neutral background, as in Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini* or Morris's "The Haystack in the Floods." Another important facet of my argument is intensity, especially in terms of how Rossetti and Morris attend to sensation in their work; the senses provide much of the evidence of the corporeal categories. Finally, in Chapter 5, I use Rossetti's own words and his poem "Jenny" to sharpen the understanding of the inner standing point, both as he conceives it and how it helps bring about habit change.

This dissertation's framework is not a cookie cutter to be applied to any randomly chosen figure in literature or art. More accurately, it could be applied widely, but likely with different results. Rossetti and Morris work in the middle ground between convention and extremism. On one hand, conventional writers and painters would have little effect on the Victorian conception of the body. On the other, extremists—say, more decadent or even pornographic fin-de-siècle portrayals of the body—would likely fail to create habit change because they would go far beyond surprise and dwell in shock. As Scarry would argue, when we are surprised, we temporarily lose our awareness of the author and the process of perception in the text, allowing the author to guide us through a mimesis of perception that may challenge our previous outer standing point. If an author pushes beyond surprise and into shock, a contemporary audience will reject the extreme outright, skipping the step of critically examining their outer standing point.

While the study of habit loops is relatively recent, it is fruitful ground for further research. One theoretical area of study is the idea of literary genres. A genre is, in a

sense, a widely used habit loop. Given a cue—say, the elements of a detective story, such as an unusual murder and the introduction of Sherlock Holmes—the reader engages in a routine: reading the story and trying to guess who the murderer is and why the act was committed. The reader expects the reward to come, perhaps an intellectual pleasure stemming from guessing correctly or marveling at the ingenuity of the “whodunit.” When works depart from convention—from a literary habit loop—the effect can range from disappointingly off-putting to gloriously innovative.

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While I have discussed habit change largely in the context of individual behavior, habits can also be seen on the society-wide level. Duhigg offers an extended discussion of how *societies* change their habits. He pinpoints three critical components in the process of large-scale movements. First, a movement begins with “the social habits of friendship and the strong ties between close acquaintances” (217). Because strong ties are another way of saying “firsthand relationships” (220), I will call this first component the inner circle, in which the closest people form a united core that leads to purposeful action and habit change. The inner circle tends to consist of people from similar backgrounds (Duhigg 220). Second, a movement continues “because of the habits of a community, and the weak ties that hold neighborhoods and clans together” (217). Weak ties are a form of “social peer pressure” that creates a “sense of obligation” (222) among the movement’s less-committed members.<sup>77</sup> We might call this the friend-of-a-friend

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<sup>77</sup> Duhigg explains weak ties in more detail: “The power of weak ties helps explain how a protest can expand from a group of friends into a broad social movement. Convincing thousands of people to pursue

level, in which people may not directly know the agents of change but certainly know other people who do. Third, a movement lasts when its “leaders give participants new habits that create a fresh sense of identity and a feeling of ownership” (Duhigg 217). One or even a few leaders cannot sustain an entire movement themselves. Duhigg explains that “[f]or an idea to grow beyond a community, it must become self-propelling. And the surest way to achieve that is to give people new habits that help them figure out where to go on their own” (239).<sup>78</sup>

In light of this dissertation’s analysis of the art and poetry of Rossetti and Morris, it is still an open question to what degree they succeeded in changing the prevailing Victorian social habit of thinking about the body in a negative way. It seems clear that Rossetti and Morris did have a large impact on their readers and viewers in an individual

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the same goal—especially when that pursuit entails real hardship, such as walking to work rather than taking the bus, or going to jail, or even skipping a morning cup of coffee because the company that sells it doesn’t support organic farming—is hard. [...] If you ignore the social obligations of your neighborhood [...] you risk losing your social standing” (225). Thus, movements often use peer pressure to convince reluctant participants to join.

<sup>78</sup> Duhigg offers an extended American example of the 1955 Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott, and its broad impact on the Civil Rights Movement, that began when African-American Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a group of white passengers. Parks was friendly with many people in Montgomery, and her inner circle included friends and close acquaintances from many overlapping groups (220). On the friend-of-a-friend level, her diverse friends and acquaintances knew other influential people, including Martin Luther King, Jr. Those more distant acquaintances helped spur people who did not know Parks at all into taking action and supporting the bus boycott (222). Finally, the leaders of the bus boycott gave protestors new habits. For example, after King’s house was bombed, rather than give in to anger, he calmed the spontaneous crowd by preaching about nonviolence and loving one’s enemies. He taught the protestors to see the larger picture of “God’s plan, the same destiny that had ended British colonialism in India and slavery in the United States, and that had caused Christ to die on the cross so that he could take away our sins” (Duhigg 240-1). He took the existing cues and rewards—racial injustice and achieving social justice respectively—and he substituted a new routine. Instead of a routine of responding with violence and anger, King encouraged protestors to turn the other cheek and meet injustice with love and nonviolence.

Of course, the Montgomery bus boycott and the Pre-Raphaelite body are not directly comparable; still, Duhigg’s analysis of the first can shed light on the second.

sense. In the previous chapters, I have traced some ways in which an individual might be likely to respond to a selection of Pre-Raphaelite poems and paintings.

To move from the individual impact of Rossetti and Morris's work to the societal impact, let us consider Duhigg's three components for a social movement. As far as the inner circle of friends and close acquaintances, Rossetti and Morris did create change. The earliest prominent example is Ruskin's favorable review of the Pre-Raphaelites, and the Brotherhood as a group was wider than just Rossetti and Morris. Skipping ahead for a moment to the third component, Rossetti and Morris successfully gave Victorians new habits for thinking about the body on their own. They kept the cue of seeing or reading about a body and kept the reward of social conformity, but they substituted a new routine. Instead of a reaction of disgust to the body as it actually looks, they substituted a reaction of seeing the body as natural, active, dynamic, and worth seeing as it really is. Much of this dissertation has focused on how the narrative gaze manipulates the inner and outer standing points and how the other six corporeal categories—privileged body parts, hidden body parts, color, gesture, posture, and facial expression—work in concert to change the habit loop.

Returning to that critical second component of large-scale social change, the friend-of-a-friend level, the success of Rossetti and Morris is more tenuous. This level includes Coventry Patmore,<sup>79</sup> who is a touchstone for the kind of poetry that Rossetti and Morris were trying to change. The Pre-Raphaelite body was surely adopted as a new

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<sup>79</sup> Millais painted a portrait of Patmore's wife, Emily. Although Millais was one of the original Pre-Raphaelites, Marsh explains that over time he changed his artistic principles: he "joined the despised Royal Academy and from at least 1860 more or less abandoned his Pre-Raphaelite principles in favour of quicker, easier and more lucrative society portraits and sentimental scenes" (18).

ideal by many Victorians, but it did not immediately become the new norm. Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), of course, is an exemplar of those who take the Pre-Raphaelite project too far, distorting the ideals of the Pre-Raphaelite brand of Aestheticism—the body for the body’s sake. Beardsley’s black-and-white drawings, which often contained grotesque and overtly erotic figures, lowered the Pre-Raphaelite body into the depths of Decadence.<sup>80</sup> While the Pre-Raphaelite influence was strong through a number of important figures through the years, such as Yeats and the Bloomsbury Group, it was not until later in the twentieth century that the habit loop of the Pre-Raphaelite body became rather mainstream.

While Rossetti and Morris met with considerable success in transforming the Victorian habit loop about the body on the individual level, then, it is fair to suggest that they failed to make a full societal transformation. In particular, they did not create enough social peer pressure on the friend-of-a-friend level to spark a broad and immediate movement. Still, that does not diminish the significance of their work. Rossetti and Morris began the process of change on the individual level. If others continued that change later, it was only because they could stand on the shoulders of the Pre-Raphaelite body.

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<sup>80</sup> In *Aubrey Beardsley: Imp of the Perverse*, Stanley Weintraub notes that Bloomsbury Group member Roger Fry called Beardsley “the Fra Angelico of Satanism” (qtd. in Weintraub 261), and Beardsley himself noted, “If I am not grotesque I am nothing” (qtd. in Weintraub 269). Weintraub notes a difference in Beardsley’s immediate impact and his lasting effects: “While it true that his subject matter was seldom innocent, his persistent influence has had little connection with the shock value of his art, for what scandalizes one age often leaves succeeding ages yawning” (261). One major area in which Beardsley differs from Rossetti and Morris is that he takes surprise to the extreme level of “shock value.”

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## APPENDIX: IMAGE RIGHTS

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