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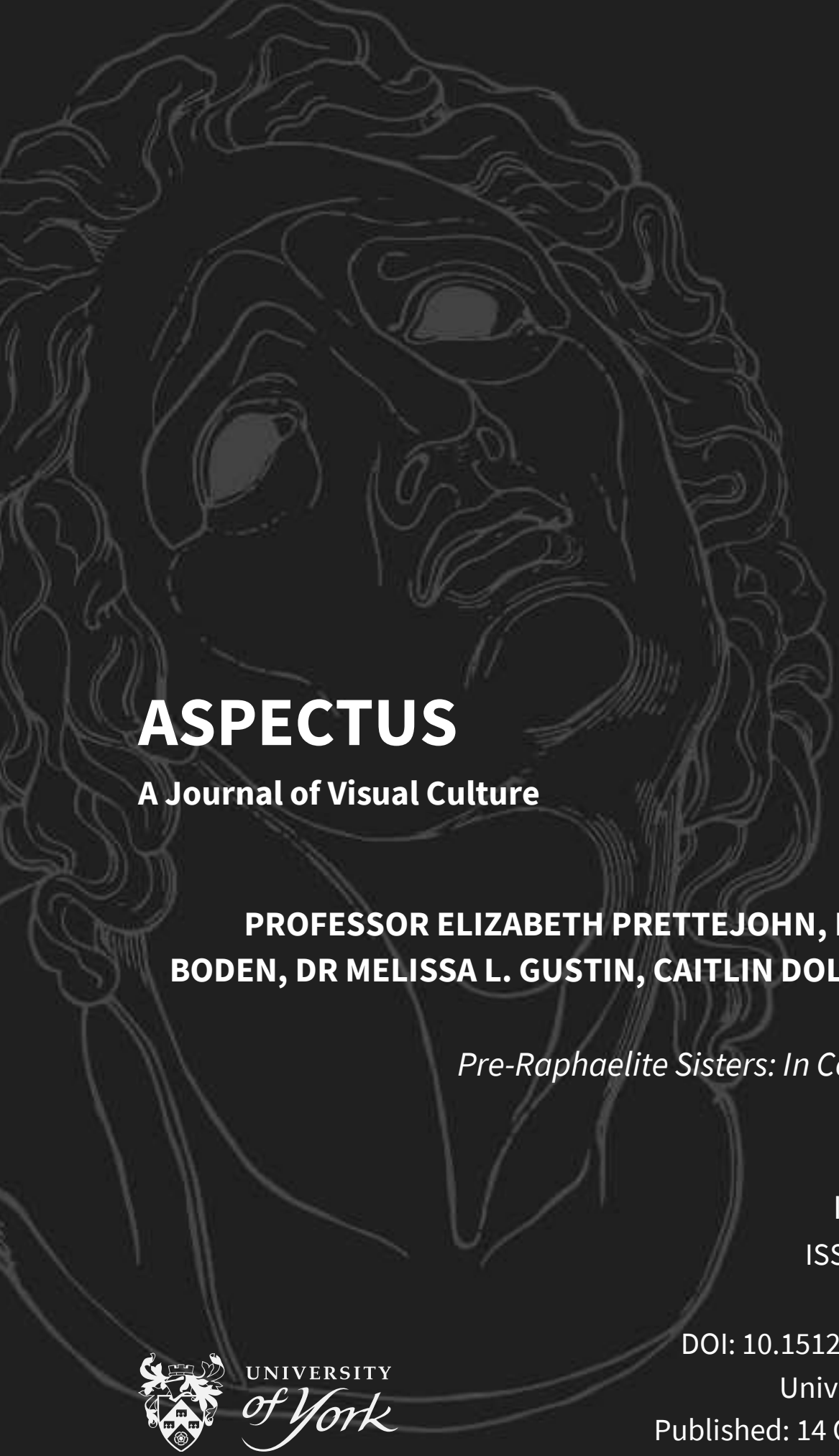

ASPECTUS

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Pre-Raphaelite Sisters: In Conversation

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INTRODUCTION

SUSIE BECKHAM, EDITOR

On 12-13 December 2019, the University of York hosted the *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters: Making Art* conference, held in conjunction with the National Portrait Gallery's exhibition *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* that ran from 17 October 2019 to 26 January 2020. This Aspectus project, titled *'Pre-Raphaelite Sisters': In Conversation*, operated as an opportunity for staff, students, and alumni from the History of Art department of the University of York to continue their consideration of the exhibition and its subject matter.

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Stunning Sisters

ELIZABETH PRETTEJOHN

Let me begin by dispelling a misconception: 'stunner' does not mean 'Pre-Raphaelite sex object', or even 'beautiful woman with rippling hair'.[1] The word is conspicuous in Pre-Raphaelite slang, and it is unequivocally an accolade, but it is just as likely to refer to artistic achievement as to physical attractiveness, and to a man as to a woman; it has become gender-specific only in the more sensationalised scholarship of recent years. John Everett Millais called Wordsworth 'a true stunner'; Dante Gabriel Rossetti used the word of Memling, Leonardo, Browning, and some of his male friends; he qualifies his praise of the French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme, for him only a 'stunner of a sort'.[2] A stunner is one who stuns. To be sure, some usages centre on physical beauty – on looking wonderful, particularly in unconventional ways, an aspect of the Pre-Raphaelite project that has proved highly appealing to younger generations worldwide in recent decades, and which should not be despised. A beautiful woman could, then, be one who stuns, but so could a powerful artist, and indeed it may not be so easy to disentangle the two. When Ford Madox Brown called Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal a stunner, in a diary entry of 1855, he was speaking of her drawings, but immediately he asks why Rossetti is not rushing to marry her.[3]

The misconception has the tendency to relegate the women of Pre-Raphaelitism to the private sphere, to downplay their creative and intellectual roles. It contributes to the persistent habit of figuring the Pre-Raphaelite movement as patriarchal or misogynistic, and the men of the PRB as oppressors of women. The recent exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* (2019-20), brought a fascinating range of creative work by women to attention. Its catalogue, nonetheless, falls back on the standard characterisation of the movement as 'male-dominated' – a word that appears with alarming frequency.[4] Some critics objected to the publicity campaign's use of an image by a male artist – Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Proserpine* (1877, private collection; also the catalogue's cover image) – as a cynical marketing ploy, but this reflects the recidivist view of scholars and curators, including those who style themselves feminists, that ultimately it is the men who count, for all practical purposes. It is of course the case that the social world inhabited by the Pre-Raphaelites – like virtually all the societies that have ever existed – was dominated by men (although it might be noted that, more unusually, it was formally governed by a woman, Queen Victoria). But are the Pre-Raphaelite women doomed merely to make the best of their subjection? Even more pertinently, for this Conversation Piece inspired by the exhibition, are we doomed, as scholars and curators, to accept male domination as the inevitable norm?

In this short introduction I want to argue that a different narrative is possible, one in which collaboration between women and men (or among people in all their diversities) can enable kinds and qualities of art-making that simply could not be achieved by the individual genius, whom we usually, though perhaps unreasonably, gender as male. This would be the kind of collaboration in which Dante Gabriel Rossetti excelled, with his generous assumption that everyone had genuine potential for artistic talent; thus a personal friend such as Siddal or Edward Burne-Jones might genuinely become a great artist, and the role of the social group

(such as the PRB) was to support one another's creativity. In this narrative the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers, rather than being condemned for misogyny, might rather be commended for their openness to new forms of collaboration – for which the word 'sister' may serve as an apposite metaphor.

One or two critics objected to the NPG's choice of the term for its exhibition title -- *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* -- as an unhistorical importation of our own feminist agendas into the nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite movement. On the contrary: there is excellent historical warrant for making this the keyword. In fact, the first instance on record of a reference to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood must be inferred from Christina Rossetti's description of her own 'double sisterhood' (i.e. natural sister and Pre-Raphaelite sister) in a letter of April 1849 to her brother, William Michael Rossetti.[5] Sibling relationships in the Rossetti family – two girls, two boys, all talented as writers and/or artists – must have been a crucial model for the idea of a collaborative artistic grouping. Perhaps, indeed, we ought to reconfigure the old quarrel about whether it was Rossetti, Hunt, or Millais who was the true 'leader' of the PRB, and instead name Christina Rossetti – the thought would horrify her, but it is scarcely unreasonable. Her poems are among the best in *The Germ*, the group's short-lived 'little magazine' of 1850. She was the model for the first, exemplary female figures in Pre-Raphaelite art, in her brother's paintings of 1849-50, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (Tate, London). She went on to write a powerful verse fable about sisters, 'Goblin Market' (1862), not only one of the greatest Pre-Raphaelite poems but also amenable to interpretation as a manifesto for the group's collaborative spirit. As Laura, saved from disaster by her sister Lizzie, sums up the message at the end:

> 'For there is no friend like a sister
> In calm or stormy weather;
> To cheer one on the tedious way,
> To fetch one if one goes astray,
> To lift one if one totters down,
> To strengthen whilst one stands.'

One might say that this is just what the sisters and brothers of the Pre-Raphaelite movement aimed to do for one another; thus all their literary and artistic works, whoever made them in the mundane sense of the word, are in a more significant way collaborative productions. Dante Gabriel's affectionate caricature of Christina in a rage at slighting criticism of her poetry uses humour to take her creativity seriously (Wightwick Manor and Gardens, Warwickshire). What if it was Christina's example, not just Dante Gabriel's whim, that generated the Pre-Raphaelite idea that anyone may have the potential to be a great artist?

The Belgian artist Fernand Khnopff seems to have grasped the special significance of Christina's sisterhood. Khnopff's fascination with the image of his own sister Marguerite might seem a personal obsession, but it was also a highly conscious artistic choice rooted in his admiration for Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In a painting of 1891, Khnopff presents a portrait of his own sister under a title from a poem by Christina: *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* (Neue Pinakotek, Munich) The enclosed room recalls the visual world of Dante Gabriel and includes at least one specific quotation -- the orange lily from the watercolour,

The Blue Closet of 1857 (Tate, London) – as well as imagery from Khnopff's own imaginative repertoire, a Bruges townscape and the sculptured head of Hypnos. This image of the Greek god of sleep appears repeatedly in Khnopff's work, but it may be equally relevant to the sleep-deprived Rossetti and the dreamworlds of Pre-Raphaelitism.

The NPG exhibition cannot, then, be faulted for using the idea of 'sisterhood' unhistorically (and that is true *a fortiori* of Jan Marsh's pioneering study, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* of 1985, the foundation for the NPG exhibition, curated by Marsh). What the exhibition did not do, however, was to extend the idea of the sister, or sisterhood, beyond its catchy title.[6] On reflection, sisters are everywhere in Pre-Raphaelite artworks – striking examples include Millais's *Autumn Leaves* (1856, Manchester Art Gallery) and *The Blind Girl* (1856, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery), Augustus Leopold Egg's *Travelling Companions* (1862, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery), and William Holman Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella* (1853, Tate, London), not to mention the many later pictures of multiple female figures who resemble one another as sisters do. These images of sisterhood are just as memorable as those stock Pre-Raphaelite 'icons', the single female figures of Rossetti and his followers – although those may, in their turn, be seen as a kind of sisterhood.

Sisters are equally prominent in the social networks of the movement, from the Rossettis and Browns (Lucy and Catherine, artist-daughters of Ford Madox) to the Pattles (Julia Margaret Cameron and her artistic sisters), Waughs (two of whom married William Holman Hunt, a third the sculptor Thomas Woolner), and MacDonalds (wives of Burne-Jones and Poynter, mothers of Rudyard Kipling and Stanley Baldwin). The influence – intellectual, creative, moral and social – of this veritable matriarchy on the next generation should not be underestimated; these sisters became the great-aunts and grandmothers of the modernist generation, Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, Ford Madox Ford and Evelyn Waugh.

It may be the case that the exhibition revealed few masterpieces by women in the traditional high art media – although the work of Joanna Boyce Wells (sister of George Price Boyce) and Evelyn De Morgan might qualify as exceptions. But that should only make us think more widely about what might count as artmaking. Georgiana Burne-Jones's watercolours and pen drawings, interesting discoveries of the exhibition, do not reveal a hitherto unrecognised artistic genius. But to my mind she did make a work of genius, even though – as the biography of a man – it might be regarded as a utilitarian product. Her *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (1904) is not, however, a sign of her subjection; it is a fascinating extended account of Pre-Raphaelite collaboration, in which Georgiana herself plays an unmistakable though reticent role, as compelling in its way as Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Marie Spartali Stillman's embroidered shoes, Jane Morris's purse, and Joanna Boyce Wells's dress are not just examples of women's crafts; they remind us that the entire visual world of Pre-Raphaelitism -- clothes, interiors, accessories, and all -- is the result not only of the handiwork but also of the artistic sensibility of the Pre-Raphaelite women. And men: as in William Morris's novel *News from Nowhere*, the Pre-Raphaelite utopia is distinctive for the high value given to art-forms traditionally gendered female. A proper re-evaluation of the role of the women will change what we think about male creativity, too.

Modelling may also be an art-form, not merely a social relationship of dominance and subservience. For me the most moving picture in the exhibition was *The Mother of Sisera Looked out at a Window* (1861, Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle), a representation by Albert Moore of the mixed-race model Fanny Eaton in the poignant role of a mother whose son, the Canaanite Sisera, will never return. He has been slain by the Israelite heroine Jael, an incident more frequently represented in the Western high art tradition. Moore's unconventional angle on the Biblical story makes us feel compassion for the mother of the enemy – a complex message that, I should argue, would not be possible without this particular model. That is true, also, of other paintings for which Eaton modelled, for example those of Simeon Solomon, his sister Rebecca Solomon, and Joanna Boyce Wells featured in the exhibition.[7] Eaton is indeed beautiful, but not in an obviously sensualised or alluring fashion. In contemplating the painting, we as viewers are given the chance to move beyond the simplistic binaries, male-female, white-black, artist-model, oppressor-victim. Eaton, like the other women included in the exhibition and in this Conversation Piece, is a 'stunner' in the true, Pre-Raphaelite sense of the word. She is not the sole creative genius (notionally gendered male) who authors the works that feature her. Rather she is a sister who collaborates in their production.

Let me finish with the words of Walter Pater, a writer deeply influenced by his close relationships with his own sisters and (perhaps not coincidentally) a careful reader of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The ideal of collaboration that Pater first observed, it may be, in the literary and artistic work of the Pre-Raphaelites helped him to formulate one of his most compelling ideas: 'that *House Beautiful* which the genuine and humanistic workmen of all ages, all those artists who have really felt and understood their work, are always building together for the human spirit'.[8] Through our scholarly and curatorial work we have the chance to make our own contribution to the House Beautiful, in which we need not bow to male domination. There, in the life of the intellect and the imagination, we may practice what Pater called 'the essence of humanism': 'that belief … that nothing which has ever interested living men and women can wholly lose its vitality'.[9]

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[1] The misconception proves remarkably persistent, even though it has been pointed out before, for example by Jan Marsh, eloquently, in a review of the index volume of William E. Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), *Journal of William Morris Studies* 22, no. 1 (2016): 80-81.

[2] Alastair Grieve, 'Ruskin and Millais at Glenfinlas', *Burlington Magazine* 138, no. 117 (1996): 229; Marsh, *Journal of William Morris Studies*, 80.

[3] *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown*, ed. Virginia Surtees (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 126 (entry for 10 March 1855).

[4] Jan Marsh et al., *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters*, exhibition catalogue (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2019); for conspicuous usages of 'male-dominated' see pp. 8, 58.

[5] Cited in Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), 73.

[6] For the idea of the sister in contemporary literature see Sarah Annes Brown, *Devoted Sisters: Representations of the Sister Relationship in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2003).

[7] Simeon Solomon, *The Mother of Moses* (1860, Delaware Art Museum), Rebecca Solomon, *The Young Teacher* (1861, private collection), Joanna Boyce Wells, *Study of Fanny Eaton* (1861, Yale Center for British Art, New

Haven). In these paintings and many drawings, Eaton as model galvanises the artists to unusually compelling results.

[8] From Pater's review of Sidney Colvin, *Children in Italian and English Design* (1872), repr. in Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 194.

[9] From Pater's 'Pico della Mirandola' (1871), repr. in Pater, *Renaissance*, 38.

Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood: *Scheherazade* (n.d.) by Sophie Anderson

DR MADDIE BODEN

This case study calls attention to the need for further investigation into the global styles that female artists, both closely and loosely associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, engaged with in their work. I focus on the Anglo-French artist, Sophie Anderson and a single undated painting, *Scheherazade* (Fig. 1, n.d.) to argue that the Pre-Raphaelite sisters' cosmopolitanism has been a relatively overlooked area of investigation and demonstrate how Orientalism fit into Anderson's speciality: paintings of women and young girls. While Anderson was not included in the *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* exhibition, her career and associations with British art make a strong case for her inclusion in future surveys of this wide-ranging group.

I base my reading on Kate Nichol's meticulously researched article on Anderson, but pivot from her reading of *Scheherazade* to highlight the unique place of the painting in her oeuvre.[1] Anderson's record of success with women and girl paintings, commonly categorised as fancy pictures, has relegated her in the canon. However, *Scheherazade* is a subtle yet profound exploration of age and gender as othering devices in Orientalist painting and demonstrates how southern Mediterranean locales such as Capri served as an artistic liminal space between Occident and Orient.

After periods spent living in France, Britain, and the United States, Anderson and her husband, the painter Walter Anderson, moved to the Isle of Capri in 1871. Biographies attribute the move to Anderson's ill health; however, Capri was a well-known Mediterranean escape for British intellectuals, writers, and artists.[2] Anderson was an established painter at the time of their move and since 1854 had exhibited regularly at the Society for British Artists, the British Institution, and the Royal Academy. She made her career from genre paintings, or fancy pictures, which typically depicted young women and adolescent girls in pastoral settings. One of her best-known paintings *No Walk Today* (c. 1850s) follows the fancy subject's typical narrative conceit: a porcelain-skinned girl dressed in lace frills and velvet overcoat hat stares out a window looking forlorn, as raindrops hit the glass and reveal the title's microcosmic tragedy.[3] While some art historians claim that Victorian female artists were 'stuck' painting pretty women and cherubic girls, popular male academicians such as Frederic Leighton and John Everett Millais also produced similar paintings to critical acclaim and commercial success. There is also some evidence to suggest William Holman Hunt borrowed elements of *No Walk Today* for his *Master Hilary – The Tracer* (1886).[4] Although relegated in contemporary British art studies, the fancy pictures of many male and female Victorian artists including Anderson hold rich interpretations that would shed light on nineteenth-century attitudes towards the intersection of age and gender, and Victorian attitudes to childhood.

In Capri, Anderson continued to paint, sent finished work to Britain and America, and took on a student, Ignazio Cerio. Her home, the Villa Castello, became a social hub for local and expatriate couples.[5] Although *Scheherazade* is undated and its provenance cannot be traced before 1930, it is likely it was painted during the two decades Anderson was in Capri.[6] I posit that it is also likely *Scheherazade* was painted sometime after 1885, following the publication of Richard Burton's translation of *The Arabian Nights* as a somewhat commercially-driven

Figure 1. Sophie Anderson, *Scheherazade*, n.d., Oil on canvas, 50 x 41 cm. Reproduced with kind permission from the New Art Gallery Walsall.

Figure 2. John Ruskin, *Study of a Peacock Feather*, c. 1880, Watercolour on paper, dimensions not given. Reproduced with kind permission from the Collection of The Guild of St. George.

response to the popularity of this text amongst British audiences, who might also be potential buyers of such a painting.

Anderson paints main character of *The Arabian Nights*, Scheherazade, a woman compelled to tell her murderous husband, King Shahryar, a new story each night to stay her own execution.[7] Anderson paints Scheherazade in radically different style to her previous subjects. The subject in the three-quarter length portrait is clothed in three richly coloured textiles: a blue lightly patterned dress, an aubergine overcoat, and a pink and gold head covering from under which two dark, thick braids of hair emerge. Her necklaces, bracelets, and hoop earrings are all gold. A single peacock feather eye has been placed at the top of Scheherazade's head covering, a potent cultural symbol that simultaneously gestures to the exotic Orient, the imperial Raj where most peacock feathers were sourced, and the burgeoning Aestheticism movement, with which Anderson was loosely associated through the Grosvenor Gallery, where she exhibited between 1878 and 1887. Its placement at the centre of Scheherazade's forehead might also reference the superstitious evil-eye, repeatedly mentioned in Burton's *Nights*.[8] The feather also makes a link between Anderson and Pre-Raphaelitism. John Ruskin's interest in the peacock, from its Darwinian implications to its utility as an instruction in the minutiae of the natural world, is exemplified in his watercolour, *Study of a Peacock Feather* (Fig. 2, c. 1880) which bears a resemblance to Anderson's version.

There is no evidence that Anderson travelled further east than Capri, but her foray into an Orientalist style echoes wider trends amongst British artists to conjure the Orient in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, regardless of any direct experiences.[9] However, for many Britons who had travelled no further than the Grand Tour routes, Anderson's residency in Capri made her proximate enough to the Orient to convincingly portray a Persian queen. At the time, the southern reaches of the Mediterranean were considered a liminal space between East and West, on the doorstep of the Ottoman Empire.[10] Given this tangential connection to the Near East, Anderson's Orientalism is more compatible with the fantasy-fuelled Orientalism we readily associate with French practitioners such as Delacroix and Ingres, and it is unsurprising that she draws on Burton's translation as source material. Other Pre-Raphaelite sisters, such as Barbara Bodichon and Marianne North, travelled to North Africa and the Near East, and their on-the-ground depictions constitute an altogether different mode of Orientalist visual representation. Additionally, this example of a racially ambiguous portrait of a likely Caprian female sitter elicits parallels to orientalising depictions of Pre-Raphaelite models such as Fanny Eaton and Keomi Gray.

Scheherazade stands out in comparison to Anderson's other images of women and children. However, it is precisely because of Anderson's skill for fancy pictures that gives *Scheherazade* such agency, akin to Julia Margaret Cameron's alluring allegorical photographs, also based on heroines from historical literature and modelled by her Freshwater coterie of women and children.[11] *Scheherazade* stands as an important example of female-authored British Orientalism, a genre preoccupied with male depictions of sexualised Eastern women, but also the scope (and limitations) of women artists' cosmopolitanism in Victorian painting.

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[1] Kate Nichols, 'A Cosmopolitan Victorian in the Midlands: Regional Collecting and the Work of Sophie Anderson (1823-1903) *Midland Art Papers* 1 (2017-8), 1-27.

[2] For more on British painters in Capri, see George P.W. Field, 'Painting Apragopolis: Foreign Painters on Capri: 1826 – 1890' (MPhil, University of York, 2020).

[3] This work is in a private collection. An image of it can be found http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/a-great-british-collection-the-pictures-collected-by-sir-david-and-lady-scott-sold-to-benefit-the-finnis-scott-foundation-l08137/lot.96.html, accessed 23 June 2020.
[4] Sotheby's, 'Sophie Anderson – No Walk Today, Lot 96' https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/a-great-british-collection-the-pictures-collected-by-sir-david-and-lady-scott-sold-to-benefit-the-finnis-scott-foundation-l08137/lot.96.html.
[5] James Money, *Capri: Island of Pleasure* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 1873.
[6] I am grateful to Jo Digger, former Head of Collections from The New Art Gallery Walsall for information on the painting's provenance.
[7] Richard Burton, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (London: Kama Shastra Society, 1885). For texts related to the British reception of *The Arabian Nights* see, Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Penguin, 1994) and Melissa Dickson, *Cultural Encounters with the Arabian Nights in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).
[8] Burton, *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night*, 358.
[9] Nichols identifies approximately five other Orientalist works by Anderson.
[10] Robert Holland, *The Warm South: How the Mediterranean Shaped the British Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018).
[11] See Jeff Rosen, *Julia Margaret Cameron's 'Fancy Subjects': Photographic Allegories of Victorian Identity and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

Wisdom Holds the Spartium: A Closer Look at *The Lady Prays-Desire*

DR MELISSA L. GUSTIN

At the Pre-Raphaelite Sisters conference at University of York in December 2019, Jan Marsh, curator of the exhibition, noted that she had wanted a painting by Marie Spartali Stillman on the cover of the catalogue: *The Lady Prays-Desire*.[1] This picture may have appeared twice in the exhibition, as the finished watercolour with gold paint, and possibly as the piece before which Stillman posed for Ford Madox Brown's chalk portrait; the catalogue suggests that rather than *Lady Prays-Desire,* the painting against which Stillman's mahl stick and palette rested was a lost work described as having 'red disorderly hair.'[2] *Lady Prays-Desire* was not used for the catalogue cover or for promotional imagery— Marsh having been overruled by marketing and the need to have a recognisable (read: Rossettian) image—but this picture invites a closer reading.

What first sparked my interest in this painting was the cryptic note on the exhibition label: 'the quotation on the scroll is still to be deciphered' (Fig. 1, 1867). The gold scroll bears a three-word motto in Greek, over a black, shield-shaped cartouche with a white owl holding or sitting on a leafy branch picked out in gold. This clearly meaningful arrangement of text and symbol stands out against the plain, pale background. The owl, as the label and catalogue both explain, symbolises Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom (as well as artistic crafts like weaving, and war, although those are not referenced); this combined with the Greek lettering on the scroll is read as indicating Spartali Stillman's heritage. The catalogue repeats that the motto on the scroll was, at the time of the exhibition, 'as yet only partially deciphered.'[3] Given Spartali Stillman's Greek heritage, I found this lack of translation, described as 'deciphering', unsatisfactory: surely, if she, as the artist, included it on the picture plane, in gold, the meaning might have something to do with the subject of the painting. Furthermore, calling the process of translating three words of the artist's language 'deciphering' serves to Other the artist and her culture by positioning the text as a coded message or cypher, rather than a living language if modern Greek or a marker of education for women if Ancient.[4]

As Professor Liz Prettejohn recognised while at the exhibition, the first word of the inscription was clearly 'ΣοΦία', *Sofia*, which translates as 'wisdom'. This ties directly to the Athenian owl; so far, so good. The second word was somewhat more difficult: σπαρτίον, which transliterates as 'spartíon', was obviously some kind of pun on Spartali Stillman's name, but it had several options for translation and without further context was not easily unpicked. Enter someone who speaks Greek: York PhD candidate Kyveli Lignou-Tsamantani, who helped us in short order, giving us the final word as κρατει, 'holds'. This gave us a literal translation, 'Wisdom holds the

Figure 1. Detail, Marie Spartali Stillman, The Lady Prays-Desire, 1867. Watercolour with gold paint on paper, 419 x 305 mm. Private collection. Low-resolution detail photograph of out-of-copyright artwork used under fair dealing for critique or review.

"spartíon"'. By combining this translation with the iconographic content of the cartouche— an owl holding some kind of branch— with a bit of judicious Googling, we found that 'spartíon', or Spartium, is the Latin name for Spanish broom, a leafy shrub with bright golden flowers that is clearly identifiable as the plant held by the owl (Fig. 2). With the pun on *Spartali*, it becomes clear that the cartouche and motto go beyond merely 'invok[ing] Spartali Stillman's Greek heritage'.[5] Rather, she directly places herself in the grasp of Wisdom, and Athena, who was not only the goddess of wisdom and war, but also artistry and crafts. On a painting described as 'personifying not beauty but ambition', and an allegorical figure who 'aspires to honour', through the character of Lady Prayse-Desire from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the symbolism of the artist textually and visually placing herself in the grasp of Athena on the picture plane is clearly directly relevant to the content of the picture.[6]

This translation, and the iconographic and textual interpretation that followed, could then have been applied to the content of the picture itself: while the title of the painting draws from the *Faerie Queene,* the attributes of the figure in the painting do not match those of the poem. In the poem itself, the Lady wears purple and holds a poplar branch; the picture shows a woman in green, with laurel leaves in her hair and with her finger between the pages of a small book. The substitution of the book for the text's poplar branch plays off the invocation of wisdom and suggests erudition, literacy, and the arts; Spartali Stillman's inclusion of Greek text and symbolism suggest that the laurel leaves should be read as another classical emblem of glory in the arts, recalling

Figure 2. *Spanish broom near Perasdefogu*, Sardinia, Italy. © Hans Hillewaert, 2008. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

Apollo and the crowns given to victors in poetic competitions. These symbolic interplays reinforce the character of the Lady Prayse-Desire from Spenser's poem. The Lady Prayse-Desire tells the Prince, 'Pensive, I yeeld [sic] I am, and sad in mind, / Through great desire of glory and of fame'; another figure gives the Prince her name: 'her name was Prayse-desire, /That by well doing sought to honour to aspyre'.[7] Spartali Stillman's painting is a pictorial and textual claim to Athena's protection and Apollo's glories.

The interpretation of the text that was (nominally) being illustrated, in line with the symbolism and text of the cartouche, reinforces the argument put forth by the catalogue that this was about Spartali Stillman's desire for fame and praise, while also emphasising her authorial erudition and creative reimagining of the poem's text. By using a Greek pun on her own name to invoke authority, wisdom, and glory, Spartali Stillman negates Ford Madox Brown's portrait of her, mentioned earlier— an image where his signature is marked onto her canvas within the picture plane, visually claiming not only her portrait but also her creative output under his authority (Fig. 3, 1869). This was not a particularly difficult or time-consuming process of translation and iconographic interpretation, because I asked for assistance from fellow scholars who had the skills I lacked. Collaboration and knowledge-sharing across disciplines are vital parts of academia and museum work; certainly someone who speaks Greek at another museum or in a Classics department could have assisted with this translation

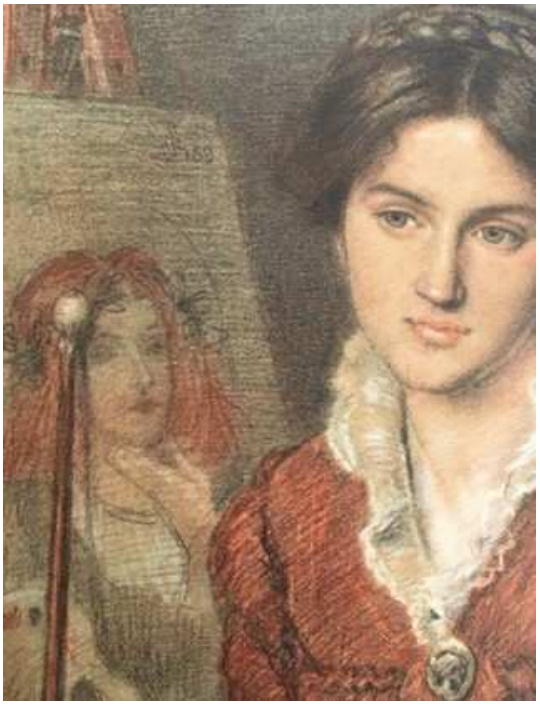

Figure 3. Detail, Ford Madox Brown, *Portrait of Marie Spartali Stillman*, 1869. Coloured chalks on paper, 775 x 559 mm. Private collection. Low-resolution detail photograph of out-of-copyright artwork used under fair dealing for critique or review.

Figure 4. Detail, Ford Madox Brown, *Portrait of Marie Spartali Stillman*, 1866/7. Chalk on paper, DIM. Private collection. Low-resolution detail photograph of out-of-copyright artwork used under fair dealing for critique or review.

across email—or the curators could have looked more closely at the work's exhibition history.

This last is the most important: the motto had already been transcribed and partially translated by an earlier exhibition catalogue, which does not appear in the scholarly apparatus of the *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* book—an exhibition upon which Alison Smith also worked, meaning this lacuna is especially egregious.[8] The suggestion that Madox Brown's portrait depicts Spartali Stillman at work on the lost *Korinna: the Theban Poetess*, with its 'red, disorderly hair,'[9] is apparently disproven by a review of the 1867 Dudley Gallery exhibition which describes the painting as having a sky[10]; it also seems unlikely that Spartali, in her first exhibition, would submit two essentially identical pictures. By giving so much emphasis in the text to Spartali Stillman's relationships with (or pursuit by) male artists, rather than attending to the pictures, her artistic choices, and self-fashioning, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* reproduces the very narratives it claims to be overturning. For example, the essay discusses the relationship between Madox Brown and Spartali Stillman as 'a lifelong regard', and talks about his 'unrequited passion' for her, rather than discussing how the portrait he made of her functions visually— his signing her work in the image, or the way she averts her gaze and hunches over, her hands twisted together, none of which suggest she was perfectly at ease with his attention (Fig. 4, 1869). Formatting the catalogue as heavily illustrated biographies rather than object-focused catalogue entries with scholarly apparatus like bibliographies, exhibition histories, and critical analysis, means that important pictures— or even early, interesting, but not groundbreaking pieces like *Lady Prays-Desire*— are steamrolled over at pace and without presenting readers the opportunity to follow up on sources.

The *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* exhibition, catalogue, and even social media campaign had the opportunity to be a ground-breaking reassessment of women artists, partners, and personalities through their own words and works. Spartali Stillman's *Lady Prays-Desire* could have been explained to the audience as a definitive, declarative claim on the artist's part to professionalism and success. Instead, these artists remained Othered and patronised by the exhibition framing and didactics. Marie Spartali Stillman was, according to one National Portrait Gallery tweet discussing the Madox Brown picture, 'a sitter noted for her gentleness,'[11] (no source for this given) while Maria Zambaco was characterised through the words of Burne Jones and Rossetti as 'primeval' and 'howling like Cassandra' in the didactic panels, emphasising her sexual relationship with Burne-Jones and only squeezing in her actual artworks into a corner. In places, these contrasts play out as a tired Madonna-Whore complex: good, gentle, patient women against coarse, mad, sexually demanding, and/or social climbing women. Little sympathy is given to women in sex work, described repeatedly as 'whores'. Women 'naturally' fall for men, especially for Rossetti;[12] no possibility of queer desires or gender-nonconformity is addressed. May Morris, a prolific professional maker who lived with a woman the majority of her life, and whose work is still being reproduced for mass consumption, would have been an excellent

addition to the show; however, she is left out beyond mentions as the daughter of William and Jane. Ultimately, the focus of the show, catalogue, and promotional material was the same focus as so many Pre-Raphaelite shows have been: isn't she lovely, wasn't she so inspiring for these men? Marie Spartali Stillman laid claim to success in three languages— Greek, English, and pictorial— but perhaps this last still needs to be deciphered more fully.

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[1] The painting is in a private collection and could not be reproduced in its entirety; the image is available online here: http://janmarsh.blogspot.com/2019/04/marie-spartali-lady-prays-desire.html

[2] J. Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters*, exh. cat. National Portrait Gallery, London, 17 October 2019-26 January 2020 (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2019) p. 156.

[3] Ibid., p. 156 n. 10.

[4] On ancient Greek and women of letters in Victorian Britain, see Yopie Prins, *Ladies Greek: Victorian Translations of Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2017).

[5] Marsh, *Sisters*, p. 159.

[6] Ibid., p. 159.

[7] Marsh's source for the poem in the *Sisters* catalogue is uncited. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, first published 1590/6, this ed. 1859 (New York: D. Appleton and Co), p. 222.

[8] Richard Dorment et al., *Pre-Raphaelite and Other Masters: The Andrew Lloyd Webber Collection*, exh. cat. (Royal Academy of Arts, London 2003) p. 307.

[9] 'Pictures of the Year,' *Saturday Review: Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, Volume 23, 23 Feb 1867, p. 236.

[10] 'The General Watercolour Exhibition,' *The Spectator* 16 February 1867 (vol 40, p. 188)

[11] National Portrait Gallery. Twitter Post. 6:35 PM GMT, Nov 4, 2019. https://twitter.com/NPGLondon/status/1191423650563579906

[12] Marsh, *Sisters*, p. 110.

A Footnote in Art History? No Longer.

CAITLIN DOLEY & MARTE STINIS

Initiated in 1848 by a distinctly gendered "brotherhood", Pre-Raphaelitism can at first seem like an exclusively male preserve. Whilst the art and lives of the various men associated with the movement retain immense popular and scholarly appeal, it has taken many years for sustained academic attention to be given to the women involved with Pre-Raphaelitism. These women's names may ring familiar - Elizabeth Siddal, Jane Morris, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Maria Zambaco, Marie Spartali Stillman, Evelyn de Morgan, Emma Sandys, to name but a few - but the roles that they played in the creation and the histories of works of art (both their own and those by others) have until recently remained disappointingly neglected or, perhaps worse, entirely misunderstood.

The National Portrait Gallery's *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters: Models, Artists, Muses* (17th October 2019 – 26th January 2020) and its corresponding conference at the University of York (12th – 13th December 2019) set out to challenge the exasperatingly enduring idea of the artist as a solitary male genius taking inspiration from a passive female muse. These two events were above all else an exercise in unearthing the oft-disregarded – if not previously presumed lost or entirely unknown – contributions of women to Pre-Raphaelitism. The aim was to reconceptualise art production as a unisex business, involving community and collaboration. By emphasising and evidencing the fact that the women typically understood as "just muses" were simultaneously artists in their own right, as well as studio managers, agents, and publicists, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* explored some of the complex power dynamics involved in the creative process that tend to feature only as brief footnotes in scholarly texts.

The outcomes of the joint effort of exhibition and conference were the following: we cannot successfully separate the "Sisters" from the "Brothers" - they are, and always will be, mutually dependent. But this is by no means a negative conclusion. Rather it shows that, moving forward, art historians have a responsibility to explain the roles and impacts of women in the history of art far more clearly than has previously been done. As *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* has demonstrated, even in times with perceived stereotypical gender roles such as the Victorian era, there were women involved with all types of responsibilities ranging from artist to collector to agent; in short, Victorian women were involved in the art world in more fundamental ways than has heretofore been appreciated. The canon of art as it is taught, seemingly dominated by male artists, deserves a reconsideration and extension to include, and recognise the value of, the role of women, whether that is making, selling, or collecting art. By necessity this has to be extended to other marginalised groups in their own right, and not as an adherent of an existing male-dominated group. In the case of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,

there was never an equivalent "sisterhood" and for these women to be appreciated in their own right, this has to be acknowledged.

Moving forward then, the world of art history will greatly benefit from a reconsideration of who was involved in the creation and the subsequent histories of the art we so cherish in our public galleries. Ultimately, practitioners of art history must recognise that the discipline remains too absorbed in considering whether a woman's talent - be it as an artist or a dealer - measures up to her inevitably more famous male companions'. Socio-political circumstances must be acknowledged, of course, but they should not subsequently be used to erode the value of any particular woman's role in the history of art. Instead of fixating on what was not done or on what was not produced, we must concentrate on looking at the results that do exist, on looking at what was actually created, sold, and bought.

On the whole, what questions should be addressed when studying a work of art produced by a woman? Questions about the creator's professional temperament and their creative drive? Questions about their natural talent? Questions about their sources of inspiration, be they contemporary or historical? Questions about the creator's circumstances at the time of production? Questions about the training opportunities available to them throughout their lives? Questions about their access to resources and materials? Questions about their social and professional networks? We believe that all of the above must be considered, just as they would be in any thorough scholarly assessment of a work of art produced by a man.

As art historians we have a responsibility to undertake rigorous research and use this to answer these types of questions and further the knowledge we have. It is not merely a question of awareness, but a question of exploration. This should be extended, in our globalised community, to the representation of all marginalised groups, a representation that researchers and public galleries can play a role in.