



# A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art but I had some lectures that I gave many years ago and I thought I could use AI systems to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice to give them.

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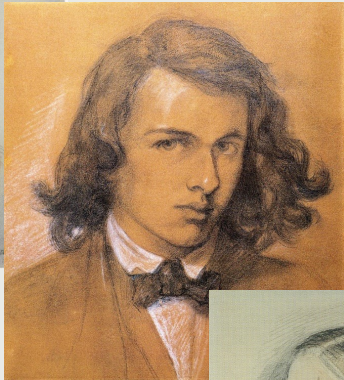
## 25-01 PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD - EARLY DAYS

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

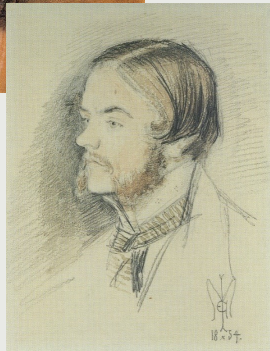
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John Everett Millais



Dante Gabriel Rossetti



William Holman Hunt



In the revolutionary year of 1848, seven young artists formed a secret Brotherhood determined to overturn everything the Royal Academy stood for. This talk traces the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood from its charged founding moment — with Chartists massing on Kennington Common — through its core members, its intellectual debts to Ruskin and the Nazarenes, and its most provocative early paintings, showing how a small, idealistic group reshaped the entire course of Victorian art.

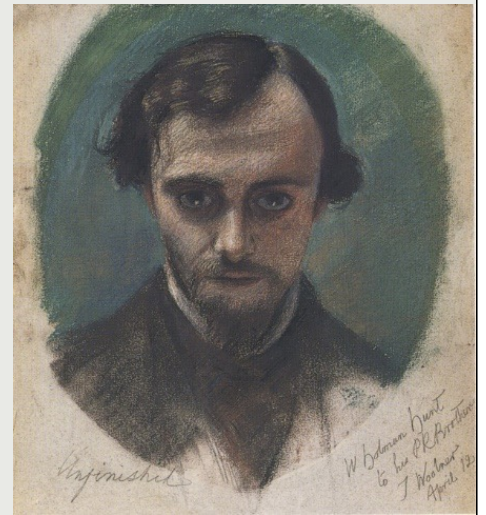




William Holman Hunt,  
**John Everett Millais**,  
(b. 1829 – d. 1896)



John Everett Millais,  
**William Holman Hunt**,  
1854, (1827-1910)



William Holman Hunt,  
**Dante Gabriel Rossetti**,  
1853, (1828-1882)

James Collinson (1825–1881), Self-Portrait, National Portrait Gallery, London

In September **1848**, three young artists studying at the **Royal Academy** — **John Everett Millais**, **William Holman Hunt**, and **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** — formed the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**, determined to overturn the conventions dominating British painting. Millais, a child prodigy from Jersey who entered the Academy at eleven, brought extraordinary technical brilliance. Hunt, self-funded against his father's wishes, brought religious conviction and relentless work ethic. Rossetti, more poet than painter, brought intellectual fire; it was admiration for Hunt's *Eve of St Agnes* that drew him into their circle. Four further members joined: **Thomas Woolner**, sculptor and poet, who emigrated to Australia in 1852 before returning to a distinguished career; **James Collinson**, whose deep religious conscience led him to resign within two years; **Frederic George Stephens**, who abandoned painting for art criticism and became one of the Brotherhood's most effective public advocates; and **William Michael Rossetti**, the group's tireless chronicler, who outlived them all. Together they launched **The Germ**, a

short-lived journal that ran to just four issues in **1850**, and exhibited paintings that provoked outrage — and, eventually, the defence of **John Ruskin** in the pages of The Times in 1851.

### Notes

Bottom row, left to right:

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Thomas Woolner, 1852 (1825-1892, sculptor and poet), National Portrait Gallery

James Collinson, self-portrait, undated (1825-1881, only 1848-50, a devout Christian who resigned when Millais painted Christ in the House of His Parents)

John Everett Millais, Frederic George Stephens (1828-1907, art critic)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919, writer and art critic)

### Seven 'Brothers'

The three years 1849-1851 were an exceptional event in the history of art because rarely do you find a group of artists who set out to radically change the status quo and who take on the leading art establishment – the Royal Academy.

So who were they? The three key members were,

Millais was a child prodigy of a wealthy family from St Ouen (pronounced 'won' as in 'wander'), Jersey, who supported his talents. He went to Sass's (a prep school for the Royal Academy) in 1839 aged 10 but only needed one year there and he went to the Royal Academy school in 1840 aged 11. He was honest, sincere and other artists were awed by his talents and charmed by his personality. He was committed to art and according to Hunt he never wasted a moment in his dedication to painting.

Hunt came from a poorer family and his father, a warehouse manager, was against his career as an artist so he worked, trained in the evenings at the Mechanics Institute and spent his salary on lessons with a portraitist. He met Millais at the British Museum in 1844 and Millais encouraged him to apply for the Royal Academy training, and on the third attempt he was accepted at the end of 1844. Hunt was hard working, religious, unconventional in his approach to art, much liked and very jovial (he was called the 'Maniac'). He

married Fanny Waugh in 1865 after his relationship with Annie Miller ended. They left for the Middle East in 1866 and she died in childbirth in Florence. Rossetti was from an intellectual family but he was not a natural painter and spent four years at Sass's (1841-5) from the age of 13 to 17. He went to the Royal Academy in 1845 but his attendance was erratic. He admired William Blake and Robert Browning and was as much a poet as an artist. He dropped out of the Academy and was accepted (eventually!) by Ford Maddox Brown for art lessons in 1848. A few weeks later he saw Hunt's Eve of St. Agnes, Keats was a favourite of Rossetti and he approached Hunt and congratulated him.

They were joined by four other members,

Thomas Woolner, sculptor and poet (1825-1892), emigrated to Australia in 1852 and returned to have a successful career as a sculptor. He had some success as a poet and art dealer. Had a 'rough' personality and had to make a supernatural effort to be polite. Became an academician in 1875 and Professor of Sculpture. Married Alice Gertrude Waugh, sister of Fanny who turned him down and married Holman Hunt. She died in childbirth a year later and Hunt married the third sister Edith which Woolner considered immoral and was defined as incest under British law at the time. They never spoke again.

James Collinson (1825-1881), only a member for two years as he resigned when Millais's Christ in the House of His Parents was declared blasphemous. Converted to Catholicism but reverted to High Anglicanism to marry Christina Rossetti but his conscience forced him to return to Catholicism and break the engagement. Trained as a Jesuit priest but did not complete his studies. In 1858 he married Eliza Wheeler sister-in-law of the painter John Rogers Herbert (1810-1890) who influenced the Pre-Raphaelites. W. M. Rossetti wrote that the aim of the Pre-Raphaelites was to 'out-Herbert Herbert'. Herbert was a Catholic convert and friend of Pugin, another Catholic convert. Herbert painted Our Saviour Subject to his Parents at Nazareth a slightly more acceptable version of Millais's painting although even Herbert was criticized. Collinson continued to paint genre scenes and moved to Brittany later in life.

Frederic George Stephens, art critic (1828-1907), physically disabled because of an accident when he was nine he was educated privately. Joined the RA School in 1844 and met Millais and Holman Hunt. Disappointed with his



artistic talent he stopped painting and took up art criticism. Three uncompleted paintings survive and one shows a lot of promise. He became a well known and leading art critic who supported the Pre-Raphaelites. He allowed Rossetti to write reviews of his own work under Stephen's name. He sometimes wrote under the pseudonym Laura Stephens (in *The Germ*) and John Seward. He wrote 100 articles on British art collecting to encourage middle-class art patronage. He became Keeper of prints and drawings at the British Museum. He married the artist Rebecca Clara Dalton in 1866. He was a great supporter of Holman Hunt but they fell out over Hunt's painting *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1885) which was damaged in transit after being crated by Stephens. He also criticized the painting for its hyper-realism and fantasy. He disliked Impressionism and saw the Pre-Raphaelites as part of the evolution of British art rather than revolutionary.

William Michael Rossetti, writer and art critic, (1829-1919), outlived them all including Holman Hunt. He worked full time as a civil servant but wrote extensively on art and biographies of artists. In 1874 he married Lucy Madox Brown and they had five children who were schooled at home and brought up in a non-Christian household.

Other artists were considered such as Charles Allston Collins and Walter Howell Deverell but no decision was made. Ford Madox Brown was older but an obvious candidate as he was Rossetti tutor but he turned it down.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was influenced by John Ruskin although they did not meet until after their formation and after they had made their early plans. We know Holman Hunt spent a night reading Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and found it supported their views but we do not know to what extent it influenced their views.

They published their views in a magazine they produced called *The Germ*. It only survived for four issues in 1850.

## Timeline

1843 John Ruskin in *Modern Painters* encouraged artists to "go to Nature in all singleness of heart rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing."

1848 Hunt, *Eve of St. Agnes*. D.G.R. asked to study under Ford Madox Brown. In September, Holman Hunt, John Millais, and Rossetti form the Pre-

Raphaelite Brotherhood. Thomas Woolner, John Collinson, W. M. Rossetti, F. G. Stephens also joined. Ford Madox Brown was close to the group but did not join.

1849 Millais, *Isabella*. Hunt, *Rienzi*, D.G. Rossetti, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*.

1850 Millais, *Christ in the House of His Parents*, *The Return of the Dove to the Ark* (exhibited 1851), *The Woodman's Daughter* (exhibited 1851) and *Mariana* (exhibited 1851). Millais painted *Eliza Wyatt and her Daughter, Sarah*. The P.R.B. publishes *The Germ* (4 issues, Jan.-April), W.M. Rossetti editor.

1850-60 D.G. Rossetti paints most of his greatest watercolours during this decade, plus major oils including *Dante's Dream*; D.G.R. meets Elizabeth Siddal.

1851 D.G.R. and Elizabeth Siddal become engaged. In May, John Ruskin defends the Pre-Raphaelites in two letters to *The Times*, and agrees to subsidize D.G. Rossetti by buying a certain number of paintings from him every year. George Meredith writes *Poems*; favourably reviewed by W.M. Rossetti. Hunt, *Hireling Shepherd*.

1852 Millais, *Ophelia* and *A Huguenot*.

1853 William Morris enters Exeter College, Oxford, and meets Edward (Burne-)Jones. John Millais elected to the Royal Academy. Lizzie Siddall, *The Lady of Shalott*.

1854 Millais, John Ruskin. Hunt, *The Light of the World* and *The Awakening Conscience*; Thomas Seddon, *Jerusalem from the Valley of Jehosophat* (first influential PRB landscape). Holman Hunt travels to the Middle East. Professor Rossetti dies April 26.

1855 Millais marries Ruskin's ex-wife.

1856 Millais, *The Blind Girl*, *Autumn Leaves*. Morris and Burne-Jones take rooms together. Their magazine, *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (12 issues, Jan.-Dec.), starts the second wave of Pre-Raphaelitism. Swinburne enters Balliol College, Oxford. D.G.R. meets Fanny Cornforth. Hunt, *The Scapegoat*. Hughes, *April Love*. Henry Wallis, *The Death of Chatterton* (for which George Meredith models). F. M. Brown, *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet*.

1857 William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones join D.G. Rossetti in painting Arthurian frescoes on the walls of the Oxford Debating Union. Hunt, Rossetti, Millais, and others illustrate a volume of Tennyson's poems for the publisher Edward Moxon. Rossetti meets Jane Burden, an artist's model, and

introduces her to the others, including Morris. Swinburne, "Ode to Mazzini"; meets Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Morris. Meredith and his wife separate.

1858 Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*. August Egg, Past and Present, three paintings on theme of fallen woman.

1859 Morris and Jane Burden married. Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*; meets Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites. Millais, *Apple Blossoms* and *The Vale of Rest*.

1860 D.G. Rossetti marries Elizabeth Siddal. Hunt, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (Hunt's first major picture using biblical typology and religious realism).

1861 D.G. Rossetti, *Early Italian Poets*. Foundation of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.; includes Burne-Jones and Ford Madox Brown.

1862 Lizzie (Siddal) Rossetti dies from a self-administered overdose of laudanum. Death ruled an accident. D.G.R. moves to Tudor House, 16 Cheyne Walk, with A.C. Swinburne. W.M. Rossetti and George Meredith also live there part of the time and Fanny Cornforth is the housekeeper. Meredith writes *Modern Love*. Whistler paints *The White Girl*.

## References

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Michael\\_Rossetti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Michael_Rossetti)

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Collinson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Collinson)

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederic\\_George\\_Stephens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederic_George_Stephens)

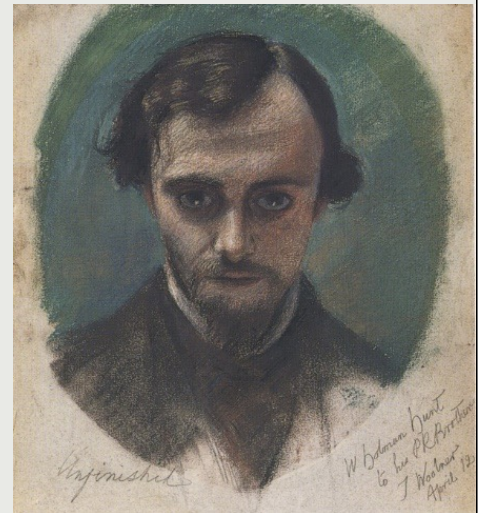
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Woolner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Woolner)



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The three principal PRB members each cultivated a distinct market identity. **John Everett Millais** projected technical brilliance and institutional respectability — elected **ARA** in **1853**, he became a full Academician and eventually President of the **Royal Academy**, a career arc that reassured collectors they were backing proven talent. **William Holman Hunt** offered a different guarantee: moral seriousness, religious conviction, and conspicuous hard work. Buying a Hunt was buying earnestness made visible. **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** played the Romantic outsider — volatile, visionary, and difficult — which paradoxically made his work feel like the product of a genuine artistic temperament. Scholar **Elizabeth Prettejohn** has argued that this diversity of persona was commercially shrewd, because together the Brotherhood covered the full spectrum of middle-class taste without competing directly against one another. Rossetti's family name itself carried an aura of deep artistic heritage: the **Della Guardia** family had been nicknamed Rossetti five generations earlier, supposedly on account of their red hair, lending the painter a lineage that reinforced



his image as someone marked out by ancestry as well as temperament. Each man sold not just paintings but a convincing reason to buy.

### Notes

Of course, their patrons, largely the middle-class themselves form different groups and each member of the PRB appealed to different types of buyers but together they created a stronger brand. In fact, they were less like a pop group as they created works and were bought independently. Each created an individual brand that convinced the buyer they were making a wise investment.

Millais could be trusted as he was a born artist, an honest Englishman and made an ARA in 1853 and later RA (and President just before he died).

Hunt could be trusted as an investment as he was serious, had religious convictions and worked hard at everything he did.

Rossetti was a typical unreliable Romantic image of the artist so buying one of his paintings was a wise investment as you were buying the work of a 'real artist'. The Della Guardia family was nicknamed Rossetti five generations before Rossetti because of their red hair.



William Edward Kilburn (1818-1891)  
**Chartist rally, Kennington Common**  
10 April 1848  
daguerreotype  
Royal Collection

William Edward Kilburn (1818-1891), Chartist rally, Kennington Common, 10 April 1848, Royal Collection

The founding of the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** sits squarely inside the revolutionary atmosphere of **1848**. On the tenth of April that year, **Millais** and **Hunt** watched from the edges of Kennington Common as tens of thousands of Chartists gathered to present their petition to Parliament. It was one of the most charged moments in Victorian Britain, with cannon positioned on the bridges and over a hundred thousand special constables deployed across the city. The crowd dispersed peacefully, yet the tension never fully dissolved. Five months later, on an evening in early September, Millais and Hunt met at Millais's parents' house on Gower Street with **Rossetti** to found the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**. **Frederic George Stephens**, **James Collinson**, sculptor **Thomas Woolner**, and critic **William Michael Rossetti** joined to complete the seven-member group. Hunt recalled that the word Pre-Raphaelite had first been deployed as a term of contempt by their critics. Rossetti insisted on "Brotherhood" over "clique" or "association," and that word alone alarmed commentators who read

into it a whiff of organised dissent. Revolutionary year, revolutionary art, revolutionary name.

## Notes

It was a time of revolution.

The paintings produced by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood or PRB were regarded as staid and irrelevant Victorian pictures during most of the twentieth century but today they are seen as controversial and even revolutionary.

The brotherhood was founded in 1848, the year of revolutions across Europe. There was a very large Chartist meeting on 10th April on Kennington Common but confrontation was avoided and the petition with six million signatures was handed in to Downing Street.

John Everett Millais and Holman Hunt accompanied the crowd from Russell Square but at the Common they were careful to remain outside the rails. In September of that year they met in Millais's parents house to form the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The term 'brotherhood' was later of concern to critics as it suggested anarchy and a revolution.

## Notes

Revolution - on Monday 10 April 1848 a revolution almost took place in England. The Chartists arranged a rally for that day to present a petition to Parliament.

74 years later my Mother was born where you see those large houses on the left.

In the morning people started to arrive by train and walk from all over London and they gathered on Kennington Common. The organiser, Feargus O'Connor an MP said there were 300,000 but the Government said it was only 15,000. Historians generally agree there were about 20,000 to 50,000. It was a peaceful demonstration and the organisers intended to hand in the petition a 5.7 million signatures to Parliament. Between 85,000 and 170,000 special constables and soldiers were prepared to do battle to prevent the demonstration from crossing back over the Thames. The special constables included Gladstone, Robert Peel and, most strangely, Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the future Napoleon III. The army had cannons prepared to open fire. Any small incident or skirmish could have resulted in a riot and many

deaths but in the event the crowd melted away and by two o'clock the crowd was gone and only a few boys playing ball games remained. There were skirmishes on Blackfriars Bridge (1769) and many arrests were made and at one point sabres were drawn by the cavalry but the violence was contained. Waterloo Bridge and Charing Cross Bridge were toll bridges and the special constables enjoyed the afternoon lounging and 'enjoying the pleasures of a pipe' (from Illustrated London News). Feargus O'Connor was allowed to take the petition to the new Palace of Westminster.

The same year there were uprisings and revolution across Europe and there were attempts at armed uprisings in England but for reasons historians cannot agree on the Chartists movement slowly faded away. It is not because reform took place, it was another 19 years before the Second Reform Act (1867) doubled the male franchise to about one third of adult males.

The other aspect of Victorian life was revolution or the fear of revolution. In France the Orleans monarchy had been overthrown in February 1848.

Link: To return to art, the Kennington Common demonstration was watched by the artists John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt and six months later (an evening in early September, 9th was Saturday) they founded the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood with Dante Gabriel Rossetti (who was living with Hunt) in Millais's parents house at 83 Gower Street. On the 20 August they met to examine Lasinio's engravings of the Campo Santo frescoes at Pisa. James Collinson, Frederic George Stephens, poet and critic William Michael Rossetti, and sculptor Thomas Woolner joined to form a seven-member-strong brotherhood.

Mr. Hunt maintained that the word Præraphaelites "had first been used as a term of contempt by our enemies". Rossetti added 'Brotherhood' which he preferred to 'clique' or 'association'. ...

## Notes

Chartists. A vote for every man over 21 (not undergoing punishment for a crime), secret ballot, no property qualification for MPs, payment of MPs, equal size constituencies, annual elections.

Voting. Second Reform Act (1867) doubled the male franchise to about one third of adult males. Women did not gain the same voting rights as men until 1928.

Waterloo Station. 11 July 1848, three months later, Waterloo Bridge station opened. It was designed by William Tite and built over marshy ground.

Waterloo Station was intended as a temporary station to be extended into the City and so sub-stations were created in a ramshackle way and it became the butt of music hall jokes. At one point there were three stations, South (now platforms 1 and 2, nicknamed Cyprus station), Central and North (nicknamed Khartoum Station) with overlapping platform numbers. The line for Waterloo East went above one of the platforms (2 now 4). The entire station was rebuilt and opened in 1922. From 1897 there was an adjoining Necropolis Company station that ran trains to Brookwood Cemetery bearing coffins for 2/6 but it was destroyed in World War II. More people go in and out of Waterloo station each year than the entire population of the UK (96 million).

Kennington Common was a sacred place of national assembly from ancient times (sharp bend in the River Effra, strategic mound or tumulus now levelled, fork in main road from London Bridge). It was the South London equivalent of Tyburn (now Marble Arch). Kennington Park was created in 1854, the first park in south London, to prevent it being used again for large meetings.

The photograph was taken from the top of the Horns Tavern where Feargus O'Connor met the police. Looking across to the 'Oil of Vitriol Manufactory' (Sulphuric acid). 'A manufactory for oil of vitriol, on the east side of Kennington Common, occupies three acres of ground; and between that and the Kent-road are, a smelting-house for lead and antimony, a tannary, a manufactory for glue, another for tobacco-pipes, with manufactories for floorcloth and for carriages.'

William Kilburn opened his portrait studio on London's Regent Street in 1846. He was commissioned to make daguerreotype portraits of the Royal Family between 1846 and 1852 as the Royal Photographer, and was awarded a prize medal for his photographs at the 1851 Great Exhibition. The Chartists who took their name from Magna Carta were the first British national working class movement. Their meetings had a carnival-like atmosphere.

Petition. House of Commons clerks said the petition was 'only' 1.9 million valid signatures but they did not have time to count them all. Some of the names were amusing or forged. The Chartists were a source of fun for the media and it discredited the petition as it included falsely signed names of Queen Victoria, Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington and names such as Mr Punch, Pugnose and No Cheese.

Feargus O'Connor never recovered from the indignity and went insane four



years later as the result of syphilis. O'Connor never married, but had a number of relationships and, it is believed, fathered several children. He is said to have drunk a bottle of brandy a day. Early historians attributed the failure of the Chartist movement to O'Connor but more recently he has been reassessed in a more favourable light. He died in 1855 and is buried at Kensal Green Cemetery.

Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was wealthy and lived in London from 1838, attempted a coup in 1840 and was imprisoned in France, escaped to London in 1846, returned to Paris after the February revolution but went back to London on 2 March and returned to Paris on 24 September after receiving more votes than any other candidate in Paris. He was therefore in London during the June days Uprising in Paris and so could not be associated with it. On 2 December 1848 Louis Napoleon was elected President of the Second Republic largely on peasant support. Exactly four years later he suspended the elected assembly and established the Second French Empire which lasted until 1871.

Ireland. The Act of Union of 1800 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801. Opposition during the nineteenth century was mainly Roman Catholic. Charles Parnell campaigned for autonomy within the Union or 'Home Rule'. The Home Rule Bill of 1914 excluded the six counties of Ulster. Ireland became independent in 1921.

A portrait painting of a woman, Mrs Abington, by Joshua Reynolds. She is shown from the chest up, wearing a voluminous white ruffled collar and a dark dress. Her hair is styled in a high, dark, powdered wig. She is looking slightly to her right with a gentle expression. The background is dark and indistinct.

Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)  
**Portrait of Mrs Abington**  
74 x 61.5 cm  
Berger Collection, Denver Art  
Museum

Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), Portrait of Mrs Abington, 74 x 61.5 cm, Berger Collection, Denver Art Museum

The **Pre-Raphaelites** defined themselves through rejection. **John Everett Millais** dismissed **Sir Joshua Reynolds** as "Sir Sloshua," a dig at what he saw as a slovenly, conventional approach — Reynolds was known to paint faces with care whilst blocking in costumes rapidly and without the same attention. More broadly, the Brotherhood argued that since **Raphael**, European painting had grown rigid and formulaic, with artists learning from established tradition rather than looking directly at nature. Whether that criticism was entirely fair is another matter. Reynolds produced startling work, and his portrait of **Mrs Abington** as Miss Prue demonstrates real psychological alertness. Mrs Abington herself had risen from selling flowers on the street to become one of the great actresses of the **eighteenth century**, and Reynolds met that extraordinary social trajectory with a portrait of wit and directness. **James Northcote**, Reynolds's own pupil, said of her acting that she had "all the simplicity of nature and not the least tincture of the theatrical" — precisely the quality the Pre-Raphaelites

claimed the **Royal Academy** had lost. Their revolt against their teachers and the artistic establishment produced a sudden, decisive shift in approach that reverberated through **Victorian art** for decades.

### Notes

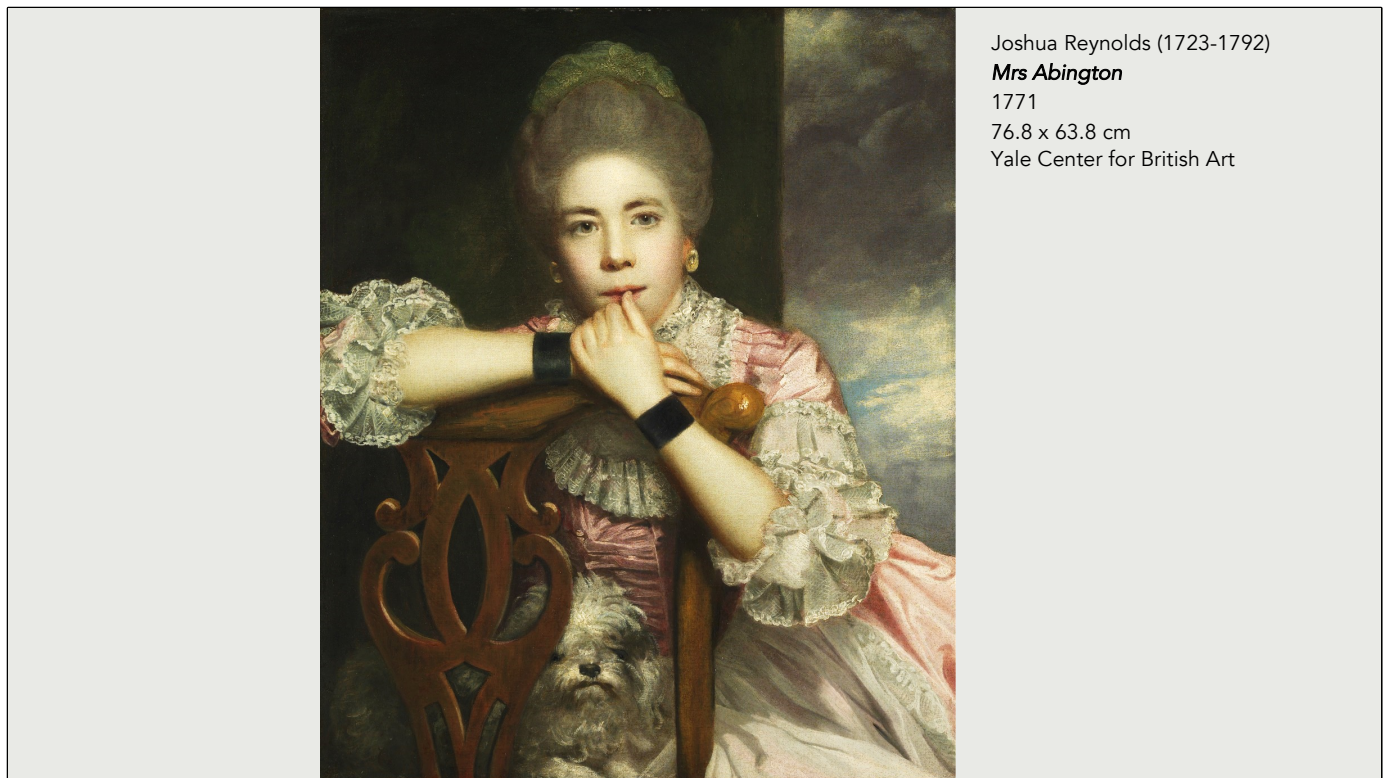
What were the Pre-Raphaelites rejecting?

Millais criticized Sir Joshua Reynolds by describing him as 'Sir Sloshua'. This may have meant simple 'conventional' but many of Reynolds paintings focus on the face and he quickly filled in the clothes. I have selected one of his portraits to illustrate their criticism. More generally, they felt that since Raphael art had become stylized and rigid and rather than go to nature artists had learnt to paint in a way that followed established traditions.

I am not saying their criticism was fair. Reynolds also painted the startling Mrs Abington as Miss Prue but a certain conventional style had developed that was acceptable to the Royal Academy. The Pre-Raphaelites were rejecting their teachers, elders and the artistic establishment and their revolt against authority and convention gave rise to a sudden change in approach that influenced later artists throughout the nineteenth century.

### Mrs Abington

Mrs Abington was a flower girl ('Nosegay Fan'), the daughter of a private soldier (or cobbler, or both), who went on to become a great actress. She worked as a servant to a French milliner and learned about costume, fashion and acquired a knowledge of French. She married her music master James Abington but her success and her relationships with other men caused her to be separated from her husband. Dr. Samuel Johnson was one of her staunchest admirers. The painter James Northcote (a pupil of Reynolds who painted about 2,000 works and made £40,000 in the 18th century) said about Mrs Abington's acting, 'I never saw a part done so excellent in all my life, for in her acting she has all the simplicity of nature and not the least tincture of the theatrical'.



Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)  
**Mrs Abington**  
1771  
76.8 x 63.8 cm  
Yale Center for British Art

Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), Mrs Abington, 1771, 76.8 x 63.8 cm,  
Yale Center for British Art

Here we return to **Joshua Reynolds** and his portrait of **Frances Abington**, a painting that immediately corrects any criticism of the earlier work — the drapery here is rendered with far greater detail and realism than that preparatory sketch. Abington, born Frances Burton, daughter of a private soldier, grew up in the slums around Drury Lane, began as a flower seller known as Nosegay Fan, and rose to become one of the leading actresses of her age. **David Garrick** called her back to the stage, where she remained for eighteen years, her performance style noted by **James Northcote** in 1772 as having not the least tincture of the theatrical. Women of fashion copied her dress. Reynolds painted her here as **Miss Prue**, the naïve country girl seduced in **William Congreve's** Restoration comedy **Love for Love**, first performed in 1694. The pose — thumb hovering at the lower lip, direct and unguarded — was unthinkable for a lady of standing. **Horace Walpole** judged the likeness easy and very like. Reynolds made a deliberate choice throughout his career to paint women who flouted

polite codes, among them Kitty Fisher and Nelly O'Brien — a provocative position for the **President of the Royal Academy**.

### Notes

This is another painting of Mrs Abington by Joshua Reynolds which you saw last term. It shows by criticism was a bit unfair as here the drapery has been painted in much greater detail and more realistically. The previous painting was a sketch.

### Notes

Joshua Reynolds, Mrs Abington as Miss Prue in - Love for Love - by William Congreve

Frances ('Fanny') Abington became one of the leading actresses – witty, clever, not theatrical

Reynolds pushed the limits of the acceptable by painting portraits of women who floated polite social codes

This portrait shows Fanny Abington as Miss Prue in William Congreve's (1670-1729) Restoration bawdy comedy, Love for Love (1694), Miss Prue is a naïve country girl seduced by a predatory, half-witted dandy.

Frances ('Fanny') Abington (1737-1815), born Frances Burton, daughter of a private soldier, grew up in the slums round Drury Lane, began as a flower girl ('Nosegay Fan') and street singer and became one of the leading actresses of her day. After her unhappy marriage to her music teacher James Abington she was called back to the stage by David Garrick where she remained for 18 years. Her acting was noted for having 'not the least tincture of the theatrical' (James Northcote, 1772). Before becoming an actress she learnt French and French fashion and later worked in a brothel. She was witty and clever which won her a distinguished position in society. Women of fashion copied her clothing.

Joshua Reynolds made a calculated decision to associate his art with the demi-monde of women who moved among the social elite but whose sex lives flouted polite codes of behaviour. For example, 'Kitty' Fisher, Elizabeth Hartley and Nelly O'Brien. So, again we see the limits of what is acceptable in an established conventional genre being tested, and this time by the President of the Royal Academy.

Adopting what was then taken to be a suggestive, or at least unrefined, pose—unthinkable for a lady—the work is both a portrait of unusual directness and candour, her thumb coyly hovering on the lower lip, and a “historical” picture, whose associations went beyond the subject's likeness, which Horace Walpole thought “easy and very like”

Notes

Hepplewhite chair





Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792)  
**Lady Worsley**  
c. 1775/6  
Harewood House, Harewood

Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), Lady Worsley, c. 1775/6, Harewood House, Harewood

**Joshua Reynolds** painted this portrait of **Lady Worsley** around **1779**, displaying her in a riding habit adapted from the uniform of the **Hampshire Militia**, the regiment her husband Sir Richard Worsley commanded. Paired with a full-length portrait of Sir Richard, it now hangs in the Cinnamon Drawing Room at **Harewood House**. Note the loose, almost sloshy handling of the trees — Reynolds working paint freely across the background. The story behind the portrait rivals the painting itself. In **1781**, Lady Worsley eloped with Captain George Bissett of the South Hampshire Militia. Sir Richard responded not with divorce proceedings but with a **criminal conversation** lawsuit against Bissett, claiming twenty thousand pounds in damages for interference with his wife. Lady Worsley's defence was audacious: she called a succession of her own lovers to the stand, and a bathhouse attendant from Maidstone testified that Sir Richard had lifted Bissett onto his shoulders to spy on his wife through a window whilst she undressed. The jury awarded Sir Richard **one shilling**. **James Gillray** immortalised

the scandal in one of forty suppressed etchings, plates later seized by Victorian authorities and recovered from the Ministry of Justice only in 2009, now held at the **Victoria and Albert Museum**.

### Notes

The relevant point about this painting is the 'sloshy' way in which the trees are painted. However, the story behind this painting is so interesting I cannot resist telling it.

It is a full length oil of Lady Worsley by Joshua Reynolds displayed in the Cinnamon Drawing Room at Harewood House. It was painted as one of a pair alongside a full length of her husband Sir Richard Worsley. Depicted in riding habit adapted from the uniform of her husband's regiment, the Hampshire Militia, of which he became Colonel in 1779.

#### Lady Worsley's Story

Seymour Dorothy Fleming, daughter and co-heiress of Sir John Fleming, married Sir Richard Worsley on September 15, 1775. The marriage however was not to last.

In 1781 Lady Worsley eloped with George Bissett, a Captain in the South Hampshire Militia, hoping that her husband would initiate divorce proceedings. Instead, Sir Richard brought a case of 'criminal conversation' against Bissett, suing him for damages of up to £20,000.

There followed a trial in which Sir Richard hoped to prove that damage to his wife or 'unlawful sexual intercourse' had taken place, in which various witnesses were called to testify including servants and hotel staff who may have witnessed the elopement. Although Sir Richard looked to have a strong case, Lady Worsley resolved to prove that she was unworthy of this large sum by exposing the secrets of her marriage and her husband's voyeuristic tendencies. The defences' intention was to demonstrate that Sir Richard's property had been damaged long before Lady Worsley's affair with Bissett, and secondly that Sir Richard was partly to blame for her conduct by encouraging and even exciting in her behaviour.

A number of Lady Worsley's lovers were called to the stand to give evidence of their relationships, but a clinching piece of evidence came from a woman who worked at a bathhouse in Maidstone. She claimed that Sir Richard had

helped Captain Bissett spy on Lady Worsley whilst undressing in the bathhouse, allowing him to climb onto his shoulders and peer through a window. The Jury awarded Sir Richard only one shilling.

Postscript: Seymour never obtained a divorce and she left Bisset and moved to France. Richard Worsley became Ambassador in Venice and died in 1805 leaving her free to remarry. She reverted to her maiden name of Fleming and married a man 20 years younger. There was a happy ending as they loved each other and she left her inheritance to him.

## Notes

The Gillray is one of 40 suppressed etchings. A man is peeping into a high bathroom window where a naked woman coquettishly washes, aware of the man's presence. She is accompanied by a maid who exclaims 'Good lack! My Lady, the Capt. will see all for nothing'. Captain George Bisset, playing the military commander, reports back 'Charming View of the Back Settlements Sir Richard.' Sir Richard Worsley says, 'My Yoke is Easy and my Burden Light'. There are two versions, one with Bisset standing on Worsley's back and the other, shown here, with him on his shoulders.

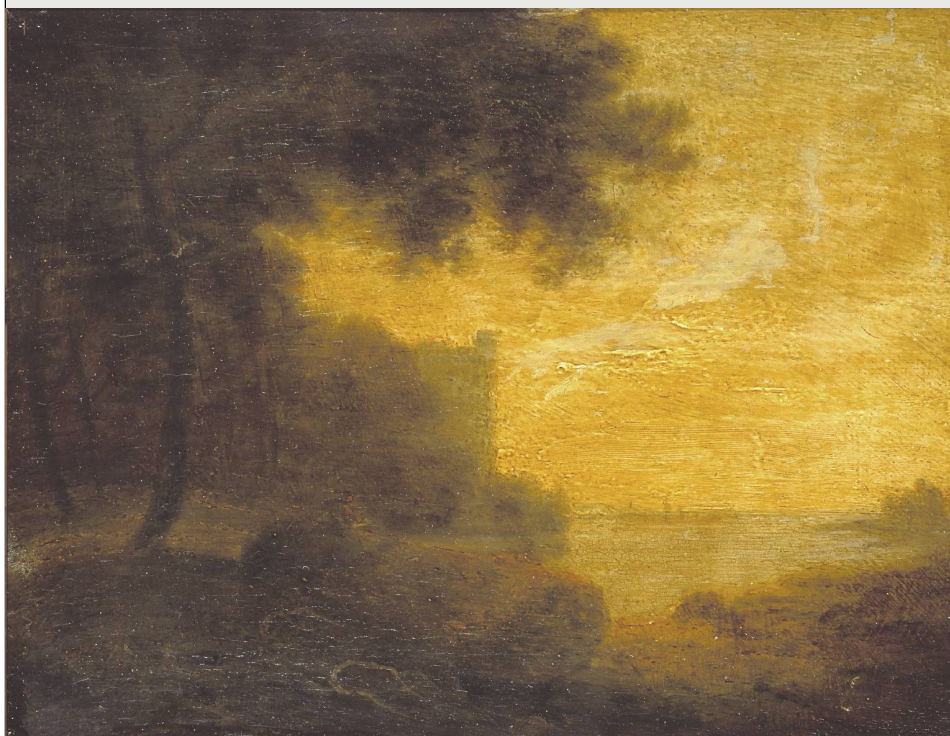
Gillray's 'supressed plates' were seized by a Victorian vice squad and were found in the Home Office (Ministry of Justice) wedged between a cabinet and a desk in 2009 and handed to the Victoria and Albert Museum. They were sold under the counter in the 1840s because of their 'offensive' content. James Gillray, our greatest genius of political satire, died in 1815, unmarried and insane.

## References

Harewood House website. Harewood House is about 7 miles north of Leeds

V&A website.

The Guardian newspaper website, 'James Gillray cartoons discovered in Ministry of Justice clearout', 15 December 2009.



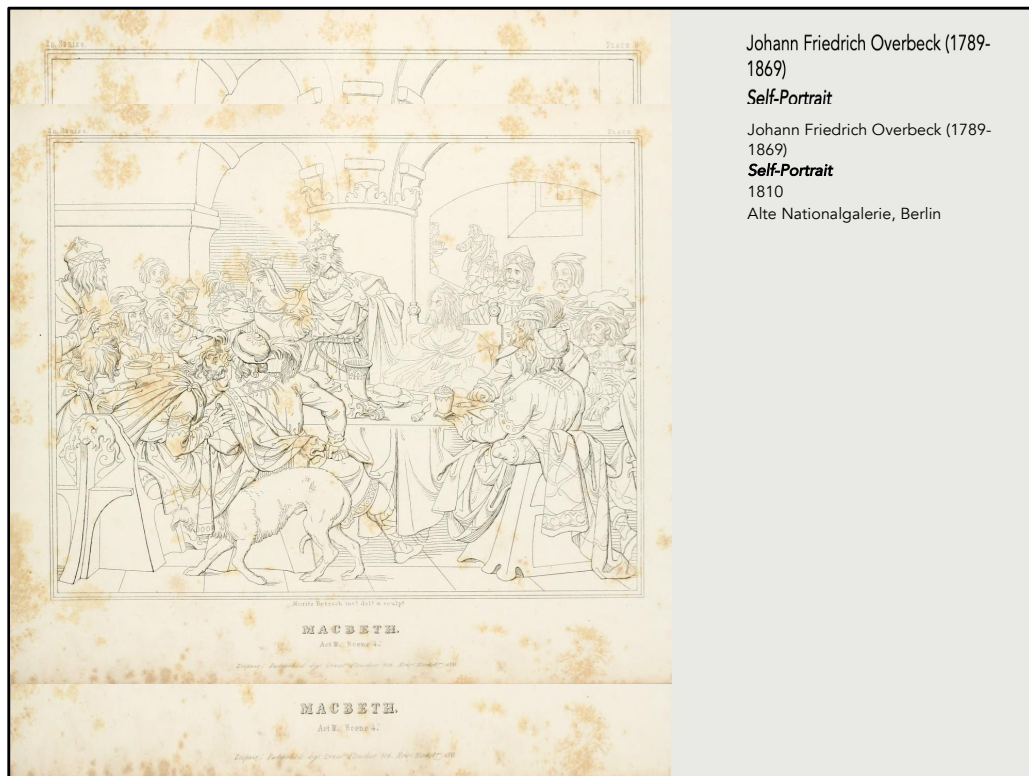
Anonymous  
**Castle by a Lake**  
Late 18th century  
Tate Britain, London

Anonymous, Castle by a Lake, Late 18th century, Tate Britain, London

The Pre-Raphaelites coined the nickname **Sir Sloshua** as a pointed rebuke to **Sir Joshua Reynolds** and the grand manner tradition he embodied as first president of the **Royal Academy**. Reynolds championed generalised, idealised forms over direct observation, and this landscape shows exactly what that philosophy produced in lesser hands. The trees are botanical fictions — no species, no specific light falling across identifiable bark or leaf structure. The sky is a studio convenience, a grey-pink smear that gestures toward atmosphere without committing to it. **The Pre-Raphaelites** looked at work like this in the late **1840s** and concluded that painting had drifted into a comfortable, self-referencing fog. Their remedy was radical: go outside, study the actual motif, record what is genuinely there. Hunt famously painted **The Scapegoat** on the shores of the **Dead Sea** in brutal heat to achieve precisely the authenticity this kind of studio landscape refuses. The irony is that Reynolds himself was a sophisticated thinker, but the academic conventions named after him hardened into exactly the formulaic slosh his younger critics despised.

### **Notes**

An example of the type of landscape the Pre-Raphaelites might have been thinking of when they talked about Sir Slosshua. It follows the Claude conventions but it does not appear the artist went anywhere near an actual landscape. The trees could be of any species and the sky bears little resemblance to a sky.



Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869), Self-Portrait, 1810, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin

The **Nazarenes** stand as the most direct precursor to the Pre-Raphaelites, anticipating the Brotherhood by roughly forty years. **Johann Friedrich Overbeck**, born into a family of Protestant pastors and scholars in Lübeck, trained in Vienna before his views on art got him expelled from the German Academy. He walked away convinced that European painting had been corrupted by the late Renaissance, which had quietly discarded Christian sincerity in favour of technical display. In **1809** he founded the **German Brotherhood of St Luke**, and the following year he and companions including **Peter von Cornelius** and **Philip Veit** settled in Rome, where Overbeck worked for nearly six decades. Their motto was hard work and holy living; they rejected classical antiquity as pagan and the High Renaissance as hollow. Like the later Pre-Raphaelites, they drew inspiration from **Giotto** and the so-called primitive painters working before **1500**, believing those artists conveyed an uncorrupted, honest faith. The PRB encountered this primitivist thinking not only through direct knowledge of the Nazarenes

but through artists influenced by them, including **Moritz Retzsch**, whose 1833 Macbeth engravings circulated widely in Britain. Overbeck's ideas reached the Brotherhood most concretely through **William Dyce** and **Ford Madox Brown**.

## Notes

### Influences/Precursors

#### 1. The Nazarenes

Overbeck painted this self-portrait when he was 21 and had just arrived in Rome after being expelled from the German Academy because of his views about art.

Overbeck and his companions thought that art before Raphael (before 1500), which was called 'primitive', was uncorrupted, Christian and honest.

In 1809 Overbeck formed 'The German Brotherhood of St. Luke'.

The PRB is a primitivist movement like the Nazarenes who predate them by forty years. Like the PRB they were inspired by the work of Giotto and other artists of the period.

The Pre-Raphaelites also saw the work of artists influenced by the Nazarenes such as the engravings of Moritz Retzsch, Macbeth, 1833.

They were not looking to emulate but to work in a similar naïve style inspired by the 'primitive'.

### Johann Friedrich Overbeck

Overbeck was a German painter and one of the Nazarenes. He painted mostly religious paintings in the style of artists before Raphael. He believed European art had become corrupted as Christianity had been slowly discarded and he took as a guide early Italian artists up to and including Raphael. He and his friends were expelled from the German Academy and went to Rome in 1810 where he worked for 59 years. He was joined by Peter von Cornelius, Friedrich Wilhelm Schadow and Philip Veit. Their motto was hard and honest work and holy living. The Classical antique was pagan and the Renaissance false.

Overbeck came from a long line of Protestant pastors. His father was a doctor of law and his uncle a doctor of theology. Overbeck became a classics scholar and received art instruction. He left Lübeck in March 1806 and studied in



Vienna. He sought to express Christian art before the corrupting influence of the late Renaissance. He was guided by the artist up to and including Raphael. He was expelled from Vienna and travelled to Rome.

Overbeck influenced William Dyce and Ford Madox Brown.

A self-portrait of John Ruskin, a man with dark, wavy hair and a serious expression, wearing a dark cravat. The portrait is rendered in a soft, painterly style with visible brushstrokes.

John Ruskin (1819-1900)  
**Self-portrait**  
1861

John Ruskin (1819-1900), Self-portrait, 1861

**John Ruskin**, born in 1819, was the leading English art critic of the Victorian era — a writer who ranged across geology, architecture, botany, political economy, and social reform with equal conviction. His collected works, edited by **E. T. Cook** and **Alexander Wedderburn** across 39 volumes, give some measure of his output's scale. Ruskin had not met the **Pre-Raphaelites** when he wrote to **The Times** in **May 1851** defending their first major exhibition. He acknowledged the group's name was ill-conceived and their knowledge of early painting slight, but insisted their commitment to drawing exactly what they saw redeemed them entirely. He singled out the drapery in works by **Millais** and **Hunt** as unsurpassed in truth and finish since **Albrecht Dürer**, and declared that Millais and Hunt might rise to very real greatness. A second letter followed within the fortnight, arguing they could yet lay foundations for a school of art nobler than anything seen in 300 years. This defence was decisive. Ruskin's championing of the Pre-Raphaelites shaped how British critics and collectors received them, and it rested on the same principle driving his **1843** first volume of **Modern Painters**

— that fidelity to nature is the foundation of all serious art.

## Notes

Ruskin was very influential up to WWI and his reputation then declined but has been improving since the 1960s. He was the leading English art critic of the Victorian era and art patron, watercolourist, prominent social thinker and philanthropist. He wrote on subjects ranging from geology to architecture, myth to ornithology, literature to education, and botany to political economy. Ruskin penned essays and treatises, poetry and lectures, travel guides and manuals, letters and even a fairy tale. He emphasised the connections between nature, art and society. He also made detailed sketches and paintings of rocks, plants, birds, landscapes, and architectural structures and ornamentation.

John Ruskin did not know the Pre-Raphaelites but he wrote two letters to The Times defending them and this helped a great deal in getting them accepted.

He wrote the first volume of *Modern Painters* in 1843 based on an essay in which he defended of Turner's 'truth to nature' against his critics. He championed the Pre-Raphaelites by writing a letter to, The Times on 13th May 1851 in which he wrote they exhibited 'fidelity to a certain order of truth'. He added that Millais and Hunt 'may sink into nothingness or rise to very real greatness'. He thought the name was ill-conceived and that they knew little of ancient paintings and their aim of returning to the early days of art was in one point only – 'they will draw what they see or what they suppose might have been the actual facts'.

He added, 'there is not a single study of drapery in the whole Academy, be it in large works or small, which for perfect truth, power, and finish, could be compared for an instant with the black sleeve of the Julia, or with the velvet on the breast and the chain mail of the Valentine of Mr. Hunt's picture; or with the white draperies on the table in Mr. Millais' 'Mariana, ' and of the right hand figure in the same painter's 'Dove returning to the Ark. And further: that as studies both of drapery and of every minor detail, there has been nothing in art so earnest or so complete as these pictures since the days of Albert Durer.'

He also wrote a second letter to The Times on 26 May in which he wrote, 'they may, as they gain experience, lay in our England the foundations of a

school of art nobler than the world has seen for 300 years.'

## Notes

Ruskin output was enormous and has been collected by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn in 39 volumes which occupy two shelves of most university libraries. From 1871 to 1884 he wrote a series of letters to the workmen of Great Britain in a periodical called *Fors Clavigera*. It forms part of what Ruskin considered his duty to intervene in the moral issues of the day following his mentor Thomas Carlyle.

The title is complex and an analysis of the name tells us a lot about how Ruskin thought. It consists of three fors (great powers) Force symbolised by the club (clava) of Hercules and the power to do good work, Fortitude symbolised by the key (clavis) of Ulysses the power to bear pain and trial as one does good work (the key symbolising patience, the key to his store house, the authority to open and close) and Fortune symbolised by the nail (clavus) of Lycurgus meaning a person's unchangeable fate which is nailed down and fastened forever (based on Ruskin's reading of Horace. Lycurgus symbolised law as he was the legendary law-maker of Sparta in Ancient Greece). They represent human talent, the ability to choose the right moment and then strike with energy. The name is derived from Shakespeare's 'There is a tide in the affairs of men/ Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune'.

In the 1877 issue of *Fors Clavigera* he attacked Whistler's paintings that were exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery that year. He found particular fault with *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, and accused Whistler of "ask[ing] two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face". Whistler filed a libel suit against Ruskin hoping to be awarded £1,000 to pay for his new house. Although Whistler won the case the jury awarded damages of only one farthing. The trial went on in Ruskin's absence in 1878 as he was ill and court costs were split between both parties. Ruskin's were paid by public subscription, but Whistler was bankrupted within six months. The episode tarnished Ruskin's reputation, however, and may have accelerated his mental decline.

Ruskin is also well known for his personal life. His marriage to Effie Gray was never consummated and was later annulled. The reasons for this are shrouded in innuendo but it seems he found something objectionable about her person. There has been speculation that it was her pubic hair but this is now thought unlikely.

The other controversial and personal aspect of Ruskin's life was his relationship with Rose La Touche. Her mother, Maria La Touche asked Ruskin to teach her daughter to draw and paint in 1858 when she was 10 and Ruskin 39. Ruskin gradually fell in love with her. Ruskin had religious doubts and this caused difficulties with the La Touche family. Ruskin proposed to her on her eighteenth birthday but she asked him to wait three years for an answer. She finally rejected him in 1872 when he was 53 and she was 24 but they still occasionally met. After a long illness she died in 1875, at the age of 27. This plunged Ruskin into despair and led to severe bouts of mental illness involving delirious visions. Ruskin turned to spiritualism and was alternately comforted and disturbed by what he thought were conversations with the dead Rose.

#### References

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Ruskin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ruskin)



John Ruskin (1819-1900)

**Falls of Schaffhausen**

1842

Watercolour, brown ink, gouache  
over graphite on cream wove paper  
31.4 x 47.3 cm

Fogg Art Museum, Harvard  
University Art Museums, Cambridge

John Ruskin (1819-1900), Falls of Schaffhausen, 1842, 31.4 x 47.3 cm,  
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge

Having established the Brotherhood's founding ideals, we turn to the critic whose writing gave those ideals their sharpest intellectual edge. **John Ruskin's** *\*Modern Painters\**, the first volume published in **1843**, began as a defence of **J. M. W. Turner** against critics who dismissed his late work as unfaithful to nature. Ruskin's counter-argument was that the Old Masters — **Claude** and **Salvator Rosa** among them — privileged pictorial convention over truth, whereas Turner pursued something deeper. For Ruskin, truth to nature meant moral as well as material truth, a distinction that proved far more consequential than a demand for photographic likeness. **William Holman Hunt** read the second volume in **1847** and found in it a solution to a problem that had preoccupied him: how to unite rigorous visual realism with spiritual meaning. Ruskin's analysis of typological symbolism in **Tintoretto's** *\*Annunciation\** showed Hunt that natural forms could carry divine significance — that God had embedded prefigurations of Christian truth within the visible world itself. Scholar **George Landow** has traced

how deeply this shaped Hunt's entire practice. Where Ruskin eventually lost his Christian faith, Hunt held to these convictions for the rest of his life, making him the Pre-Raphaelite most thoroughly transformed by Ruskin's vision.

## Notes

### 2. John Ruskin, Modern Painters

The other influence was John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (1843) which was read by Holman Hunt in 1847. Hunt wrote that he skim read through the book one evening and was excited by it but it was not read by Millais and Rossetti and appears to be a secondary influence but one Hunt believed supported their ideas.

Ruskin wrote,

"go to nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remembering her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing . . . and rejoicing always in the truth"

However, this did not mean a photographic likeness. He was defending late Turner and dealing with the critics head on. The critics thought Turner was not like nature, Ruskin thought otherwise. However, he wrote of the student, "from young artists nothing ought to be tolerated but simple bona fide imitation of nature . They have no business to ape the execution of masters . . . Their duty is neither to choose, nor compose, nor imagine, nor experimentalize; but to be humble and earnest in following the steps of nature, and tracing the finger of God"

But of the master painter, he wrote,

"we will follow them wherever they choose to lead . . . They are then our masters, and fit to be so"

Ruskin painted *The Falls at Schaffhausen* (1842, Fig: John Ruskin, *Falls of Schaffhausen* (1842), watercolour, brown ink, and gouache over graphite on cream wove paper 31.4 x 47.3 (13 1/2 x 19), The Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of Samuel Sachs) and was very proud that it had provoked the strongest positive reaction from the taciturn Turner, who looked at it a long time and then shook his finger in approval. Ruskin showed the



Falls from one of the viewing places that the tourist guides recommended to achieve the maximum sublime reaction. John Ruskin, *Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton*, 2 vols., vol. 2, Boston and New York, 1904, p. 75.

John Ruskin was motivated to write *Modern Painters* (Vol. 1 1843, Vol. 2 1846) to defend John Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) against adverse criticism. In the book, Ruskin maintained that Old Masters such as Claude, and Salvator Rosa, unlike Turner, favoured pictorial convention, and not 'truth to nature'. He explained that he meant 'moral as well as material truth'. Truth to nature was one of the driving motivations of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Ruskin had more influence on Holman Hunt (1827-1910, he died aged 83) than the other Pre-Raphaelites. When Hunt read *Modern Painters* (Vol. 2) it solved an artistic problem that had been worrying him. How to be truthful to nature yet represent spiritual truths. Ruskin's explanation of the typological (or prefigurative) symbolism in Tintoretto's *The Annunciation* showed Hunt how he could unite realism and iconography, form and content, matter and spirit. Typological symbolism is based on the idea that God placed anticipations of Christ and Christian truths in the laws, events and people of the Old Testament. Victorian scholars, such as Ruskin, extended this to show that the structure and form of the plants and animals of the natural world demonstrates God's hidden truths. Ironically, Ruskin lost his Christian belief as Hunt was learning to exploit his ideas fully. Hunt stayed true to his beliefs and approach throughout his long life.

## References

Laurence Shafe, 'The Science of Art and the Art of Science: Watercolours by Turner and Ruskin', ed. By Joanna Selborne, *Life, Legend, Landscape : Victorian Drawings & Watercolours* (London: The Courtauld Gallery, 2011)  
Victorian Web, George P. Landow, "'Your Good Influence on Me': The Correspondence of John Ruskin and William Holman Hunt".



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

*Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru*

1846

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru*, 1846, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Painted when **John Everett Millais** was just sixteen years old, *\*Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru\** has the assured authority of a far older artist. Exhibited at the **Royal Academy in 1846** and awarded a gold medal the following year, it depicts the capture of the **Inca emperor Atahualpa** by the **Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro** in **1532**. The composition draws on **Richard Brinsley Sheridan's** play *\*Pizarro\**, performed at the Princess's Theatre early in 1846, where Millais regularly attended. The actor **James Wallack**, who played the Indian hero Rolla there, sat as the model for Pizarro himself. Millais's father sat for the priest **Vicente de Valverde**, shown raising a crucifix against a setting sun — a deliberate symbol of Catholic triumph and the extinction of Inca power. As Marina Warner notes, the group of mother and children to the right echoes the Massacre of the Innocents. Millais worked on all this at his parents' home on **Gower Street**, the very studio where the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** would be founded two years later. The painting passed to his half-brother Henry Hodgkinson

and was bequeathed to the **V&A** in **1897**.

### Notes

Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1846, it won a gold medal in 1847.

It has the appearance of a conventional academic painting by a mature artist trained in the Royal Academy methods.

The unusual subject of this painting is the capture of the Inca emperor Atahualpa by the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro in 1532. As a model for Pizarro, Millais used an actor who had recently appeared in a play of the same name.

Millais was only 16 when he painted this work. It belonged to his half-brother Henry Hodgkinson and was bequeathed to the V&A in 1897.

Millais's studio was at his parents' house at 83 Gower Street, which is where the Pre-Raphaelites were founded two years later.

### Background

The composition must have been planned by early in the year; Millais received in payment for a sketch a £5 cheque - his first - dated 28 February 1846, and he drew on the back of the cheque a small sketch of himself at work on a painting which is clearly identifiable as the present picture (J G Millais, I, p34, repr p35).

The painting was exhibited in the West Room of the Royal Academy, with the following appended to the title in the catalogue: 'Pizarro himself advanced towards the emperor, whom he took prisoner; while his soldiers, incited by Vincent de Valverde, massacred all that surrounded the Monarch. Vide Luffman's chronology'. (The source is presumably John Luffman's *The Pocket Chronologist, or Authentic register of recent events both foreign and domestic* published in 1806.)

The priest Vicente de Valverde holds aloft a crucifix against a setting sun, symbolising the triumph of Catholicism and the end of Inca religion and power; Warner also links the group of mother and children on the right with the traditional, and appropriate, subject of the Massacre of the Innocents.

The most likely source, as Warner claims, is Sheridan's play *Pizarro* (first performed in 1799, and itself an adaptation of von Kotzebue's *Die Spanier in Peru*). The play was performed at the Princess's Theatre early in 1846. Millais

frequently attended that theatre, and knew the leading actor James Wallack (whose son Lester later married Millais's sister Emily) who appeared in Sheridan's play there as the Indian hero Rolla. Wallack was the model for Pizarro in Millais's painting. J G Millais records that the artist's father sat for the priest Valverde and for other figures, and Hunt notes that Millais borrowed native costume and jewellery that the artist Edward Goodall had brought back from an expedition he had accompanied in South America. Warner also thinks it likely that Millais borrowed costumes and props from the Princess's Theatre, and that he may have looked at original Inca artefacts in the British Museum.



John Everett Millais,  
*Cymon and Iphigenia*,  
1848,  
Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool

Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), *Cymon and Iphigenia*, c. 1775-1789,  
143.2 x 171.6 cm, Royal Collection

[Opening context: how did their art change?] To show the scale of that change, we start just before it happened. **John Everett Millais** began *\*Cymon and Iphigenia\** in **1847**, aged eighteen, months before the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** was formed with **Holman Hunt** and **Rossetti**. The picture belongs entirely to the academic tradition Millais was about to abandon. Its rich, atmospheric handling and sensual mood follow the manner of **William Etty**, and the composition is already confident — impressively so for a teenager. The subject comes from **Boccaccio's** *\*Decameron\**, though Millais worked from **John Dryden's** seventeenth-century verse retelling. Cymon, a nobleman banished to rural life for his boorishness, discovers the sleeping Iphigenia and is so struck by her beauty that he is transformed into a refined courtier, and wins her hand. The reclining female figure places the work squarely in the Venetian tradition of the nude — the same tradition behind **Joshua Reynolds's** *\*Cymon and Iphigenia\**, exhibited at the **Royal Academy** in **1789**, which drew directly on **Titian's**

\*Venus of Urbino\*. Millais knew this lineage and was already dissatisfied, vowing he could do better. \*Isabella\*, now in Liverpool, proved he was right.

## Notes

How did their art change?

This was started in 1847 when Millais was 18 and before the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded. I show it briefly as it demonstrates the enormous change in style Millais went through over the next few years.

It is a complex and mature composition in the style of William Etty and the sensual mood is appropriate to the romantic subject.

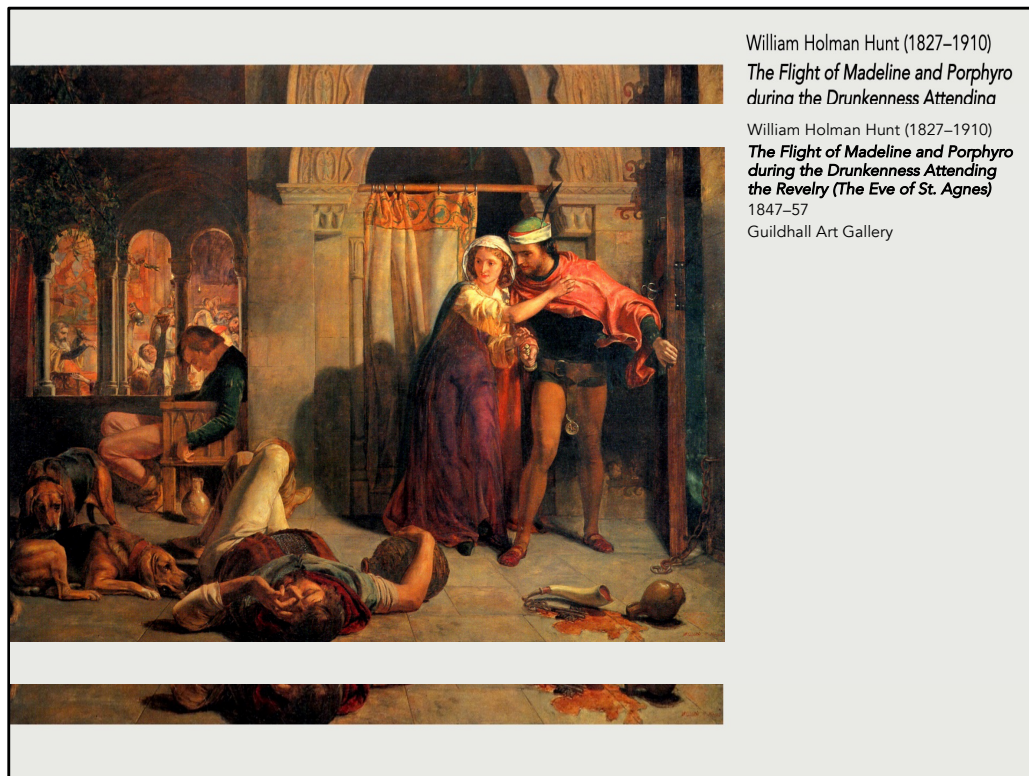
From Lady Lever Art Gallery:

"The story of Cimon (or Cymon, which means 'the brute') and Iphigenia was originally told in The Decameron of Boccaccio. Millais's source, though, was the version by the 17th century English poet John Dryden. The poem described the love of the aristocratic but boorish Cymon, who had been banished by his family to live in the country as a rustic, for the distant and refined Iphigenia. Cymon is transformed from a 'boor' and a 'brute' to an elegant courtier when he finds her asleep and is able to observe the beauty of her face, throat, arms and 'bosom'. This transformation enables him to win Iphigenia's hand in marriage.

Millais was only 18 when he began the painting, and it was the last major canvas he worked on before he embraced Pre-Raphaelitism with his friends Holman Hunt and Rossetti. Hunt assisted him with Iphigenia's dress but Millais was already dissatisfied with the picture and vowing he could do something much better. The outcome was 'Isabella', now in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool."

Reynold's Cymon and Iphigenia is an important history painting dating from Reynolds's final years. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1789 and is one of his last works. Reynolds painting is inspired by the Venetian tradition of the female nude, particularly Titian's Venus of Urbino (Uffizi, Florence).





William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness Attending the Revelry (The Eve of St. Agnes)*, 1847–57, Guildhall Art Gallery

**William Holman Hunt** began *\*The Eve of St. Agnes\** in February **1848**, months before the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** was formally founded that September, making it a remarkable anticipation of the movement's defining qualities: heightened colour, precisely delineated detail, and literary medieval subject matter. Hunt was the Brotherhood member who remained most consistently faithful to its original ambitions. His source is the **1820** poem by **John Keats**, whose work, though poorly received during his short life, became central to later nineteenth-century culture. The poem follows **Madeline**, who believes that on **St. Agnes' Eve**, the twentieth of January, she will dream of her future husband if she performs a prescribed ritual before sleep. Her lover **Porphyro**, whose family are sworn enemies of hers, hides in her chamber, prepares a feast, and the two eventually flee together across the southern moors. Hunt selects the tense moment of their escape. Both figures move silently through the door while the household



sleeps off its revelry, dimly visible in the background. Madeline places her hand on Porphyro's chest, a gesture directed at the dog, signalling that he is no threat. The dog's silence is their escape. Hunt turns a single quiet gesture into the entire drama of the poem.

### Notes

Begun in February 1848 before the Brotherhood was founded in September. Exhibited at the RA exhibition and admired by Rossetti which led to them becoming close friends and sharing a studio. The cramped picture space, bright colours, naturalism and detail prefigured the work of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Key point: literary subjects could be painted in the Pre-Raphaelite style

### The Eve of St. Agnes

Holman Hunt was a founder member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with Rossetti and Millais. He was the one that stayed most true to its aims.

In John Keats poem *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1820) a young maiden called Madeline is in love with a young man called Porphyro. It is January 20th, the day before the feast of St. Agnes, the patron saint of virgins. St Agnes was a young Roman girl, martyred in the fourth century for her faith. There was a superstition that a girl could see her future husband on St Agnes Eve if she followed a certain ritual when going to bed. She would dream of the man and he would prepare a feast for her. Her family are sworn enemies of his family and on the evening her family engages in an alcoholic revelry that can be seen in the background. Porphyro rides to the castle and persuades an elderly woman to hide him in Madeline's bedroom. He watches her prepare for bed and fall asleep and then creeps out to prepare a feast. Madeline wakes and sees the man she has been dreaming about and half asleep invites him to bed. She fully wakes, realizes her mistake and says she cannot hate him for his deception. They both agree to flee across the southern moors where Porphyro promises her a home.

Here we see Holman Hunt has caught the moment when both are downstairs opening the door and trying not to make a noise. I think they are both looking at the dog which is looking at them. He is a stranger so the dog could bark and wake everyone but she lays her hand on his chest to signify he is a

friend.

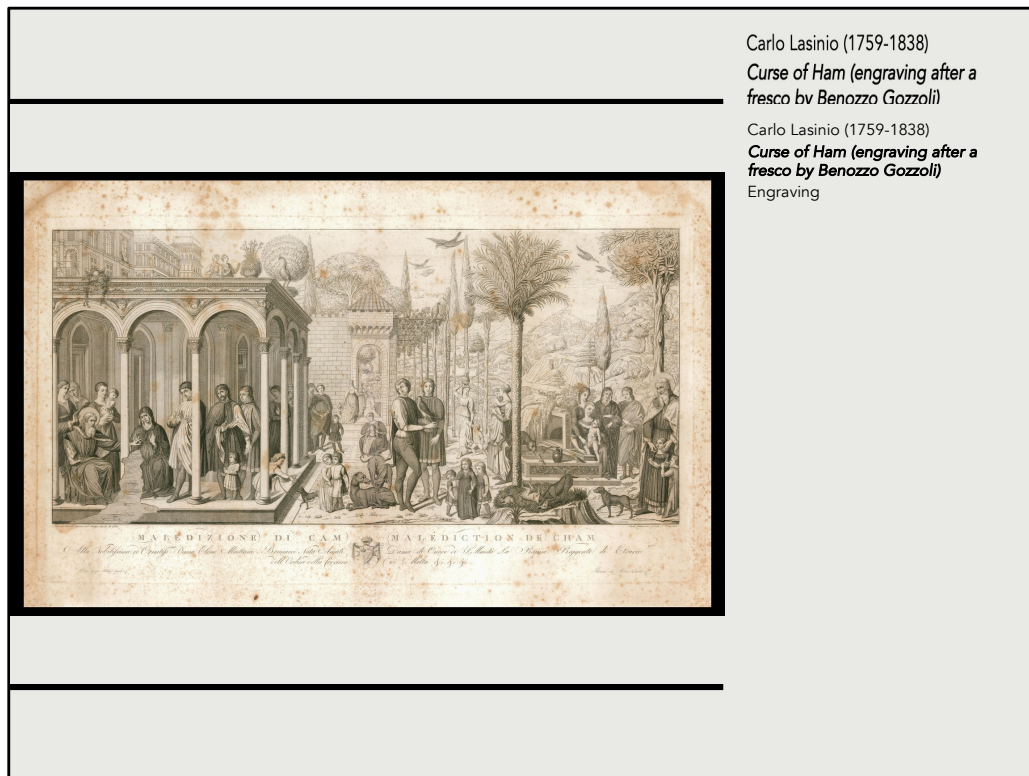
The painting is interesting as it was started before the Pre-Raphaelite movement began (which was September 1848) and yet it has many of the features such as heightened colour, cleanly delineated detail and a medieval subject.

### John Keats

John Keats (1795–1821, aged 26) was an English Romantic poet. He was one of the main figures of the second generation of Romantic poets along with Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley despite his work having been in publication for only four years before his death.

Although his poems were not generally well received by critics during his life, his reputation grew after his death, so that by the end of the 19th century, he had become one of the most beloved of all English poets. He had a significant influence on a diverse range of poets and writers. Jorge Luis Borges stated that his first encounter with Keats was the most significant literary experience of his life.

The poetry of Keats is characterised by sensual imagery most notably in the series of odes. Today his poems and letters are some of the most popular and most analysed in English literature.



Carlo Lasinio (1759-1838), Curse of Ham (engraving after a fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli)

Building on the Brotherhood's founding moment, we turn to the visual catalyst that first united them in purpose. In September **1848**, seven founding members — **William Holman Hunt**, **John Everett Millais**, **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, James Collinson, W. M. Rossetti, F. G. Stephens, and Thomas Woolner — formally established the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** at the Millais family home. The trigger was a book of engravings after **Benozzo Gozzoli's** fifteenth-century frescoes at the **Campo Santo in Pisa**. Hunt records that he and Rossetti found in those images freedom from corruption, pride, and disease — a whole spirit, as Lisa Tickner notes, that was simple and sincere. The engravings were produced by **Carlo Lasinio**, who moved to Pisa in 1807 as conservator of the Campo Santo and began engraving its frescoes the following year. Rossetti owned an **1828 edition** of Lasinio's Campo Santo di Pisa, catalogued as the celebrated volume of engravings in the auction of his effects in 1882. The Gozzoli frescoes themselves, twenty-three Old Testament scenes painted on the north

wall between 1468 and 1485, survived centuries before an Allied bomb caused catastrophic fire damage in **1944**. Restoration continues to this day.

### Notes

#### 3. Lasinio's Engravings of Gozzoli's Frescoes

According to Hunt, both John Everett Millais and Gabriel Dante Rossetti were searching through a book of engravings and found in them, 'freedom from corruption, pride and disease' (Faxon, 46). 'There was no trace of decline, no conventionality, no arrogance and whatever the imperfections, the whole spirit of the art was simple and sincere' (Lisa Tickner, Dante Gabriel Rossetti). These engravings are considered to be an important trigger for setting up the movement but the actual name, according to Hunt 'originated when he and a fellow student Millais, were criticizing Raphael's Transfiguration and other students proclaimed that they must then be the Pre-Raphaelites.' (Lona Mosk Packer, Christina Rossetti, p. 30).

This designation was officially accepted in September, 1848 at the Millais family house. The founding members include William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, Gabriel Dante Rossetti, James Collinson, W. M. Rossetti, F. G. Stephens, and Thomas Woolner.

Carlo Lasinio's book of engravings of the fifteenth century Italian frescoes at the Campo Santo at Pisa, painted by Francesco Traini

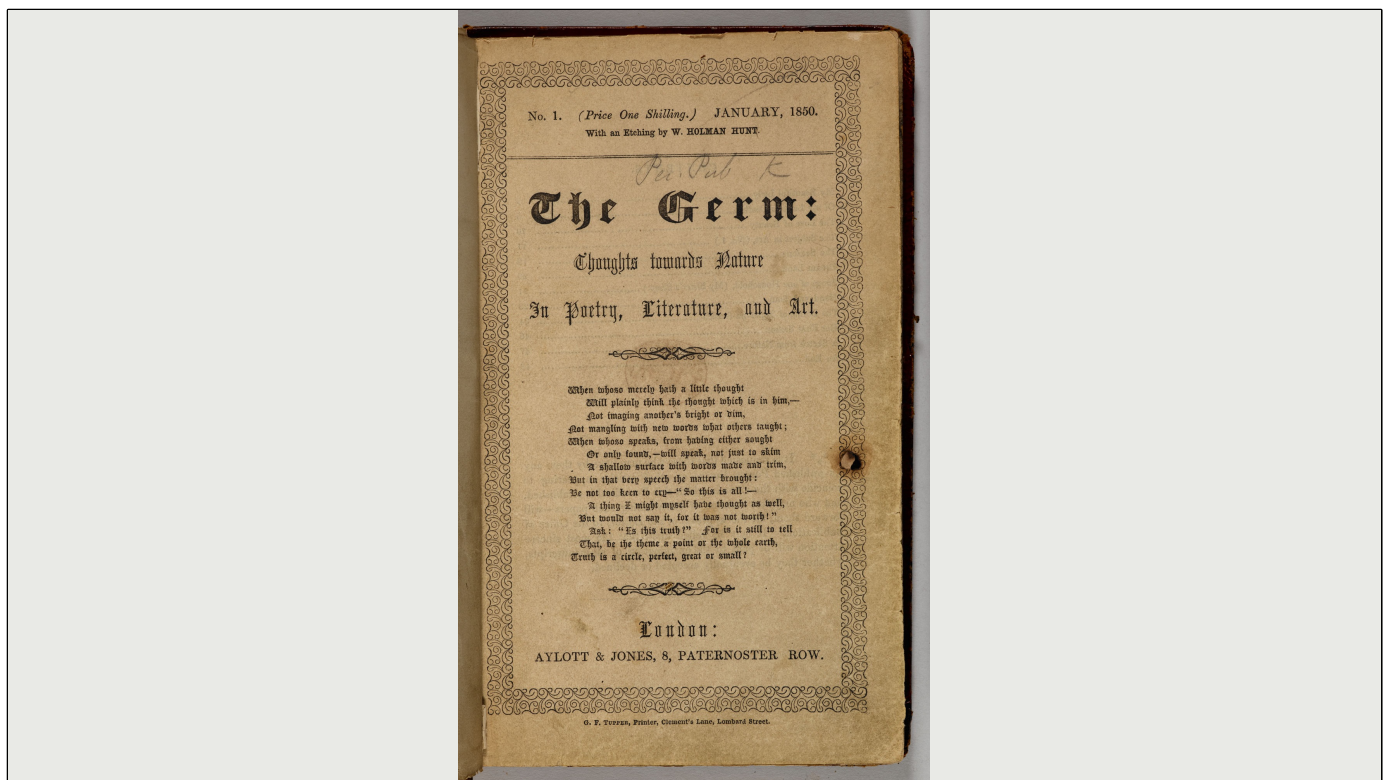
These were a set of engravings done of the fresco at the Campo Santo in Pisa. The cloister at Pisa was begun in 1277 and not completed until around 1350. The first group of frescoes was done by Francesco Traini (The Triumph of Death of c. 1350 on the south wall), Taddeo Gaddi (c. 1300-1366), Andrea da Firenze. who painted the story of a local saint, Beato Raineri, for which he was paid on 13 October 1477, Antonio Veneziano and Spinello Aretino (1328-1400), finished in 1391. A second group of 23 scenes of the Old Testament was done on the north wall from 1468-85 by Benozzo Gozzoli (1420-97). Both Carlo Lasinio (1759-1838) and his son Giovanni Paolo Lasinio worked on engravings of the scenes so it is difficult to know which one the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood saw, but Rossetti, in a letter of 20 August 1848 to Brother William, refers to Richard Monckton Milne, The Life and Letters of Keats, volume I, published in August 1848 says the Keats "having just looked over a folio of the first and second schools of Italina painting, he has to the

conclusion that the early men surpassed even Raphael himself!" (Doughty and Wahl, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 40). As Keats in 1820, it would seem that the engravings seen were mainly by Carlo, whose engravings of the Campo Santo were as early as 1808. Rossetti owned a 1828 edition of Lasinio's Campo Santo di Pisa labeled "the celebrated volume of Engravings," #595 in the auction of his effects July 5-7, 1882. (from Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts, ed. Liana Cheney,p.57)

Lasinio moved to Pisa in 1807 as the conservator of the Camp Santo and produced a book of etchings to try to preserve them.

The 'Curse of Ham' concerns a section of the Bible that describes how Noah got drunk and his son Ham saw him naked. His other two son's covered his nakedness while averting their eyes. Noah cursed Ham and his future offspring which has been linked to the enslavement of black races. The sin of looking at his father's nakedness seems slight so scholars have debated whether this is a euphemism for Ham mocking his father in the streets, or committing sodomy or having sex with his mother, Noah's wife but all explanations seem unsatisfactory.

The Campo Santo is literally 'holy field' because of the alleged shipload of soil from Golgotha around which it is built. It is also known as the Camposanto Monumentale ('monumental cemetery') and Camposanto Vecchio ('old cemetery'). The huge oblong Gothic cloister was begun in 1278 and has frescoes that date back to 1360 by Francesco Traini, Buonamico Buffalmacco, Benozzo Gozzoli (15th century) and others. In 1944 an Allied bomb fragment caused it to burn to the ground. American restorers salvaged pieces of the frescoes and built a temporary shelter. The frescoes are still being restored and put back into place.



The Brotherhood's ideas reached the public through **The Germ**, a magazine they published in **1850**, its title evoking a seed of new thought. Their declared enemy was artistic "slosh" — competent but hollow work — and against it they set four founding principles: to hold genuine ideas worth expressing, to study nature with close attention, to honour sincerity over convention in earlier art, and above all to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues. As **Andrew Graham-Dixon** notes, their subject matter divided into three streams — Christian and medieval life, contemporary scenes grounded in moral and religious seriousness, and literature drawn from **Shakespeare**, **Keats**, **Tennyson**, and others. There was an endearing naivety to their list of personal heroes, which ran from Jesus Christ and Homer through to Washington and Thackeray in sometimes startling sequence. Yet the ambition was genuine. By **1856** the movement had extended into poetry, drawing in **Christina Rossetti**, **William Morris**, and **Algernon Swinburne**, broadening Pre-Raphaelitism beyond painting into a wider cultural programme. What had begun as a small, secretive

Brotherhood was becoming one of the most influential artistic tendencies in Victorian Britain.

### Notes

Their thoughts were published in the year of 1850 in a magazine called The Germ (a germ is a seed as in 'the germ of an idea'). The Pre-Raphaelites aim was to avoid producing 'slosh' their ultimate condemnation. What they did produce was art and literature covering three areas of subject matter that include,

"First, Christian doctrine and medieval life;

Second, scenes from contemporary life, often expressing moral values founded on religious belief;

and lastly, scenes from literature, particularly Shakespeare and other nineteenth century poets as Keats, Tennyson, Coventry Patmore, and Sir Henry Taylor".

They founded the Brotherhood on the following principles:

To have genuine ideas to express.

To study nature attentively, so as to know how to express them.

To sympathize with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote.

And most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues. (Andrew Graham-Dixon, A History of British Art, p. 175)

There was a degree of naivety in their aspirations; they had a list of heroes who appeared (in sometimes unlikely sequence) in paintings by various members of the Brotherhood: Jesus Christ, Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, Chaucer, Leonardo, Goethe, Keats, Shelley, King Alfred, Landor, Thackeray, Washington and Browning.

In 1856, a poetic Pre-Raphaelite movement included Christina Rossetti, William Morris, and Algernon Swinburne.





John Everett Millais (1829–1896)  
**Isabella**  
 1848–9  
 Walker Art Gallery

John Everett Millais (1829–1896), *Isabella*, 1848–9, Walker Art Gallery

John Everett Millais painted *Isabella* in 1849, aged just nineteen, exhibiting it at the Royal Academy that same year as his first fully Pre-Raphaelite work. The Brotherhood — formed in rebellion against academic convention — published their ideas in **The Germ**, a short-lived magazine of four issues in 1850. Their central argument, articulated by **William Michael Rossetti**, was that art had decayed after **Raphael** as painters copied each other rather than nature. They particularly targeted **Sir Joshua Reynolds**, dismissing him as "Sir Sloshua," where "sloshy" meant anything lax, conventional, or scamped in execution. *Isabella* illustrates **John Keats's** poem of doomed love between Isabella and Lorenzo, whose murder is being plotted here by her merchant brothers. Millais deliberately distorts perspective, elongates the table, flattens the figures, and nearly eliminates chiaroscuro, forcing raw colour contrasts rather than sculptural illusion. Every figure is a real person: **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** drinks at the right, his brother **William** plays Lorenzo, and the brutish kicking figure is John Harris, a man who had bullied Millais at art

school. The **blood orange**, spilt salt, passion flowers, and majolica plates depicting beheading all embed the violence to come within an apparently domestic scene.

### Notes

Millais first work in the Pre-Raphaelite style. It was completed in 1849 when Millais was only 19 and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1849.

In 1850 they showed five paintings (three by Millais) and in 1951 eight works at London exhibitions.

The Pre-Raphaelites are startlingly innovative although their work must have looked gauche. It does not follow the practices of the artists working before Raphael but seeks inspiration from them for a thoroughly modern set of techniques.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood did not have a formal prospectus but their views are clearly put forward in *The Germ*, an unsuccessful magazine they published as four issues in 1850.

They believed that art had gone astray after Raphael as artists started to copy other artists and use agreed painting conventions rather than looking at nature. They found the classical poses and elegant compositions of Raphael in particular had been a corrupting influence on the academic teaching of art, hence the name 'Pre-Raphaelite'. In particular, the group objected to the influence of Sir Joshua Reynolds whom they called 'Sir Slosua'. To the Pre-Raphaelites, according to William Michael Rossetti, 'sloshy' meant 'anything lax or scamped in the process of painting ... and hence ... any thing or person of a commonplace or conventional kind'. In contrast, the brotherhood wanted a return to the abundant detail, intense colours and complex compositions of Quattrocento Italian art.

In summary, their style involved:

The bright colours of nature, painted on bright white to increase their brilliance.

Detail painted from nature rather than 'sloshy' conventions. This was very slow.

Distorted perspective, such as the elongated right side of table with crowded flattened figures like playing cards.

Elimination of chiaroscuro and the exaggeration of the intensity of colours, note the black and white servant whose yellow legs merge into the background. Chiaroscuro is the contrast between light and dark that is used by artists to create sense of volume and if exaggerated to create a dramatic theatrical effect. Now usually only commented upon when the artists uses extreme contrasts, such as Caravaggio. A lack of chiaroscuro introduces subtlety and flatness that draws attention to the work as simply colours applied to a flat surface, a modern theme in art that rejects 'dishonest' art that tries to create the illusion of three-dimensionality.

Natural angular poses are characteristic of medieval art not classical or Renaissance.

There is an all over precision. Millais does not draw the viewers attention to one part by painting that in detail and leaving other areas loose.

Medieval setting and based on a Keats's poem.

They painted their friends rather than use professional models in order to achieve a natural look

They did not idealise their models or subjects.

The painting includes elaborate symbolism and motifs.

The humour of the kick jars with the seriousness of the subject suggesting genre paintings such as Hogarth's Marriage a-la-mode (the marriage settlement includes sitting around a table arguing about a marriage, one difference is the 'young lovers' look in opposite directions in Hogarth).

History subjects were painted using real models and authentic objects when possible.

They often painted historical subjects, biblical subjects or medieval tales. This utilized the status of the history painting by applying it to genre paintings.

## Isabella

The painting illustrates an episode from John Keats's poem, Isabella, or The Pot of Basil, which describes the relationship between Isabella, the sister of wealthy medieval merchants, and Lorenzo, an employee of Isabella's brothers. It depicts the moment at which Isabella's brothers realise that there is a romance between the two young people, and they plot to murder

Lorenzo so they can marry Isabella to a wealthy nobleman. Isabella, wearing grey at the right, is being handed a blood orange on a plate by the doomed Lorenzo. A cut blood orange is symbolic of the neck of someone who has just been decapitated. This refers to Isabella cutting off Lorenzo's head to take it with her after finding him buried. One of her brothers violently kicks a frightened dog while cracking a nut. Keat's poem was in turn based on one of the tales from Giovanni's Boccaccio's Decameron (c. 1352).

Millais and his colleague William Holman Hunt had both produced drawings illustrating episodes from the poem, but only Millais worked his up into a full painting. Both drawings used distorted perspective and angular poses characteristic of medieval art, by which the Pre-Raphaelites were influenced.

The painting is structured with deliberately distorted perspective, elongating the right hand side of the table and flattening the figures ranged along it. Following Pre-Raphaelite theory, Millais almost eliminates chiaroscuro (light and dark) and exaggerates the intensity of juxtaposed colours and tones - as evidenced in the flat black tunic set against the sharply modelled white cloth of the servant at the right, whose lower body virtually disappears as his yellow stockings semi-merge with the background.

Millais also carefully characterises each figure with equal precision. Another distinctive Pre-Raphaelite feature is the inclusion of images and patterns within the image as a whole. Each of the plates has a distorted picture glazed into its surface. The base of the bench on which Isabella sits contains a carving depicting a kneeling figure under which appear the letters PRB (standing for Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood).

The central motif of the thuggish brother's kicking leg and upturned chair further disturbs the equilibrium of the composition, as does the deliberately confusing 'crowding' of the figures on the table and elaboration of motifs.

The figures are based on friends of Millais. Rossetti is drinking on the right side of the table. His brother William Rossetti is Lorenzo passing the cut blood orange. The wife of Millais's half-brother is Isabella and his father, John William Millais, is the elderly man dabbing his mouth. The artist Walter Deverell and F. G. Stephens are the two brothers on the left and the brother kicking the dog is John Harris, a man who had bullied Millais at the Royal Academy School and who he painted from memory. Millais certainly got his own back by showing him as a bully of poor dumb animals for all time to millions of people. The shadow of the arm on the table alongside the spilt salt signifies that he will carry out the murder as salt symbolises life and spilt

salt death. I think the shadow of the arm could also signify something else which is reinforced by the salt signifying spilt or wasted life.

The white rose and the passion flower symbolise their love and the dog with its head in Isabella's lap symbolizes Lorenzo's devotion to her. The pot of basil on the balustrade on the right may be the one she puts his head in. The majolica plates all have different designs and one has David beheading Goliath and another shows Prometheus having his entrails pecked out by an eagle, both a reminder of the violence to follow.

There are three brothers and we can tell which one hatched the plot to kill Lorenzo. The other two look smug knowing the plot and one looks at Lorenzo and Isabella while pretending to examine his wine.

Somewhere in the picture are the initials PRB, can you find them?

The painting was sold to a tailor for £150 and a new suit.

(Research thanks to [mydailyartdisplay.wordpress.com](http://mydailyartdisplay.wordpress.com))

## References

See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-Raphaelite>

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Everett\\_Millais](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Everett_Millais)

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella\\_\(Millais\\_painting\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella_(Millais_painting))

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Germ\\_\(periodical\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Germ_(periodical))



William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)  
*Rienzi vowing to obtain justice for  
 the death of his young brother, slain  
 in a skirmish between the Colonna  
 and the Orsini factions*

1849

Private collection Mrs E. M. Clarke

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *Rienzi vowing to obtain justice for the death of his young brother, slain in a skirmish between the Colonna and the Orsini factions*, 1849, Private collection Mrs E. M. Clarke

Rienzi is among **Hunt's** earliest works, painted in 1849, the year the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** was at its most cohesive. Within a year, as Hunt himself later acknowledged, the group's formal meetings had ceased, and each member was moving towards his own distinct vision. The painting draws on **Bulwer-Lytton's** 1835 novel *\*Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes\**, a story set in fourteenth-century Rome centring on a poor classical scholar who vows revenge after his younger brother is killed in a feud between the rival Orsini and Colonna families. That private grief becomes public purpose: Rienzi eventually rallies the Roman people, declares the Republic re-established, and for a brief period imposes genuine order on a lawless city. His story ends in 1354 when a mob turns against him. Hunt exhibited the painting with a passage from the novel describing how a single catastrophic event transforms Rienzi from dreamer and scholar into a man of passion and political action. The raised arm and upward gaze embody that turning



point. Critics at the time noted that Hunt struggled with natural figure poses — the soldier to the left reads as stiff — a tension between idealism and technical command that would preoccupy Hunt throughout his career.

## Notes

The subject was taken from Bulwer Lytton's *Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes* of 1835.

It was exhibited with the following excerpt from the novel,

But for that event, the future liberator of Rome might have been but a dreamer, a scholar, a poet, - the peaceful rival of Petrarch - a man of thoughts, not deeds. But from that time, all his faculties, energies, fancies, genius, became concentrated to a single point and patriotism, before a vision, leaped into the life and vigour of a passion.

Hunt sometimes had problems with natural poses, see the soldier on the left.

By the end of 1850 the meetings of the Pre-Raphaelites were already obsolete and although the artists were still close friends they started to go in their own directions.

Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton PC (25 May 1803 – 18 January 1873), was an English novelist, poet, playwright, and politician. He was immensely popular with the reading public and wrote a stream of bestselling novels which earned him a considerable fortune. He coined the phrases "the great unwashed" (novel *Paul Clifford*), "pursuit of the almighty dollar" (novel *The Coming Race*), "the pen is mightier than the sword" (play *Richelieu*), "dweller on the threshold", as well as the infamous opening line "It was a dark and stormy night".

The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest is for the most terrible opening for an imaginary novel inspired by "It was a dark and stormy night". In the comic strip *Peanuts* Snoopy usually began with this same line.

The novel was made into an opera by Richard Wagner.

The novel is about the feud between the Orsini and Colonna. Set in Rome in the 14th century it is a biography of *Rienzi*, a poor classical scholar who achieved glory. When young he vowed to avenge the death of his younger brother. The papacy were in Avignon at this period (1309 to 1377, seven French popes who all refused to move to Rome). In 1347 *Rienzi* rallied a mob



and declared the Roman Republic re-established. For a year his word was law, he cleared the woods of bandits, imposed the death penalty on all murderers and beat the aristocracy's re-invasion. He went into exile, was captured by the papacy, but when the pope changed he was sent back to Rome as a representative but again made himself master of the city but the following year, in 1354, Rienzi was slain by a miserly Roman mob. Petrarch was his contemporary.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)  
***The Girlhood of Mary Virgin***  
 1849  
 Tate Britain, London

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, 1849, Tate Britain, London

This first oil painting by **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, completed in **1848**, announces the ambitions of the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** with extraordinary confidence. Rossetti grew up in a High Anglican household, and though he held no personal religious faith, that domestic immersion in sacred order shaped how he built the picture's layered symbolic structure. Saint Anne assists the young Mary in embroidering a lily, the central emblem of purity, whilst an angel holds it before them. Around the figures, every object carries doctrinal weight: the vine, the lantern, and the dove each signal the **Annunciation**, and the book spines are lettered with the cardinal virtues in Latin. Rossetti wrote to **F. G. Stephens** in 1852 that the work was a symbol of female excellence, with the Virgin representing its highest expression. The technique is as deliberate as the symbolism. Rossetti primed his canvas with white until it was as smooth as cardboard, then applied thinned oils with watercolour brushes, producing a luminous transparency unlike anything in conventional oil painting. Fearing

rejection, he avoided the Royal Academy entirely and instead exhibited at the **Free Exhibition at Hyde Park Corner**, an institution that opened its doors to women artists excluded elsewhere.

### Notes

Painted in Hunt's studio, begun 20 August 1848.

Not exhibited at the Royal Academy as he was worried about being rejected.

Symbolism is so complex he wrote two sonnets to explain it. It includes objects such as the dove, the lamp, the rose, the flower, the vine and colours such as gold for charity, blue for faith, green for hope and white for temperance.

There is no evidence Rossetti had any religious beliefs, he was a Victorian agnostic. His deepest belief was that women enshrine the meaning of existence. His mother and sister, Christina were High Anglicans.

He wrote in 1852 to F. G. Stephens, 'that picture of mine was a symbol of female excellence. The Virgin being taken as its highest type.'

Millais Carpenter's Shop followed on from Rossetti's Girlhood.

### Dante Gabriel Rossetti

The third key member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was Dante Gabriel Rossetti. This is his first oil painting and although Rossetti was not a believer the sonnet he wrote describes human events that are surrounded by the sacred and give it meaning. He grew up in a High Anglican household and this gave him a sense of order such beliefs provide.

St. Anne, her mother, is assisting Mary embroider a lily which is held before by an angel. The embroidery also appears in his painting of the Annunciation. He chose embroidery as something more likely to be done at the time and as less commonplace. Mary and Anne are typically shown reading a book. In front of them is a pile of volumes symbolising spiritual virtue and the top one is Charity. In front of Mary the lily symbolizes purity. Near Mary's feet are the seven-leaved palm and the briar twig with seven thorns. They symbolise Mary's sorrows and Christ's Passion but they are not integral to the painting but placed by the artist. The vine, the lantern and the dove are typical symbols of the Annunciation with the dove representing the Holy Spirit ('Until the end be full, the Holy One abides without'). In the background St Joachim

(Mary's father, not mentioned in the Bible, patron saint of fathers and grandfathers) is pruning a vine.

Rossetti used an unusual technique. He first primed the canvas with white until it was as smooth as cardboard and then used thinned oil paints that he applied using watercolour brushes. The result is that every tint is transparent and it looks like a watercolour.

There were two sonnets inscribed on the frame.

The painting was not exhibited at the Royal Academy but at the Free Exhibition at Hyde Park Corner. The Free Exhibition was held by a short-lived organisation called Institution for the Free Exhibition of Modern Art (later the National Institution for Fine Arts) that provided alternative exhibition space to the Royal Academy to make it more accessible to women artists who suffered discrimination. The exhibition was 'free' in the sense that the artist was free to exhibit as long as he or she paid.

Rossetti Archive: 'Linguistic forms populate the canvas (and the integral frame). DGR often incorporated such verbal elements in his pictures—a device he borrowed from medieval styles—in order to increase the conceptual and abstract character of his work. Here the names of the virtues appear on the book spines (Fortitudo (strength), Temperentia (restraint), Prudentia (prudence), Spes (hope), Fides (faith), and Caritas (charity), the cardinal virtues); the gilt haloes are inscribed S. Ioachim, S. Anna, S. Maria S.V.); a scroll binding the palms and briars bears the legend "Tot dolores tot gaudia" ("So many sorrows, so many joys"); and the portable organ near the hassock is carved with the initial M and has the inscription "O sis, Laus Deo" ('Oh, praise be to God').'

## References

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante\\_Gabriel\\_Rossetti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti)



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)  
*Christ in the House of His Parents*  
 1850  
 Tate Britain

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Christ in the House of His Parents*, 1850, Tate Britain

**John Everett Millais** exhibited his painting of the Holy Family in a carpenter's workshop at the **Royal Academy** in **1850**, titling it only with a passage from **Zechariah** in which Christ is questioned about the wounds in his hands. The critical response was ferocious. **Charles Dickens**, writing in *\*Household Words\**, described the Virgin Mary as horrible in her ugliness and Christ himself as hideous and wry-necked. **Ralph Wornum** in the *\*Art Journal\** articulated the period's governing assumption — that the most beautiful soul must have the most beautiful body — making Millais's deliberately unglamorous Holy Family read as a moral offence. The figures were modelled on Millais's own family and friends, the tools are those of a **Victorian carpenter**, and the setting deliberately blends Middle Eastern costume with nineteenth-century detail. Art historian **Michaela Giebelhausen** argues that Millais constructed these anachronisms intentionally, drawing on an eighteenth-century tradition of ahistorical religious settings. Critics also detected an uncomfortable proximity to **Puseyism** and the **Oxford**

**Movement**, reading the Pre-Raphaelite embrace of pre-Reformation art as a threat to Protestant values. By **1898** the painting was passionately admired, its power to shock absorbed into the new visual culture it had helped to create.

## Notes

Christ in the House of His Parents

Millais, untitled, 'And one shall say unto him, What are those wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends' (Zechariah, 8:6). Described in the Art Journal as 'The improprieties are manifold ... the coarsest representation of humanity ... even more revolting than the flayed Marsyas.' The work of Overbeck is mentioned as precursor of 'some of the worst followers of the Giottteschi'.

The reaction to Millais's painting was unprecedented. The term 'ugly' was rarely used by critics to describe fine art yet this painting was described not only as ugly but as hideous, loathsome and disgusting. The most unfavourable was the satirical piece by Dickens in his Household Words. Dickens described Mary as 'horrible in her ugliness' and clarified what he meant by ugly:

Wherever it is possible to express ugliness of feature, limb, or attitude, you have it expressed. Such men as the carpenters might be undressed in any hospital where dirty drunkards, in a high state of varicose veins, are received. Their very toes have walked out of Saint Giles's.

Saint Giles was an area that was well known for its crime and had 'the worst living conditions in all of London's history'. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine wrote that the painting contained 'Ricketty children, emaciation and deformity' and 'we can hardly imagine anything more ugly, graceless, and unpleasant'. Dickens also described Christ as 'hideous, wry-necked, blubbering' and the whole painting with its 'ugliness of feature, limb, or attitude' expressing 'what is mean, odious, repulsive, and revolting'. In the painting, Christ has red hair, which was traditionally associated with Judas Iscariot and red hair regarded as both 'ugly' and a 'sign of degeneration'. Mary's eyes are almost closed and ringed in black and her brow is heavily lined, which combined with the twist of her neck, gives her a distorted

appearance and Joseph's arms are veined and muscular, his nails are dirty, his left knee is damaged and his toenails are broken.

In the Art Journal Ralph Wornum wrote: 'the most beautiful soul must have the most beautiful body' indicating that the moral worth of a character, in this case the Holy Family, must be signified by a beautiful body. The Times critic wrote that the picture 'is, to speak plainly, revolting' and there was 'no conceivable omission of misery, of dirt, and even disease, all finished with the same loathsome minuteness'. The Athenaeum also wrote that 'we recoil with loathing and disgust' at the 'pictorial blasphemy'. What is morally shocking to the reviewer is the minute detail, which suggests we are looking at something that is forbidden and so it must be seen only in some generalised or modified form.

The room is unnaturally bright and evenly lit and the source of the light is on the left. In Millais's preparatory sketches, there is a window on the left, which is cut off in the final painting and is the notional source of the light. The figures have the idiosyncratic features associated with particular people and we know that they were modelled by Millais's family and friends. Millais went to a carpenter's shop in Oxford Street to sketch its interior in order to represent a carpenter's tools and method of working accurately. The tools are those of a nineteenth-century carpenter and the clothes are a mixture of Middle Eastern, conventional religious symbolism, such as Mary's blue dress and St. John's animal fur, with nineteenth-century additions, such as Christ's smock. Clearly, Millais was not trying to reproduce a historically accurate carpenter's shop but an accurately observed contemporary carpenter's shop with figures that were modelled on friends and family. The critics pointed out that the painting is full of anachronisms such as the mixture of costumes from different periods and the Victorian carpenter's tools. However, the art historian Michaela Giebelhausen believes that Millais carefully constructed these anachronisms in order to create an ahistorical setting. In the eighteenth century, she points out that such an ahistorical setting was associated with religious devotion as it prevented a painting from being seen as a genre painting set in a particular time and period.

Christ's small stature compared with the height of the table also suggests that Millais was representing an accident resulting from childish enthusiasm rather than a stage-managed event. This is also suggested by the assistant at the left ignoring the interruption to his work, Joseph's perfunctory examination and the look of 'I told you not to meddle' on St. John's face. Mary is holding



her head back for a kiss suggesting she is the injured party and St. Anne offers practical assistance rather than comfort. Through the open entrance, a group of sheep stare over a fence inquisitively suggesting there could have just been a noisy scene. Millais linked the highest spiritual subject, the Holy Family, with the lowest rung of society, the urban poor, and turned a spiritual prefiguration into an everyday accident.

By associating themselves with artists that pre-dated the formation of Protestantism the Pre-Raphaelites linked themselves with Puseyism, the Oxford Movement, and the widely resisted move towards Catholicism. This was reinforced by their unconventional approach to religious symbolism. The painting was therefore seen to be subversive and an attempt to undermine Protestant beliefs. This aspect of the Pre-Raphaelite movement is spelled out in Max Nordau's *Degeneration*.

It is clear from the critical reaction that this painting was revolutionary and was seen as an extreme attack on the conventions used to represent religious subjects. Fourteen years later, in Paris, Manet caused a similar reaction by undermining bourgeois notions of respectability with *Olympia* (1863, exhibited 1865).

The critical response changed over the years and by 1898 the painting was 'passionately admired, and even loved'. By the end of the century, the painting was no longer regarded as ugly and 'blasphemous'. This might be because Millais had become accepted as a member of elite society but the painting had also lost its ability to shock as the changes it brought about in the way we see the world had become established.

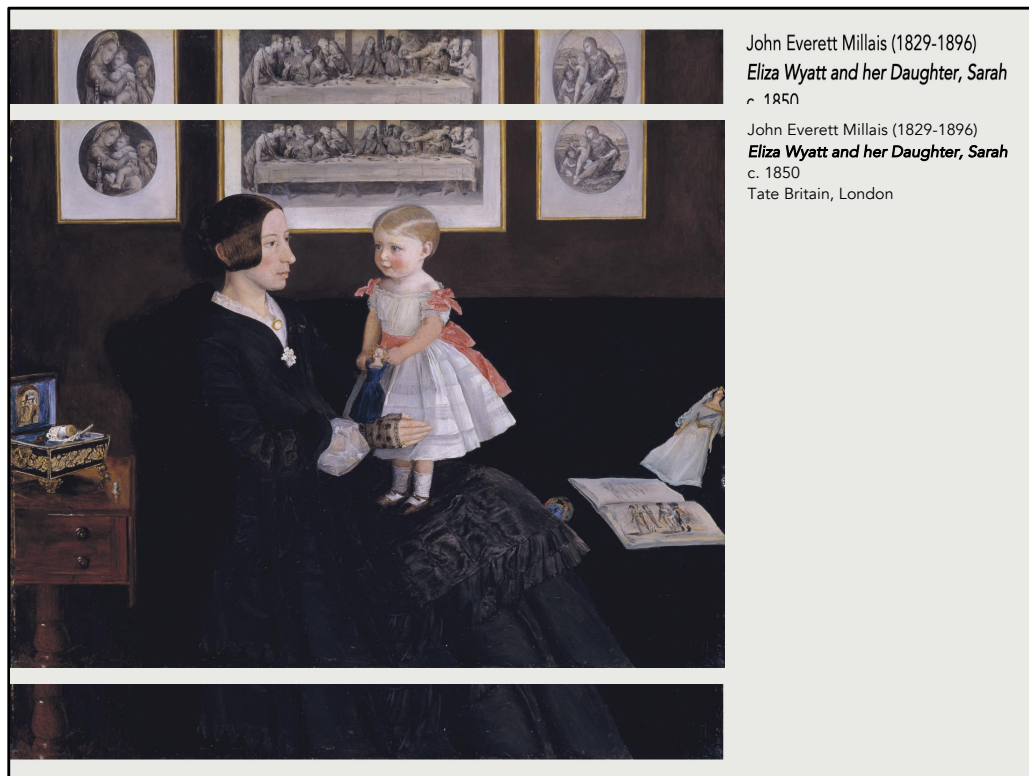
John Rogers Herbert (1810-1890), *Our Saviour Subject to His Parents at Nazareth*, anticipated Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents*. It was praised but the prestigious *Art Journal* (1847) criticized it in a way that was a foretaste of the more extreme criticism Millais was to receive three years later:

"The style of the work is a deduction from early Italian Art modified by more advanced experiences. It is a work of much merit; but most defective where we should most look for excellence; the character of the Saviour — in youth — has been utterly mistaken; there is in it nothing of that high feeling and perfect grace — grace of heart as well as mind — inseparable from our ideas of the character: the expression is, indeed, rather repulsive than inviting ; it gives us no glimpse of the mighty hereafter of the Divinity who had taken our nature upon him."

## References

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ\\_in\\_the\\_House\\_of\\_His\\_Parents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_in_the_House_of_His_Parents)

And [www.victorianweb.org/painting/Herbert/paintings/1.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/Herbert/paintings/1.html)



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Eliza Wyatt and her Daughter, Sarah*, c. 1850, Tate Britain, London

**Millais** painted *\*Eliza Wyatt and Her Daughter Sarah\** at a formative moment in his career, most likely during his Oxford visit of **1850**, when **Sarah** was just twenty months old. A later family note gives **1853**, but Millais did not visit Oxford that year, so 1850 is the more credible date. The commission came through **James Wyatt**, Oxford collector, art dealer, curator of Blenheim, and Mayor of Oxford in **1842 to 1843**. Wyatt knew Millais personally, had bought *\*Cymon and Iphigenia\**, and commissioned a double portrait of himself and his wife before turning to this image of his daughter-in-law and granddaughter. What makes the painting so searching is its refusal of warmth. Neither figure makes eye contact — with each other, with the viewer, or with anything in particular. Behind them hang **Raphael's** *\*Madonna della Sedia\**, Leonardo's *\*Last Supper\**, and Raphael's *\*Alba Madonna\**, all images of tender devotion that throw the stiffness before us into sharp relief. Millais actively disdained Raphael at this period, and the contrast reads as deliberate. The rigid, doll-like poses echo the literal dolls in the

composition, one held by Sarah, one resting on the sofa, while the open sewing box implies **Eliza** made the doll's clothes herself — an act of care that the painting's frozen surface conspicuously withholds.

### Notes

This painting is like a cold shower in comparison, with its lack of eye contact, rigid pose and angular lines. This is one of the great paintings of early Millais as it raises more questions than it answers. The lack of eye contact between mother and child, their lack of eye contact with anything in particular and the contrast with the loving relationship in the Raphael on the wall raise many questions. Millais distained Raphael at this period and his stark portrait contrasts with Raphael's idealised depiction. The stiff pose with an outstretched hand may be compared with this Giotto but is Millais simply ignoring the implication that there is a lack of love or is this the intention under the guise of following Giotto. The 'dollishness' of the poses is emphasized by the fashion plate in on the sofa and the rigid, life-like dolls, one held by Sarah, the other on the sofa. Again, are we to engage with the strict form of rigid, doll-like pose or is there a psychological meaning we should draw from the pose? The open sewing box might suggest that Eliza has just made the clothes for the doll Sarah is holding.

James Wyatt was an Oxford collector, art dealer, curator of Blenheim and Mayor of Oxford in 1842-43. He knew Millais and bought Cymon and Iphigenia and commissioned a portrait of himself and his wife. This painting is of his daughter-in-law Eliza Wyatt and her daughter Sarah. There is some uncertainty regarding the date. We know Millais stayed in Oxford in 1850 and he could have painted the picture then but there are family notes made much later giving 1853 as the date. There is no evidence provided and Millais did not visit Oxford in 1853. In 1850 Sarah would have been 20 months old making 1850 more likely.

### Notes

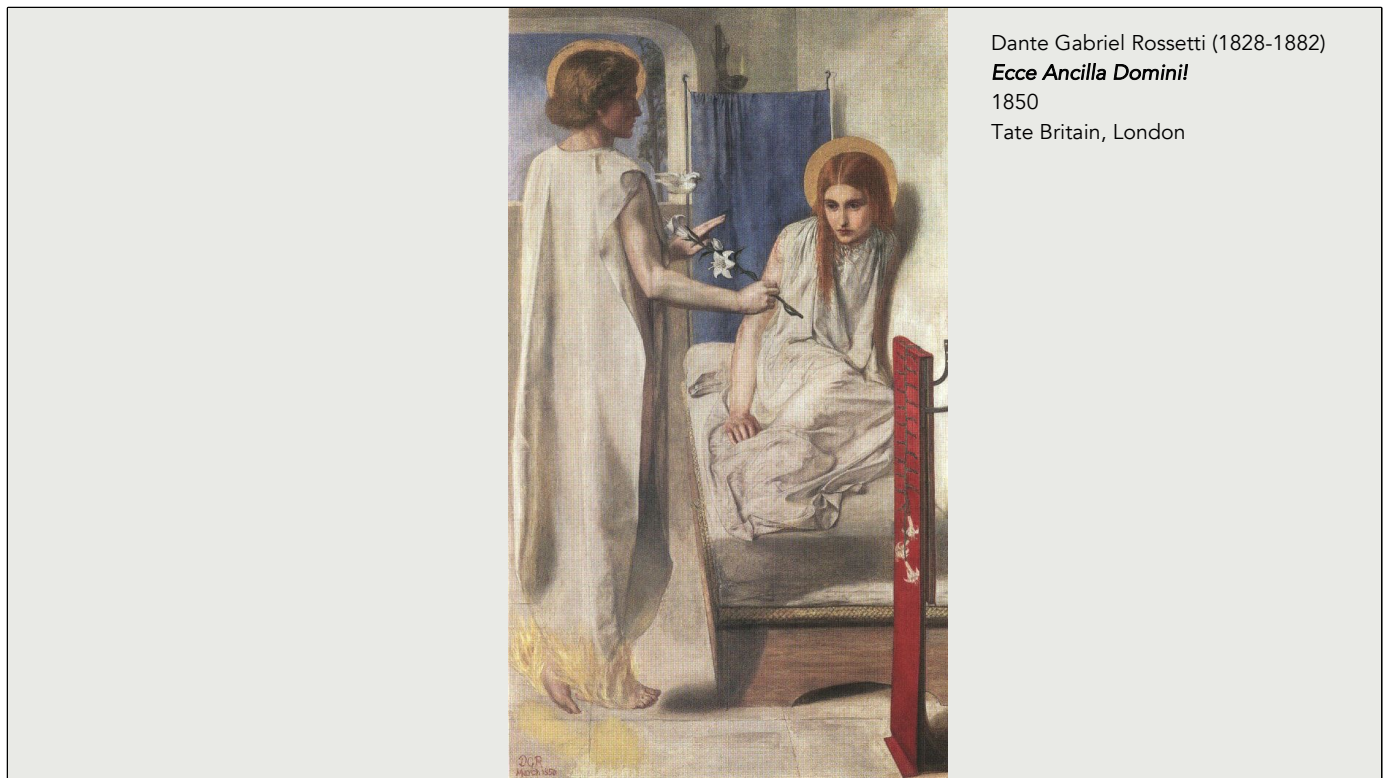
The Madonna della Sedia was incorporated in the background of many paintings by Ingres, and by Zoffany in the Tribuna of the Uffizi.

In the background are, left to right, a Raphael Madonna della Sedia ('Madonna of the Chair', 1518), Leonardo's Last Supper and Raphael's Alba

Madonna (so called because it belonged to the Spanish house of Alba, 1509).

## References

Tate website



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, 1850, Tate Britain, London

**The Germ**, published on the first of January **1850**, announced the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's ambitions in print — a journal yoking poetry, literature, and visual art to a single reforming purpose. That reforming impulse shows most forcefully in the Brotherhood's technique. **Alison Smith** of the Tate describes their all-over sharpness as a discordant quality of focus, like a high-definition film where the entire depth of field is simultaneously crisp. Nothing is allowed to recede into soft shadow or painterly blur. The effect is confrontational rather than seductive, demanding attention across every inch of the canvas. No work makes that demand more insistently than **Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!***, painted in **1850**. The subject is the **Annunciation** — **Mary's** virginity, purity, and submission before the divine — and Rossetti structures the entire composition around that meaning. The palette is almost entirely white, with controlled touches of the three primaries: red, blue, and yellow. Colour is not decorative here; it is doctrinal. Rossetti confines Mary to the corner of her own bedchamber,

her body contracted and wary, making purity feel not serene but deeply unsettling.

### **Notes**

1 January 1850 published *The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature and Art*

The overall in-focus depiction of the Pre-Raphaelites is like the harshness of high-definition film. Alison Smith (Tate) calls it a 'discordant quality of focus – rather like a high definition film, where the whole depth of field is sharp'.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* was the most audacious of all Pre-Raphaelite paintings. It is about female purity, innocence and virginity. It is white and the primaries – red, blue and yellow.





William Holman Hunt  
(1827-1910)  
*A Converted British  
Family Sheltering a  
Christian Missionary*  
1850  
Ashmolean Museum

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary*, 1850, Ashmolean Museum

Having established the Brotherhood's founding ambitions, we turn now to the extraordinary productivity of **1850**, when their most confrontational works appeared simultaneously. **Dante Gabriel Rossetti's** *\*Ecce Ancilla Domini!\** is the most audacious painting the group produced. Its near-total palette of white, red, blue, and yellow enforces a visual austerity that feels devotional and unsettling in equal measure. The work meditates on female purity and virginity with an intensity that borders on claustrophobic. **Alison Smith** of the Tate describes the Pre-Raphaelite treatment of focus as a discordant quality — like high-definition film, where the entire depth of field is sharp at once. This technical radicalism runs through **Millais's** *\*Christ in the House of His Parents\**, savaged by critics and the *\*Art Journal\** alike for distorted poses and peculiar composition. **Holman Hunt's** *\*A Converted British Family\** drew similar condemnation, yet Hunt considered it among his finest achievements, privately lamenting twenty-two years later that he had surpassed it so rarely. The painting

depicts a converted family concealing a **Christian** missionary from pagan Celtic pursuers, with a druid directing the mob at left. The stone circle and thorns embedded in the missionary's feet reward close attention — **Pre-Raphaelite** detail always carries symbolic freight.

### Notes

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, 1850, Tate Britain

John Everett Millais, *Christ in the House of His Parents*, 1850, Tate Britain

John Everett Millais, *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*, 1850, private collection

1 January 1850 published *The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature and Art*

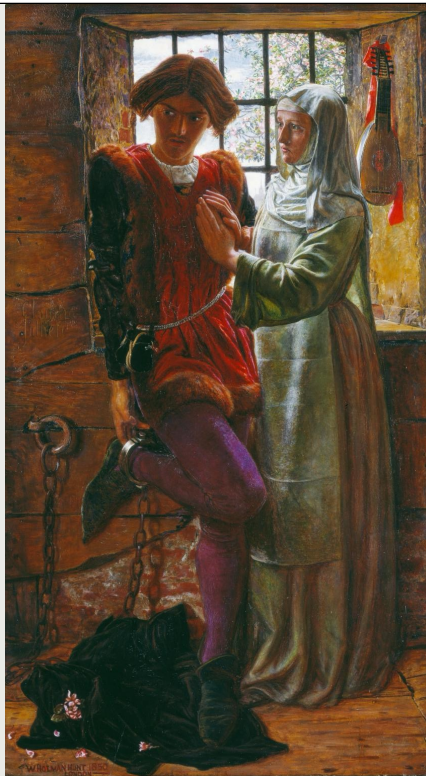
Overall in-focus is like the harshness of HD film. Alison Smith (Tate) calls it a 'discordant quality of focus – rather like a high definition film, where the whole depth of field is sharp'.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* Was the most audacious of all Pre-Raphaelite paintings. It is about female purity, innocence and virginity. It is white and the primaries – red, blue and yellow.

Hunt's *A Converted British Family*, *Art Journal* 'The drawing and manner of the figures show all the objectionable peculiarities of the infancy of the Art'. It was heavily criticized for its distorted poses and odd composition.

Hunt continued to believe it was one of his finest works and felt ashamed he had done nothing better 22 years later but put it down to the enthusiasm of youth.

The painting shows a converted family hiding a missionary from the pagan British Celts. Celts were centred on what is now Austria and the earliest graves are from 800-450BCE. The Celtic identity was created by the nineteenth century Romantic Celtic revival. A druid (left) is directing the mob to seize another missionary (right). Notice the stone circle and the thorns on the feet of the missionary.



William Holman Hunt (1827–1910)  
***Claudio and Isabella***  
 1850  
 75.8 x 42.6 cm  
 Tate, London

William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), *Claudio and Isabella*, 1850, 75.8 x 42.6 cm, Tate, London

Holman Hunt painted *\*Claudio and Isabella\** in **1850**, exhibiting it at the Royal Academy in **1853** alongside lines from **Shakespeare's** *\*Measure for Measure\** in which Claudio confesses that even the most wretched earthly life surpasses his terror of death. Hunt sets the painting inside a prison, where Isabella, a novice of the **Order of Saint Clare**, stands bathed in sunlight wearing a pure white habit. Her upright, luminous figure contrasts sharply with her brother's contorted posture, which signals a mind at war with itself. She presses her hands against his heart, reminding him that passion — not principle — governs him. Outside, an apple tree blossoms; the same blossom scattered across Claudio's cloak was a late addition by Hunt, signifying Claudio's willingness to sacrifice his sister's honour to preserve his own life. The vertical lines of the prison divide the composition and reinforce the moral gulf between the two figures. When Hunt issued an engraving in **1864**, he identified the picture's central argument as the Biblical injunction *\*thou shalt not do evil that good may come\**.

Elizabeth Prettejohn reads the work as characteristic of **Pre-Raphaelite** practice: precise, literary, and morally unambiguous in its visual rhetoric.

### Notes

Based on a scene from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Claudio and Isabella are brother and sister and his life can only be saved if she agrees to sacrifice her virginity to Angelo, the deputy of the absent Duke.

The frame contains the lines:

Claudio. Death is a fearful thing.

Isabella. And shamed life is hateful.

Isabella is dressed in the order of St. Clare. The 'Poor Clares' are a contemplative Franciscan Order founded in 1212. Followers of St. Clare were originally discalced, that is they went barefoot, but they now wear sandals or shoes. She is upright and bathed in sunlight and wears a pure white habit. Outside an apple tree is in blossom and in the distance there is a church spire. Claudio's distorted pose signals his troubled mind. He wears bright clothes and is a creature of passion whose heart rules his head. Isabella lays her hands on his heart to remind him that his passion for Juliet led to her pregnancy and his subsequent imprisonment. He avoids his sister's gaze. The apple blossom strewn across his cloak was a late addition and signifies his willingness to sacrifice his sister's virginity to save his life.

When the picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1853 it was accompanied by a quotation from *Measure for Measure*, Act III, scene I:

Claudio: Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;

'Tis too horrible!

The weariest, and most loathed worldly life,

That age, ache penury and imprisonment

Can lay on nature, is a paradise

To what we fear of death.

In 1864 Hunt issued a pamphlet advertising the engraving of Claudio and Isabella, in which he summarised the picture's 'deep and noble moral' as 'Thou shall not do evil that good may come.'

## Notes

In 1958 Saint Clare was declared Patron Saint of television by the Catholic Church.

Isabella refuses to help Claudio but the Duke has not left the city but hides in disguise to observe Angelo. He works with Isabella to trick Angelo. First Isabella sends a message to Angelo that she agrees but will only have sex in complete darkness. She then substitutes Mariana who wants to marry Angelo but has been refused. Afterwards Angelo goes back on his word and sends a message to the prison that he wishes to see Claudio's head. A pirate who looks like Claudio has just died of fever so his head is sent instead. The Duke 'returns' and eventually exposes Angelo. He proposes marriage to Isabella but she does not reply and her silence is an intentionally open reply so the audience can decide if this means she agreed or refused.

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Tate website

Leslie Parris (ed), *The Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery, London 1984, reprinted 1994, pp.103-4, reproduced p.103 in colour. Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, London 2000, pp.144-5, reproduced p.146, in colour





John Everett Millais (1829-1896)  
***Ferdinand Lured by Ariel***  
 1850  
 Private collection

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*, 1850,  
 Private collection

John Everett Millais, Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti each exhibited provocative work in **1850**, and the critical establishment met them with open hostility. Millais's *\*Christ in the House of His Parents\** drew particular fury — **Charles Dickens** condemned it as vulgar and irreverent, scandalized by the unglamourised, working-class depiction of the Holy Family. Hunt's *\*A Converted British Family\** and Rossetti's *\*Ecce Ancilla Domini!\** fared little better, critics bristling at the Brotherhood's rejection of academic convention in favour of flattened colour, hard outlines, and unidealized figures drawn from direct observation. The following year, Millais submitted *\*Ferdinand Lured by Ariel\**, and the reception remained hostile, if inconsistently reasoned. The **Athenaeum** conceded the painting was technically stronger than its predecessor, yet dismissed it as "more senseless in the conception." The **Art Journal** identified "a considerable vein of eccentricity" in the portrayal of Ariel as "a hideous green gnome." **The Times** simply condemned it as a "deplorable example of perverted

taste." What united these responses was less aesthetic disagreement than discomfort: the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** was dismantling the very standards by which Victorian critics knew how to judge a painting.

### Notes

John Everett Millais, Christ in the House of His Parents, 1850, Tate Britain

Holman Hunt, A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary, 1850, Ashmolean Museum

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ecce Ancilla Domini!, 1850, Tate Britain

Millais, Ferdinand Lured by Ariel, critical reception was initially mixed. The Athenaeum stated that it was "better in the painting" than Millais' controversial previous exhibit Christ in the House of His Parents, but "more senseless in the conception". The Art Journal identified "a considerable vein of eccentricity" in the portrayal of Ariel as "a hideous green gnome". The Times condemned it as a "deplorable example of perverted taste".





William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)  
**Valentine Rescuing Silvia from Proteus**

1851

33.5 x 25.7 cm

Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), Valentine Rescuing Silvia from Proteus, 1851, 33.5 x 25.7 cm, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham

**Holman Hunt's** painting of 1851 draws its subject from Act Five, Scene Four of Shakespeare's *\*Two Gentlemen of Verona\**, depicting the moment of Proteus's attempted assault on Silvia and Valentine's sudden intervention. Reading left to right, the four figures are Julia in her disguise as the page Sebastian, Silvia, Valentine, and the remorseful Proteus. Hunt painted the landscape background at **Knole Park, Sevenoaks**, then completed the figures in his studio: **Elizabeth Siddal** modelled Silvia, solicitor James Aspinall sat for Proteus, and young barrister James Lennox Hannay for Valentine. The flanking spandrels carry lines from the same scene — Valentine's anguished cry of betrayal on the left, Proteus's confession and plea for forgiveness on the right — so the moral architecture of the painting is literally framed by Shakespeare's language. **John Ruskin**, writing to the *\*Times\** on **26 May 1851**, singled out the drapery as unmatched anywhere in the Academy that year, praising the black sleeve of Julia and the velvet

and chain mail on Valentine with particular force. That endorsement from the period's most authoritative critic helped establish **Pre-Raphaelite** attention to surface detail as a serious painterly virtue rather than mere technical display.

### Notes

John Ruskin wrote to the Times on 26 May, 'there is not a single study of drapery in the whole Academy, be it in large works or small, which for perfect truth, power, and finish, could be compared for an instant with the black sleeve of the Julia, or with the velvet on the breast and the chain mail of the Valentine of Mr. Hunt's picture;'

The subject is taken from Shakespeare's 'Two Gentlemen of Verona', Act V, Scene IV. From left to right: Julia disguised as the page Sebastian, Silvia, Valentine and Proteus. Julia is in love with Proteus and travelled in disguise. Valentine and Proteus are friends and are both in love with the Duke of Milan's daughter Silvia. Proteus is already sworn to Julia back home in Verona. When Valentine plans to elope Proteus tells the Duke and gets Valentine banished. The Duke wants Silvia to marry Thurio but when Silvia and Thurio are travelling through the woods they get attacked by bandits and Thurio runs away. Proteus rescues Silvia but as a reward he wants her to promise to favour him and when she refuses he tries to rape her. Valentine arrives and stops him, Proteus apologises, Valentine offers Silvia as a token of friendship, Sebastian (Julia) faints and her identity is revealed, Proteus realises he really loves her, the Duke arrives and realises Thurio is a coward and agrees Valentine should marry her.

Hunt began to paint this landscape in Knole Park, Sevenoaks, after which he began to work on the figures in his studio. Silvia was modelled by Elizabeth Siddal, Proteus by James Aspinall a lawyer and friend of Hunt, Valentine by James Lennox Hannay, a young barrister. The related oil sketch is in the Makins Collection.

### Two poems

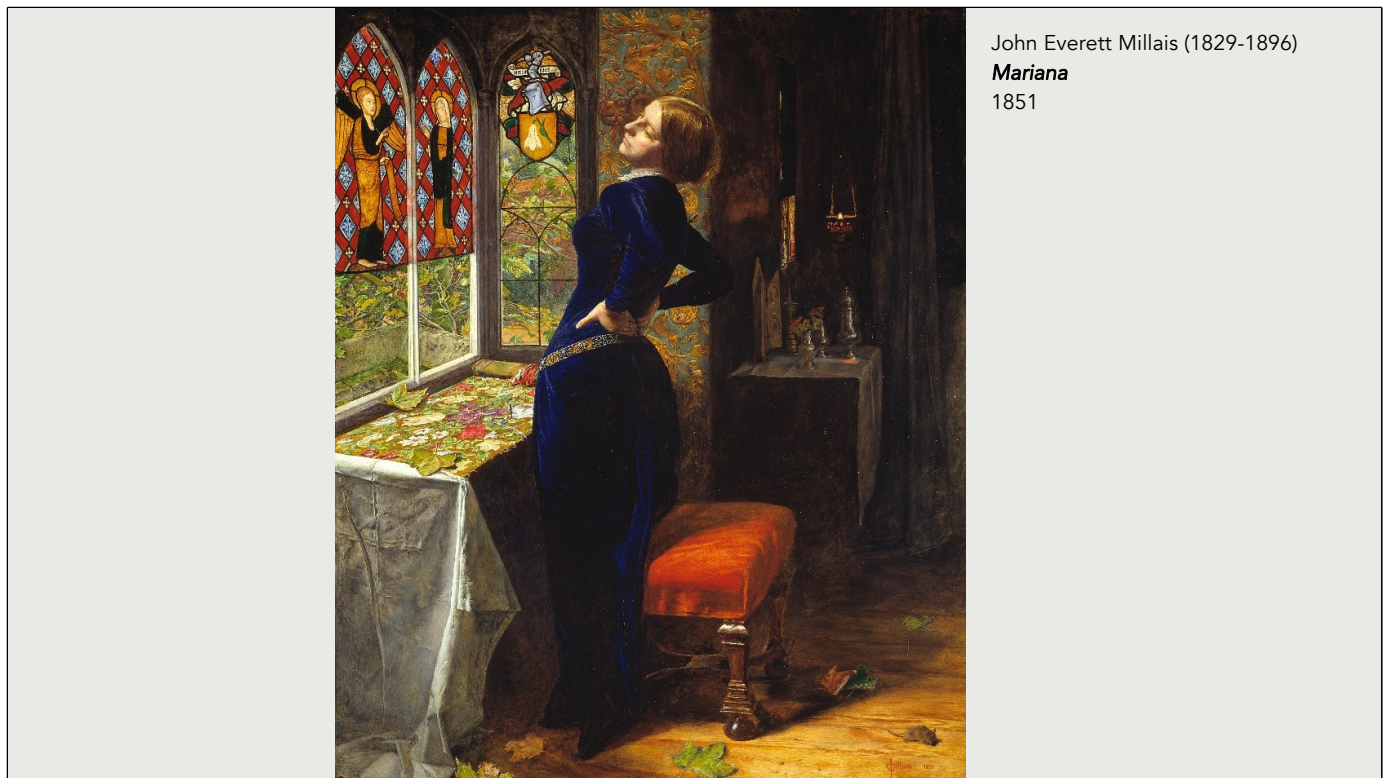
On the left spandrel are lines from Act V, Scene iv of The Two Gentlemen of Verona,

Valentine. Now I dare not say I have one friend alive; thou would'st disprove me Who should be trusted now, when one's right hand I've [ sic] perjured to

the bosom? Proteus. I am sorry I must never trust thee more But count the world a stranger for thy sake.

On the right spandrel lines from Act V, Scene iv of The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Proteus. My shame and guilt confound me Forgive me Valentine if hearty sorrow Be a sufficient ransom for offence, I tender it here; I do as truly suffer As e'er I did commit.



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)  
**Mariana**  
 1851

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), Mariana, 1851

These three works, shown at the Royal Academy in 1851, arrived poorly received by critics but drew a crucial new ally to the Brotherhood's cause. **John Ruskin**, England's foremost critic, was persuaded by Mrs Coventry Patmore to write in defence of the **Pre-Raphaelites** in letters to The Times that May. Millais met Ruskin and his wife Effie the following month — a meeting that would reshape his life. **The Woodman's Daughter**, based on a poem by **Coventry Patmore**, traces an impossible love across class lines, ending in infanticide and madness. The boy's startling red tunic makes the social gulf between the children impossible to ignore. Impossible love recurs across Millais' work throughout this period. **Mariana**, drawn from Shakespeare's *\*Measure for Measure\** and filtered through **Tennyson's** 1830 poem, shows a woman abandoned after her dowry was lost at sea. Every detail — the Annunciation window, the snowdrop, the motto *\*In coelo quies\**, meaning in heaven there is rest — signals longing and despair. Tennyson had just been named Poet Laureate in 1850, making the subject sharply topical. **The Return of the Dove to the Ark** so moved

Ruskin he sought to buy it immediately, only to find **Thomas Combe** had already claimed it.

### Notes

1851 The Woodman's Daughter, Mariana and The Return of the Dove to the Ark exhibited at the RA, poorly received. Ruskin (English critic and art theorist) asked to support Pre-Raphaelites by Mrs Coventry Patmore (wife of poet) in letters to The Times in May; Millais then meets Ruskin and his wife, Effie, in June (Millais and Effie met once before seven years earlier). Leaves London with Hunt for Ewell to paint landscapes for Ophelia and The Huguenot.

Paintings represent a return to morality and spirituality.

The Woodman's Daughter, Guildhall Art Gallery

Based on a poem by Coventry Patmore.

Maud as a child befriends the son of the local lord, culminating in love as they get older. Maud gives birth to an illegitimate child but cannot marry because of their different class which results in Maud becoming desperate and ultimately insane. She drowns the baby in a local pool. The boy's startling red tunic emphasises the class difference.

Impossible love is a common theme for Millais - Isabella (1849), Mariana (1851), Ophelia (1852) and A Huguenot (1852).

Mariana

The image is based on the solitary Mariana from William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, written between 1601 and 1606. In the play, Mariana was to be married, but was rejected when her dowry was lost in a shipwreck. She was still in love with Angelo, Deputy to the duke of Vienna. The stained glass window shows the Annunciation in contrast to her frustration. The motto 'In coelo quies' means 'In Heaven there is rest' and clearly refers to Mariana's desire to be dead. The snowdrop symbolises 'consolation' and is also the birthday flower for 20 January, St Agnes' Eve, when young girls put herbs in their shoes and pray to St Agnes to send them a vision of their future husband.

The painting is regarded as an example of Millais' "precision, attention to

detail, and stellar ability as a colorist".

When it was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851, the display caption contained lines from Tennyson's "Mariana" (1830). It was a topical painting as Tennyson had been made Poet Laureate in November 1850. It was inspired by Shakespeare:

She only said, 'My life is dreary,  
He cometh not,' she said;  
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,'  
I would that I were dead!'

Return of the Dove to the Ark, Ashmolean Museum

Ruskin was so taken by it he wanted to purchase it as soon as he saw it but it had already been bought by Thomas Combe (pronounced 'coomb'), a Pre-Raphaelite patron.

Two of Noah's daughters nurse a dove that has returned to the ark with an olive branch. This was the second time Noah had sent it out and the third time it did not return (Genesis 8:6-12). The dove signifies the Holy Spirit and the olive branch Jesus.

The French thought the Pre-Raphaelite work bizarre, *Le Journal pour Rire* ('The Journal of Laughs') suggested the title should be changed to 'The Joy of the Straw on the Return of the Dove' as Millais appears to have lavished more attention to the straw than the dove.





William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)  
*The Hireling Shepherd*  
1851  
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *The Hireling Shepherd*, 1851,  
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester

**William Holman Hunt's** painting *\*The Hireling Shepherd\**, exhibited at the Royal Academy in **1851**, places biography and belief at the centre of its meaning. Hunt had recently helped found the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**, and the work embodies the movement's commitment to moral seriousness beneath a surface of vivid naturalism. The model for the shepherd's companion was Emma Watkins, nicknamed "the Coptic" by the Brotherhood for her striking features. The scene — a shepherd neglecting his flock to show a **death's-head hawk moth** to a country girl — struck contemporary critics as merely vulgar. Hunt's intention ran far deeper. In a letter, Hunt explained the painting as a critique of **Anglican churchmen** absorbed in futile theological disputes while their congregations drifted without moral guidance. The title alludes to the **Good Shepherd parable**, in which a hireling shepherd abandons his sheep when danger comes. Every detail reinforces this reading: the sickly lamb fed unripe apples in the heat, the **swampy field** that causes sheep-rot, the death's-head moth signalling mortality.



Apples recall Temptation and Fall; the lamb signals Redemption endangered. **John Ruskin** addressed near-identical concerns in \*Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds\*, published the same year, arguing that **High Church and Evangelical** divisions were destroying pastoral care.

### Notes

William Holman Hunt

The painting shows a shepherd neglecting his flock in favour of an attractive country girl to whom he shows a death's-head hawk moth. The meaning of the image has been much debated.

A local girl called Emma Watkins is the model, known as 'the Coptic' by the Pre-Raphaelites because of her exotic features. The male model is not known. It was accompanied when displayed at the Royal Academy by an excerpt from King Lear:

Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?  
Thy sheep be in the corn;  
And for one blast of thy minikin mouth,  
Thy sheep shall take no harm.

It was condemned for its vulgarity, showing red-faced and sexually uninhibited country people. Hunt had a much more esoteric meaning. He wrote that he intended the couple to symbolise the pointless theological debates which occupied Christian churchmen while their 'flock' went astray due to a lack of proper moral guidance. The title is therefore a Biblical allusion; in the story of the Good Shepherd (in the King James Version), the Good Shepherd is explicitly contrasted with a hireling shepherd, who has no care for the sheep [John 10:11-15].

Hunt explained in a letter that the unprotected sheep will die from eating grain by becoming what farmers call 'blown'. The lamb fed sour apples symbolize the effects of such pastoral neglect, while the death's-head moth, is a symbol of human mortality. The themes are temptation and fall leading to neglect and death rather than hard work and redemption. The apples are unripe and poisonous to the lamb, symbol of Redemption, and they remind us of the Temptation and Fall. The lamb is a sickly and late-born and covered

with a cloth despite the heat. The field is swampy which is bad for sheep as it causes sheep-rot.

Ruskin wrote an article call Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds (1851) with a similar theme. The overall message of his article is that internal disputes in the church, which was splitting between High Church and the Evangelical, had led to the neglect of the flock. We do not know if Hunt read the article but the theme of the painting is similar.

#### References

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Holman\\_Hunt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Holman_Hunt)

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Hireling\\_Shepherd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hireling_Shepherd)



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)  
**Ophelia**  
1852  
Tate Gallery, London

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Ophelia*, 1852, Tate Gallery, London

The **Pre-Raphaelites** rejected the grand manner of Joshua Reynolds, whom they mockingly called Slossua, and looked back to before **Raphael** for an innocent, unmediated encounter with nature. Their method demanded extraordinary labour. **John Everett Millais** spent five months in 1851 painting the landscape for *\*Ophelia\** on the banks of the **Hogsmill River**, working eleven hours a day, six days a week, advancing each session by an area no larger than a five-shilling piece. By November he had a hut built beside the river to push through the snow and finish the work. The result is a flat tapestry in which foreground, middle ground, and background receive equal weight — no hierarchy, no atmospheric recession. Every flower is botanically precise, drawn from those named in *\*Hamlet\**, with the addition of red poppies signifying sleep and death. The model, **Elizabeth Siddal**, posed in a candlelit bath at Millais's studio at **7 Gower Street**, and when the candles went out unnoticed she developed a severe cold; her father demanded fifty pounds in medical expenses. Contemporary critics were hostile, one dismissing *Ophelia* as a dairymaid in a frolic.

Salvador Dalí, writing in 1936, saw exactly the opposite, describing Pre-Raphaelitism's flagrant surrealism as dazzling.

## Notes

### Ophelia

Ophelia is a character in Shakespeare's Hamlet who drowns herself in a river after Hamlet denies he loves her and accidentally kills her father.

The idea of seeing the world in new ways was part of the motivation of the Pre-Raphaelites, who described Joshua Reynolds as 'Sloshua' and looked back to before Raphael to find an innocent way of looking at the natural world, uncontaminated by technique. Pre-Raphaelite paintings, such as Millais's Ophelia (1851-52), demonstrated a commitment to this idea through the sheer hard work obvious in the detail of the brushwork. They were worked over in minute detail on every inch of the canvas, producing a flat tapestry of colour that assigned every object in the foreground, middle ground and background equal prominence.

Ophelia was the result of months of painstaking painting on the banks of the Hogsmill River, near Tolworth. Millais was a fast painter and yet he said that he could only paint an area 'no larger than a five shilling piece'. Millais painted for 11 hours a day, six days a week over a five month period in 1851. By November it started to snow and Millais had a hut built by the river to enable him to finish the landscape. As the painting took so long to produce, it conflated time, which for scenes of nature produced anachronisms. The painting consists of an assembly of minutely observed yet disconnected parts. Millais is now thought to have sat in the 'Six Acre Meadow on the west bank at the bottom of the Manor House garden in Old Malden', as reported by Richard Savill, 'Mystery of Location of Millais' Ophelia Solved' in The Telegraph, 30 June 2010. Holman Hunt worked on his The Hireling Shepherd nearby.

There was a water rat swimming in the river but in December 1851 relatives of Holman Hunt did not recognise what it was so Millais painted it out.

The flowers are the one's mentioned in Hamlet except for the red poppies which signify sleep and death. The human skull many have seen in the bushes was not intended to be a skull.

The model was Elizabeth Siddal and Millais painted her in a bath heated by candles back in the studio. The most famous story associated with this picture

is how she developed a severe cold when Millais did not notice the candles had gone out. Her father sent Millais a letter demanding £50 for medical expenses, about twice the annual salary of a live-in servant. He eventually accepted a lower sum. The studio was at 7 Gower Street which still remains and has a blue plaque outside.

At the time the painting was not acclaimed. A critic in *The Times* wrote that 'there must be something strangely perverse in an imagination which souses Ophelia in a weedy ditch, and robs the drowning struggle of that lovelorn maiden of all pathos and beauty', while a further review in the same newspaper said that 'Mr. Millais's Ophelia in her pool ... makes us think of a dairymaid in a frolic'.

In 1936 Salvador Dalí wrote, 'How could Salvador Dalí fail to be dazzled by the flagrant surrealism of English Pre-Raphaelitism'.

It has a cult following in Japan but when it was exhibited in Tokyo in 2008 the gallery was afraid to show the painting on posters in case its power would cause young women to take their own lives.

It was bought on December 10 1851 by Henry Farrer for 300 guineas. It was sold and resold and continued to increase in value, it is now estimated to be worth at least £30 million.

## References

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophelia\\_\(painting\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophelia_(painting))



William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)  
*Our English Coasts, 1852 ('Strayed Sheep')*  
 1852  
 Tate Britain, London

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *Our English Coasts, 1852 ('Strayed Sheep')*, 1852, Tate Britain, London

At the heart of **Pre-Raphaelite** doctrine lay an uncompromising demand for fidelity to nature in both detail and colour. **John Ruskin**, writing in **Modern Painters**, urged young artists to go to nature in all singleness of heart, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing. **William Holman Hunt** took that instruction literally. The painting before us depicts the Lover's Seat, a clifftop beauty spot overlooking Covehurst Bay near Hastings. Hunt assembled the composition from multiple viewpoints — the cliffs, sheep, and foreground elements each painted separately — and even brought live butterfly specimens indoors to render them with precision in the left foreground. The work carries layered meaning. **F.G. Stephens**, critic and Brotherhood member, read the straying flock as a commentary on Britain's vulnerability to invasion, a fear stoked by **Napoleon III's** dictatorial régime in **1852**. Hunt reinforced the religious dimension when he retitled the work **Strayed Sheep** for the **Exposition Universelle** in Paris in **1855**, sharpening its symbolic resonance. Ruskin returned to

the painting in 1883, declaring it showed, for the first time in the history of art, an absolutely faithful balance of colour and shade by which actual sunshine might be transposed through pigment into the same impression as light itself.

### Notes

Key point: the Pre-Raphaelites demanded the faithful reproduction of detail and colour

William Holman Hunt

John Ruskin (1819-1900) in *Modern Painters* (1847) urged young artists to ...go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instructions; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth.

Following this advice William Holman created this painting, his greatest and most Pre-Raphaelite landscape. It is the Lover's seat, a beauty spot on the cliffs overlooking Covehurst Bay, near Hastings. Hunt paid attention to natural detail, although the cliffs, sheep and parts of the foreground were all painted from different viewpoints. The butterflies in the left foreground were painted indoors from a live specimen.

F.G. Stephens, a critic and member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, suggested it 'might be taken as a satire on the reported defenseless state of the country against foreign invasion'. In 1852 the press had created fears of an invasion because of Napoleon III's dictatorial régime.

The original frame bore the inscription 'The Lost Sheep', and when Hunt sent the painting to the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855 he changed the title to *Strayed Sheep*, thus underlining the picture's religious symbolism.

Critics noticed the treatment of light and Ruskin wrote in 1883 that

It showed to us, for the first time in the history of art, the absolutely faithful balances of colour and shade by which actual sunshine might be transposed into a key in which the harmonies possible with material pigments should yet produce the same impressions upon the mind which were caused by the light



itself.



William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)  
Our English Coasts, 1852 ('Strayed Sheep')  
1852

## 25-01 PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD - EARLY DAYS

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

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In the revolutionary atmosphere of 1848, seven young artists formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, vowing to abandon academic convention and return to the direct observation of nature. Through founding figures Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti, we have traced their origins, their intellectual debts to Ruskin and the Nazarenes, and their first provocative exhibitions. Attacked by critics and defended by Ruskin in *The Times*, the Brotherhood had, by 1851, irrevocably altered the course of British painting.



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