“THE PERENNIAL DRAMAS OF THE EAST”

Representations of the Middle East

in the Writing and Art of

Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt

by

DEANNA VICTORIA MASON

A thesis submitted to the Department of English

in conformity with the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen’s University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

June, 2009

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Abstract

This dissertation studies depictions of the Middle East in the works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. My discussion focuses on two prominent members of the Brotherhood—Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt—and utilizes an interdisciplinary approach that examines the poetry, prose, unpublished correspondence and journals, sketches, watercolours, and oil paintings that they produced prior to 1856. I argue that Rossetti and Hunt make use of the Middle East as a repository for and reflection of the ambiguities and ambivalences of their own positions as avant-garde artists and authors.

Chapters Two and Three focus on the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Chapter Two examines Rossetti’s juvenilia in order to trace the ways in which the young author-artist uses the Middle East as a platform from which to work out the interplay between narrative and image, the conceptualization of the role of the author and artist, and the use of realistically depicted elements in religious painting. Chapter Three continues this discussion of Rossetti through an investigation of the 1850 edition of his poem “The Burden of Nineveh,” which centres on an encounter with an ancient Assyrian statue, and I argue that Rossetti links this artifact to the P. R. B. and uses it to critique the artistic ideals of mid-nineteenth-century England.

The next two chapters shift to an investigation of William Holman Hunt’s first visit to the Middle East in 1854-6, a journey that became a focal point of the author-artist’s career. Chapter Four makes extensive use of Hunt’s unpublished diaries and letters from his sojourn in the Holy Land to destabilize the widespread conception of the artist as a staunch imperialist and the foremost English religious painter of the nineteenth century. Building on this foundation, Chapter Five looks back to the three months that
Hunt spent in Egypt in 1854 and investigates the ways in which the complex experiences that the author-artist describes in his unpublished letters from this period filter into the watercolours, sketches, and oil paintings that he executed in Egypt.
Acknowledgments

I would like first to thank my supervisor, Chris Bongie, for his commitment to this project, generosity with his knowledge, and lightning-quick turnaround times. Working with him has, I hope, made me a better scholar. I am also grateful to my second reader, Maggie Berg, a fellow lover of the Pre-Raphaelites who has shown great interest in this project from the time when it was nothing more than a proposal. I owe a debt of gratitude, as well, to Scott-Morgan Straker, who is not on my committee but whose generous advice and guidance came at a critical time. Finally, without the wonderful year-long graduate seminar on the Pre-Raphaelites organized by my external examiner David Bentley at the University of Western Ontario in 2000-2001, this project would never have come into existence, so I thank him for being the conduit through which the members of the P. R. B. have enriched my life with the beauty of their work.

The Queen’s University School of Graduate Studies and Research generously funded a three-week research trip to the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, in 2005, and the time that I spent there—happily ensconced among William Holman Hunt’s diaries and letters—was an unforgettable experience and a source of re-inspiration.

The friends that I made in the graduate program helped to make even the worst days more bearable and the best days a lot more fun. Sandy Bugeja and Adriana Hetram, in particular, have played important roles in my life—and at my wedding; I still miss our old Thursday “office hours.”

I also want to thank my family—Murray and Victoria Mason, Beatriz Duarte, Bill and Paula Alakas, Will Alakas, and the big Alakas and Mason clans in Welland and Nottingham. I know that what I’ve been doing for the last few years hasn’t always been
clear, but thank you for commiserating with me anyways! And to those of you who read various conference papers and chapters in an effort to find out exactly what I’ve been up to for all this time, thank you for your interest and your encouragement.

My dear little friend Calliope Francesca deserves my gratitude (as well as many treats) for her devoted companionship through many, many stressful days and long nights of work. I am fortunate to have her to remind me of the things that really matter in life. I promise that I’ll have more time to play from now on!

Finally, I want to thank my beloved husband, Brandon Alakas, who has stayed by my side and held my hand through all of the many fulfilling and painful moments of the Ph.D. program. You have been there to help me in so many ways each day, and I can honestly say that this dissertation would not have been finished without you. You truly are la mia anima gemella, and I dedicate this work to you with boundless gratitude and never-ending love. La nostra vita nuova comincia adesso!
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In 2008, the Tate Britain held an exhibition entitled *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*. In the catalogue and in the installations themselves, the organizers cited two central reasons for the existence of this exhibition: first, that the contemporary political climate made an understanding of Britain’s past relationship to the Middle East essential (Tromans, *Lure*),¹ and second, that it was high time for “the first major museum exhibition to explore in any depth the British branch of . . . Orientalist painting” (Deuchar and Meyers 6). The numerous qualifiers—“the first major,” “to explore in any depth,” and “the British branch”—embedded in this statement are meant to highlight the originality of this exhibition, but they also suggest the extent to which the field of Orientalism in art has already been investigated.

French Orientalist art, in particular, has garnered a great deal of scholarly attention, and one of this genre’s most famous works, Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *The Snake Charmer* (1880),² is familiar to most literary critics through its placement on the cover of Edward Said’s groundbreaking 1978 study *Orientalism*. Moreover, another foundational text in the study of Orientalism in art, Linda Nochlin’s 1983 essay “The Imaginary Orient,” was written as a response to “the 1982 exhibition and catalogue *Orientalism: The Near East in French Painting, 1800-1880*” (Nochlin 33) and focuses on Gérôme and his predecessor Eugène Delacroix. Even the title of an exhibition that was held at

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¹ The statement that “[t]hroughout the world today there is a desire, made urgent by recent events, to understand the relationship between the Middle East and the Western world” is the first sentence on the back cover of the catalogue.

² The date that follows each painting represents the year of its first exhibition.
London’s Royal Academy of Arts in 1984 called The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse highlights art history’s past emphasis on French Orientalism (Stevens, Orientalists).

Thus, although The Lure of the East was billed as the first in-depth study of British artists, the relationship between nineteenth-century art and notions of imperialism, race, and gender had frequently been discussed over the past several decades, and a number of British artists—including William Holman Hunt, John Frederick Lewis, David Roberts, Edward Lear, Thomas Seddon, and David Wilkie—had already been included in these discussions, both in exhibitions like The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse, where they were included but were not considered focal points, and in others like the 2005 Manchester Art Gallery exhibition Black Victorians: Black People in British Art 1800-1900, where William Holman Hunt’s well-known painting of an Egyptian peasant The Afterglow in Egypt (1864) was included in the context of a discussion of representation of race in Victorian British art (Marsh, Black 138-9).

As a means of further establishing its originality, The Lure of the East makes an effort to differentiate itself from other exhibitions by arguing that British Orientalist art is fundamentally different from that of France, which the editor of its catalogue characterizes as “flagrant fantasy” (Tromans, Lure 10). Regardless of the danger inherent in such a sweeping generalization about a widespread artistic movement, The Lure of the East uses this suggestion of the homogeneity of French Orientalist art to present a perspective on British Orientalist art as a complex trajectory that, in the works included in the exhibition, is centred in the nineteenth century but also ranges from an Elizabethan portrait of a Moroccan ambassador to England (Riding 49) to a 1925 cityscape of Jerusalem (Tromans, Lure 196).
But one thing that *The Lure of the East* has in common with every inquiry into representations of the Middle East in literature and art since the late 1970s is the fact that its discussion is rooted in the work of Edward Said. In the Foreword of the catalogue, Deuchar and Meyers point to the ideas expressed by Said as an “omnipresent” force within the exhibition (6), so, while these notions have become an indelible part of the critical landscape in examinations of Middle Eastern themes in literature and visual culture, it is worthwhile at this point to take some time to describe them briefly.

In his seminal monograph *Orientalism*, Said rewrites the meaning of the term *Orientalism*—traditionally used to denote a field of study focusing on the language, history, politics, and culture of North Africa and the Middle East (Said 2)—in order to give the word a broader meaning. In one of the most famous critical statements of the late twentieth century, Said redefines *Orientalism* as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism . . . [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). Basing his discussion on Michel Foucault’s notions of discourse, Said goes on to define Orientalism as a discourse that allowed “European culture [to gain] in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). Although he briefly mentions examples of such a use of Orientalist discourse in both the classical and medieval periods,3 Said locates the beginning of Orientalism on a large scale on the cusp of the nineteenth century in 1798, when the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte arrived in Egypt (42-3). Since that point, Said argues, the Middle East has been subject to the monolithic West, which attempts to categorize and define the region

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3 See his brief and highly selective discussion of earlier instances of Orientalism on 55-73.
and its people in order to create its own identity and to control the areas that it has markedly constructed as an Other.

Said’s study led quite rapidly to great changes in the way in which scholars consider representations of the Middle East in literature and, subsequently, in art; because much of *Orientalism* focuses on nineteenth-century figures like Richard Burton, Gustave Flaubert, Edward William Lane, and Gérard de Nerval, Said’s work has had a particular effect on the field of Victorian studies and has now become an obligatory reference point for much discussion of nineteenth-century literature and art. Yet, while Said’s work has certainly left a lasting mark on literary studies and art history, the ideas expressed in *Orientalism* were taken to task not long after the book’s original publication. When Linda Nochlin used Said as a foundation for “The Imaginary Orient,” her essay, although reliant on his central argument, seemed to suggest that, by leaving out a detailed discussion of visual culture, Said had not mapped out an important way in which Orientalism functioned, and her article is one of the first in a still ongoing series of reappraisals—questionings, expansions, and critiques—of Said. For example, critics like Aijaz Ahmad and Lisa Lowe have argued that Said oversimplifies the division between East and West and essentializes European thought in the same way that, he argued, Orientalist discourse offers a reductive understanding of the Middle East.⁴ In her fascinating study *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*, Lowe takes this point even further, arguing that “orientalism is not a single developmental tradition but is profoundly heterogeneous” (*ix*), and that it is easily destabilized by intersections with other discourses—such as gender or nationalism—that highlight its “contradictions and lack of fixity” (*x*).

⁴ For a lengthy critique of Said, see Ahmad 159-219.
Said’s influence and later reactions that serve to extend or complicate his argument have within the last six years been questioned, in particular, in two important essays—one by literary critic Erin O’Connor and another by art historian Emily M. Weeks, and these two articles are critical to the approach that I take in my own study of representations of the Middle East in the writing and art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt.

In “Preface for a Post-Postcolonial Criticism,” O’Connor critiques what she describes as a longstanding trend in Victorian studies to examine the Victorian novel—and, often, “poetry and nonfiction prose” (225)—as simply “a cipher for imperialist ideology” (218). O’Connor bases her discussion on an examination of the influential reading of Jane Eyre as a locus of “widespread imperialist sentiment” (218) that Gayatri Spivak offers in her 1985 essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” and O’Connor goes on to argue that the application of postcolonial theories, which often simply results in some variation on repeated observations that the text is caught up in and reinforces notions of imperialism, contributes to a profound oversimplification of the Victorian novel (and, by extension, other genres) by effacing their “thematic subtleties, structural indeterminacies, and genuine intellectual rigour in order to make . . . [them] into the means of establishing broadly applicable theoretical paradigms” (220). In other words, O’Connor argues that the nineteenth-century novel has been co-opted by postcolonial studies in order to function as a support for theories and paradigms that do little to help scholars read texts in a new light but instead contribute to an “utterly predictable” (242) linking of Victorian literature with uncomplicated imperialist thought. To describe this two-decade-long trend in Victorian studies, she coins the neologism
“Victorientalism,” which she defines as “the mining of a distant, exotic, threatening but fascinating literature to produce and establish a singularly self-serving body of knowledge elsewhere, a body of knowledge that ultimately has more to tell us about the needs of its producers than about its ostensible subject matter” (227). The fact that O’Connor’s language here clearly echoes the definition of Orientalism offered by Said is entirely deliberate, for she goes on to argue in a later section of the article that approaches to Victorian literature that insist upon reading the text as reflections of reductive imperialist thought actually offer a skewed, “simplif[ied] and distort[ed]” (241) perspective on the work in much the same way that Orientalist thought is said to present a simplistic and stereotypical view of the Middle East and its inhabitants. Indeed, O’Connor concludes her essay by advocating a new understanding of Victorian writing that focuses not just on putative links between the literature and social and political discourses of the period but instead bears in mind “the sheer complexity of literature, of history, and of the uncertain, shifting relationship between the two” (242).

O’Connor’s discussion of “Victorientalism” and her re-evaluation of the contributions of Said and Spivak are very clearly rooted in Victorian literary studies, but similar observations about the need for scholars to commit to a re-consideration of nineteenth-century works have also recently been made in the field of art history. Emily M. Weeks’s 2008 article “Cultures Crossed: John Frederick Lewis and the Art of Orientalist Painting” similarly presses for a change in art-historical studies that clearly demonstrates the applicability of O’Connor’s notion of “Victorientalism” to other disciplines.
Beginning her essay with a brief discussion of the subtle ambiguity of the painting *The Carpet Seller* (1861)\(^5\) by the well-known mid-nineteenth-century British Orientalist artist John Frederick Lewis, Weeks launches into a critique of art historians’ reliance on the paradigms offered by Said in *Orientalism* and makes the controversial declaration that, due to such theories, Orientalist art has “become the most presupposed and predetermined in all of British art” (23). Through a discussion of Lewis’s painting, Weeks’s essay attempts to demonstrate how questioning these assumptions can allow scholars to develop fresh insights into British Orientalist art, and she offers her strongest condemnation of simplistic understandings of Orientalism and nineteenth-century painting when she writes,

> Though it would be impossible (and foolish) to deny that instances of Said’s brand of Orientalism existed in the visual arts, the continuation of such widespread interpretive confidence on the part of art historians—and the public who rely on them—is disturbing. Not only does it predetermine conclusions and preclude more subtle analyses of often very different artists and pictures, but it also allows the misdiagnosis or dismissal of situations, experiences, peoples and objects that are not complicit with Said’s paradigmatic framework. (25)

For Weeks, the critical tendency to label a particular work of art as an emblem of “broader imperial designs” (23) prevalent at the time of its creation detracts from our understanding not just of the painting itself but of the artist, as well, and can blind us to “[c]riticisms leveled against British society, . . . personal narratives, experiences, and idiosyncrasies, . . . and, perhaps most importantly, genuine moments of cross-cultural understanding, respect and commemoration” (23) that may inhere in the work.

O’Connor’s and Weeks’s recent essays provide important—and similar—re-evaluations of the critical heritage and future of Orientalism in the disciplines of literary

\(^5\) This painting is also sometimes referred to as *In the Bezestein, El Khan Khalil, Cairo* (Stevens, *Orientalists* 203).
criticism and art history, and their arguments for the need to step outside traditional conceptions of nineteenth-century literature and painting become especially significant when we consider them in conjunction with the mid-nineteenth-century group of writers and artists known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

The story of the origins of the Brotherhood in 1848 is frequently rehearsed in texts on Victorian art and literature, a fact that attests to the impact that the group’s members had in both of these fields of endeavour, so, although I discuss the ideals of the group in more detail in the following chapters, it is sufficient for the moment to say that this coterie of young authors and artists consisted of seven members—of whom the most prominent were twenty-one-year-old William Holman Hunt, nineteen-year-old John Everett Millais, and twenty-year-old Dante Gabriel Rossetti—who banded together under the originally cryptic initials of the P. R. B. in opposition to what they saw as the misguided conventionality of contemporary British art. These young men united in support of, as William Michael Rossetti later expressed it, the attentive “study [of] Nature” and a “sympath[y] with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learnt by rote” (qtd. in Lambourne 231). Although—or perhaps because—the three central members of the group met due to their simultaneous enrolment in the Royal Academy Schools, the P. R. B. deliberately set itself against the conventional training of the Royal Academy, which, as I discuss in Chapter Three, was very much carried on “by rote” and relied on the

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6 See, for example, Wood 9-14, Lambourne 231-2, Collins and Rundle 506, and Lang xi-xii.

7 The other four members of the Brotherhood were James Collinson (1825-1881), who continued his career as an artist after resigning from the P. R. B. in 1850; William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919), who went on to become a prominent art critic and historian of the P. R. B.; Frederic George Stephens (1828-1907), who gave up his early efforts at painting and, instead, became, like William Michael Rossetti, an influential art critic; and Thomas Woolner (1825-1892), a sculptor; and. For brief accounts of the lives of all of the Pre-Raphaelites and their associates, see Prettejohn 278-85.
lionization of classical statuary and conservative artists like Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose work the Pre-Raphaelites largely—and famously—rejected. The Pre-Raphaelites’ insistence on painting from—and, often, in—nature and their attempts to push British art away from its reliance on conventions had a significant impact on later British artists; in fact, in her important 2000 study *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that “Pre-Raphaelite art should be studied alongside, and on equal terms with, the greatest art of the period we conventionally designate ‘modern’” (9) and goes on to discuss the way in which the group’s members both “chang[ed] the immediate direction of English art . . . [and] establish[ed] their fame for posterity” (40).

While most accounts of the P. R. B. as a whole focus on its relationship to the Victorian art world, some members of the group also had a marked impact on Victorian literature, as well. Most famously, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s publication of *Poems* (1870), which Rossetti scholar Jerome McGann describes as “a stunning success” (*Collected xx*), established his fame as an author as well as an artist, but, exactly twenty years prior to this, the Pre-Raphaelites also collaborated on a periodical that they called *The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art*, a title which clearly demonstrates the group’s commitment to a renovation of conventions in literature as well as in art.

Despite the large influence that the P. R. B. had on later artists and writers, the movement was actually quite short-lived; in November 1853, just five years after the establishment of the Brotherhood, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote sadly to his sister Christina Rossetti that “the whole Round Table is dissolved” (qtd. in des Cars 58). Yet, in spite of the transience of the original group, Rossetti, Hunt, and Millais all went on to
have successful and prolific careers as artists and, in the cases of Rossetti—and, to a lesser extent, Hunt—as writers. While the Pre-Raphaelites’ reputations declined among critics of art and literature in the twentieth century, much recent work has reasserted the group’s centrality to nineteenth-century culture. In fact, in the last few years, apart from studies like Prettejohn’s *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* and Tim Barringer’s 1998 *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, a number of books, such as Sophia Andres’s 2004 *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel* and Elizabeth K. Helsinger’s 2008 *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts*, have attempted both to link the Pre-Raphaelites to and demonstrate their influence on Victorian culture. However, despite this sustained scholarly focus on the Pre-Raphaelites and in spite of the fact that, as I showed earlier, the study of Orientalism has figured so prominently in critiques of Victorian art and literature, no study has yet been devoted to an in-depth discussion of Orientalism and the work of the Pre-Raphaelites.

This critical gap in Pre-Raphaelite scholarship is particularly surprising when we consider the centrality of representations of the Middle East to the early work of the Pre-Raphaelites, including Rossetti’s first two exhibited oil paintings *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1850) and one of Millais’s most well-known early works *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1850). Moreover, in 1850, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote one of the longest poems of his career, “The Burden of Nineveh,” which centres on the speaker’s encounter with a large statue of an Assyrian winged bull that had recently made headlines upon being brought to the British Museum in the fall of 1850. Finally, it is commonly acknowledged by both the Pre-Raphaelites’ contemporaries and later critics that one factor that contributed to the demise of the
P. R. B. was Hunt’s departure for Egypt and the Holy Land in 1854 (des Cars 58). Hunt remained in the Middle East—where he executed a number of watercolours and sketches, completed one oil painting, and began work on three others—for two full years, and this journey came to mark a defining moment in his career that he describes in great detail in his 1905 memoir Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. As these few examples demonstrate, references to and representations of the Middle East abound in the works of various members of the P. R. B. Yet, while a number of articles have touched on the representation of the Middle East in particular works by Rossetti and Hunt, no scholar has written a detailed investigation of the ways in which Middle Eastern themes and motifs unite much of the early work of the P. R. B. and relate to its members’ concerns and anxieties about artistic authority and tradition, the nature and achievability of realism, and issues of masculinity, identity, and self-representation.

This study, which examines four separate and major instances of representations of the Middle East in the early work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt aims to rectify this unaccountable scholarly oversight both by challenging readings of these works that would attempt, in the words of O’Connor, to locate them as simple “instance[s] of widespread imperialist sentiment” (218) and by linking the various and multivalent strategies that these two figures employ in their depictions of the Middle East to their larger concerns about the roles of art and literature and the functions of the artist and author, all of which lie at the heart of the establishment of the P. R. B.

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As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, Christina Rossetti also suggests in an 1853 sonnet entitled “The P. R. B.” that the group has disbanded because “Hunt is yearning for the land of Cheops” (line 3).

For a series of discussions of Rossetti’s Orientalist poem “The Burden of Nineveh,” see Andrew M. Stauffer’s three recent articles. References to Orientalist elements in Hunt’s work are much more varied. See, for example, Barringer, Reading 118-32; Bendiner, “Scapegoat”; Boime; Bronkhurst, Catalogue passim; Bronkhurst, “Interesting”; Bronkhurst, “Passion”; Pointon; and Stevens, Orientalists 186-94.
In choosing to focus on the work of Hunt and Rossetti, I also depart in another way from previous scholarly approaches to these two figures, which have always tended to discuss them either as individuals with little in common or as members—along with five other men—of the P. R. B. On a very superficial level, there may seem to be few similarities between the work of Hunt, the nineteenth century’s most renowned English religious artist, and Rossetti, whose early religious paintings were often condemned by critics and whose later paintings and poetry were accused of vulgar sensuality. Yet much may be gained from a joint study of these two men. Each of them, unlike other members of the Brotherhood, became known as artists and authors during their lifetimes, and both of them made use in their early work of the Middle East as a repository for and reflection of the ambiguities and ambivalences of their own positions as avant-garde artists and authors.

This study utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to the work of Rossetti and Hunt by offering detailed examinations of the poetry, prose, unpublished correspondence and journals, sketches, watercolours, and oil paintings that they produced prior to 1856. In doing so, my research offers not only critical readings of some lesser known works—like the sketches that young Rossetti completed in 1839-40, eight years prior to the founding of the P. R. B., and Hunt’s 1854 Egyptian watercolours, which are often overshadowed by the artist’s larger and more famous Middle Eastern paintings—but also demonstrates the necessity of refusing to rely on traditional conceptions of Rossetti as a creator of ethereal artwork not grounded in pressing contemporary concerns or of Hunt as a staunchly imperial “artist/explorer” (Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 17). Indeed, the widely varying depictions of and reactions to the Middle East that Rossetti and Hunt created
between 1835 and 1856 demonstrate the extent to which questions of the function of art and literature and of the role of the author and artist were central to these two figures not just at the high-point of the P. R. B. between 1848 and 1853 but much earlier and later in their careers, as well.

In Chapter Two, I begin to trace these concerns in the *oeuvre* of Dante Gabriel Rossetti through an examination of some of the author-artist’s juvenilia, which, like much other juvenilia, has been dismissed up to this point as simplistic and unworthy of serious critical attention. Yet the position of juvenilia within literary studies has recently undergone a significant re-evaluation, and using the approaches that have been developed by a variety of critics who are now directing attention towards the study of literature by children, I examine a number of early works by Rossetti that make use of Middle Eastern settings and narratives. These works—an 1835 fragmentary play based on the story of Aladdin, an 1839 sketch of the conversion of Jesus’s apostle Simon Peter in his fishing boat, and an 1840 series of illustrations of tales from the *Arabian Nights*—reveal the earliest sources that informed Rossetti’s engagement with the Middle East in his later work and, I argue, are also worthy of more detailed examination for the way in which they avoid the more typical exoticization of the Middle East. Instead, this text and these drawings make use of the region as a platform from which to work out the interplay between narrative and image, the conceptualization of the role of the author and artist, and the use of realistically depicted elements in religious painting, all of which are issues that are central to Rossetti’s later career as a Pre-Raphaelite brother.

Chapter Three continues the preceding section’s attempt to recover and reassess a largely ignored segment of Rossetti’s work by centering on a discussion of the 1850
version of Rossetti’s long poem “The Burden of Nineveh.” While this poem is frequently anthologized in collected editions of Rossetti’s poetry and in larger anthologies of Victorian literature, few critics take into account the fact that the version of the poem that appears in print is a second edition of the text, which was published in 1870 and differs substantially from the first version of “Burden,” which Rossetti wrote in 1850 and published in 1856. This earlier version offers a far more biting commentary on British society, and, most importantly for my purposes, the 1850 edition of the poem, which describes the arrival of an ancient Assyrian statue in London, both implicitly and explicitly links the artifact to the P. R. B. and uses it as a means of critiquing the artistic ideals embraced by the Royal Academy—whose school Rossetti, Millais, and Hunt all attended—and its sister institution the British Museum. This chapter is devoted to drawing out the links between Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s artistic ideals at this time and his representation of the Assyrian statue of the “wingèd beast from Nineveh” (“Burden” line 10).

In Chapter Four, my discussion shifts to William Holman Hunt and his first visit to the Holy Land in 1854-6. This period of the artist’s life became, both in Hunt’s own accounts and later scholarly discussions of him, a pivotal point in his career, but, with few exceptions, later critical work tends to rely on the lengthy narrative of his travels that Hunt included in his autobiography, Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This chapter destabilizes scholarly dependence on Hunt’s published account by offering a detailed examination of the unpublished letters and private diaries that Hunt maintained throughout this portion of his travels. By setting the private representation of events against the public version that sought to establish the artist as the
definitive British painter of religious realism at the end of his long career, I argue that Hunt was not actually “the paradigm of the Orientalist explorer-adventurer-author characterized by Edward Said” (Boime 94), which is the perspective adopted in his memoir, but was in fact a man faced with crippling insecurities about the plausibility of applying Pre-Raphaelite ideals to biblical paintings, the construction of Englishness and masculinity, the significance of Christianity, and the impossibility of true realism in artistic representation. An awareness of all of these uncertainties about the nature of art, artistic and religious ideals, and selfhood contributes to a new understanding of Hunt’s career that sets aside common impressions of the artist’s intense religiosity and supposedly lifelong desire to paint biblical works in the Holy Land and instead highlights the extent to which this re-presentation of the artist stems from a deliberate attempt on Hunt’s part to reduce the complex and unsettling experiences of his time in the Holy Land to a single cohesive narrative.

As the preceding account of the various sections of this study suggests, a major subtext of all of these varied topics is the concept of rewriting. In later accounts of his brother’s career, William Michael Rossetti consistently attempted to downplay and elide the significance of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s juvenilia in order to create a linear narrative of the author-artist’s career, while Rossetti himself reworked “The Burden of Nineveh” and Hunt reformulated his Holy Land letters and diaries into his 1905 memoir. This theme of rewriting—and of writing elements out of a narrative—is particularly important to the final chapter of this study, which examines the often overlooked three months that Hunt spent in Egypt in 1854 prior to his visit to the Holy Land. Building on the foundations of Chapter Four, this chapter examines the roots of the uncertainties and
ambivalences that Hunt expresses in the Holy Land and argues that these issues are not exclusive to Hunt’s frequently mythologized time in Palestine but instead began months earlier in Egypt, the nation in which Hunt’s first experiences of living and working in the Middle East occurred. Again using Hunt’s unpublished letters, I demonstrate how his determined adoption of the stance of “the anti-tourist tourist,” a term developed in 2001 by postcolonial critic Graham Huggan (196), shapes his perspectives on Egypt and, as I show in the latter part of this chapter, filters into the numerous watercolours, sketches, and oil paintings that Hunt began during this portion of his trip, which are deserving of more discussion than they have heretofore received since they represent the first artworks that Hunt created in the Middle East.

Finally, in a brief conclusion, I attempt to move beyond my previous—and necessarily bifurcated—examination of the earlier periods of Rossetti’s and Hunt’s careers and bring the awareness of the issues of artistic and self-representation engendered by the preceding chapters to bear on a discussion of two roughly contemporary later paintings by Rossetti and Hunt: *The Beloved* (1866)\(^\text{10}\) and *The Shadow of Death* (1873).\(^\text{11}\) Both of these paintings, which Rossetti and Hunt completed as mature artists years after the disbanding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, depict biblical subjects, but these two very different interpretations of Old- and New-Testament themes build on the relationship to the Middle East that is evident in the two author-artists’ earlier works while also demonstrating the extent to which the issues of realism, representation, and selfhood, which their depictions of the region allowed the artists to

\(^\text{10}\) This painting is also sometimes referred to as *The Bride*. It was substantially reworked by Rossetti in 1873 (Surtees 105; Parris, *Pre-Raphaelites* 211).

\(^\text{11}\) There are three versions of this painting in existence; the largest one, which is life-sized and was exhibited in 1873 (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 225-6), represents “the definitive treatment of the subject” (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 221).
explore around the time of their direct involvement with the P. R. B., continued to be central to the works that they completed later in their careers.
Chapter Two

“CHILDISH PLAYS”: THE PERSONAL USES OF ORIENTALISM IN DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI’S JUVENILIA

The reputation of Dante Gabriel Rossetti that currently prevails rests in a significant part upon a single key moment of the writer and artist’s career: the quasi-mythological founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848. It is not difficult to see why this defining moment, with its motifs of youthful rebellion, idealism, and Romantic belief in the power of art, has so captured the imagination of historians and critics since the return of the Pre-Raphaelites to scholarly discussion in the middle of the last century, but this construction of the events surrounding the establishment of the Brotherhood has also coloured our understanding of Rossetti himself. Indeed, in examinations of the early years of the Brotherhood, which began when Rossetti was twenty and had disbanded by the time he was twenty-five, the young poet-artist is often presented as something of a second-generation Romantic, a youthful bohemian challenging the world of English art from within its very confines.

William Holman Hunt, despite his own later disagreements with his former friend and colleague, depicts the young Rossetti in such a light. In Hunt’s often-quoted

12 Art historian Tim Barringer sets the time of this “major revival of Pre-Raphaelitism” in the 1960s (Reading 17), as do Quentin Bell (14) and art collector Jeremy Maas (“Personal” 233).
13 Hunt’s 1905 memoir makes reference to their various professional disagreements in numerous places. See, for instance, 2: 143, 363-4 and 420. It is important to note here that all of the citations of Hunt’s autobiography throughout this chapter and the subsequent ones refer to the 1905 version of Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood rather than the expanded 1913 edition of the book. I have chosen to use the earlier version of the text since questions have been raised about the reliability of the later edition, which was edited after the artist’s death in 1910 by Hunt’s second wife (Amor 273), who was notorious for her desire to secure her husband’s artistic and personal reputation. In making this decision, I am following in the footsteps of such scholars as art historians Elizabeth Prettejohn (23, 265) and Julie Codell (Victorian 138-41), both of whom rely exclusively on the earlier version of the memoir.
portrait of the twenty-year-old artist in his autobiography, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, he suggests some of the differences between Rossetti and the more typical students of the Royal Academy by emphasizing his “decidedly Southern . . . aspect,” “dreaming eyes,” “singularity of gait,” and sartorial “careless[ness]” (1: 144-5). With these words, Hunt highlights the bohemian appearance of his colleague, but Hunt also goes on to further this impression of Rossetti’s difference from those around him by declaring that he “delighted most in those poems for which the world then had shown but little appreciation” (1: 144-5). With his references to young Rossetti’s well-known predilection for such authors, unappreciated during this period, as Browning and Poe (1: 145-6), Hunt also reminds the reader just how *avant-garde* his friend was at the time of their meeting in 1848, thereby further contributing to his depiction of Rossetti as an unconventional young man about to jar the worlds of English art and poetry.

More recent accounts of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites also tend to use this easily romanticized period of the beginning of the Brotherhood as their launching point for discussions of Rossetti himself. For example, works like Carolyn Hares-Stryker’s *An Anthology of Pre-Raphaelite Writings* and Elizabeth Prettejohn’s *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* leave no space to discuss what Rossetti—or any of the other Pre-Raphaelites, for that matter—did prior to the founding of the group in the autumn of 1848. Even texts that are more centred on Rossetti himself overlook this formative pre-1848 period.

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14 Hares-Stryker’s anthology, which is roughly divided into decades beginning with 1848-59, does not include any of the Pre-Raphaelites’ pre-1848 work, and the only event prior to the actual founding of the Brotherhood that it mentions is the meeting of Hunt and John Everett Millais in 1843 (17). While Prettejohn’s *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* differs from Hares-Stryker’s anthology in that it contains a segment in the first chapter entitled “Prehistory” (23-34), this section also begins with the meeting of Hunt and Millais, which Prettejohn places in 1844 (23).
For instance, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* by Lisa Tickner, one of the more recent publications about the artist, devotes only three paragraphs to his life prior to the foundation of the P. R. B. (8-9), and another book with the same title, which was published to accompany the most recent retrospective exhibition of Rossetti’s career at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 2003, makes little reference to the numerous sketches that Rossetti created prior to the time he met John Everett Millais and Hunt. Indeed, although the exhibition catalogue contains a section entitled “Early Work to Pre-Raphaelitism,” the earliest work included in the exhibit is a sketch based on Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven” from 1846 (Treuherz, Prettejohn, and Becker 142). Not only does the choice of this drawing as the earliest work on display re-emphasize the standard perception of Rossetti’s youthful avant-gardism, but, more importantly, it also leaps over a significant segment of the artist’s early work, including his earliest completed extant drawing, which was created twelve to fourteen years before “The Raven.”

This emphasis on the period surrounding the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as the starting point of Rossetti’s career does, of course, run the risk of suggesting that Rossetti—and his Pre-Raphaelite brethren—arrived at the Royal Academy Schools, the institution where they met one another, with their ideals fully formed. Moreover, even more importantly, such accounts, while alluding to the Brothers’ disdain for such academic fixtures as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Raphael, largely overlook what Rossetti and the others considered to be more positive influences on their earlier work. If one, in reading these accounts, wonders what kind of artwork and texts

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15 This brief section does little more than outline Rossetti’s family history and name the art school that he attended prior to becoming a student at the Royal Academy.
16 In *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters with a Memoir*, William Michael Rossetti, the artist’s brother, states that Dante Gabriel Rossetti drew this illustration of his rocking-horse between 1832 and 1834, when he was only four or five years old (1: 42-3).
Rossetti, Millais, and Hunt—the three most prominent of the seven Brothers—admired and emulated prior to 1848, a paucity of information is suddenly encountered. Scattered references to early inclinations and attempts can be found in the large number of memoirs and published letters and diaries of the Pre-Raphaelites, but little scholarly energy has been spent in trying to establish some discussion of the education in art and literature that these painters received before their enrollment in the Royal Academy and how these early introductions may have influenced their later work.

Of course, an attempt to investigate the early influences on such diverse figures as Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti would be a huge undertaking that is beyond the scope of this project; instead, this chapter focuses solely on the juvenilia of Dante Gabriel Rossetti that he created between 1835, when he was seven years old, and 1842, when he began formal art training in anticipation of his entrance into the Royal Academy Schools (Marsh, *Painter* 10). More specifically, this discussion will examine the impact that texts and illustrations with Middle Eastern settings and motifs—in particular, John Martin and Richard Westall’s *Illustrations of the Bible* and Antoine Galland’s and Edward William Lane’s famous translations of the *Arabian Nights*—had on Rossetti’s childhood sketches and first literary attempts. While much of Rossetti’s early work is reproduced in Virginia Surtees’s indispensable *catalogue raisonné* of Rossetti’s artwork, William Fredeman’s *A Rossetti Cabinet*,17 and Jerome McGann’s increasingly comprehensive online Rossetti Archive, the artist’s juvenilia has garnered virtually no critical discussion. However, these sketches and narratives represent an alternative point of entry into Rossetti’s career that allows us to begin our understanding of his work not in 1848, the year of the

17 Fredeman’s *A Rossetti Cabinet* was published as a special issue of *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Studies* in 1989. Please consult the Works Cited list for full publication information.
founding of the P. R. B., but over a decade earlier, when the young artist began to
demonstrate the impact that the texts and illustrations that he admired as a child would
have on his career.

Before continuing with a discussion of the artwork and texts that Rossetti
produced as a child, it is essential to place this examination within the larger framework
of the reputation of juvenilia as a whole. The term *juvenilia* itself is a somewhat vague
category. The *OED* defines it simply as “[l]iterary or artistic works produced in the
author’s youth,” but the word has also often taken on a more pejorative sense as a
reference to the hopelessly unsophisticated scribblings—whether literary or artistic—of
an immature mind. Indeed, as Christine Alexander rightly notes, many figures have
sought to distance themselves from their own juvenilia (“Defining” 73), and authors as
diverse as Thomas Babington Macaulay (Randall x), Robert Browning (Alexander,
“Defining” 74), Charlotte Brontë (Robertson 291-2), and even Dante Gabriel Rossetti
himself19 have attempted to ensure through various means that the work that they created
as children and young adults did not appear before the public.20

18 For a more detailed discussion of the problematic nature of this term, see Christine Alexander’s seminal
article “Defining and Representing Literary Juvenilia,” to which this segment of my work is indebted.
19 According to William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti feared that *Sir Hugh the Heron*, a poetic
chivalric romance that he began writing in 1841 and had privately published by his grandfather two years
later, would harm his reputation or make him the subject of ridicule. He asked William Michael Rossetti
“somewhere towards 1875” (W. Rossetti, *Family-Letters* 1: 84) to destroy the remaining copies and was
apparently annoyed that a copy of the text remained in the British Museum Library. He wrote in a note
circa 1881 that “there is no knowing what fool may some day foist the absurd trash into print as a
20 Although the examples cited here and in Alexander deal with literary juvenilia, the same assumption and
concerns arise in treatments of artistic juvenilia, as well. The childhood creations of an artist are rarely
mentioned, except in the context of an individual *catalogue raisonné*. Moreover, when artistic juvenilia is
discussed, it is frequently exhibited as a mere curiosity and is often described in the same condescending
vocabulary used to explain its literary counterparts. For example, in Jill Lever’s *Catalogue of the Drawings
of George Dance the Younger (1741-1825) and of George Dance the Elder (1695-1768)*, the early plans of
the younger architect are frequently described as “uncertain,” “naïve,” “awkward,” and “clumsy.” Thus, I
would argue that Alexander’s observations about literary juvenilia are equally applicable to pictorial
representations created in childhood.
Until quite recently, literary scholars were content to abide by the judgments of writers such as these and distance adult authors and their canonical texts from the works of their childhood. In their introduction to *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, the only book-length study of juvenilia as a literary genre, Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster describe writing by children as “a category of literature that has been largely neglected” (1). Indeed, it is only within the last fifteen years that scholars have realized the significance of such well-known works of juvenilia as the Brontë siblings’ Gondal and Angria chronicles and Jane Austen’s narratives *Catharine*, *Love and Freindship* [sic], and *The History of England*.

While the recognition of texts such as these has helped to create a space for some works of juvenilia within scholarly discussions of nineteenth-century literature, critics who are interested in juvenilia as a literary genre have also raised concerns about the ways in which these texts are often treated. In the article “Changing Models of Juvenilia: Apprenticeship or Play?,” Leslie Robertson points out that, while the study of juvenilia is, happily, an “emerging field” (291), those who concern themselves with the writing—and, by extension, I would argue, the art—of children need to be careful to avoid assumptions about these works that implicitly denigrate their importance as individual objects and as segments of the larger *oeuvre* of an author or artist. Robertson points, in particular, to what she labels the “apprenticeship model” of understanding a child’s work, in which the text is considered as “simply the lead-in to the later work” (292), or, in other words, the first tottering steps toward an idea that is only fully realized in an author’s or artist’s adult work.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{21}\) Robertson’s criticism of the “apprenticeship model” as a means of approaching juvenilia finds a parallel, albeit in a different context, in Dominick LaCapra’s *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts,*
This type of evaluation is evident in a number of anthologies of children’s writing and art that have been published since the 1980s. For instance, the title of Brilliant Beginnings: The Youthful Work of Great Artists, Writers, and Composers alerts the reader to the use of the apprenticeship model as an underlying assumption (de Ayala and Guéno), and, in an anthology of English poets’ juvenilia entitled First Lines: Poems Written in Youth, from Herbert to Heaney, Jon Stallworthy also embraces this model, describing the works included in the volume as “poems of childhood and adolescence by fifty-eight hands that were later to write many of the finest poems in the English language” (9).

In outlining the difficulties imposed by this overly simplistic apprenticeship model, Robertson suggests what she calls the “play model” as a more sophisticated perspective on juvenilia. This model, while still allowing “the scholar to look back to the juvenilia for the seeds of what was to come” (293), places greater emphasis on a young person’s narrative or artwork as an independent object to be analyzed on its own terms, rather than as a basic precursor to a more complex work. Moreover, the “play model” allows us to examine how young authors and artists achieve “‘mastery of their environment’” (Robertson 295) by both appropriating and inverting the conventions of their chosen genre, thereby asserting, in a manner traditionally attributed only to adults, their own place within a literary or artistic milieu. Indeed, Robertson’s discussion notes

Language. LaCapra argues that two of the most common ways of viewing a writer’s corpus—either as a pattern of “continuity among texts (“linear development”)” or as a process of “dialectical synthesis ([in which] the later stage raises the earlier one to a higher level of insight)”—oversimplify our understanding of both the writer’s individual works and his or her oeuvre as a whole (55). Although LaCapra’s focus here is not explicitly upon juvenilia, his observations highlight the extent to which, as Robertson argues, childhood art and writing is frequently considered significant only in its relation to the artist’s or author’s later creations.

Robertson borrows this phrase from developmental psychologist Elizabeth Hrncir.
that it is often in the works produced in childhood that authors—and painters—consider
themselves for the first time as “developing professional writers” (293) and artists.

Such is certainly the case with Rossetti, who was clearly “playing” at being a professional author-artist by the age of seven, when he inscribed on the title page of his own dramatic retelling of the story of Aladdin the words “by Gabriel Rossetti / Painter of Playpictures [sic]” (Aladdin 24). This description of himself in the context of a literary work hints at Rossetti’s later adoption of the roles of both painter and poet, but, in fact, he was not alone in attempting to appropriate such adult roles for himself. In a letter written in 1871 to his friend Anne Gilchrist, William Michael Rossetti recalls, “In Gabriel’s case . . . the resolve to be a painter . . . came very early: I suppose he was barely 6 or 7 [sic] when this was definitely regarded, all through the family, as almost a fixed and certain prospect” (Selected Letters 269). Similarly, William Michael Rossetti reminisces in his 1895 memoir Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters with a Memoir that, “[h]aving once begun, Dante never dropped this notion of drawing . . .; and I cannot remember any date at which it was not understood in the family that ‘Gabriel meant to be a painter” (1: 43).

Perhaps it was this belief in her son’s prospects that led the Rossettis’ mother, Frances Polidori Rossetti, to preserve a significant number of his early writings and artworks. In a letter to his mother written in 1873, Dante Gabriel Rossetti affectionately describes her as “a great keeper of family relics” and proceeds to inquire whether she has kept certain early poems of his (Correspondence 6: 147). Virginia Surtees’s comprehensive catalogue lists a number of these early works, which were preserved by Mrs. Rossetti, including the sketch of the rocking-horse that is commonly believed to be

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23 William Michael Rossetti’s memoir will hereafter be referred to as Family-Letters.
Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s earliest existing work (1). Through the combined efforts of Frances and William Michael Rossetti, who became the family’s second-generation archivist, a significant number of other works have been preserved, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “earliest original literary work” (Marsh, Painter 5), a drama entitled The Slave, which he wrote in 1835; a series of illustrations that he made for his sister Maria depicting events from The Iliad in 1840 (Surtees 1); a deck of playing cards that he also designed in 1840 (Surtees 1); a large number of illustrations of texts such as Goethe’s Faust, Frédéric Soulié’s Les Mémoires du diable, Shakespeare’s plays, and a poem by his own father; and, most significantly for my own purposes, nineteen drawings of events and characters from the Arabian Nights and three illustrations of figures of the Old and New Testaments. From this brief and selective description of Rossetti’s juvenilia, it is clear that—even at an early age—he had a wide range of influences on his work and that these varied texts and illustrations had a significant impact on his youthful conception of what it means to become an author or artist.

In William Michael Rossetti’s Family-Letters, which is an indispensable source of information on Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s youth, the artist’s brother describes over the course of a few pages his brother’s early education and broad reading preferences, noting that

[these books—Shakespeare, Faust, Walter] Scott, and the Arabian Nights—and, along with these, [Thomas] Keightley’s Fairy Mythology . . . , Monk Lewis’s verse-collection Tales of Wonder . . . , and the stirring ballad of Chevy Chase—may certainly be regarded as the staple and the fine fleur of what Dante Rossetti reveled in up to the close of his tenth year or thereabouts. (1: 60)

24 For a detailed list of these and other juvenile drawings, see Surtees 1-4; Surtees also reproduces some of the illustrations in the second volume of her catalogue. Fredeman’s A Rossetti Cabinet discusses and reproduces other pieces of juvenilia not included in Surtees, and, of course, the online Rossetti Archive contains a chronological listing of all of Rossetti’s drawings and paintings (http://www.rossettiarchive.org/racs/pictures.chrono.rac.html).
The Rossetti children first encountered many of these texts in illustrated editions; indeed, William Michael Rossetti recalls “that the very first book my brother took to with strong personal zest was Shakespear’s Hamlet—i.e., certain scenes of Hamlet, giving a fairly complete idea of the story, which were printed to accompany the outlines to that tragedy engraved after the then universally celebrated German artist, Retzsch” (Family-Letters 1: 58). In the most general terms, illustrated editions of texts such as this one, which Dante Gabriel Rossetti first encountered at the age of four or five (W. Rossetti, Family-Letters 1: 58), emphasize the complementary nature of text and drawing, and Rossetti’s familiarity with illustrated versions of Shakespeare, Goethe, the Arabian Nights, and the Bible may perhaps have contributed to the tendency that he exhibited throughout his career of creating both poems to accompany pictures and paintings that serve as illustrations of textual events. More specifically, however, the pared-down outline engravings produced by such artists as Retzsch, whom William Michael Rossetti specifically mentions, became the basis for some of Rossetti’s earliest forays into illustration.

For William Michael Rossetti’s discussion of these texts and illustrations, see Family-Letters 1: 58-62. According to art historian William Vaughan, the work of Friedrich August Moritz Retzsch (1779-1857) was enormously popular in England throughout much of the nineteenth century (123). At the time of Rossetti’s childhood, Retzsch was most well known for his illustrations of “plays and poems by Goethe, Schiller, . . . and Shakespeare” (Vaughan 123); his designs belong to the genre of Umrissen (Buchanan-Brown 84) or outline engravings, which are printed illustrations based on original “drawing[s] in which an object is represented by contour lines only, without shading, etc.” (“Outline”). Retzsch published outline engravings of a number of Shakespeare’s plays between 1828 and 1846 and also illustrated Faust, another favourite text of Rossetti’s. For excellent summaries of Retzsch’s work, see Vaughan’s chapter “F. A. M. Retzsch and the Outline Style” in German Romanticism and English Art (123-54) and Buchanan-Brown 87-93. Rossetti’s many depictions of characters and incidents from The Divine Comedy are an obvious example of this latter aspect of his work, while both the painting entitled The Girlhood of Mary Virgin (exhibited 1849) and the accompanying poems, “Mary’s Girlhood (For a Picture),” represent one instance of his use of a literary genre—in this case, the sonnet—to elaborate on the symbolism of an image.
In *German Romanticism and English Art*, Vaughan explicitly refers to the influence of Retzsch’s outlines on Rossetti as “objects of study and inspiration” (123), and he goes on to note briefly that Rossetti, “[h]aving known Retzsch’s *Faust* from childhood, . . . made use of themes in these outlines in both his early drawings and writings” (150). While Vaughan’s statement focuses on the prevalence of Faustian storylines and motifs in Rossetti’s juvenilia, it overlooks the fact that the German artist’s impact on his younger colleague is evident in a number of other early illustrations created by Rossetti that are not thematically related to the story of Faust. Indeed, some of Rossetti’s earliest illustrations are explicitly linked by the young artist to Retzsch’s outlines; on a sheet containing five small figures depicting characters from *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, Rossetti inscribed the words “from Retzsch” at the top and carefully recorded the series and plate numbers of the original illustrations (Fredeman, *Cabinet* plate 75). These Shakespearean figures, which were drawn when Rossetti was about eight years old, are, as Fredeman notes, “either copied directly from or inspired by Moritz Retzsch” (*Cabinet* 11), for their costumes, poses, and gestures are represented in a more sophisticated fashion than in other Shakespearean illustrations that Rossetti executed around the same time.\(^{28}\)

However, Retzsch’s impact on Rossetti’s early work extends well beyond such direct and obvious influence. The German artist’s characteristically sparse outline engravings are distinguished by two traits: first, a marked emphasis on the dramatic moments of the narrative being illustrated (Vaughan 125, 135) and, second, the manner in which the lines of the central figures are “thicken[ed] and modulate[d] . . . , producing an effect of slight relief, and at the same time drawing attention to the dramatic potential of

\(^{28}\) See, for example, the depiction of Falstaff that he also drew *circa* 1836 (Fredeman, *Cabinet* plate 75b).
these characteristics rightly highlight the fact that Retzsch’s outlines place all of their emphasis on the movement of two or three central figures and, as the name of the genre to which they belong suggests, relegate background details like buildings to a few lines.

These elements of Retzsch’s engravings clearly influenced Rossetti’s own style of illustration. Among the drawings that Rossetti created to accompany his own narratives are two clear and original examples of his adoption of Retzsch’s techniques. First, the 1841 frontispiece sketch to accompany the original ballad “William and Marie,” both of which, according to Fredeman, Rossetti attempted unsuccessfully to publish in a magazine29 (Cabinet 12), offers perhaps the most striking similarities to the German artist’s work. In this illustration, the figures are positioned against a stark white background, and the only visible architectural detail in the entire frame is a rectangular flat surface meant to suggest the floor of the upper-story room from which the poem’s heroine is thrown to her death in “the moate which rolled beneath” (qtd. in Fredeman, Cabinet 12). As in Retzsch’s work, the lines that form the outlines of the figures are drawn heavily to distinguish them from their background and to increase the viewer’s sense of dramatic movement. Moreover, the characters are drawn relatively simply and partake of the general whiteness of the illustration; in contrast to the work of many prominent contemporary illustrators, like George Cruikshank and Phiz (George Hablot Browne),30 who both depend heavily on the use of crosshatching to create effects of light

29 Fredeman is uncertain as to whether the image was drawn in 1841 or 1843, but he argues that “[t]he date is . . . much more likely to be 1841” and offers a fairly lengthy explanation of the rationale behind his dating of the work (Cabinet 12). Critics, including William Michael Rossetti, are also unsure in which magazine Rossetti attempted to publish the poem and illustration, but Fredeman suggests that it was, in fact, Smallwood’s (Cabinet 12).

30 The work of Cruikshank (1792-1878), who drew over 2,000 prints and illustrated 850 books over the course of his long career (Buchanan-Brown 175), and Browne (1815-1882), who “is primarily remembered
and shadow, very few areas of intricately drawn dark lines appear either in Retzsch’s drawings or Rossetti’s ballad illustration. Similarly, Rossetti’s later illustration to his own unfinished early novel *Sorrentino*, which his brother recalls as being “in course of composition in August 1843” (*Family-Letters* 1: 103),31 when Dante Gabriel Rossetti was fifteen, mimics Retzsch’s emphasis on two figures brought out in relief against a sparsely-drawn background, and, although Rossetti incorporates cross-hatching to darken the figures’ clothing and suggest shadows on the floor, the overall effect is still one of whiteness.

I have already suggested that Rossetti’s familiarity with illustrated editions of various texts may have been an early influence on the young artist’s desire to combine illustration and narrative, but this notion is particularly significant to our understanding of Retzsch’s impact on Rossetti. The illustrations of the German artist were widely considered by his contemporaries to combine the best of the narrative and pictorial arts. Indeed, in her introduction to Retzsch’s *Fancies*, a collection of outline engravings that was published in England in 1835, Anna Jameson alludes to “her conception of Retzsch as a visual poet” (Vaughan 138) by declaring, “The pencil is to him what the pen is to other poets” (qtd. in Vaughan 138); similarly, when Retzsch died in 1857, the *Art Journal* echoed Jameson’s evaluation of the artist as a man occupying two disciplines by stating that Retzsch’s drawings have “a feeling of pure, natural poetry” (qtd. in Vaughan 139). This sense of Retzsch as both an artist and a poet, which was no doubt enhanced by

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30 as Dickens’s illustrator” (Buchanan-Brown 186), would have been familiar during this period to anyone who, like young Rossetti, was interested in textual illustration.

31 The ascription of this date to *Sorrentino* is upheld by a letter from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to his mother dated August 14, 1843, in which he mentions that he has finished “a third chapter” of “the romance,” which his family members, he says, consider his “chef-d’oeuvre” (*Correspondence* 1: 26). William Michael Rossetti believes that the partial text, which consisted of “some four or five chapters . . . , on the scale of an ordinary novel” was destroyed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*Family-Letters* 1: 103).
his decision to illustrate the dramatic events of so many literary texts, would probably
have engendered a great deal of admiration on the part of young Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
who, as his Retzschian drawings for “William and Marie” and Sorrentino suggest, made
such efforts during the early part of his life to work within both the literary and visual
spheres.

Moreover, although Retzsch, in particular, was constructed by his contemporaries
as something of a poet-artist, the notion that outline engraving as a genre “express[ed] in
visual terms . . . the emotions aroused by great works of literature” (Buchanan-Brown 84)
was also subscribed to by a number of critics and artists in the early nineteenth century.
Indeed, as Vaughan points out, an influential article that appeared in the Athenæum in
1799 described the entire genre as images that

  become almost like hieroglyphs, like those of the poet. The imagination is incited
to complete the picture and to continue to create independently according to the
stimulation it has received. . . . Just as the words of the poet are actually magic
formulae for life and beauty . . . so it appears to be true wizardry how, in a
successful outline, so much soul can dwell in a few delicate lines. (qtd. in
Vaughan 124-5)

Of course, Rossetti had obviously not read this evaluation of outline engraving when he
first encountered Retzsch’s illustrations of Hamlet; however, the Athenæum’s expression
of this widespread opinion of the genre—and of Retzsch as its most popular
practitioner—can help us to understand both why illustrations by Retzsch were admired
in the Rossetti household and, even more significantly, why the drawings of the German
artist intrigued Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose early interests in text and illustration were
both reflected in and fed by Retzsch’s work.

While these outline engravings clearly influenced Rossetti’s illustrative style
during this period before his involvement in focused art training, comparisons between
the work of professional artists like Retzsch, who was considered by British audiences to be the pre-eminent outline engraver of the first half of the nineteenth-century (Buchanan-Brown 87), and that of a young boy inspired by his work can be misleading in that they can easily lead to the denigration or even dismissal of Rossetti’s early work. Scholars who examine juvenilia and the influences upon it are particularly attuned to this risk, which has caused so much art and writing by children to be disregarded as merely derivative. It is for this very reason that Christine Alexander’s discussions of juvenilia distinguish between “simpl[e] copying” and “imitation” (“Survey” 17). Alexander argues in her essay “Defining and Representing Literary Juvenilia” that “[w]e are inclined to think of imitation as bad . . . because one of the meanings of ‘imitate’ is to copy, to reproduce” (77), and she suggests that such a simplistic view of imitation—as basic copying—can actually cause us to undervalue a great deal of juvenilia since “[i]mitation is a major characteristic of youthful writing” (77). Alexander proposes that, to combat this tendency, we become aware of the extent to which a young author—or artist—imitates his or her predecessors while bearing in mind the essential fact that, whereas “[m]ere copying . . . has a stultifying effect on the creative process, . . . [i]mitation, however, involves a creative process. To imitate is to follow the example of, to try to do something in the manner of something else. It involves reworking . . .” (“Defining” 77). With this distinction between copying and imitation, Alexander attempts to overcome the traditionally accepted notion of child authors and artists as passive receptors and regurgitators of adult conventions and culture and, instead, recognizes the possibility that children actively engage with particular issues and attempt to forge an identity for themselves and their work by deliberately placing themselves within such a traditional
framework while simultaneously attempting to mould its expectations to their own purposes.

In another essay, “Play and Apprenticeship: The Culture of Family Magazines,” Alexander points to such significant pieces of Victorian juvenilia as the Brontës’ imitation of *Blackwood’s* magazine and young Virginia Woolf’s periodical “The Hyde Park Gate News,” and she offers a re-evaluation of children’s art and writing that views such imitation of adult works not as derivative and unworthy of scholarly attention but as a virtually untapped literary genre that allows critics access to young creators’ “imaginative recreation of the adult world, their experimenting with different voices and styles, their rewriting of relationships in order to position and define the self” (32). All of these kinds of issues—appropriation, imitation, subversion, and creation of selfhood—are central to our understanding of more canonical texts, and Alexander’s argument asserts that the same critical concerns are raised by the work of authors and artists before they reach artistic (or even literal) maturity.

As we have already seen, this type of creative imitation—as opposed to simple copying—is evident in Rossetti’s use of some stylistic tendencies of Retzsch to illustrate his own original works, but such active “reworking,” to borrow Alexander’s word, is perhaps most strongly evident in the texts and images that Rossetti created in response to his reading of the *Arabian Nights*. The text and illustrations of the *Arabian Nights* can be considered one of the major contributors to Rossetti’s childhood impressions of the Middle East; in fact, as I have already mentioned, William Michael Rossetti recalls that this text was among his brother’s early favourites and goes on to note that Dante Gabriel Rossetti first read the collection of stories in an “old English translation” from the French
edition of Antoine Galland and, subsequently, in Edward William Lane’s “very different version” (Family-Letters 1: 60).

These two editions of the anthology of Middle Eastern tales known in Europe as the Arabian Nights are indeed quite disparate, and it is worth taking a few moments to discuss their publication history and central characteristics in some detail. According to Robert Irwin’s comprehensive account of the tales’ reception in Europe in The Arabian Nights: A Companion, France’s Antoine Galland was “the first European translator” of the stories told by the character of Scheherazade; his translations were published under the title Les Mille et une nuits between 1704 and 1717 (14-16). Like any translator, Galland had an agenda behind his work—to create a version of the tales acceptable to audiences assembled in eighteenth-century French salons, and he was determined to remove what he termed “the barbarous and the overly exotic” in order to make the text into a sophisticated mixture of “delight and edification” (qtd. in Irwin 19). Indeed, Galland was so determined to make his stories suitable to their intended audience that it seems that he actually fabricated (rather than translated) a number of the narratives that he incorporates into the collection (Irwin 17), including the tale of Aladdin (Parreiras-Horta 88), which has become, ironically, one of the most famous stories in the series. Moreover, Galland’s motivation is also apparent in many other places throughout the

32 It is a slightly complicated matter to decide upon a single name by which to refer to these stories, which are most commonly referred to now as the Arabian Nights. In Arabic, the collection of tales, which likely originated in its written form in ninth–century Persia and was supplemented at numerous points thereafter, is known as Alf Layla wa Layla, “a title meaning literally ‘the thousand nights and one night’” (Mack x). While Galland’s French version was entitled Les Mille et une nuits, the first translation into English of Galland’s text was called the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. Finally, Lane’s translation had as its full title The Thousand and One Nights, Commonly Called, in England, The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. According to Robert L. Mack, the editor of the only recent version of the first English translation of Galland, the collection of tales was “more commonly known in England throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [as] the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments” (ix). For the sake of clarity and brevity (and following in the path of Peter Caracciolo’s and Robert Irwin’s work on the subject), I have chosen to refer to the tales by their modern name, the Arabian Nights.
remaining stories, for as Luis Paulo Parreiras-Horta insightfully notes, Galland’s translation “adheres to French norms in passages pertaining to behaviour and character, architecture and gardening, furniture and interior decoration, standards of beauty and fashion, and the representation of love and the marvelous” (4). Thus, Galland’s text succeeds in its efforts to omit “the overly exotic” by arbitrarily transferring its tales of adventure, intrigue, and romance to a setting much more familiar and recognizable to its audience. The translator seems to have accurately gauged the desires of his countrymen, already whetted by the publication of Charles Perrault’s fairy tales in 1697 (Irwin 18), for narratives at once far removed historically and geographically and, at the same time, reflective of eighteenth-century France’s own culture and day-to-day existence. Indeed, Galland’s translation proved to be widely popular, and, partaking of the cultural exchange that characterized French-English relations throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it rapidly appeared in English in an “anonymous ‘Grub Street’ translation,” which was published in a series of twelve volumes between circa 1706 and 1721 and “circulated widely throughout the earliest years of the eighteenth century” (Mack i, xvi).

Thus, English readers first encountered the tales that comprise the Arabian Nights through the medium of a more-or-less direct translation of Galland’s fairy-tale version, and this “anonymous ‘Grub Street’ translation”—regardless of its own literary merits—had a marked influence on many English authors.33 Indeed, Mack perceptively remarks that

33 For a varied and detailed study of the impact of the Arabian Nights on English literary culture during this period (and afterward), see Peter L. Caracciolo’s The Arabian Nights in English Literature: Studies in the Reception of The Thousand and One Nights into British Culture.
bibliographer James Hanford put it, “could quote from memory phrases which must have come from his version and no other.” The shape the Nights assumed in the history of European literature is that first imprinted upon it by Antoine Galland. (xvi)

It seems that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was among this group described by Hanford for whom the earliest English translation of Galland became a kind of touchstone. When William Michael Rossetti recalls in Family-Letters that the first version of the Arabian Nights that his brother read as a child was “the old English translation after Galland,” his use of the phrases “old English” and “after Galland” points directly to the “anonymous ‘Grub Street’ translation” of 1706 to 1721, which, moreover, was the version of the tales that most English children read during this period (Alderson 83).

William Michael Rossetti’s account suggests that this first edition of the tales retained its hold on his brother’s imagination until the publication of the “very different version” of Edward William Lane, which was originally printed in monthly segments between 1838 and 1841 (Irwin 23), when Rossetti was between the ages of ten and thirteen.34 Lane, who was already well-known in England for his ethnographic work Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians,35 deliberately set out to write a translation of the Arabian Nights that was entirely distinct from those of Galland and his later English incarnations. As Parreiras-Horta notes, Lane resolved “to supersede or efface Galland’s romantic translation with a more realistic one” (85), and Lane makes his intention explicit in “The Translator’s Preface” of his edition by declaring,

34 The same text, with accompanying illustrations and notes, was later compiled into three volumes and published by Charles Knight and Co. in 1841 (under the aforementioned title of The Thousand and One Nights, Commonly Called, in England, The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments). Rossetti seems to have originally read Lane’s translation in its earlier, monthly incarnation since William Rossetti places his discussion of Lane’s text just prior to his summary of what his brother read “up to the close of his tenth year or thereabouts [i.e., 1838]” (Family-Letters 1: 60).
35 Manners and Customs is a three-volume text that was published by Lane in 1836 after two periods of residence in Egypt (between 1825 and 1828 and between 1833 and 1835 [Thompson]).
Galland has excessively *perverted* the work. His acquaintance with Arab manners and customs was insufficient to preserve him always from errors of the grossest description, and by the *style* of his version he has given to the whole a false character, thus sacrificing, in a great measure, what is most valuable in the original work,—I mean its minute accuracy with respect to those peculiarities which distinguish the Arabs from every other nation . . . . (1: viii)

As this portion of his self-justification suggests, Lane felt that he was qualified to translate and extensively annotate the stories because of his previous research and firsthand knowledge of the Middle East, and he repeatedly returns to references to these qualifications throughout the preface, and, indeed, throughout his careful and copious notes to the stories themselves. 36

Lane’s emphasis on ethnographic accuracy and his lengthy explanatory notes, which are, in some cases, longer than the tales they explicate, are considered by many critics to be the defining features of his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, but his version is also significant in the history of English adaptations of the tales for its inclusion, as the title page proudly notes, of “many hundred engravings on wood, from original designs by William Harvey.” Harvey is—and was—renowned as “the leading designer for wood-engraved book illustrations in the 1830s and 1840s” (Hodnett 126), and, by 1839, he had already created over 5,000 book illustrations (Muir 29-30). 37

Rare book collector Percy Muir, whose work *Victorian Illustrated Books* is considered a seminal text in discussions

36 However, despite the distance that Lane sought to place between his own work and that of Galland, he followed the example of his predecessor in one significant area: the expurgation of “such tales, anecdotes, &c. as are comparatively uninteresting or on any account objectionable” (1: xvii). Lane’s “prudishness” (Irwin 25) led him to write in the notes to Volume One that he omitted the section of tales from the forty-fourth to the one-hundred-and-forty-fifth night because “so much of it depends upon incidents of a most objectionable [i.e., sexual] nature . . .” (604). As Irwin rightly notes, Lane clearly intended his text to be suitable for “family reading” (Irwin 25), and the work was successful among contemporary critics. In fact, no less a critic than Leigh Hunt described the text as “beyond all doubt a most valuable, praiseworthy, painstaking, learned and delightful work; worthy to be received with honour and thanks by all lovers of the ‘Arabian Nights’ and to form an epoch in the history of popular Eastern literature” (qtd. in Irwin 25).

37 Harvey (1796-1886) remained popular until the 1860s and contributed to a broad range of texts, including *Punch* (1841-2), *The Illustrated London News* (1843-59) (Houfe 335), *Don Quixote* (1839) (Houfe 92), and *Robinson Crusoe* (1831) (Buchanan-Brown 164). For a selected bibliography of other works by Harvey, see Muir 53-4.
of this period of book illustration, describes Harvey’s work in the *Arabian Nights* as the artist’s “*magnum opus*” (53), perhaps, in part, because the text is so heavily illustrated, with about 600 illustrations (de Maré 36) spread among the three bound volumes.

Instead of the full-page illustrations that can be found in other early Victorian works, Harvey’s drawings tend to be no larger than a “half page or smaller” (Buchanan-Brown 166), and, with the exception of a handful of designs that function as page borders, the illustrations are mostly “vignettes, most of them head- and tailpieces” (Muir 31) to the stories and notes. However, despite their small size, Harvey’s engravings contributed significantly to the text’s popularity, a fact that was openly admitted by Lane himself (Muir 30). Indeed, in “The Translator’s Preface,” Lane implies his belief in the integral nature of the illustrations, declaring, “Many of the engravings which are so numerously interspersed in the present volume . . . will considerably assist to explain both the text and the notes” (1: xxi). To Lane, these illustrations serve not just as ornamentation but are also central to his aim of providing as much ethnographic detail as possible.

To this end, Lane, in a somewhat unusual fashion, had a significant amount of control over the illustrations that accompany his text. In his preface, he describes how he lent Middle Eastern clothing and accessories to Harvey “to ensure . . . accuracy,” and he also mentions the fact that Harvey not only had to “submit” his drafts of illustrations to Lane for “directions” and “corrections” but also was required to research his work by consulting books, drawings, “and various other sources” (1: xxi-xxii). Such intense scrutiny may have come as something of a surprise to Harvey, who was already such a renowned illustrator, but Lane seems to have been determined, in the words of Buchanan-
Brown, to temper Harvey’s inherent Romanticism with his own “authenticity” (166) and to use the illustrations as another means of disseminating his ethnographically inflected version of the Middle East to the work’s intended audience. Indeed, Lane’s copious notes frequently refer to Harvey’s illustrations as a means of reinforcing the facts that the textual apparatus provides. For instance, in the notes to the first chapter, Lane suggests that the drawings are more important than his notes themselves in providing a clear explanation of the customs and habits he attempts to describe in prose (1: 76), and it is evident that some of the illustrations, like that of a funeral procession in “The Story of Noor ed-Deen and Enees el-Jelees” (1: 444), have been carefully collated with Lane’s notes so that the illustration represents the various social groups described in Lane’s endnote (1: 481-2) in the exact order in which he discusses them, thereby serving as a visual cue to help the reader recall the scholarly information that accompanies the more fanciful tale.

Lane’s obsession with this notion of ethnographic accuracy, which is demonstrated in his translation of the Arabian Nights both by his fulsome notes and his rigorous supervision of Harvey’s illustrations, has earned him a reputation as an archetype of the nineteenth-century Orientalist scholar who wants, as Edward Said puts it, “to comment on, acquire, possess everything around [him]” (160). Indeed, Said devotes a number of pages in Orientalism to a discussion of Lane’s earlier work,

38 The audience that was targeted by Lane’s original publisher Charles Knight was quite a broad one. Knight intended the work to be accessible to “the more studious” members of the working class (Muir 11) and initially released the text and illustrations “in monthly parts at 1s apiece,” but the bound version of the tales that came out soon after “cost £4 4s” (Muir 3), a price that would have put the books out of the reach of many consumers.
39 Similar correspondences between textual details and illustrations are apparent throughout the work. See, for instance, in the first volume, the illustrations that visually depict information provided in various endnotes on pages 228 and 486, as well as the design “Descent of the Handkerchief” in “The Story of ‘Azeez and ‘Azeezeh” (537), which explicates the description of Middle Eastern handkerchiefs offered in a corresponding note (607).
Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, and he notes that the text’s “sheer, overpowering, monumental description” (162)—words that might just as easily be applied to the footnotes of Lane’s Arabian Nights—functions as a means of both disrupting the work’s narrative flow and demonstrating to the reader that only Lane himself as a singular European among a nation of Egyptians has the necessary “discipline and detachment” to marshal this seemingly endless stream of details into a unified educational account of contemporary Middle Eastern life (Said 162). If we keep in mind Said’s explanation of the use of detail in Manners and Customs, we can see that the copious notes in Lane’s version of the Arabian Nights may serve a similar purpose. Lane uses superscript numbers to alert readers to the existence of each note, and, by constantly interrupting their progress through each narrative by suggesting that there is additional background information that is necessary to their full understanding of the tale, Lane both reinforces his own authority as a cultural “expert” and, more importantly, subtly re-emphasizes the distance that exists between the world of his readers and that of the romantic, adventurous heroes and heroines with which the Arabian Nights is replete. Lane’s notes suggest that readers who live in England in the 1830s need a kind of mediator to help them to understand the fictional material that they encounter in the text; thus, somewhat paradoxically, by trying to familiarize his readers with all of the mostly mundane information that he deems necessary for a full appreciation of the stories, Lane makes the world of the Arabian Nights seem even more exotic, distant, and different from that of his English audience.

This distance that Lane creates between the fictional and actual spheres also serves, as Said observes regarding Manners and Customs, to “foil narrative movement”
and “prevent smooth transitions” (162). Lane’s readers cannot simply become engrossed in the adventures of which they are reading to the exclusion of all else; even if they choose to ignore the notes, the superscript numbers that appear throughout the text serve as constant reminders of Lane’s schoolmaster-like presence hovering over the entire collection of tales. Thus, I would suggest that the notes in this version of the *Arabian Nights* may also contribute to Lane’s goals as an editor since his frequent intrusions into the narrative can serve to control a reader’s reactions to the text. As I have already mentioned, Lane was very careful to edit or omit the many stories that he considered “objectionable,” and his notes can be considered as another, albeit more subtle, attempt to ensure that his audience recalls that it should be reading the work not solely for entertainment but also for edification. Through his use of notes, Lane reasserts his own control over the text by ensuring that the stories that he has chosen to retain within the collection are read through a particular (educational) lens, but the notes also attempt to prevent the reader from becoming too absorbed by the fantastic details inherent in many of the tales or emotionally attached to the dramatic characters and events that the stories describe.

The Lane-Harvey edition of the *Arabian Nights*, with its complex combination of fictional narrative, scholarly critical apparatus, and illustration, served as one of the principal means by which young Dante Gabriel Rossetti was introduced to the complex interplay between narrative and design, a theme which, as I mentioned earlier, became a central concern throughout much of his career. In fact, in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet*, the pre-eminent Pre-Raphaelist Jan Marsh describes art and poetry as “ancient competitors within Rossetti” (126) and portrays the years up to the mid-1850s as
ones of “restless alternation between verbal and visual art” (127). The appeal that both creative writing and textual illustration had for Rossetti is evident in the works based on the *Arabian Nights* that he created as a child—a brief play entitled *Aladdin, or The wonderful Lamp* and the series of illustrations of stories from the *Arabian Nights*. Although these works, like the rest of Rossetti’s juvenilia, have received virtually no critical commentary, they are nonetheless worthy of discussion on at least two levels: first, as independent works that demonstrate Rossetti’s own youthful creativity in altering and adapting the writing and pictures of others to suit his own purposes and desires and, second, as an entrée into the study of Rossetti’s corpus as a whole that provides a glimpse of early textual and pictorial influences on his work and on his conception of the complex juxtaposition of illustration and text, an issue that he would continue to rework throughout his career.

Jerome McGann’s Rossetti Archive considers the very brief and unfinished text of *Aladdin, or The wonderful Lamp*, which exists in a “small notebook” along with another play entitled *The Slave* and an excerpt from *The Merchant of Venice* (Rossetti Archive, *The Slave*), to have been written in 1835 (Rossetti Archive, *Aladdin*), when Rossetti was six or seven. The text of the play consists only of a fragment of Act One, Scene One in which an “African Magician” promises to “lead” Aladdin “[i]nto a beautiful garden, where all sorts of fruits’ [sic] grow” (Rossetti, *Aladdin* 26). Although the discussion of this garden—and of the fact that it is “[a] much more beautiful garden than” the one in which the characters stand (Rossetti, *Aladdin* 27)—is all that occurs in the fragmentary

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40 For a further discussion of this tendency, see Marsh’s introduction to *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Writings* (xi).
41 The material contained in the notebook, apart from three lines from *The Slave*, was published for the first time in the Rossetti Archive (Rossetti Archive, *The Slave*). Neither Fredeman nor Surtees makes any reference to the notebook, which is in the collection of the South African National Gallery.
text of the play itself, the textual apparatus, including the title page and the cast of characters, is remarkably complete and mature in its knowledge of the traditional format of the text of a play (figure 1).

Moreover, it is in this early work that Rossetti clearly adopts for the first time the authoritative position of a professional adult for himself (Marsh, Painter 5) by declaring that the play is “by Gabriel Rossetti Painter of Playpictures” (Rossetti, Aladdin 24). This description of himself in an adult role is clearly meant to echo the literary and artistic bylines of the early nineteenth century, in which authors and artists were identified alongside references to their well-known previous works, and the use of this method of self-representation demonstrates Rossetti’s awareness—even at the age of six or seven—of the conventions of the milieu to which he seems already to aspire. In Family-Letters,
William Michael Rossetti makes reference to this self-description of his brother and somewhat dismissively states that it “refers to his constant industry in colouring prints of stage-characters” (1: 66). While this reading is, of course, accurate on one level, it overlooks the fact that, in the second earliest extant text written by Rossetti, he is already gesturing toward the dual identity of painter and author that informs so much of his later career. Indeed, this allusion to his allegiance to both art and writing is further emphasized by Rossetti’s use of the hybrid word “Playpictures,” which, through its fusion of the concepts of text and image, highlights the dual nature of the role young Rossetti wishes to occupy. This creation of his artistic and literary persona, therefore, is not only, as Marsh describes it, “the earliest evidence of [Rossetti’s] self-conscious presentation as an artist” whose later work would often involve “many framed scenes of costumed figures” (Painter 5); it is, in addition, a daring claim to occupy both the worlds of art and literature and a recognition that, despite his family’s encouragement of painting as his future livelihood, young Rossetti harboured the desire not to limit his creativity to one field or the other.

A similar adoption of formulaic language and dramatic convention to give expression to the author’s goals and desires is also evident in the following page of

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42 Around the same time that Rossetti came under the influence of F. A. M. Retzsch, he and his brother also began to collect “sheets of slight engravings of actors and actresses in costume—‘Skelt’s Theatrical Characters’ was the name of one of the leading series of them” (W. Rossetti, Family-Letters 1: 43). These ephemeral publications have been largely forgotten now, but they were a great source of enjoyment for Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his brother (Rossetti Archive, “Theatrical Prints”) and provided an early exercise in the use of colour, since, as William Michael Rossetti notes, “The quantity of these figures which Dante and I coloured is marvelous to reflect upon” (Family-Letters 1: 43). The collection of these images became a ruling passion for Dante, and his letters to other family members from this period often mention prints he has either purchased or wants to buy. See, for instance, Rossetti, Correspondence 1: 8 and 17-18. For more detailed discussions of his purchases of prints, see W. Rossetti, Family-Letters 2: 21, 23-5, 28-9, and 31. Unfortunately, none of the images owned by the Rossetti brothers appears to have been preserved.

43 The only other extant text that may predate Aladdin is The Slave, which is assumed to be a slightly earlier work because it precedes Aladdin in the notebook in which both works appear; however, the Rossetti Archive states that both works were written in 1835 (Rossetti Archive, The Slave and Aladdin).
Aladdin, which provides a list of all of the play’s characters, even including various minor roles like “Soldiers, Grooms, Genii, Attendants, Cupbearers, Musicians” (Rossetti, *Aladdin* 25), and, perhaps most remarkably, a list of the actors who portray these characters. Given that this fragmentary play was written by a six- or seven-year-old boy who does not seem to have had much sustained contact with people outside the circle of his immediate family (W. Rossetti, *Family-Letters* 1: 57), one might reasonably expect that this list of cast members would consist of the names of various relatives, but, instead, Rossetti continues to occupy the role of an adult author-director and casts such famous actors of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries as “Mrs. Siddons,” “Mr. Kemble,” “Mr. Kean,” and “Mrs. Kemble” (25), among a number of others. Rossetti’s use of titles and surnames and his exclusion of first names attest once again to his careful adoption of the dramatic conventions of the time, and his familiarity with these famed actors must be attributed to the theatrical prints that he collected, since the Rossettis “hardly at all entered a regular theatre” during this period (W. Rossetti, *Family-Letters* 1: 39). Interestingly, a number of the actors that Rossetti names were closely related, and, although it is impossible to know if Rossetti was aware of this fact when he wrote *Aladdin*, his choice of such a closely related group of people suggests a sort of mirroring of his own domestic circumstances, in which his three siblings constituted his primary

44 Sarah Siddons (1755-1831) “was regarded as the leading tragic performer of her time” between 1782 and 1812 (Dann, “Siddons”). The name “Mr. Kemble” may refer either to John Philip Kemble (1757-1823), a well-known “specialist in pensive and tragic roles” and theatre manager, or to Charles Kemble (1775-1854), who “was for many years London’s leading fine gentleman in comedy” (Dann, “Kemble”). Edmund Kean (circa 1787-1833) was “the leading tragedian of the romantic age” known for the “frenzied, tempestuous emotion” of his roles (Moody, “Kean”), and, finally, Fanny Kemble (1809-1893), the daughter of Charles Kemble, was an accomplished and well-known tragic and comic actress who toured America in 1834 and wrote dramas of her own, as well as poetry and memoirs (Dann, “Kemble”).

45 For examples of this type of cast listing for actual plays, see the facsimiles of early and mid-nineteenth century playbills in Jackson 31, 175, 238, and 241.

46 Sarah Siddons was the sister of both Charles and John Kemble and the aunt of Fanny Kemble (Dann, “Kemble”).

Perhaps Rossetti chose to make use of the various members of the Kemble family in his play as a means of imaginatively transporting the childhood role-playing and games of the Rossetti children into an adult sphere in which—somewhat unusually—this type of familial cohesiveness could be maintained. Most importantly, however, Rossetti’s attempt at casting all of the roles before the play was ever completed suggests his desire for himself, and others, to view the work not just as an act of childish imagination based on a fairy-tale narrative but as a carefully considered production that explicitly positions itself within the dramatic culture of the period.

The final noteworthy aspect of *Aladdin’s* critical apparatus is that, despite the fact that the Rossetti Archive’s brief introduction to the work treats it cursorily as a “juvenile dramatic fragment” (*Aladdin*), it does seem that the text may also have been intended to include illustrations. In fact, there are three line drawings on the title page and the list of cast members that function both as decorative flourishes and textual dividers, and these images, as the description in the Rossetti Archive’s transcription suggests, are possible representations of “some aerial being[s]” (perhaps the tale’s two genii) and “what may be a lamp” (*Aladdin*), a central object in the well-known story of Aladdin since it is from this lamp that the genius who grants the hero anything that he desires emerges. Thus, the images contained in the textual apparatus of the play suggest that they have been carefully designed both to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the title pages and, to readers familiar with the tale of Aladdin, serve as reminders of the central figures and events in the story.
Because of the way in which these relatively simple designs fulfill this dual role, it is certainly worth considering them as precursors to Rossetti’s later forays into book illustration and design, which also often make similar use of decorative elements that are subtly tied to the book’s content, thereby holistically integrating the book as a physical object with the words that it contains. Curiously, while the Rossetti Archive notes that the play *The Slave*, which was, like *Aladdin*, written in 1835 and which appears in the same notebook, “clearly forecasts DGR’s later interest in book and page design” because of the way in which the text is arranged on the page (*The Slave*), the website makes no such observations regarding the illustrations on the first two pages of *Aladdin*, which offer a much clearer precedent for Rossetti’s later designs of book bindings and frontispieces and attest to his very early interest not just in the integration of the literary and visual arts but also in the creation of finely crafted objects that would be the hallmark

47 Although Rossetti is widely considered to be an important influence on book illustration in the mid-nineteenth century, his personal experience of creating illustrations professionally “was for him a brief and unsatisfactory episode,” which only resulted in “ten illustrations in four books” (Hodnett 171)—one for his friend William Allingham’s collection of poetry *The Music Master* (1855), five for an edition of Tennyson published by Edward Moxon (1857), and two illustrations for each of two of his sister Christina’s volumes of poetry, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) and *The Prince’s Progress and Other Poems* (1866) (Muir 130-31). In terms of book design, Rossetti undertook a wider range of texts, and, as the Rossetti Archive’s excellent survey of his work in this genre declares, “[I]n all cases he was intent upon marrying the binding design to the content of the particular book . . . and sometimes incorporated illustrations into the book’s design structure” (“Material Design”). The Rossetti Archive lists all of the book bindings that Rossetti created, including those for some of his own publications (e.g., *The Early Italian Poets* [1861] and *Poems* [1870]), Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* and *The Prince’s Progress*, William Michael Rossetti’s translation of *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Part I—the Hell* (1865), his sister Maria Rossetti’s *A Shadow of Dante* (1871), and Algernon Charles Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) and *Songs before Sunrise* (1871).

48 See, for instance, the binding that Rossetti designed for his brother’s translation of *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, which incorporates “three rondels of stars and flames, emblematic of the tripartite cosmological structure of the *Divine Comedy*” (Fredeman, “Woodman” 30), or that of Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon*, with “gilt roundels [that] contain stylized plant forms based on the patterns of Greek vases, to complement the classical spirit of Swinburne’s poem” (Treuherz, Prettiejohn, and Becker 221).
of his later involvement with William Morris’s design firm49 and interest in producing furniture, jewellery, stationery, and textiles.50

Apart from the interest that Aladdin holds as an early example of Rossetti’s forays into design, the play is also significant because it represents the very first manuscript or drawing of Rossetti’s career that makes use of a Middle Eastern subject, and it is to this aspect of Aladdin that I now want to turn. Rossetti’s play is very clearly based on the tale of Aladdin that is told in the “old English translation” of Galland’s Les Mille et une nuits to which William Michael Rossetti refers in Family-Letters. Although critics frequently—and correctly—point to the significance of Lane’s version of the Arabian Nights in Rossetti’s childhood, they tend to ignore the fact that Rossetti’s first contact with the collection of tales was through the English translation of Galland. This fact becomes increasingly important when we consider that the play Aladdin cannot be based on Lane’s edition since it predates by three years the earliest publication of Lane’s work, which, in any case, did not include the story of Aladdin.51 Since William Michael Rossetti specifically mentions that the Galland and Lane editions were familiar to his brother as a child, we can ascertain that Rossetti used the English translation of Galland 48

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49 Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. was established in 1861 with the intention, as Rossetti informed the poet William Allingham that year, of creating “furniture and decoration of all kinds” that would provide “real good taste at the price as far as possible of ordinary furniture” ( Correspondence 2: 343). Rossetti designed thirty-six stained-glass windows for “The Firm” (Marsh, Painter 235), as well as a sofa, some parts of a painted cabinet, a chair, and a number of tiles (Marsh, Painter 237-9).
50 For a complete list of the products of Rossetti’s various forays into design, see the section entitled “Material Design” in the Rossetti Archive. Pages 219-34 of Treuherz, Prettejohn, and Becker are also useful. Finally, for an interesting discussion of Rossetti’s designs for and use of jewellery in his art, consult Shirley Bury’s article “Rossetti and His Jewellery.”
51 From the eighteenth century until the present day, there have been concerns over the authenticity of some of the tales included in Galland. In his discussion of the questionable origins of the story of Aladdin, Irwin notes that the tale has not “been found in any surviving Arabic manuscript written before Galland’s translation of the Nights was published” (17), and Parreiras-Horta declares that Galland likely drew some of the tales, including that of Aladdin, from his own imagination (88). Parreiras-Horta also goes on to note that Lane omitted “The Story of Aladdin” from his own version of the Arabian Nights due to “its perceived inauthenticity” (259).
as the source for his dramatized version of Aladdin, and this conclusion is further bolstered by the fact that the name of Rossetti’s play, *Aladdin, or The wonderful Lamp*, is taken almost verbatim from the title of the tale in the “‘Grub Street’ translation,” “The Story of Aladdin; or, the Wonderful Lamp.”

From the brief text of Rossetti’s play, we can also see that he was heavily dependent on Galland’s version of the story, which begins with an “African magician,” pretending to be young Aladdin’s uncle, leading the fourteen-year-old boy out of the city and through a number of gardens until the conniving older man convinces his “nephew” to enter an enchanted garden, “which surpasses all [they] have yet seen” and which contains jewels growing on trees, so that he can retrieve the magic lamp for him (Mack 656-9). Rossetti’s unfinished play depicts a portion of this early part of the story, and the focus on the enchanted garden in his dramatic version of Aladdin suggests the extent to which he was influenced at this early point in his familiarity with the *Arabian Nights* by the fairy-tale nature of Galland’s edition of the tales. In fact, Rossetti seems to have been drawn solely to the fantastic elements of the story, for his dramatic retelling of the tale begins *in medias res* with the magician luring Aladdin to the enchanted garden, which is actually the first magical element in Galland’s version, and ignores all of the more quotidian details of Aladdin’s prior life and upbringing that Galland provides in the previous pages. Moreover, if the Rossetti Archive’s interpretations of the drawings that accompany the text of Rossetti’s play are correct, the illustrations, like the play itself, focus on the supernatural elements of the story (like the genii and lamps) rather than its various human figures and events, a fact that again suggests how drawn Rossetti was to Galland’s fairy-tale vision of the *Arabian Nights*. 

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Of course, it is hardly surprising that a six-or-seven-year-old boy would be attracted to the imaginary and fantastic over the realistic and prosaic, and we might be tempted to draw the obvious conclusion that Galland’s version of the Middle East, a site of wonder and magic in which jewels grow on trees and genii help to arrange marriages between paupers and princesses, led Rossetti to create—in his own first depiction of the Middle East—a place of equally exotic enchantment and fantasy. However, before reaching automatically towards this conclusion, we must bear in mind that, although Rossetti follows Galland’s lead in focusing on the more fantastic elements of Aladdin’s life, there are no exclusively Middle Eastern details in either his fragmentary retelling of the tale or in Galland’s original account of Aladdin. Indeed, as we have seen, Galland’s version of the Arabian Nights is well-known for its apparent transplantation of stories of the medieval Middle East into an eighteenth-century French cultural milieu, and, although Rossetti’s cast of characters names, for instance, the “Sultan” and the “Grand Vizier” as roles in his drama, these figures could just as easily be labeled “king” and “courtier”—in Galland’s version of the tale and, presumably, in Rossetti’s, which was so heavily influenced by its French predecessor—since there is nothing in the text to differentiate them from the inhabitants of the French court. Moreover, the action that Rossetti describes in the single act of the play that he did commit to paper could occur in any fairy tale—whether Eastern or Western—and makes no specific allusions to its ostensibly Middle Eastern setting at all.

Because Rossetti’s play so blithely follows the example of Galland’s story, which separates the events and characters that it describes from their apparent cultural context, I would argue that young Rossetti may have been drawn to “The Story of Aladdin; or, the
Wonderful Lamp” for a reason other than the orientalizing impulse that we might immediately assume. He was not, it seems, attracted to the narrative because it promised to lift a veil, as it were, in order to reveal the culture and manners of some exoticized Other, for, as “The Translator’s Preface” of Lane’s version of the Arabian Nights complains, Galland’s text never attempts to undertake such a task. What may have, instead, attracted Rossetti to the tale of Aladdin, the tailor’s son who becomes the ruler of a kingdom, is the story’s thematic emphasis on the development of personal identity.

The story of Aladdin—or, at least, Galland’s version of it—clearly highlights this aspect of the protagonist’s growth. Aladdin is described at the very beginning of the tale as a “wicked, obstinate, and disobedient” boy who reaches the age of fourteen without ever “thinking in the least how to get his bread” (Mack 651). Thus, the narrative begins at a point when Aladdin has just reached a critical stage between childhood and adulthood, and, early in the tale, the African magician tells Aladdin that he must “break himself off his childish plays, and endeavour to keep men company and improve by their conversation; for . . . you will soon be at man’s estate” (Mack 656). However, it is only through the various tribulations that Aladdin endures from this point in the story and throughout the subsequent seventy pages that he eventually assumes his place as an adult and takes on the role of prince and, finally, of sultan.

As I have already shown, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was exceptionally careful to construct a critical apparatus for his play that both matched that of an adult production and, more importantly, announced his own adoption of the role of the author-artist, and, given all of the concern that he lavished on such ancillary matters, it would be difficult to believe that Rossetti’s decision to dramatize the story of Aladdin, in particular, was made
at random. Indeed, I would argue that Rossetti’s selection of this specific story serves as a pendant to his decision to construct himself within the text as a professional, adult writer and illustrator, for the original story of Aladdin is focused thematically on the notion of growing up in much the same way that the apparatus that Rossetti created for his play repeatedly attempts—albeit implicitly—to remind the reader of the same theme. Furthermore, this confluence of thematic concerns between the play (and the story used as its source) and the illustrations and text that Rossetti built around the drama suggests that Rossetti chose the story as the foundation for his first attempt at drama not because of its supposedly exotic setting but because he was drawn to the themes central to the story and its protagonist.

In fact, two of the major structural changes that Rossetti makes in his retelling of the tale suggest his attraction to the figure of Aladdin himself. Through both converting the original short story with its omniscient narrator into a play and beginning the drama in medias res, Rossetti heightens the reader’s connection to the central character by allowing the audience to hear Aladdin’s voice directly and by removing the mediating narratorial voice that separates the reader from the protagonist in Galland’s version. This desire to highlight the figure of Aladdin while simultaneously ignoring any socio-cultural context for the character, however slightly the latter may have been drawn by Galland, suggests that, in this work, Rossetti is far more interested in the character of Aladdin and the events that befall him than in the details of the narrative’s geographical and cultural setting, which Rossetti does not even bother to describe in any stage directions at the beginning of the play. As a matter of fact, Rossetti does not make a single direct reference to the Middle East anywhere within the fragmentary play or its textual
apparatus, and the absence of such detail suggests that this fairy tale had a more basic, thematic appeal to Rossetti as a child.

The idea that fairy tales can engender a form of catharsis or at least serve as a means of allowing the child-reader to acknowledge and work through the complex emotions associated with a particular figure or life-event is commonly accepted in the study of literature for children. Indeed, the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim argues in his book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, which has exercised a significant influence on the study of fairy tales as literary texts, that “[b]y dealing with universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child’s mind, these stories speak to his budding ego and encourage its development” (6), and, in a similar vein, Bettelheim later goes on to note that “fairy tales have great psychological meaning for children of all ages . . . . Rich personal meaning is gained from fairy stories because they facilitate changes in identification as the child deals with different problems, one at a time” (17). By keeping in mind Bettelheim’s conception of the reading of fairy tales as a means of facing a child’s developmental concerns, the careful reader of *Aladdin, or The wonderful Lamp*, one of the earliest examples of Rossetti’s juvenilia, can see quite clearly that the young author-artist employs the story of Aladdin not out of a simple attraction to common Orientalist tropes but, instead, out of the desire of a child to consider and work out for himself the implications of the transition from childhood to maturity.

In 1840, five years after he wrote *Aladdin*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti undertook an even more ambitious project centred on the *Arabian Nights* and created a series of fifteen drawings (Fredeman, *Cabinet 11*) depicting events from Lane’s version of the collection.
of Middle Eastern tales. It would be reasonable to surmise that the illustrations in this series are imitations of Harvey’s engravings in the Lane edition since both William Michael Rossetti’s memoir and the Rossetti Archive’s introduction to these drawings emphasize Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s fascination with the Lane-Harvey version of the Arabian Nights (Rossetti Archive, “Arabian”). Moreover, this assumption seems even more sensible when we consider that the first volume of Lane’s translation was published in 1838, two years before Rossetti created these sketches, and that the drawings correspond almost exactly with the order of the stories, which can vary by edition and translation, in Lane’s first volume.

It therefore comes as something of a surprise to realize that Rossetti’s illustrations bear virtually no resemblance to those drawn by Harvey. At the most basic level of comparison, Rossetti’s drawings are heavily influenced by the simple, expressive, and somewhat unpolished conventions of the theatrical prints Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti were so fond of collecting and colouring, while Harvey’s work for Lane is reminiscent both of a more conservative academic tradition in its somewhat sedate

52 As the Rossetti Archive’s introduction to the series notes, only fourteen of these drawings are extant. The website’s introduction lists four other illustrations that McGann does not view as belonging to the original series but that are clearly based on the Arabian Nights: “Amgiad and Assad” (circa 1843), “Queen Budoor” (1840), “Turk with scimitar” (circa 1842), and what is described as “a head resembling Sinbad in a small sketch of Four Heads” (circa 1842). To this list, I would provisionally add the sketch “A Turk” (circa 1842), which Surtees describes as a small pen-and-ink drawing of a figure “[w]earing a head-dress with feathers, facing to front, beside a palm tree” (213). However, since this drawing is still in the hands of Rossetti’s family (Rossetti Archive, “A Turk”) and is not reproduced in any catalogue, it is impossible to declare definitively whether it is related to the Arabian Nights illustrations. For the purposes of this chapter, I will consider these additional illustrations— with the exception of “Amgiad and Assad”—as pendants to the original series since they are very similar in style and technique and since the approximate dates attributed to them by the Rossetti Archive are by no means certain. I exclude “Amgiad and Assad” from the series because, judging by Rossetti’s technique, the drawing is indeed a later work and is also a deliberate re-presentation of one of Harvey’s illustrations.

53 The first thirteen of Rossetti’s illustrations all depict events described in the first through sixteenth stories of Volume One of Lane’s translation, omitting only the fourth, eighth, and thirteenth tales. The illustrations “Queen Budoor” and “Amgiad and Assad” portray incidents from two consecutive stories from the second volume, and “Sindbad’s [sic] bales brought to him by order of the Captain” and the “head resembling Sinbad” depict events from the beginning of the third volume. The remaining two works are not detailed enough to be linked to a particular narrative.
portraits of characters and their reactions and of the relatively new trend of realism in
depictions of Middle Eastern clothing and customs. Moreover, the differences between
the two sets of illustrations are also evident in the fact that the artists either depict
different moments within the same scene or choose altogether different scenes from one
another. Rossetti seems to have been particularly desirous of choosing moments of
decisive action within the scenes he illustrates, and this aspect of his illustrations
becomes obvious when we consider that all fourteen of the drawings in the original series
have verbs like “killing,” “fainting,” “threatening,” and “discovering” in the captions that
Rossetti inscribed on them. While Harvey’s illustrations are often employed by Lane to
highlight ethnographic details and frequently show only the antecedents or the results of
some central action within a story, Rossetti’s drawings clearly reflect his childish desire
to focus on the central events and decisive actions of each tale, free of any obstructions.

Such basic differences between the two series of illustrations demonstrate that
Rossetti had no intention of imitating Harvey or of re-creating the older artist’s published
illustrations; instead, these significant variations suggest that Rossetti wanted to develop
independently his own drawings to accompany the text and have them reflect his personal
interests and not those of a professional artist. Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s decision to create
his own visual interpretations of the tales is not without precedent during this period of
his life, for, early in 1840—the same year in which he created the Arabian Nights

54 For example, the design by Harvey entitled “The Herdsman introducing his Daughter to the Sheykh”
(Lane 1: 50), which illustrates “The Story of the First Sheykh and the Gazelle” (Lane 1: 48-52), depicts an
event that occurs prior to one of the story’s central moments, which takes place when the daughter turns the
sheykh’s son from a calf back into a human. It is this later, climactic event that Rossetti chose as his theme
for the drawing “The Steward’s Daughter disenchanting the First Old Man’s Son.” In another instance,
Harvey shows only the lamentations of the protagonist over the young man he has accidentally killed (Lane
1: 185) in “The Story of the Third Royal Mendicant” (Lane 1: 178-91) while Rossetti’s drawing to
accompany the same tale, “The Third Calendar killing the young man by accident,” portrays the very
moment at which the protagonist trips with knife in hand and accidentally stabs his companion.
illustrations—Rossetti also produced “twenty-seven sketches on loose paper as illustrations to Homer’s *Iliad* to please his sister Maria, who (herself aged ten) was well-acquainted with Pope’s translation” (Surtees 1). Like much of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s juvenilia, these Homeric illustrations have suffered from uncomplimentary appraisals; for instance, William Michael Rossetti declares in *Family-Letters* that they “are not in any tolerable degree good, nor even distinctly promising; but they may count for something as showing the lad’s ambitious temper in design, and his willingness to take up any attempt that offered, however ludicrously inadequate his means for coping with it” (1: 81). While William Michael Rossetti’s attitude is hardly one of flattery, his comments on the *Iliad* illustrations are equally applicable to those for the *Arabian Nights* since the words suggest that, at this stage of his career, Rossetti grasped at any opportunity to appropriate the role of a professional artist by demonstrating his ability to interpret and supplement a text through outlining it in visual form, a habit that allowed him to combine his two loves—literary narratives and visual art.

This careful combination of text and illustration is evident in the ordering of the *Arabian Nights* series, which, as I have pointed out, conscientiously ties one illustration to each of thirteen stories, but, as I suggested earlier, these works are also significant to our understanding of early influences on Rossetti because they clearly echo motifs of his favourite theatrical prints and highlight once again the impact that these often overlooked works had on him. The influence of these prints can be seen in at least two ways. First,

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55 According to William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti drew “one design to each Book” (*Family-Letters* 1: 81), but, since the drawings remain in the possession of Rossetti’s family (Surtees 1), only three of them have ever been reproduced. They appear in H. C. Marillier’s *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life* (212).

56 The fact that the two narratives for which he chose to create multiple illustrations are foundational texts within their respective cultures also seems to imply Rossetti’s need at this time to test and prove his ability of encapsulating canonical works in visual form.
the *Arabian Nights* illustrations make frequent and repeated use of the same poses, which Rossetti must have absorbed from theatrical prints and which often depict the exaggerated actions surrounding one central event. For example, in “The Genius threatening to kill the Merchant” (figure 2) and “The Genius about to kill the Princess of the Isle of Ebony” (figure 3), the victims share the very same pose: both are propped up by one arm and bent leg in a triangular fashion while warding off their enemies by raising the other arm vertically. Another stylized pose—this one of surprise—in which the characters’ arms are diagonally outstretched also recurs throughout the illustrations; both the husband in “The Second Old Man’s surprise on discovering his Wife to be a

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57 I have adopted Rossetti’s own idiosyncratic use of capitalization in the titles that he inscribed at the bottom of each drawing.
Fairy” (figure 4) and the young man faced by attacking troops in “The 1st Calendar seized by order of the Vizier, who had usurped the crown” (figure 5) adopt this easily interpretable attitude. Secondly, Rossetti also makes use of theatrical prints’ simple manner of depicting an army in a limited space by ranging partially realized duplicate outlines behind a fully drawn figure of a soldier, a tactic that he adopts in “The 1st Calendar seized . . . .” These conventions that Rossetti adopts for his own illustrations are clearly a means of communicating an attitude, event, or idea in a simple way that is

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58 The extent to which Rossetti makes use of these stereotypical poses is also demonstrated in his *Iliad* illustrations. For instance, in “Agamemnon killing Adrastus,” the latter figure adopts the same near-death pose described above (Marillier 212).

59 The same style of representation is employed in another *Iliad* illustration, entitled “Jupiter awaking sees Neptune rallying the Greeks” (Marillier 212).
easily manageable for a child to draw, but these stylized attitudes and techniques also represent a sort of *lingua franca* among nineteenth-century illustrators that would need to be mastered by a young man fantasizing about joining their ranks as an adult. Using these set poses, therefore, allows Rossetti to demonstrate his knowledge of this genre’s artistic conventions and his ability to apply them to his own original illustrations.

However, Rossetti’s adoption of these conventions of theatrical prints has other implications beyond that of his appropriation of an adult role, for he employs these stylized poses and gestures specifically within an Orientalist context. Thus, the techniques that he uses to depict his characters raise questions, for example, of Othering and of the construction of the “exotic,” and it might be tempting to assume that Rossetti’s repeated usage of the same gestures and poses suggests a homogenizing impulse in his depictions of the Middle East at this point in his life, as though all of the figures that he illustrates are interchangeable. Nevertheless, we must also keep in mind that Rossetti makes use of the same poses and techniques in the illustrations that he created for the *Iliad*, which were drawn in the same year as the *Arabian Nights* series, and in a number of other illustrations of such varied texts as Matthew Gregory Lewis’ 1796 play *The Castle Spectre* (Fredeman, *Cabinet* plate 74) and *Macbeth* (Fredeman, *Cabinet* plate 75), both of which predate the *Arabian Nights* series by four years (Fredeman, *Cabinet* 11).

It is, therefore, too simple to label the repeated use of theatrical gestures in Rossetti’s *Arabian Nights* illustrations as the manifestation of an Orientalist discourse that attempts to erase all of the distinctions between the various figures that it describes; instead, I would argue that, much like the alterations that he makes in his dramatized version of

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60 For other examples of Rossetti’s use of similar gestures and poses, see Fredeman, *Cabinet* plates 76, 87, 91, 99-100, and 105-8.
Aladdin, Rossetti’s employment of the conventions of theatrical illustration in this series of drawings is meant primarily to heighten his works’ emphasis on the dramatic importance of a particular moment and the characters’ personal reactions to it. As I have already discussed, in this sense, Rossetti’s drawings contrast with the more staid illustrations of Harvey, which are focused on ethnographic detail rather than narrative drama, but, furthermore, Rossetti’s re-presentations of the tales from the Arabian Nights that he chooses to illustrate also highlight the impact that the English “Grub Street” translation of Galland had upon his conception of the tales even after he had read the Lane-Harvey edition.

As many people have noted in reference to Galland’s Mille et une nuits, the characters in Rossetti’s illustrations are not defined by their Middle Eastern background; indeed, Rossetti’s use of the Middle East as a setting, like that of Galland, is clearly subordinated to his interest in the narrative—in the characters themselves and the magical and mysterious fairy-tale-like events that affect them. In Rossetti’s illustrations to the Arabian Nights, it is clearly, above all, the characters—who face various life-altering situations; experience emotions of love, anger, fear, and surprise; and are entangled in all manner of difficult familial and romantic relationships—that form the central element within each drawing, and this attention to the figures and their personal experiences is more akin to the fairy-tale world of Galland’s Mille et une nuits than to Lane’s scholarly desire to use the tales in the Arabian Nights as a series of studies from which “useful” sociological information can be gleaned.

Along with this tendency to focus on characters and their emotions rather than on their geographical and cultural setting, the costumes of the figures in Rossetti’s
illustrations also simultaneously betray a debt to theatrical prints and utterly negate the potential influence of Harvey and Lane’s own obsessively realistic clothing of their fictional characters. Rossetti makes repeated use of the same basic stereotypical costumes with small—if any—changes between illustrations. For instance, the attire of the husband in “The Second Old Man’s surprise . . .” is identical to that of the vizier in “The Black overturning the Fish, in presence of the Sultan & Vizier” (figure 6). This similarity of costume makes no effort to take into account the varying socioeconomic positions of these two characters, the former of whom is a merchant who has just nearly drowned (Lane 1: 52-6), while the latter is a man of wealth and rank in the king’s court (Lane 1: 97-106). A similar lack of interest in costume is apparent in the portrait of “Queen Budoor,” one of the additional illustrations, in which this royal figure from China (Lane 2: 78-149) wears a gown that resembles those of the English Renaissance with its fitted bodice and full skirt. The absence of attention to sartorial detail that is evident from these few examples suggests that Rossetti was simply not interested in the ethnographic accuracy upon which both Lane and Harvey lavished such effort, and his rejection of this emerging facet of Orientalist discourse in art serves a number of purposes. First, it functions as further evidence of Rossetti’s attraction to Galland’s fairy-tale version of the
Arabian Nights over that of Lane, but, more importantly, this conscious or unconscious refusal to align his art with the relatively new concept of Orientalist realism also negates the latter technique’s tendency to exhibit a particular culture for the consumption of the European gaze. By not imitating Lane and Harvey’s educationally ethnographic illustrations, Rossetti’s drawings make no claims to the all-encompassing knowledge that Lane insists that he himself has, and the series of illustrations thereby both resists the furtherance of any imperialist project—however well-intentioned—and suggests to the viewer that these characters and stories are of interest not because of their difference or “exoticism” but because of their similarity to European fairy tales and the universality (if we are to believe Bettelheim) of the emotions that they portray.

Moreover, as anyone who is familiar with Rossetti’s later work can appreciate, such lack of interest in realistic details of dress and background on the part of the young artist is hardly surprising; indeed, we can consider the Arabian Nights illustrations as a prototype of what Marsh calls the artist’s deliberate and lifelong “Romantic archaism” (Painter 106) and attraction to what he termed the “poetic” over the actual. Rossetti’s fellow artist and P. R. B.-member William Holman Hunt records a conversation that he had with Rossetti in 1848 in which the latter declared his opinion “that attention to chronological costume, to the types of different races of men, to climactic features and influences, were of no value in any painter’s work, and that therefore oriental properties in the treatment of Scriptural subjects were calculated to destroy the poetic nature of a design” (Pre-Raphaelitism 1: 149).61 Hunt’s recollection of Rossetti’s words, which

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61 Although, as I discuss at greater length in Chapter Four, Hunt’s memoirs are often condemned for their evident biases and lack of accuracy, the belief about Rossetti that Hunt expresses here can be amply proven by an examination of the romanticized and non-period-specific costumes that Rossetti employs in both his early and later paintings of biblical narratives.
were spoken just eight years after the creation of the *Arabian Nights* illustrations, emphasizes the fact that, for Rossetti, the most important element in a painting or drawing was its “poetic . . . design”—its ability to convey the emotions of a particular character and to elicit a similar type of sentiment in the viewer, and this emphasis on the establishment of a specific feeling or mood in a work is evident in Rossetti’s first displayed oil painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) (figure 7).62

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62 The date provided after each painting in this chapter and subsequent ones represents the year in which the work was first exhibited.
the era of photography, of empirical science and of botanical classification,” and he concludes his discussion of *Girlhood* by saying that the painting represents a “combination of a yearning for the past with an intensely modern, mid-nineteenth-century realism” (8). However, despite Barringer’s emphasis on realism, on the notion that “each object [in the work] has been carefully painted from nature” and that “[t]he faces are those of real people and do not merely replicate the idealised Raphaelesque features which conventionally personified the Virgin and her mother” (8), his analysis of this early painting by Rossetti fails to address the fact that certain basic elements of *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* also explicitly reject representational accuracy on a historical level. For example, although the drapery of the various figures’ clothing was carefully painted from actual models, the attire of Mary, Anne, and Joachim is more reminiscent of medieval Europe than ancient Judaea, and the landscape visible over Anne’s shoulder contains no details that would suggest the incident’s actual geographical setting in “Nazareth of Galilee” (Rossetti, “Mary’s Girlhood” 1.3). Such details of costume and background seem to have been secondary considerations for Rossetti; indeed, while he wrote a sonnet explicating the symbolism of the lily, palm, books, and Mary’s embroidery in the painting (“Mary’s Girlhood” 2.1-10), there is no record of the reason for his choices of these particular styles of landscape and clothing. Thus, despite Barringer’s claim that the painting deploys a particularly intense kind of symbolic realism, a description that is, indeed, partially true, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* also attests to the notion that Rossetti was more interested in what I would term selective realism, which creates a personal interpretation of the often-painted childhood of Mary that depicts only some objects realistically while avoiding the kind of thoroughly
researched and documented style of painting adopted by William Holman Hunt, which would, in Rossetti’s mind, detract from “the poetic nature of [his] design.”

The same type of selective realism that characterizes *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* is evident, as we have seen, in Rossetti’s series of *Arabian Nights* illustrations, but it is also apparent in three small pen-and-ink and pencil drawings that Rossetti executed on May 26, 1839, one year before he created the *Arabian Nights* sketches. It is on these three images, which illustrate the Old-Testament figure Judah, the son of Jacob63; a Roman centurion; and Christ with Peter and another apostle, that I now want to focus.

According to the Rossetti Archive’s “Physical Description” of the drawings, in his attempts to catalogue his brother’s works for posterity, William Michael Rossetti wrote the word “Copied” on both “Judah” and “Roman Soldier,” and both William E. Fredeman (*Cabinet* 15) and McGann’s Rossetti Archive (“Judah” and “Roman”) have been content to echo this evaluation without actually discussing Rossetti’s illustrations in any detail.64 The simple word “copied” seems to have caused critics to dismiss the drawings, for the word is, as Christine Alexander’s writings on juvenilia suggest, not simply a description but also a value judgment that implies that a work is not worthy to be considered independently of its inspiration. Such an evaluation certainly seems to be the case with these three biblical drawings, which have been provided with only very cursory descriptions in both McGann’s and Fredeman’s accounts of them.

Apart from providing basic physical descriptions of the works that detail their dimensions and media, the Rossetti Archive comments very briefly upon them and

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63 For the biblical account of Judah, see Chapters 29-49 of Genesis.
64 Surtees, the final member of the trio of scholars who have collected Rossetti’s juvenilia, does not list these three biblical illustrations in her catalogue, and they are not, as far I have been able to find, mentioned in any other Rossetti scholarship.
repeats the same statement for each of the illustrations, saying, “This drawing is one of three Biblical subjects reproduced in The Rossetti Cabinet. As [William Michael Rossetti’s] note on the verso suggests, these images are likely copies, perhaps after Martin and Westall’s Illustrations of the Bible, which was known to be a favourite work of the artist” (“Judah,” “Roman,” “Miraculous”). As it openly acknowledges, this brief introduction echoes the earlier evaluation of the drawings by Fredeman, who groups the sketches into a single plate within The Rossetti Cabinet and describes them as “[t]hree Biblical subjects, probably copies suggested by Martin and Westall’s Illustrations of the Bible, a volume acquired early on in the Rossetti household and popular with [Dante Gabriel Rossetti]” (15).

McGann’s and Fredeman’s descriptions are, of course, correct to highlight young Rossetti’s familiarity with Martin and Westall’s work; indeed, William Michael Rossetti states that, along with the Arabian Nights, one of the volumes to which Dante Gabriel Rossetti was most drawn in his childhood was Illustrations of the Bible (Family-Letters 1: 61), which was originally published from 1835 to 1836 and reissued twice in the following two years. In fact, William Michael Rossetti goes on to say that his brother

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65 Marsh also points to the work’s significance to Rossetti, saying that “Martin and Westall’s dramatic illustrations to the Bible were the earliest influence on his pictorial imagination” (Painter 26).

66 The publication history of this text is somewhat confusing. Between 1831 and 1835, John Martin independently published a series of his own biblical drawings under the same title, Illustrations of the Bible. However, these works met with both commercial and artistic failure (Feaver 84-5), which has been attributed both to matters of production—that is, to “the manner in which the parts were put together and the badly designed pages and letterpress” (Johnstone 21)—and design—due to the lack of historical accuracy, which was unacceptable to a public increasingly desirous of realism (Feaver 170-1). The failure of the series, which represented a considerable investment for Martin himself, brought the artist to the brink of financial ruin. The publisher Charles Tilt purchased the plates and remaining stock (Ray 45) and reissued a collection of ninety-six engravings, all of which depicted events from the Old Testament and half of which were drawn by John Martin. (Richard Westall contributed the other half [Balston 151].) According to Martin’s biographer Christopher Johnstone, the illustrations were published on a monthly basis, and “each of the twelve monthly parts consisted of eight wood engravings . . . and a page of description by the Rev. Hobart Caunter” (21). This version of the publication was much more successful than the previous one; it greatly contributed to Martin’s reputation and led Martin and Westall to publish
“never tired of” examining the book and that his fascination with Martin as “an imaginative pictorial genius of no mean power” remained with him for the rest of his life (Family-Letters 1: 61). However, despite William Michael Rossetti’s account of his brother’s admiration for the painter, Martin’s style, which emphasizes large-scale natural scenery to the point that his tiny human figures are frequently overwhelmed by their surroundings, seems to have left little—if any—marks on his younger contemporary’s technique or subject matter. In fact, much like his Arabian Nights drawings, Rossetti’s juvenile illustrations that depict biblical scenes tend to function in the opposite manner by placing nearly all of their emphasis on the action of individual human figures and virtually depriving them of any detailed large-scaled background.

Illustrations of the New Testament (which consisted of another forty-eight plates divided equally between the two artists) in 1835-6 (Johnstone 21; Balston 151). Finally, all of the illustrations were republished together in one volume in 1837 under the title Illustrations of the Old and New Testaments and were reissued yet again as Pictorial Illustrations of the Old and New Testament, which was published by H. G. Bohn in 1838 (Balston 153).

It seems that the Rossetti family owned the 1837 edition, for, as Ruthven Todd notes, William Michael Rossetti purchased a copy of this edition and wrote in it, “I bought this book in 1910 because another copy of it had been a great favourite of us four children towards 1829-40” (116).

John Martin, who also exhibited oils on canvas at the Royal Academy annually between 1837 and 1852 (John Martin: Loan Exhibition 17-19), is known now mostly for his 1827 illustrations of Paradise Lost (Hodnett 130) and, perhaps to a lesser extent, for his biblical engravings. As Johnstone rightly notes, Martin’s aim as a painter is probably best summed up in his own words, taken from the prospectus for the Illustrations of the Bible: it was to avail himself “of all objects afforded by inanimate nature, as well as by the passions and ingenuity of man, by bringing before the eye the vast and magnificent edifices of the ancient world, its forests, wilds, interminable plains, its caverns and rocks and mountains, by freely employing the aid of its powerful and primitive elements of fire and water . . . .” (25)

With his deeply rooted interest in the sublime (Johnstone 11), Martin was a quintessentially Romantic artist. For multiple examples of this marked tendency in Martin’s work, see the catalogue John Martin 1789-1854: Loan Exhibition. This tendency is characteristic of the artist’s later biblically-themed works, as well. If we consider, for instance, Rossetti’s own later depictions of events from Christian narratives, such as his early Pre-Raphaelite works The Girlhood of Mary Virgin or Ecce Ancilla Domini! (1850) and the later paintings Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee (1858) and Mary in the House of St. John (1858), we can see that, in all of these designs, Rossetti emphasizes the quieter, more personal aspects of these biblical figures and their stories. Three of these paintings are set in various domestic interiors, locations that highlight the private worlds of these characters. The one exception to this type of background, Mary Magdalene at the Door, is set in a city street populated by a crowd of revelers, but the exterior walls of the
Thus, Fredeman’s and the Rossetti Archive’s comments about Rossetti’s three 1839 biblical illustrations are, at the very least, misleading in their suggestion of Rossetti’s stylistic dependence on the engravings of Martin and Westall; moreover, these critics’ cursory comments imply that, since a possible source of the works has been identified, no further investigation of the three drawings needs to be undertaken.

However, I would argue that Rossetti’s illustrations are actually quite significant to our understanding of the development of his career since they represent the very first occasion on which both Middle Eastern characters and biblical narratives—motifs that underpin a substantial portion of the artist’s adult work—make their appearance in his art. If only for this reason, then, the illustrations of “Judah,” “Roman Soldier,” and “The Miraculous Draught of Fishes” deserve a more detailed examination than they have heretofore received. Equally importantly, the source of the three drawings has been misidentified until now. Both Fredeman and McGann rely on William Michael Rossetti’s accounts of his brother’s admiration for Martin, and they point to Martin and Westall’s engravings as the source of these sketches. However, the original versions of Rossetti’s figures are, as I have realized after careful scrutiny of *Illustrations of the Bible*, not to be found there. In fact, the source of one of the drawings, which Dante Gabriel Rossetti labeled at the top “The Miraculous Draught of Fishes Luke C5-V8” (figure 8) is actually a cartoon by Raphael (figure 9), and it is this illustration that I want to focus on.

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houses and the overarching beams that cross the street enclose the central figures of the Magdalene and Christ, thereby suggesting the more personal and less public nature of her conversion. None of these illustrations of biblical narratives—and, in fact, none of Rossetti’s work in general—exhibits the kind of dramatic use of “vast forbidding landscape” and heavy chiaroscuro for which Martin’s work was famed (Johnstone 13).

Shirley Millidge defines cartoon as a “[d]rawing, sometimes coloured, made specifically as a pattern for a painting, textile, or stained-glass panel. It is produced on the same scale as the final work and is usually fairly detailed.”
here because of the very interesting issues that the sketch’s status as an imitation of Raphael’s work raises.


Figure 9. Raphael, *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, 1515-6. Her Majesty the Queen.

It is, in a way, unsurprising that this illustration’s debt to Raphael has gone unnoticed until now since, as I suggested earlier, so much of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century representation of Rossetti relies on his explicit youthful rejection of Raphael as an artistic example and his determination to be, in the term’s most literal sense, a Pre-Raphaelite. This ethos, which was adopted by Rossetti early in adulthood, is well-known to anyone with even the most basic familiarity with the Pre-Raphaelites and has, indeed,
become one of the most often repeated facts about the group of artists, but what many critics may not realize is that William Michael Rossetti also attempts retroactively to attribute this attitude to his brother at an even earlier point in his career. In his memoir of his brother, William Michael Rossetti describes one of the early pictorial influences on the artist as “a book of rather large outline engravings from Scripture, after the Old Masters—emptyish-looking things which he frequently inspected, with little real sympathy,” and he goes on to declare, “I have always thought that his indifference to the respectable conventions of Old-Masterhood, leading on to the Præraphaelite movement, had something to do with this book” (Family-Letters 1: 61-2). With this statement, the unofficial family historian clearly attempts to construct for the public a thoroughly linear account of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s career that points to the germs of ideas in the child that went on to become fully developed and expressed in the works of the more mature artist. In this sense, Rossetti’s depiction of his brother is reminiscent of two models of constructing an author’s career. First, his discussion, which identifies his brother’s childish disdain for the Old Masters as the root of the eventual development of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, recalls LaCapra’s notion of “dialectical synthesis” in which “the later stage [i.e., the P. R. B’s rejection of the Old Masters] raises the earlier one [i.e., Rossetti’s childhood dislike for the Old Masters] to a higher level of insight” (55), and, second, William Michael Rossetti’s linkage of his brother’s youthful reactions to Renaissance artists to his adult career also fits into Robertson’s “apprenticeship model” of juvenilia, which, as I discussed earlier, insists upon viewing the ideas of a child solely in relation to his or her adult creations. Moreover, William Michael Rossetti’s attempt in this statement to provide the roots of his brother’s troubled relationship with Raphael
vastly oversimplifies the matter, for it suggests that Rossetti had a lifelong disdain for the Old Master at the same time that it ignores the fact that the young artist found at least one of Raphael’s works sufficiently interesting to compel him to imitate it carefully.

As a matter of fact, William Michael Rossetti refrains from exploding the simple narrative of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s lifelong disdain for Raphael, which had already become integral to the Pre-Raphaelite legend, by not even mentioning his brother’s 1839 imitation of *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* in *Family-Letters*, the most complete source of information on Rossetti’s childhood influences and juvenilia. Indeed, he does not make a reference to the drawing in any of the other numerous memoirs that he wrote about his family either, and this attempt to overlook a work whose existence was clearly known to him suggests the extent to which William Michael Rossetti desired to preserve the rather uncomplicated model of “dialectical synthesis,” to borrow LaCapra’s phrase, within his accounts of his brother’s career. This decision on William Michael Rossetti’s part thus allowed him, as his sibling’s biographer, both to maintain strict control of the manner in which he decided to represent his brother after the latter’s death and, simultaneously, to reinforce other, previous accounts of the artist, thereby further contributing to the creation of the “myth of Rossetti” that is so familiar to contemporary Pre-Raphaelite scholars.

Moreover, if we can consider the notes that William Michael Rossetti personally wrote on two of the three 1839 biblical illustrations as a guide to his own attitude toward the works, it seems as though he actively attempted to avoid drawing too much attention to his brother’s imitation of Raphael. While, as I have already noted, he wrote “Copied” on the backs of “Judah” and “Roman Soldier,” he did not provide the same information
for “The Miraculous Draught of Fishes.” In fact, he simply wrote on the verso of the
drawing, “By Gabriel towards 1839” (Rossetti Archive, “Miraculous”). While it
might be argued that William Michael Rossetti did not record that “The Miraculous Draught” is
a copy simply because he was unaware of the fact, this lack of knowledge is highly
unlikely for at least two reasons. First, he clearly recognized that the other two
illustrations, which were drawn on the very same day as “The Miraculous Draught,” are
imitations of other works. Second, William Michael Rossetti himself worked as an art
critic for a number of years71 and would have easily recognized the image as an imitation
of one of Raphael’s cartoons of the same name that was already on display in England.
At the time, Raphael’s Miraculous Draught, along with the other cartoons with which it
forms a series, was widely considered a “masterpiece of the art of . . . history painting”
(Fermor 24) and “the pride of [England] . . . an invaluable national treasure” (Shearman
152). Given all of these facts, it seems that, in his role as the historian of his famous
brother, William Michael Rossetti cautiously avoided—whether consciously or
unconsciously—upsetting the accepted narrative of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s intense
lifelong dislike for Raphael by making no reference whatsoever to his youthful imitation
of the Old Master.

Because there is such a paucity of information about Rossetti’s early imitation of
Raphael’s Miraculous Draught, there is no way of ascertaining just how the young artist

71 In fact, in her entry on William Michael Rossetti in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Angela
Thirlwell identifies him as an “art critic and literary editor” by profession, and she notes that, in addition to
writing art reviews for “The Critic (1850-56) and The Spectator (1850-58) . . . [h]e was also an organizer,
acting as secretary to the exhibition of British art shown in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston in 1857-8.”
Thirlwell goes on to state that “[f]rom 1850 to 1878 he wrote nearly 400 art ‘critiques’ . . . for English and
American periodicals including The Academy, the Saturday Review, and the New York based Crayon.”
Later in his life, Rossetti also “contributed over fifty short critical biographies on (mostly Italian) artists
from Canaletto to Tintoretto to the Encyclopaedia Britannica,” and, finally, his knowledge of art was
employed in a professional capacity between 1888 and 1905, when he “assess[ed] art works for estate duty”
as part of his job at the Inland Revenue Board (Thirlwell).
first encountered the original work. In *Family-Letters*, William Michael Rossetti mentions in passing that, as a child, his brother was familiar with a book owned by their aunt that consisted of “English engravings from Raphael’s Cartoons, with highly laudatory descriptions” (1: 62), but Rossetti may also have had the opportunity to see the original cartoon in person in the galleries of Hampton Court Palace.\(^{72}\) Whether the young artist saw the original or a reproduction, the work’s context would have sufficed to make him aware of the great significance that was attached to Raphael’s *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* in nineteenth-century England.

According to John Shearman’s *Raphael’s Cartoons*, which is widely acknowledged as the definitive study of these works, Raphael drew the *Miraculous Draught* between 1515 and 1516 (3) as one of a series of ten large works depicting the lives of St. Peter and St. Paul that were to be used as patterns for tapestries commissioned by Pope Leo X to be hung in the Sistine Chapel. After the tapestries were woven, seven of the ten original cartoons were eventually purchased by the future King Charles I in 1623 and brought to England (“Raphael Cartoons”). In 1699, they were put on display in Hampton Court, which, as I have mentioned, was their permanent home during Rossetti’s childhood. By the nineteenth century, the Raphael cartoons had become—paradoxically given their Italian Catholic roots—an English national treasure. In fact, since the

\(^{72}\) The cartoons had been on display—with various interruptions—in a gallery designed by Christopher Wren at Hampton Court since 1699 (Fermor 22). (For a detailed and exhaustively researched account of the multiple locations of the cartoons between 1699 and 1865, when they were finally loaned by Queen Victoria to the South Kensington Museum [now the Victoria and Albert Museum, where they are still displayed], see Shearman 149-59.) By 1839, when Rossetti drew his imitation of the *Miraculous Draught*, Raphael’s cartoons were at the centre of a heated controversy. There was a great deal of public interest in the works, which drew thousands of visitors to Hampton Court annually (Fermor 27), and, when construction of the new National Gallery began in 1833, an ongoing debate about where the cartoons should reside was injected with fresh vigour (Shearman 156-7). Indeed, in September 1839, *The Art-Union* published an editorial demanding, “Why are [the cartoons] allowed to moulder on the walls of Hampton Court useless and unproductive in their effects, when, if removed to the National Gallery, they would produce better results upon Art than the Elgin Marbles?” (qtd. in Shearman 157).
eighteenth century, the works had been considered “exemplars of the art of history painting on a grand scale . . . [,] essential elements in the formation of taste and required viewing for any cultivated gentleman” (Fermor 26). Since the works acquired such cachet in terms of their national and artistic significance, it is not surprising that they were given particularly elevated status by the teachers of the Royal Academy, and Sharon Fermor’s excellent account of the cartoons notes that the numerous pinpricks that are visible in them today demonstrate the extent to which the R.A.’s students made pencil tracings of the works, which “increasingly became seen as a school for art students—particularly for [the designs’] rich repertoire of gestures and expressions” (26).

From this brief overview of the cartoons’ reception in England, it is evident that, since their initial display in 1699, the works, which are not only the sole tapestry cartoons ever created by Raphael (Fermor 7) but were also “the only monumental works by Raphael to be seen outside of Rome in the first half of the eighteenth century” (Meyer 18), had rapidly acquired canonical stature and were widely “regarded as some of the most important works of art in existence” (“History”). Thus, at the time at which Rossetti encountered the Miraculous Draught, which depicts Christ summoning the fisherman Simon (later called Peter) to be his disciple and to “catch men” (Luke 5.10), the cartoon was—at least in an English context—among the most admired works of the artist who was most revered by practitioners of nineteenth-century academic art.

Raphael’s Miraculous Draught is centred around the moment of Christ’s call to Peter, but the work also manages to incorporate events that occur immediately prior to

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73 The significance of the cartoons to the course of instruction at the Royal Academy Schools is also evident in the fact that one of the series (the Charge to Peter) “was at Somerset House on loan to the Royal Academy for copying, in 1823” (Shearman 155). Shearman also notes that “large . . . copies . . . were hung in the Great Room of the Academy and used for demonstration in lectures” (155, n. 127).
this central moment within Luke’s narrative in the Gospels. Fermor’s description of the
cartoon highlights the various events that are portrayed by Raphael as occurring
simultaneously; she writes,

Raphael again chooses a moment of some complexity, before Christ names Peter
a fisher of men, and when Peter, having questioned Christ’s command to let down
his nets, kneels and says to the Lord, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O
Lord.” At the same time, the apostle behind him, as if unaware of this intimate
encounter, seeks his own dialogue with Christ, expressing amazement at the
catch, while others struggle to haul the fish on board. (82-3)

As this summary of the cartoon implies, the *Miraculous Draught* contains a number of
figures, including six large central characters, along with various kinds of birds, fish, and
shellfish. In addition, the cartoon includes a seascape in the foreground and
background and a detailed portrayal of a hillside town with numerous clusters of people
observing the events occurring on the lake.

In contrast to the original cartoon’s numerous figures and detailed background,
Rossetti’s imitation of the work is significantly less populated. In fact, Rossetti clearly
made no attempt to reproduce the entire cartoon; instead, he leaves out the animals, lake,
landscape, and secondary—and even three of the central—characters and chooses to
focus solely on the boat at the left of the cartoon that carries Jesus, Peter, and one of the
other future apostles. Of course, since Rossetti was only eleven years old when he
decided to re-create Raphael’s cartoon, it is hardly surprising that the young artist decided

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74 Luke 5.1-11 describes the calling of the first three of Christ’s twelve disciples. In this passage, Jesus
climbs aboard Simon’s fishing boat and preaches from Lake Gennesaret to a group that has followed him.
Christ then commands Simon to lower his nets, and the fisherman, while saying that they have not been
able to catch any fish that day, does so. When Simon raises the net, he must call for the help of another
group of fishermen since his nets are so full, and Simon kneels before Jesus and says, “Depart from me;
for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (5.8), to which Jesus responds, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt
catch men” (5.10). At this point, Simon, James, and John leave their boats to become Christ’s disciples.
75 For a brief but insightful discussion of the symbolism of the various animals that Raphael includes, see
the Victoria and Albert Museum’s online article “Animal Imagery in The Miraculous Draught of Fishes.”
to reduce the massive original to a more manageable portion.\textsuperscript{76} However, his reduction of the scale and scope of the cartoon also highlights aspects of Rossetti’s own artistic interests at the time, for these changes, much like those evident in the play \textit{Aladdin} and the \textit{Arabian Nights} illustrations, focus on what is arguably the most dramatic event of this narrative—Simon Peter’s conversion—and emphasize the more personal aspect of the incident. Moreover, I would argue that, in placing so much emphasis on these elements of the illustration, the alterations that Rossetti makes to Raphael’s cartoon represent a clear attempt to erase the original’s Catholic connotations and firmly place the image within an English Protestant register.

Raphael’s \textit{Miraculous Draught} is strongly entrenched within a Catholic tradition; after all, the work was commissioned by a pope for the Sistine Chapel, which, during the Renaissance, was ranked in importance as “the first chapel in Christendom” (Shearman 45) since it was “reserved primarily for the use of the Pope and his immediate entourage” (Fermor 9). Moreover, the series of cartoons that Raphael designed depicts the acts and experiences of St. Peter and St. Paul and “[t]aken as a whole, . . . focuses on the complementary roles and power of the two principal apostles” (Fermor 15). At the time the cartoons were drawn, Peter and Paul were looked upon “as the twin founders of the Christian Church, with special missions to convert the Jews and the Gentiles respectively” (Fermor 10), and Peter, furthermore, was considered within Catholic tradition as the first pope, since, as Raphael depicts in another cartoon, \textit{Christ’s Charge to Peter}, Jesus declared to his first apostle, “‘. . . thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church’” (Matt. 16.18). All of the subsequent “popes were considered

\textsuperscript{76} Raphael’s cartoon, which had been affected by “the contraction of area caused by the marked wrinkling of the paper,” measured nearly ten-and-a-half feet in height and thirteen feet in width in 1858 (Shearman 210-11).
successors of Peter in his office as Christ’s representative on earth,” and, as one commentator has noted, “Leo was eager to emphasize the legitimacy of papal succession by including key episodes in the lives of Peter and Paul in the Sistine tapestries” (“The Miraculous Draught”). Critics of the Raphael cartoons have also pointed out that Raphael carries out this task of legitimizing Leo’s papal authority not just in terms of the episodes that the artist depicts but also in the symbolism that he incorporates into his recreations of these events. For instance, it has been argued that the cranes in the foreground of the Miraculous Draught are “because of [their] reputation for vigilance, . . . an emblem of papal authority . . . [and] another link between Peter and the current pope, Leo X” (“Animal Imagery”). In ways both obvious and subtle, Raphael’s work deliberately bolsters the status and authority of the patron—and, by extension, the institution—that commissioned it.

In marked contrast to the pervasively Catholic milieu in which Raphael’s cartoons were created, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s upbringing was thoroughly Anglican. Marsh notes that, as small children, the four Rossetti siblings “learnt prayers, Bible stories and moral tales, and on Sundays went dutifully to church, for the Polidori [Rossetti’s mother’s family] women were devout Anglicans, and this was an Evangelical age” (Painter 4). Marsh also highlights the extent of this maternal religious influence on Dante Gabriel Rossetti in particular, saying,

His first beliefs came from his mother, . . . who had been raised in the Evangelical mode where daily examination of conscience or moral reckoning was a typical practice. Such teaching [is] traceable in Gabriel’s lifelong habit of aiming to accomplish “something in some branch of work” every day. (Painter 26)
Although Rossetti moved away from these beliefs as he grew into adulthood, William Holman Hunt, who had the benefits of both personal knowledge and hindsight, later wrote that his former friend and colleague “still cherished the habits of thought he had contracted at his mother’s knee” (qtd. in Marsh, Painter 27) during the early days of the P. R. B. Judging by both Hunt’s nostalgic reminiscences and Marsh’s more scholarly assessment, the impact of this early religious teaching by Mrs. Rossetti remained unmitigated during her son’s childhood, and this influence was, moreover, uncontested by Rossetti’s Italian father, who, despite his Catholic background, “cheerfully gave up his children to Mrs. Rossetti’s evangelical training” (Waller 78). While Dante Gabriel Rossetti himself left no detailed record of his own religious upbringing, the accounts of his brother, other contemporaries, and later scholars uniformly emphasize the centrality of Anglican religious thought within the Rossetti household at the time at which the young artist created his imitation of Raphael’s cartoon.

The prevalence accorded to the Anglican interpretation of Christianity in Rossetti’s youth is clearly evident in his reworking of The Miraculous Draught, for all of the changes—both visual and textual—that Rossetti makes in order to emphasize the individual and dramatic nature of Peter’s experience also serve to sever Raphael’s portrayal of Jesus and his new disciples from its Catholic context and resituate the image as one of a more Evangelically inflected personal encounter between humanity and divinity. At first glance, the most obvious alteration that Rossetti has made is to place the most important figures from the cartoon (i.e., Christ, Peter, and the other apostle in the

77 Marsh sets the date at which he stopped attending church as approximately 1842, when Rossetti was fourteen (Painter 26, 10). However, R. D. Waller, who has written The Rossetti Family, cites 1846 or 1847 as the point at which this shift occurred (169). Whichever date is correct (and it is most likely Marsh’s), what is significant here is that Rossetti’s “Miraculous Draught of Fishes” precedes both dates.

78 See Family-Letters 1: 21, 57.
boat) in isolation; by removing the other three fishermen and the numerous secondary figures that are included in Raphael’s cartoon, Rossetti emphasizes the significance of Peter’s moment of conversion to the exclusion of all else and both literally and metaphorically separates this event from the other actions and incidents described in Luke’s Gospel. In doing so, Rossetti suggests the impact that Evangelical beliefs, which, due to their reliance “on religious sentiment and personal piety [rather] than on theology or dogma” (Péteri 10), place great emphasis on the notion of personal religious conversion, had had upon him up to this point.

In a similar vein, Rossetti’s alterations to Raphael’s image also strip away some of the more symbolic elements of the original cartoon that serve to position Peter as a figure of central importance. For example, Rossetti’s version of *The Miraculous Draught* eliminates such symbols as the cranes and other birds that populate the cartoon and create subtle links with notions of papal succession, but, interestingly, Rossetti chooses to retain the various fish and sea creatures that are piled in the bottom of the boat and a single fish that swims alongside it. Rossetti’s fish are not nearly as detailed as those of Raphael. However, it is significant that he chooses to keep these creatures and no others in the image, for the fish have been interpreted as representations of “souls that have been saved” (“Animal Imagery”). If we concur with this interpretation, then the fish function as symbols of basic Christian doctrine and are not tied to any specifically Catholic teaching. Thus, although Rossetti removes the more inherently Catholic symbols from his re-creation of Raphael’s cartoon, he allows the fish to remain since they are not a problematic or contradictory element in this Protestant re-drawing of a Catholic image.

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79 Shearman notes that, in fact, “all the identifiable fish collected in such a remarkably accurate still-life in Peter’s boat are, normally, inhabitants of deep water” (50).
Even more significant, however, than these instances of repositioning and revision is the fact that Rossetti removes the haloes from Peter’s and the other apostle’s heads so that Christ is the only figure adorned with this accoutrement of divinity. By stripping the apostles of the haloes that they wear in Raphael’s cartoon, Rossetti fundamentally alters the power dynamics within the image. Instead of showing Christ speaking with two men who both have quasi-divine status themselves, Rossetti’s sketch attributes divinity solely to Christ, and the absence of the apostles’ haloes serves to remind the viewer that the boat’s passengers are simply ordinary humans who, at the moment depicted, experience a life-altering meeting with the divine. This small but important revision effectively removes all of the original cartoon’s connotations of Peter’s divinely ordained leadership, which supposedly led to the foundation of the Catholic Church, and, instead, places the work in an Evangelical context by depicting Peter not as a saint but simply as a man who undergoes a profound conversion, which has personal—rather than institutional—results.

Finally, the last significant change that Rossetti makes in his own image is to identify one specific verse of Luke’s account as a kind of caption for the sketch. After providing the title of the work at the very top of the drawing, he adds the words, “Luke C5-V8,” in reference to a verse that states, “When Simon Peter saw it [the draught of fish], he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’” As I have already mentioned, Raphael’s portrayal of Peter’s conversion also incorporates several other occurrences that are mentioned in the course of Luke’s eleven-verse description of the calling of the apostles, so, by listing only one specific verse, Rossetti rigidly demarcates the moment that he is attempting to portray and simultaneously limits the potential interpretations of it. While choosing this particular
verse demonstrates an early example of the concern for parallelism between image and
text that marked Rossetti’s entire career, it also once again emphasizes the significance
within the biblical account of Peter’s personal encounter with Christ by explicitly
separating this one event from all of the other occurrences in the surrounding narrative.
In this way, although Peter is not presented in Rossetti’s “Miraculous Draught” as the
foundation of a divine institution on earth, his conversion is not by any means stripped of
importance, for Rossetti depicts the disciple as an example of the ideal Evangelical
Christian, whose life is altered ever afterward by a personal encounter with Christ.

It is, of course, virtually impossible to state with any certainty whether Rossetti
made these various Evangelically-inflected changes to Raphael’s cartoon consciously or
otherwise, but the very fact that he felt it permissible to make alterations to a work that
was considered such a bastion of high culture and national pride indicates both the young
artist’s growing confidence in his own work and the early development of the idea, with
which he became so strongly associated in his young adulthood, that artistic authority
must be questioned. Like many of his other juvenile works, Rossetti’s re-creation—in the
most literal sense—of Raphael’s sixteenth-century cartoon demonstrates his awareness of
and desire to appropriate the role of a professional painter who works within the
precedents set by previous artists while simultaneously adapting and sometimes
jettisoning altogether their images, techniques, and styles to suit his own contemporary
purposes.

However, even more importantly, Rossetti’s emphasis on the personal experience
of the central characters in “The Miraculous Draught of Fishes” also partakes of the same
tendency that I have highlighted in Aladdin and the Arabian Nights illustrations,
Rossetti’s other Middle-Eastern-themed juvenilia, for, instead of foregrounding the fact that these works are all set in the Middle East, Rossetti downplays the actual geographical and cultural setting and instead chooses to emphasize the personal experiences that the characters in each of these works undergo. For example, the costumes of the figures in Rossetti’s “Miraculous Draught” contain nothing that would suggest the story’s setting in Jewish antiquity, and this sketch even takes the lack of cultural specificity in Raphael’s original work one step further: instead of setting the three central characters against Raphael’s pastoral landscape, which is more reminiscent of the Italian countryside than of the actual setting of Luke’s narrative in Galilee, Rossetti’s partial re-creation of Raphael’s image removes the event’s geographical context altogether by entirely omitting the background. By excluding such details, which would highlight the work’s setting in a particular time and place, the emphasis that Rossetti desires to place on the three figures in the boat remains undisturbed, and, more importantly, the work’s focus on the moment of Peter’s conversion as both a profoundly moving personal event and an exemplum of the universality of the conversion experienced by all Evangelical Christians is maintained.

Furthermore, Rossetti’s decision to avoid realistic details of costume and background in his version of “The Miraculous Draught,” his first drawing of a biblical subject, also suggests his lack of attraction to the kind of Orientalist realism that was exemplified by Harvey’s carefully researched illustrations in the Arabian Nights. Indeed, although Rossetti first encountered the Lane-Harvey edition of the Arabian Nights in 1838, one year prior to his creation of “The Miraculous Draught,” the text’s numerous engravings seem to have had no influence on the style or subject matter of either “The
Miraculous Draught” or Rossetti’s own *Arabian Nights* illustrations from 1840. Instead, in “The Miraculous Draught,” Rossetti rejects the more scholarly style embraced by Lane and Harvey and adopts the same kind of selective realism that I argue is present in the *Arabian Nights* illustrations and in his 1849 painting *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* in order to evince a particular mood rather than a specific socio-cultural setting. In this manner, Rossetti’s re-creation of Raphael’s cartoon simultaneously reminds us once again of the strong trend in the artist’s entire *oeuvre* of valuing “poetic design” over ethnographic accuracy and also highlights the fact that this tendency began not in 1848, as much contemporary criticism of Rossetti would lead us to believe, but nearly a decade earlier with his *Arabian Nights* illustrations and his entirely overlooked imitation of Raphael.

Given the reverence that was clearly granted to the Bible in Rossetti’s household due to the Evangelical upbringing of himself and his siblings, it may seem surprising that the young artist makes no obvious effort to differentiate between or hierarchize the various narratives that are the sources for his Middle-Eastern-themed juvenilia. Instead, Rossetti employs the same techniques and highlights the same thematic concerns in his biblical illustrations that he does in his fairy-tale *Arabian Nights* drawings and his re-writing of the fantastic story of Aladdin. However, this lack of differentiation between a sacred text and a collection of magical tales can be more easily explained when we consider a comment about Rossetti made by William Holman Hunt in his memoir. Hunt writes that, around the time of the founding of the P. R. B., “Rossetti treated the Gospel history simply as a storehouse of interesting situations and beautiful personages for the artist’s pencil, just as the Arthurian legends afterwards were to him” (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 1: 83).
172). Although Hunt comments here on the lack of a hierarchy in Rossetti’s early adult work that would situate “the Gospel” above chivalric lore, his words are equally applicable to the artist’s juvenilia, which is drawn toward and emphasizes the same kinds of intensely personal experience and “interesting situations,” whether they are taken from the New Testament or from various translations of the *Arabian Nights*. In this way, then, we can consider Rossetti’s “Miraculous Draught” not just as a precursor to the strong emphasis on personal narratives within Rossetti’s later Christian paintings but also as the true starting point of his tendency, which was commented upon by Hunt, to view the Bible not as an inviolable text but as a collection of stories like any other that could provide a series of narratives that lend themselves well to “poetic design.”

A detailed discussion of the earliest works of Rossetti’s career is a task that has not been undertaken until now, and this chapter has attempted to address this overlooked segment of the artist’s work through an examination of selected portions of Rossetti’s historically denigrated and currently ignored juvenilia in order to learn what these works can contribute to our understanding of his *oeuvre* as a whole. Focusing on Rossetti’s early engagement with texts and drawings that utilize Middle Eastern themes and motifs allows us to situate his early work within the context of a number of important figures—including F. A. M. Retzsch, Antoine Galland, Edward William Lane, William Harvey, John Martin, various illustrators of theatrical prints and outline drawings, and even Raphael himself—who influenced many nineteenth-century writers and artists besides Rossetti.

Despite their diverse sources, the three works that I have focused on in this chapter—the play *Aladdin*, the series of *Arabian Nights* illustrations, and “The
Miraculous Draught of Fishes”—not only highlight young Rossetti’s strong emphasis on narrative drama, but they also allow him to utilize the individual experiences of characters from the *Arabian Nights* and from Luke’s Gospel to deal with concerns that were, to him, simultaneously universal and intensely personal. Indeed, Rossetti’s emphasis on the theme of personal growth in his fragmentary play *Aladdin*, adult emotions in the *Arabian Nights* illustrations, and the experience of a Protestantized religious conversion in “The Miraculous Draught” gives the young author-artist the opportunity to begin to interrogate—and vicariously experience—some of the larger issues of developing maturity. As Robertson, who advocates the view of juvenilia as a form of “play” that allows children to “gain . . . mastery” (295) over a particular emotion or situation, would argue, these three works clearly contain an element of “play” in that they allow their creator to deal with issues of “[t]ransformation, elaboration, the development of mental constructs, [and] catharsis” (296) in “an environment of complete safety” (295) within his own imagination.

However, beyond the insight that these drawings and this play provide into Rossetti’s early attraction to more personal aspects of artistic and authorial creativity, the works can also be viewed as precedent-setting texts and images that point toward trends in depictions of the Middle East in some of the works of Rossetti’s later career. I have already discussed how the selective realism of the 1840 *Arabian Nights* illustrations, which focus on depicting believable reactions to moments of dramatic import while ignoring cultural and historical accuracy in terms of more prosaic details of costume and setting, anticipate a similar conception of emotional—but not ethnographic—realism in Rossetti’s first publicly exhibited oil painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*. Likewise, I
would argue that the kind of emphasis on a particular figure’s response to a dramatic moment to the exclusion of all else that is evident in Rossetti’s “Miraculous Draught of Fishes” is echoed in the artist’s second major oil painting *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (figure 10). The predominating use of whiteness in the painting (in Gabriel’s robe, Mary’s nightgown, and the bedding and blank walls of the protagonist’s room) and its token effort at a landscape in the form of a tree barely glimpsed through a back window force the viewer’s eyes onto Mary’s face, which forms one of the few visible coloured areas in the painting, in much the same way that the omission of Raphael’s varied and detailed background realigns the emphasis of “The Miraculous Draught” and places it firmly upon Peter’s humanized reaction to his experience of divinity. Moreover, this tendency to focus on emotion, rather than on the type of painstakingly researched literal details associated with the canvases of William Holman Hunt, runs throughout Rossetti’s work, and it is evident both within these early paintings, which mark the beginnings of his

Figure 10. D. G. Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, 1850. Tate Britain.
professional artistic career, and in later works like *The Beloved* (1866)\(^{80}\) and *Astarte Syriaca* (1877), which, despite their use of various material objects that are meant to evoke the cultures they portray, are actually divorced from any one particular socio-cultural background and are instead “decorative in the extreme, as [Rossetti] himself noted” (Rossetti Archive, *The Beloved*).

Of course, such statements that attempt to find “precedents” in an author or artist’s juvenilia or “echoes” of ideas in his later works run the risk of adhering too closely to the “apprenticeship model” of evaluating juvenilia that Robertson so rightly criticizes, yet pointing out some of the continuities in Rossetti’s career—his abiding interest in the confluence of text and image; his focus on narrative drama; his use of selective realism; and, concomitantly, his attraction to Middle Eastern narratives as diverse as the *Arabian Nights* and the New Testament that results in works that highlight the dramatic and personal while overlooking (or ignoring entirely) questions of social, cultural, racial, and temporal difference—actually allows us to attribute a much more significant role to Rossetti’s juvenilia by highlighting the need, which has been so long overlooked, of reconstructing scholarly accounts of Rossetti’s career so that they begin not at the time of the founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood but over a decade earlier. By including the rather large—but heretofore ignored—corpus of Rossetti’s juvenilia, of which a remarkable portion remains extant, in our considerations of the author-artist’s work, we can begin the study of his career in 1834, rather than 1848, and arrive at a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the themes and motifs that form some of the central concerns of his *oeuvre* as a whole.

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\(^{80}\) I discuss *The Beloved* in greater detail in the Conclusion.
The Illustrated London News was a “pioneering venture into illustrated journalism [that] covered virtually all aspects of everyday life and high society, as well as great events at home and abroad” between 1842 and 1900 (Anderson 137). In July and October of 1850, this popular periodical contained a pair of articles on the transportation and arrival in London of “the Great Bull from Nimroud” (qtd. in Bohrer 140), a huge sculpture from the recently excavated ancient Assyrian capital of Nimrud, depicting a figure with the head of a man, the body of a bull, and the wings of an eagle. This statue, along with another representation of a lion with a man’s head and an eagle’s wings, was unlike anything else in the collections of the British Museum, which was to house them. The discovery of these and many other artifacts from the previously unexcavated cities of Nimrud and Nineveh caused a sensation upon their arrival in England, but none of them became as widely known and recognized as the winged bull. Indeed, art historian Frederick Bohrer, who offers a wide-ranging and meticulously detailed discussion of the reception of Assyrian artifacts in nineteenth-century Europe in his recent book Orientalism and Visual

81 Nimrud, which is located on the eastern banks of the Tigris River, was chosen by King Ashurnasirpal II “as his administrative capital in 879 BC[E]” (Reade 34). In 1850, Nimrud was a part of the Ottoman Empire; it is now in northern Iraq, approximately twenty miles south of Mosul (Reade 34).

82 Nineveh is, like Nimrud, on the eastern shores of the Tigris; it is located directly across the river from Mosul. Nineveh was chosen as the capital of the Assyrian empire by King Sennacherib (ruled 705-681 B.C.E.) (Reade 50, 92). Although Nimrud and Nineveh are two distinct areas, they were often conflated in the Victorian period and referred to simply as Nineveh. For example, the archaeologist Austen Henry Layard, who became renowned for his excavations of both cities, published a series of books describing his work at Nimrud and Nineveh whose titles refer only to the latter site: Monuments of Nineveh (1849), Nineveh and Its Remains (1849), Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon (1853), and A Second Series of the Monuments of Nineveh (1853).
Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe, has argued that this sculpture and its companion “became the very emblems of Assyria in the popular mind” (Bohrer 106).

The winged bull was hoisted up the main steps of the British Museum in the fall of 1850, and it was at the time of its installation that Dante Gabriel Rossetti first saw the statue. Rossetti’s prolific correspondence does not make reference to his experience of the event, but we know from various entries in his brother William Michael Rossetti’s “P.R.B. Journal” that Rossetti began a poem “suggested by some of the Nineveh sculpture” just prior to October 23, 1850 (287, 279). The poem, which became “The Burden of Nineveh,” uses its speaker’s encounter with the newly arrived Assyrian bull at the entrance to the British Museum as a matrix from which to ponder the long history of the artifact, imagine its eventual role within the Museum, and, finally, use the statue to remind the speaker’s own culture of the transience of empires and the forgetfulness of history. For the purpose of this chapter, which seeks to demonstrate how Rossetti’s comments on the Assyrian bull reflect his own Pre-Raphaelite artistic and cultural ideals, it is important to note that, in the midst of the more abstract considerations of the poem that are outlined above, the text also makes explicit reference to the physical appearance of the Assyrian sculpture and the efforts expended to place it within the Museum, issues which, as I shall discuss, were highly controversial at the time of the bull’s arrival in England.

The text is one of the longest of Rossetti’s poems and has also been described as “the longest and most important of the poet-painter’s meditations on contemporary political, social, and, ultimately, religious problems” (Bentley 159). This description of
the poem nicely summarizes the most common twentieth-century readings of the work, which has been variously discussed as a “broadly based critique of imperial cultures” (McGann 383), a “condemnation of the pride and vanity of earthly empires” (Bentley 169), and as a meditation on “the rise and fall of civilizations” (Marsh, Painter 31). In terms of the poem’s treatment of religious issues, it has been seen by critics as a discussion of the impossibility of “religious certainty” (Marsh, Painter 107), as a questioning of whether Christianity can endure the passage of time (Riede 88-9), as an argument that the decline and fall of societies is caused by their own obeisance to “vanity and material gain” rather than “Christ’s ‘lowly ways’” (Boos 139), and, finally, as a warning of “the apocalyptic consequences of the contemporary failure to regard the message of Christianity” (Bentley 172). The poem itself supports all of these varied notions of the objects of its criticism, but one aspect of interest in these critical perspectives is that all of them, with the exception of that of Pre-Raphaelite scholar D. M. R. Bentley, rely on a version of the poem that is both later than and substantially different from the version that Rossetti wrote in 1850.

The edition of the poem that was written at the end of 1850 first appeared in print in 1856 in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, with which Rossetti’s younger followers William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones were deeply involved. However,
when the same poem appeared for a second time in Rossetti’s Poems (1870), it had been substantially altered throughout and had undergone a change in tone, which one critic has described as a shift from “light-hearted and whimsical” to “more serious and contemplative” (Riede 89-90). The poem was also shortened from 210 lines in the earlier version to 200 in the later one, and the colloquial language employed by the narrator in the opening stanza (and elsewhere) was removed entirely and replaced with lines more

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*Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life,* that contains “three stanzas, two from the original manuscript of 1850, the third an interpolation made in 1856” (Rossetti Archive, “Burden”).

However, the evidence of these three stanzas does not, in my opinion, provide a sufficient basis for the Archive’s repeated claim that “The Burden of Nineveh” underwent major revisions between 1850 and 1856. Although there are some differences between the language and imagery of Marillier’s manuscript page, which he dates from 1850, and the 1856 published text, there is not a radical disparity between them, and, in fact, much of the same text appears in this manuscript and in lines 31 to 60 of the 1856 version. Moreover, Marillier himself makes it clear that neither he nor the owner of the manuscript knows when the additional stanza was added to the page; although Marillier provides a tentative date of “c. 1855-6” in the caption for the facsimile of the additional stanza (222), he describes this stanza in his text only as “a later interpolation” and dates it “to some succeeding year not later than 1856” (221). Finally, to return to the Rossetti Archive, it seems somewhat risky to form assumptions about the lengthy process of revising an entire long poem based on a single manuscript page containing only three stanzas.

In addition to the risks that inhere in such reliance on Marillier’s facsimile, a number of the accounts by William Michael Rossetti that the Rossetti Archive uses to support its hypothesis concerning the heavy revision of the original 1850 draft actually call this claim into question. For example, the Archive relies on William Michael Rossetti’s statement in the notes of the 1911 edition of his brother’s collected works that “Burden” was “[w]ritten in the autumn of 1850,” but it fails to note that he immediately goes on to say that the poem was, in that year, “I think, brought to completion” (Works 649), a statement that immediately calls into question the Archive’s aforementioned supposition that “Burden” may only have existed “in a fragmentary form” at this stage. W. M. Rossetti’s chronology of the poem also notes that “an attentive revision was made later on” (Works 649), but his note, which then refers to the poem’s initial publication in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* while the text reprints the 1870 version of the poem, makes it unclear whether he is referring to the substantial changes made before the publication of the final 1870 version or to an earlier process of revision. I believe that he is referring to the changes made between 1856 and 1870, for, as William Michael Rossetti himself notes (Designer 137), Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote a letter to Ford Madox Brown on January 3, 1854, that strongly suggests that he had finished “my poem about Nineveh” by that date because he was prepared to submit it for publication in a new “penny weekly mag[azine] to be called the ‘Pen,’” which was run by his friend James Hannay (Rossetti, Correspondence 1: 305-6).

The evidence outlined in the preceding paragraph, combined with the fact that there is nothing in William Michael Rossetti’s account of the initial composition of the poem in “The P.R.B. Journal” that implies that the version written in 1850 differs substantially from the text published six years later, suggests that the Rossetti Archive’s positive assertions regarding two very different 1850 and 1856 versions of “The Burden of Nineveh” are questionable at best, and I am more inclined to follow the lead of Bentley, who makes no distinctions between the text as it was written in 1850 and as it appeared in print in 1856 (Bentley 166-7).

Thus, for the remainder of the chapter, I will refer to the first printed version of the poem as the 1850 text, operating on the reasoned assumption that the version of the poem published in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* is essentially the same as the text that Rossetti wrote in the autumn of 1850.
closely aligned with what one might traditionally expect from a poetic meditation on history, religion, and empire. The stance adopted by the speaker, moreover, in his relationship to the British Museum and to the various members of English society that he envisions within the institution also changed dramatically; before the publication of the text in 1870, Rossetti completely rewrote the first eight lines. Also, since the later version was published nearly twenty years after the demise of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood that Rossetti had helped to establish, the poet also removed the references that the work contained to the group and the public stir it had created in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Rossetti also deleted or substantially rewrote eighteen lines that had implied a criticism of the artistic and cultural mores of London—and, by extension, English society. Given the substantial alterations that “The Burden of Nineveh” underwent between the times of its first and second publication, it is surprising that the earlier version of the poem has been so neglected by critics, especially since numerous elements of the 1850 text—including Rossetti’s explicit references to the P. R. B.—clearly suggest that the original version of the poem is linked to its author’s artistic credo at the time of the Brotherhood’s founding.

While there is general agreement among critics that a substantial shift in tone occurs between the two versions\(^\text{84}\), this observation has tended to create a hierarchy between the editions of the text in which the 1850 version is viewed as simply comical or inferior and skipped over in favour of the later text,\(^\text{85}\) in much the same way that, as I discuss in Chapter Two, Rossetti’s juvenilia is overlooked in relation to his more mature

\(^{84}\text{Cf. McGann 383; Marsh, Painter 31; and Bentley 166-7.}\)

\(^{85}\text{It is the 1870 version that appears, for instance, in the two most recent collections of Rossetti’s poetry edited by Jerome McGann and Jan Marsh. The dismissal of the earlier edition is also evident in, for example, Boos 207, 209; Riede 89; Rees 52-3; and Black 142, 144.}\)
work. A notable exception to this critical tendency is the argument put forward by Bentley in his 1979 article “Political Themes in the Work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,” which states that the earlier text “perhaps conveys more truly Rossetti’s mood when he first confronted the ‘Bull-god’ in 1850” (167). This proximity of the 1850 version to Rossetti’s political ideals in and around 1850 is important to Bentley’s arguments because he seeks to outline the larger political climate in which “The Burden of Nineveh” was written in order to highlight Rossetti’s own often overlooked political views during this period. Bentley’s reasoning behind his use of the original version of the poem suggests the extent to which the poem’s narrator and his use of language are rooted in the specific political, artistic, and religious milieus of 1850.

The years around 1850 were the period of Rossetti’s most intense involvement in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and they were also the years in which Rossetti wrote a number of political poems treating the events and aftermath of 1848, a year that saw revolutions in a number of European nations. Bentley discusses “The Burden of Nineveh” in the context of Rossetti’s political ideals and convincingly argues against the widespread conception of the poet-artist as an apolitical figure, saying, “From almost the beginning to almost the end of his poetic and artistic career [Rossetti] manifested a sporadic but nevertheless keen and satirical interest in contemporary English and European affairs” (159). With its emphasis on Rossetti’s political standpoint, Bentley’s article certainly offers a valuable re-reading of “The Burden of Nineveh,” but, in trying to understand the ways in which Rossetti’s early work is influenced by concrete events and situations, we must be careful not to step too far in one direction and overlook the poem’s

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86 The poems with political resonances that date from this period include “At the Sun-Rise in 1848,” “Vox Ecclesiae, Vox Christi,” “On Refusal of Aid between Nations,” “The English Revolution of 1848,” and “A Last Confession.”
clear connections to less tangible but equally pressing aesthetic concerns. McGann notes that the poem “clearly relates to Rossetti’s programmatic concerns about art and its relation to society” and goes on to mention in passing that “[t]he 1856 [i.e., the 1850] text treats these matters in a comic tone that tells much about his skeptical view of English art and society at large” (383), but McGann does not go on to discuss this important observation in detail. Indeed, the direct links that Rossetti creates in the early version of “The Burden of Nineveh” to contemporary debates about the value of Assyrian artifacts and, more broadly, the conception of the history of art and the status of English art education have gone unnoticed. In order to fill this critical gap, this chapter will take as its starting point the idea that Rossetti’s political beliefs alone do not lead to his condemnation of the worldliness and “unchristian” materialism he sees in mid-nineteenth-century British society; I will argue, instead, that the specific way in which he chooses to condemn his culture—through his frequently ambiguous and ambivalent employment of the Assyrian bull as an artifact of antiquity—reflects not just Rossetti’s political stance but, even more importantly, his artistic ideals during the period of the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Before turning to a reading of “The Burden of Nineveh,” however, it is important to discuss the significance of the artifacts from Nineveh, which inspired the poem, within a larger social context. Bohrer, to whose work this historical segment of my argument is heavily indebted, makes frequent references to “the remarkably deep and sustained English reaction” (9) to the artifacts excavated by Austen Henry Layard and goes on to declare that England was “[t]he most intense and articulated milieu of Assyrian reception, by any measure” (65). The media’s reaction to the appearance of the artifacts in London
certainly was marked; *The Illustrated London News* was just one of several magazines that offered—to a very diverse readership—discussions of the artifacts, their arrival in England, and their subsequent installation in the British Museum. However, Assyrian objects served as far more than journalistic fodder for periodicals of the time. According to Bohrer, “[o]ne finds nationalistic, historical, textual, and aesthetic” (104) evaluations of the objects in widely ranging sources, and his book is largely devoted to analyses of these differing views across nations and decades. Of the various perspectives on the artifacts that Bohrer outlines, the one that is most crucial to my understanding of the use Rossetti makes of the winged bull in “The Burden of Nineveh” is the reluctance of art critics and, especially, the Trustees of the British Museum to recognize any sort of artistic or aesthetic value in the objects brought to London by Layard’s excavations.

Indeed, books that discuss the history of Layard’s work inevitably touch upon the difficult and often strained relationship that the amateur archaeologist had with the Trustees of the British Museum. Despite the intervention of Sir Stratford Canning, the British Ambassador at Constantinople, Layard’s requests for the institution to fund the excavations were initially “coldly received” (Lloyd 107); from this very early stage the Trustees showed a complacent lack of interest in the work being done by Layard at his own expense prior to 1846. Interestingly, the Museum had already had in its possession, before Layard’s discoveries, a small collection of Assyrian artifacts gathered in the second decade of the nineteenth century, and these “were displayed in a glass case as one of the extremely few concrete testimonials to the existence of the ancient cultures in

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87 See, for instance, the 1850 article “Nineveh and Persepolis” in the *Art-Journal* (225) and the *Athenæum*’s October 1850 discussion of “The Nineveh Marbles” (1121).
88 See, for example, Saggs 53, 62; Larsen 100, 108-14, 145-6, 194-5, 206, 239, 268; and Waterfield 156-8, 187, 196-7, 215-6, 222, 232, 478.
Assyria and Babylonia” (Larsen 9). However, the Trustees did not exactly rush forward when they learned from Canning that they would be able to augment the Assyrian collection with far more significant finds than they had in their possession. In fact, Layard had a difficult time “persuading the Museum authorities of the importance of the Assyrian discoveries” (Waterfield 478), and, as Bohrer convincingly argues, when they did agree to add Layard’s finds to their collection and offer financial support for the excavations, they did so on the basis of “nationalistic and antiquarian/historical” (130) reasons rather than artistic or aesthetic ones. That is, the Trustees saw the possibility of displaying the artifacts in London as a way of keeping up with and perhaps outstripping the French, who had been the first Europeans to conduct archaeological research in the area, and as a means of presenting to a British audience historical evidence of a place that had been “shrouded in myth and legend” until the nineteenth century and for which “no concrete evidence . . . could be found” (Larsen xi) in any museum. Canning certainly played upon this nationalistic desire of the Museum when he wrote to the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, in an attempt to secure funding for the excavations, saying that the number of sculptures and inscriptions unearthed by Layard gave “much reason to hope that Montagu House [the British Museum] will beat the Louvre hollow” (qtd. in Larsen 96). Yet the reaction of the Trustees to the entire endeavour was mixed at best. When the Museum finally did offer its official support near the end of 1846, Layard was dissatisfied with the terms of the contract (Waterfield 156-9), which provided quite limited financial support. However, he accepted the offer, and, by the time he was preparing to return to London in 1847, a letter signed by the secretary to the Trustees acknowledged the arrival of twelve cases of artifacts at the British Museum. It stated that
the artifacts “have created great interest, and all who have examined appear to be much
gratified” (qtd. in Larsen 132). The noncommittal language of this piece of
correspondence, which does not state that those who had seen the artifacts actually were
“gratified,” is indicative of the cool reception that Layard’s findings received from a
number of the Trustees and their compatriots in artistic circles.

Layard’s struggles with lack of funding (Larsen 194-5; Saggs 62) and exhibition
space (Saggs 54; Bohrer 114-16) from the British Museum continued during the second
round of his excavations, which began in 1849, but the issue that is most relevant to this
chapter’s discussion of Rossetti’s use of the Assyrian bull in “The Burden of Nineveh” is
what prominent figures in the Museum and art world had to say about the artifacts as they
began to arrive in England. An article in the Athenæum in July 184789 declares, after a
lengthy discussion of the reliefs sent by Layard,

I have been induced to enter thus minutely into the detail of these
interesting sculptures from the important light which they are likely to throw upon
our previous historical records:—for although they can in no way be available for
their beauty as works of Art, the high state of civilization which they manifest as
regards the ornamental and useful sciences will at once be appreciated by the
intelligent and enlightened observer. (Bonomi 707)

With this statement, the aesthetic or artistic value of the artifacts is entirely and explicitly
negated; the author instead chooses to focus on the historical value of the sculptures,
emphasizing, in the words of Sir Stratford Canning, how they will fill “an enormous
blank in the early history of the world” (qtd. in Bohrer 103). In the mind of the
Athenæum’s writer, the reliefs, while valuable for other interests and endeavours, simply
do not qualify as works of art. A similar view is expressed in another issue of the
Athenæum three years later in response to a different set of objects shipped from

89 This article appeared anonymously but, as Larsen points out, was later stated to be the work of Joseph
Bonomi in a letter from the author in the September 11 issue of the same year (Larsen 336).
Mesopotamia, the “Winged Human-Headed Lion” and the “Winged Human-Headed Bull” (“Nineveh Marbles” 1121) that inspired Rossetti’s poem. After citing the descriptions of the statues provided by Layard, presumably in his 1849 book *Nineveh and Its Remains*, which “achieved immediate fame and has become one of the classics of archaeology” (Saggs 60), the anonymous author confess[es] to being satiated with these repeated recurrences to the same formulae of expression,—and little disposed to recommend that an inch more of the valuable space in our Great National Building [the British Museum] shall be given up to them. It is sufficient for the national honour that this country was among the first to possess any of these primitive specimens of sculpture, with the valuable lessons which they teach. We have enough of them in the Museum to represent satisfactorily their style and meanings. (“Nineveh Marbles” 1121)

This statement clearly appeals to the same type of nationalistic, competitive tendencies that Canning’s early letter to Peel does, particularly with its references to the British Museum as “our Great National Building” and to the fact that England is “among the first” to bring Assyrian artifacts back from its excavations. Indeed, this discussion of the “primitive specimens” in such nationalistic terms amply demonstrates the accuracy of Barbara J. Black’s assertions in *On Exhibit: Victorians and Their Museums* that “collecting and empire” were inextricably intertwined in the nineteenth century and that museums within London “served to legitimate Britain’s power at home and across the globe . . . [by] housing the spoils of colonization and guarding the growing perimeter of the British empire” (11). In fact, now that “the national honour” had been preserved by the delivery of the objects into the Museum’s hands, the author of the *Athenæum* could confidently declare that the artifacts’ purpose had been served. “[T]he valuable lessons which they teach,” presumably of a historical nature, had been conveyed, and the possibility that these objects might be perceived as works of art is not even given
consideration here. Views such as those expressed in the *Athenæum* appear repeatedly in varied discussions of the Assyrian artifacts, and these two examples highlight the reluctance of art critics to admit any aesthetic value in them.

Certain members of the Trustees of the British Museum were also quite vocal about their evaluations of the objects. W. R. Hamilton, one of these Trustees, had no interest in displaying any of the Assyrian artifacts acquired from Layard. A letter written to Layard by William Vaux, an assistant in the Museum’s Department of Antiquities, refers to Hamilton’s sentiment of “wish[ing the artifacts] at the bottom of the sea”; on another occasion, Hamilton declared his opinion that Layard’s finds were “a parcel of rubbish” (qtd. in Miller 192). Hamilton was not the only board member to feel this way; other prominent figures among the board of directors felt similarly that the objects should not form a highly visible part of the Museum’s collections (Bohrer 122). One of these Trustees, Sir Richard Westmacott, to whom I shall return later, declared when questioned about the value of Assyrian art in a parliamentary inquiry in 1853 that “it is very bad art” and came to the following conclusion: “I certainly think that the less people, as artists, look at objects of that kind, the better” (qtd. in Bohrer 124-5). In the same discussion, Westmacott also averred “that the Assyrian reliefs were entirely devoid of artistic qualities, and therefore did not really belong under the same roof as the Parthenon sculptures” (Larsen 103). Here, with his admiring reference to the Parthenon (or Elgin) Marbles, Westmacott voices the traditional, classical ideology embraced by most of the art world at the time.

To the Trustees, many of them bastions of a conservative form of cultural history, “the masters of fifth-century BC Greece produced what was then considered the greatest
art of all time” (Wilson 109). In traditional artistic circles of the period, ancient Greek art was viewed as the pinnacle of artistic achievement and the primary object of emulation for both aspiring and mature artists (Bohrer 40). For this reason, the Museum’s directors tended to view the Parthenon Marbles, perhaps the most prized objects in their collection, as an “inspiration for contemporary artists and architects” (Wilson 71), while the aesthetic value of Assyrian artwork was constantly downplayed, as Bohrer suggests, to undermine its “challenge to the primacy of the Greeks” (40) as the apex of ancient sculptural beauty. Assyrian culture issued such a challenge on two levels. First, it threatened the accepted narrative of art history by presenting artifacts that were clearly distinct from Greek sculpture yet still might be perceived as having historical and even aesthetic value. Second, it threatened a larger view of general history as a progressive process, a movement toward an increasingly better society, based on the supposed ideal of ancient Greece and Greek art as the beginning of a tradition leading to the works exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in nineteenth-century London.  

Nineveh was removed both in terms of geographical and temporal distance from this Western classical ideal (Bohrer 43-4) and therefore suggested that progress was not so straightforward a process as the Hellenic ideal would have its proponents believe.

Because of these artistic, historical, and ideological complications that Layard’s findings presented, even the actual placement of the artifacts in the Museum proved to be problematic. Bohrer’s careful research into the organization of the Museum’s galleries at this time has found that the first Assyrian objects that were put on display in 1847 were

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90 In The Birth of the Museum, an intriguing discussion of the development and functions of public museums, Tony Bennett identifies this presentation of history as progress as a novel and defining aspect of Victorian museums, which constructed their public “as both the culmination of the evolutionary series laid out before it and as the apex of development from which the direction of those series, leading to modern man as their accomplishment, was discernible” (97).
unceremoniously crammed into a “space [that] was not even recognized by the Commissioners as a gallery at all, but merely a corridor” (114), where they were jumbled together with miscellaneous Greek, Roman, and Norman pieces in a place that “represented the lowest level of the museum’s own valuation of antiquities, a room whose contents were worthy enough to be displayed, but without meriting enough attention to fully establish the more unified . . . identity displayed in . . . the other galleries” (Bohrer 115-6). In the same letter to Layard that described W. R. Hamilton’s disdain for Assyrian art, William Vaux complained about the inadequacy of the display of the artifacts, saying, “[S]o they may for the future live in a dark vault where they cannot be seen at all” (qtd. in Bohrer 329).

Despite the reluctance of the Trustees to provide adequate space for the display of Layard’s findings, the British Museum remained “the central threshold of Assyrian display in England” (Bohrer 105) throughout the nineteenth century, and it is to the role of the Museum as a self-declared cultural arbiter that I would now like to turn. The British Museum was certainly, alongside the Royal Academy of Arts, one of the most prominent and important cultural institutions in London—and all of England. It was a great storehouse of cultures and artifacts, and an 1860 parliamentary committee recommended that it be viewed as “primarily . . . a great consultative repertory” (qtd. in Wilson 101). Yet, at the time of the Ninevan bull’s arrival in London, the British Museum’s conservatism was readily evident in the fact that key members of the institution devalued the artifact because of its lack of connection to the Greek ideal.

In its inherent conservatism, the British Museum might be compared to another important nineteenth-century cultural institution, the Royal Academy. The Pre-
Raphaelites’ criticisms of the latter institution, whose school Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and John Everett Millais all attended, are well known (and will be discussed in more detail later), but the Royal Academy Schools were generally acknowledged as the standard educational basis for anyone with a serious interest in a career as an artist. Together, the British Museum and the Royal Academy (R. A.) functioned as what Pierre Bourdieu calls “institutions of cultural conservation and consecration” (Field 124) in the sense that they were granted by their society the right to function as cultural arbiters and simultaneously possess and award “cultural consecration”—i.e. legitimacy” (Field 121) to certain artworks, artifacts, and artists while at the same time placing others outside this rarefied realm. I have already demonstrated how the British Museum enacted this role by relegating Assyrian works to areas both literally and metaphorically outside its carefully guarded narrative of cultural progression, but, as Bourdieu repeatedly points out in The Field of Cultural Production and The Love of Art, the educational system also plays a huge—and often unrecognized—role as another “agenc[y] of consecration” (Field 112), which is linked to an entire network of museums, art critics, and coteries and helps to maintain and replicate the artistic status quo embraced by all of these groups.91 Indeed, Bourdieu makes this link between schools and all of these other cultural agents explicit, noting that

-the various instances of consecration . . . consist, on the one hand, of institutions which conserve the capital of symbolic goods, such as museums; and, on the other hand, of institutions (such as the educational system) which ensure the reproduction of agents imbued with the categories of action, expression, conception, imagination, perception, specific to the “cultivated disposition.” (Field 121)

91 In Field, see, for example, 123 and 230-3. This notion of education underpinning a visitor’s capacities of perception and “appropriation” (Love 39) of artworks in a museum is a central motif of The Love of Art; see, in particular, Chapter Four, “Cultural Works and Cultivated Disposition,” 37-70.
In other words, schools and museums work together—either directly or indirectly—to create and perpetuate a particular model of “aesthetic disposition” (Field 120) or artistic appreciation, and this linkage is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the numerous explicit connections between the R. A. and the British Museum during Rossetti’s lifetime. For instance, in the early to mid-nineteenth century, the president of the Royal Academy was automatically made a Trustee of the British Museum (Wilson 119), and the president and other members of the R. A. were called upon to support the British government’s purchase of the Parthenon Marbles in 1815 (Wilson 73). Finally, at the time of Rossetti’s enrollment in the Antique School of the Royal Academy in July 1846 (Marsh, Painter 20), the R. A. and the Museum shared a prominent member, Sir Richard Westmacott, whose opinions of Assyrian art we have already encountered. Westmacott had been one of the artists and R. A. members who testified in favour of having the Parthenon Marbles at the Museum thirty years earlier (Wilson 73), and in the intervening years he had become both Professor of Sculpture at the R. A. (Sandby 381) and “something of an odd-job man” (Miller 196) for the British Museum, arranging and restoring displays at the request of the Trustees. Because of his professorship at the R. A., he was “automatically adviser to the British Museum in all matters concerning the purchase and display of sculptures” (Larsen 174). In fact, on at least three occasions Westmacott was chosen by the Trustees over persons with greater archaeological expertise to set up exhibits of ancient artifacts at the Museum (Miller 175-6, 196, 301).

Thus, Sir Richard Westmacott is perhaps the ideal representative figure through which to discuss the connections between these two institutions. Not only did he have a lengthy association with both the R. A. and the Museum—even designing the famous
Greek-Revival pediment *The Progress of Civilization* for the Museum’s new buildings in the late 1840s and early 1850s (Wilson 98), but both aspects of his career also highlight the persistent embrace of classical ideals that was so much a part of the ethos of both institutions. In these two sites, Westmacott held the status of a “paragon of taste” whose “judgments were largely based on an idealization of the traditional classical canon” (Bohrer 112). Indeed, Westmacott’s biographer Marie Busco avers that the “classicizing imagery” of the Museum’s pediment, which might be considered the most tangible result of Westmacott’s connection with the R. A. and the Museum, is the epitome of “the sculptor’s aesthetic attitude” (5), and the diary of one of Westmacott’s contemporaries refers directly to the sculptor’s “great deference for whatever is Greek” (qtd. in Busco 6). Rossetti, as a student of the R. A.’s Antique School, would most likely have been familiar with Westmacott at least by name and may even have attended the six annual lectures (Busco 28) that the sculptor “continued to deliver . . . till 1854” (Sandby 381).92

In any case, Rossetti, as a pupil of the R. A., would have enjoyed privileged access to the sculptures in the British Museum, and the opportunities that the Museum granted to the Academy’s students will serve as the final focal point for this discussion of the links between the two institutions, which are significant to the new approach to “The Burden of Nineveh” that I will be taking. Prior to 1855, R. A. students and artists actually had “special days . . . set aside for their visits” to the Museum (Wilson 102) since study and drawing of ancient sculpture represented the first official level of artistic

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92 Despite the fact that Westmacott “hardly ever wrote about his own sculpture” (Busco 6) and that his Royal Academy “lectures were never published in their original form” (Myrone 260), Busco’s investigation of secondhand accounts of Westmacott’s speeches highlights his apparently relentless emphasis on the beauty of the Greek ideal, his “only cursory references to artists and works after classical antiquity,” and his opinion that the neoclassical sculptors John Flaxman and Antonio Canova should be admired for “establishing the return to classical principles in sculpture” (Busco 28-9).
training at the R. A.’s Antique School and since the “[a]dmission of artists to the sculpture galleries had from the beginning of the century been an important part of the Museum’s function” (Wilson 101). The curriculum set by the R. A. and its idealization of classical Greek sculpture was thus implicitly endorsed by the British Museum, and students of the R. A.’s Antique School, of which Rossetti was one, “were encouraged to use other resources such as the adjacent National Gallery with the . . . collection of Old Masters, or the sculpture galleries at the British Museum” (Marsh, Painter 21). Thus, the two institutions together served to reinforce the idea that classical Greek art was the acme of Western artistic expression and that serious artists must study its forms in order to have a basic understanding of techniques of representation.

Pupils of the R. A. were only allowed to draw from a human model in the phase of training after the Antique class, and there seems to have been an “unwritten rule that students spend three years before progressing from Antique to Life, by which time they had spent months in front of the same plaster casts” (Marsh, Painter 21). Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s impatience with this system of repetitive and detailed study is well known. In fact, he never progressed beyond the Antique School, and, while he was still enrolled in it, he seems to have avoided much of the usual style of study (W. Rossetti, Family-Letters 1: 94). Prior to entering the Antique School, he had been criticized by an Associate of the R. A., who, in a visit to the school Rossetti attended as a preparation for the Academy, espied the young student drawing “grotesque caricatures of classical figures on the margins of his paper” and declared that “[s]uch liberties . . . were inconsistent with the dignity of the Antique” (Marsh, Painter 11). As an official student of the R. A., Rossetti became even more critical of its precepts and style of teaching, attending classes
irregularly (Prettejohn 24) and, famously, referring to Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first president of the R. A. and an iconic figure among conservative artistic circles, as “Sir Slishua” (Marsh, *Painter* 32). Rossetti’s letters also suggest the extent to which he rebelled against this system of teaching and against the Academy itself. In an 1851 letter to his friend William Bell Scott, he speaks of the election of a group of new associates at the R. A., saying, “I suppose these newly elect must not hope, though, to be Academicians; not being quite such fools as Mr. Hart or Mr. Redgrave” (*Correspondence* 1: 188). His sarcastic reference to the Academicians suggests the view that the P. R. B. had of the R. A. as a group that had become complacent, confident in its past achievements and modes of expression and dedicated to recreating them instead of striving to advance British art in new and imaginative ways (Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism* 1: 82-91). This opinion of the R. A. was, of course, a central factor in the development of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as a force meant to rejuvenate the world of English art, but Rossetti’s statement represents on a more personal level the artist’s own “stubborn independence and subversive distrust of imposed authority” (Marsh, *Painter* 36).

As these instances suggest, Rossetti was highly skeptical of the benefits of learning his art in the manner prescribed by the Royal Academy, and the ways in which he utilized the resources of the British Museum during his time at the R. A. indicate his lack of interest in the strictly classical regimen imposed by his instructors. From Rossetti’s correspondence, we know that he was a not infrequent visitor to the Museum, but his letters highlight not his visits to the sculpture galleries, the usual destination for R.

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93 Rossetti refers to Solomon Alexander Hart (1806-1881), a “historical genre painter,” who was made a member of the Royal Academy in 1840 and later became a “highly regarded” professor of painting and librarian at the R. A. (Valentine). Richard Redgrave (1804-1888) was a prominent artist and “arts administrator” who was made an associate of the R. A. in 1840 and a full member in 1851 (Heleniak).
A. students, but his many trips to the Museum’s Reading Room. In 1849, Rossetti wrote to his brother, saying,

> I have done but little in any way, having wasted several days at the Museum, where I have been reading up all manner of old romautants, to pitch upon stunning words for poetry. I have . . . derived much enjoyment from the things themselves, some of which are tremendously fine. (Correspondence 1: 93)

Rossetti’s correspondence rarely, if ever, mentions any visits to work from the Greco-Roman statuary for which the Museum was famed; what Rossetti finds worth mentioning instead is his perusal of medieval manuscripts, which contain forms of art that were highly influential for Rossetti’s own artwork but certainly would not have been looked upon as objects worthy of emulation by the R. A. (Prettejohn 18). It was also through his visits to the Reading Room that Rossetti came into possession of the William Blake manuscript that he retained throughout his life. According to William Michael Rossetti’s Family-Letters, Rossetti was offered the purchase of the manuscript by an attendant of the British Museum’s Reading Room while “attending . . . on one of his ordinary errands” (1: 109) in April 1847. Speaking of the significance of the manuscript and Blake’s ideas to Rossetti’s art, William Michael Rossetti writes,

> His ownership of this truly precious volume certainly stimulated in some degree his disregard or scorn of some aspects of art held in reverence by dilettanti and routine-students, and thus conduced to the Præraphaelite [sic] movement; for he found here the most outspoken . . . epigrams and jeers against such painters as Correggio, Titian, Rubens, Rembrandt, Reynolds, and Gainsborough—any men whom Blake regarded as fulsomely florid, or lax, or swamp[ing ideas in mere manipulation. These were balsam to Rossetti’s soul, and grist to his mill. (1: 109)

Thus, it becomes clear that, through his study of medieval romances and Blake’s poetry and personal opinions, Rossetti’s use of the British Museum differed from that of the “routine-students” his brother describes. Instead of the Museum serving to reinforce the
R. A.’s dogma of classical supremacy, it became for Rossetti a site of subversion, and his divergent interests suggest his impatience with the “old-fashioned system” (Marsh, *Painter* 21) of instruction upheld by both the Academy and the British Museum. As his brother notes, it was such sentiments that led in part to the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but, on a more concrete level, this desire to escape the confines of more traditional methods and valuations of art is also evident in the ways in which Rossetti depicts both the Assyrian winged bull and the British Museum itself in the 1850 version of “The Burden of Nineveh.”

Rossetti and the other members of the P. R. B. constructed their organization as a group whose mission it was to revivify British art by challenging long-accepted notions of technique and subject matter. As F. G. Stephens, one of the seven original members of the Brotherhood, declared in *The Germ*, the short-lived Pre-Raphaelite periodical published in 1850, what was needed in contemporary art was “the mind and the mind’s-workings, not the remains of earnest thought which has been frittered away by a long dreary course of preparatory study, by which all life has been evaporated” (60). This segment of Stephens’s essay clearly takes aim at the often tedious system of training set out by the Royal Academy, and William Holman Hunt, writing in 1905 about the founding of the P. R. B., declared,

I here venture to repeat, what we said in the days of our youth, that the traditions that went on through the Bolognese Academy, which were introduced at the foundation of all later schools and enforced by . . . Sir Joshua Reynolds, to our own time were lethal in their influence, tending to stifle the breath of design. (1: 137)

The Brotherhood set out to do away with blind adherence to artistic dogmas such as the absolute supremacy of the Old Masters in painting and the unquestioning imitation of
their techniques, and bring about what Hunt later described as “a purgation of art” (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 2: 197) by “eschew[ing] all that was conventional in contemporary art” (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 1: 125). Through their style of painting, which was centred on faithful representation of nature (Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism* 1: 135) and drew inspiration from fourteenth-century Italian artists who were criticized in the nineteenth century for being “incorrect in expression, false in drawing, or unnatural in . . . composition” (Stephens 61), the members of the P. R. B. intended both to be a part of the British art world and to be separate from and condemnatory of what they saw as its outmoded tendencies.

In “The Burden of Nineveh,” the statue of the winged bull brought from Assyria functions in much the same way as the P. R. B. in terms of the criticisms its position outside British artistic and cultural tradition allows the speaker to make through it. Indeed, although critics have overlooked this fact, at one point in the text, Rossetti constructs a parallel between the bull and the P. R. B. itself, and, in doing so, the poet suggests that there is a strong similarity between the aesthetic, cultural, and historical issues that the ancient artifact and the contemporary art movement raise. The criticism of London society that the bull inspires in the narrator is dependent on the statue’s status as an object foreign to the experiences of the speaker’s society, in much the same way that the criticism inherent in Pre-Raphaelite art depended upon its deployment of its own stylistic tendencies that obviously distinguished it from the types of painting endorsed by the R. A. The biting, “acid[ic]” (Woodring 14) nature of the criticism that some scholars have noted in the poem stems from the fact that the statue, which was figured by others like W. R. Hamilton as so foreign to the society to which it had been transported, has collapsed all notions of progress, pride, and superiority within that society. Indeed, by
the end of Rossetti’s poem, which conflates contemporary London with the bull’s ancient
Ninevan origins, the bull’s status as an outsider has allowed it to tear down all previous
hierarchies and distinctions and establish its own, more threatening notions of culture and
history in their place.

Before embarking upon a detailed analysis of the poem, it would be useful to offer
a brief outline of the narrative structure of the 1850 version of “The Burden of Nineveh.”
The poem constantly moves back and forth between the interior and exterior of the
British Museum and between Victorian London and ancient Assyria, and the first 150
lines convey the various trains of thought that the statue inspires within the speaker when
he first encounters the Assyrian bull being moved into the Museum. These lines
highlight two of the poem’s main concerns: the past that the speaker imagines for the bull
and the future that he envisions for it as an artifact within the British Museum, and,
within this segment, he is able to develop a strong critique of contemporary London that
is brought to a devastating conclusion in the remaining sixty lines of the poem. After the
initial critique, the speaker pauses and declares, “. . . . Here woke my thought” (“Burden”
line 151, ellipsis in text),94 and he returns to a description of the weather at the entrance
to the Museum. Yet, even after this break with his earlier meditations, he briefly returns
to a consideration of the statue before saying that he has awakened (161) once again. At
this point, the narrator deliberately “turn[s]” (161) both literally and figuratively to the
sources of happiness in his own life, trying to forget his “dream of Nineveh” (170), as he
calls it. However, it seems that he cannot so easily elude the significance of his previous
meditations, for his mind returns to a state of simultaneous reverie and prophecy. As the

94 To avoid confusion, in-text citations referring to the 1850 version of “The Burden of Nineveh” allude
either to “Burden” and the line number or simply the line number, while quotations from the 1870 edition
are always cited as “‘Burden’ 1870.”
speaker describes it, he feels as though his “sense [is] half shut” (171), and it is while he is in this state that the poem concludes with a deft maneuvering that conflates the cities of London and Nineveh and leaves the reader with the image of the Assyrian bull as an artifact that will survive London’s future demise and contribute to the cultural amnesia of future generations, who will have no knowledge of the once mighty British Empire.

As I noted earlier, “The Burden of Nineveh” has frequently been viewed as a critique of imperialism; it has also been discussed by critics as a meditation on the transience of religions, a criticism of social decay brought about by vanity and worldliness, and a warning to remember the basic precepts of Christianity. Thus, as a form of criticism of mid-nineteenth-century British society the poem works on several different levels at once in order to address Rossetti’s political and social sentiments and religious doubts. All of the criticisms that Rossetti’s speaker offers are filtered through the figure of the winged bull, and it is this indefinable “creature” (“Burden” 11) that provides the narrator with the opportunity to condemn so many aspects of his society. However, even before the sight of the bull provides the speaker with the occasion to launch into his more widespread considerations, the poem’s opening stanza offers a critique of the British Museum and implicitly suggests the institution’s old-fashioned rules and systems that make both it and the Royal Academy enemies of the “wingèd beast from Nineveh” (10) and of Rossetti himself.

Both the 1850 and 1870 versions of the poem begin with a description of the experiences of “a contemporary Londoner”—who, as the Rossetti Archive sensibly suggests, is closely associated with Rossetti himself (“Burden”)—during a visit to the British Museum. However, as I mentioned earlier, Rossetti made substantial changes to
the 1870 version that completely altered both the type of language the speaker uses to
describe his own experiences and, most importantly, the stance that he adopts towards the
British Museum from the beginning of the poem. In the much-anthologized later version,
the speaker clearly identifies himself in the first line of the text alongside other British
citizens, speaking admiringly and somewhat nationalistically of the Museum as “our
Museum” (“Burden” 1870 line 1), and describing how he

    . . . lingered o’er the prize
    Dead Greece vouchsafes to living eyes, —
    Her Art for ever in fresh wise
    From hour to hour rejoicing me. (“Burden” 1870 2-5)

Here, the speaker adopts the conventional valuation of Greek art that we have
encountered already in a number of the Museum’s Trustees and various other art critics.
Greece’s art is depicted as a “fresh” and continuous source of inspiration and joy, and it is
only with reluctance that the speaker can be removed from it, “Sighing” (“Burden” 1870
6) as he returns to the banal world outside the Museum. This first stanza of the 1870
version places the speaker in a stance of admiration for the Museum and highlights (to the
exclusion of all else) the “prize” (“Burden” 1870 2) collection of Greek statuary that, as
we have already seen, was so highly valued by the Museum and the Royal Academy.
Both the tone and content of this passage are markedly different from those of the 1850
version, which adopts a much more jovial and colloquial tone that sets the narrator’s
descriptions of the Museum apart linguistically from his meditation on the Assyrian bull
and also quickly constructs a strained relationship between the speaker and the Museum
early in the poem. These changes—along with others made in various parts of the 1870
text—have a direct impact on the way in which the reader views the narrator in relation to
his society as a whole.
From the first line of the original version of the poem, the speaker places himself in direct conflict with the Museum, declaring, “I have no taste for polyglot” (1), which, in his mind, the institution clearly represents. The narrator thus establishes for the reader his own opinionated and straightforward style, while the following lines suggest his criticism of the Museum:

At the Museum ‘twas my lot,  
Just once, to jot and blot and rot  
In Babel for I know not what.  
I went at two, I left at three.  
Round those still floors I tramp’d to win  
By the great porch the dirt and din [.] (2-7)

Rossetti’s reference to the British Museum as simply “the Museum” contrasts with his use of the phrase “our Museum,” and its connotation of fraternally inflected nationalism, in the 1870 version and thereby creates more of a distance between the speaker and the establishment. Moreover, his description of the institution in the 1850 text also serves to remind the reader that the British Museum is such a huge presence in the London cultural scene that the narrator need not even mention its full name. Rossetti’s contemporaries would clearly recognize the place to which the speaker refers, and, by his use of the colloquial title “the Museum,” Rossetti also suggests how this single institution has come to represent all museums and dominate the representation of history and culture. Indeed, as I have already noted, the British Museum’s collections of antiquities were crucial to both creating and supporting a notion of progress centred upon ancient Greek culture. However, whereas these collections were meant to inspire art students and artists alike, Rossetti’s narrator has the opposite reaction. In fact, the opening lines of the 1850 poem, unlike those of the later version, significantly avoid any reference to Greek art, and, when we compare the two versions of the poem, this earlier absence foreshadows the speaker’s
unconventional lack of admiration for the most vaunted items in the Museum’s collection. The narrator’s description of the purpose of his trip—“to jot and blot” (3)—suggests that he, like the author, might be an art student who has gone to the Museum to draw from its collections, but his use of these words also implies a certain carelessness that he brings to this apparently uninspiring task. Moreover, he speaks of the reason for his visit to the institution as “my lot” (2), suggesting an unpleasant—perhaps even forced—experience, and the fact that he says that he has entered the building on such a mission “Just once” (3) implies his lack of desire to repeat the occurrence. Furthermore, the word “rot” (3) highlights in another way the speaker’s negative experience since it depicts the building as a site of death or decay, and the lines that follow relate the narrator’s desire to escape the confines of the structure. This sense of the speaker’s desperation to leave is emphasized by the monosyllabic diction of lines five to eight; when he says, “I went at two, I left at three. / Round those still floors I tramp’d . . .” (5-6; ellipsis added), the staccato-like iambic echo both his restless wandering and his desire to find an exit. Moreover, the words suggest his lack of interest in the Museum’s displays; after only one hour, the narrator feels that he has seen enough.

Interestingly, the only reference to the actual building that houses the Museum is an allusion to “the great porch” (7), the main entrance of the edifice, which was designed as part of the Greek Revival construction that had taken place in the 1830s and 1840s (Wilson 94-8) and included the overtly classical *Progress of Civilization* pediment by Westmacott. The colonnade on the façade of the structure also consisted of a row of Ionic columns; thus, this brief reference to the building implicitly aligns the Museum with a belief in the cultural supremacy of ancient Greece. This seemingly minor detail
also sets the idealization of the classical world in contrast to the reality of contemporary London, for the narrator “win[s] / By the great porch the dirt and din” (6-7) of the city. Even this early in the poem, the progressivist notions underpinning Greece’s perceived superiority are called into question, for, instead of progressing, the world seems to have declined from the supposed grace and refinement of the ancient world to the chaos of contemporary London. This juxtaposition of the two sites is the first instance of the far-reaching social criticism that so many critics of the poem have noted, since it begins the questioning of hegemonic social values that will become central to the rest of the text. Despite these larger implications, the narrator’s criticism here is largely directed toward the British Museum itself; however, because of the relationship between the Museum’s narrative of art history and common Victorian notions of progress and British supremacy, the speaker’s criticism of the Museum also becomes in a sense a critique of the society that reveres this institution.

Interestingly, Rossetti further complicates this depiction of the Museum and its alignment with Greek culture by describing the Museum as “Babel” (4) and, as we have seen, characterizing it as a site of “polyglot” in the first line. Rossetti’s contemporaries would have recognized these lines as an allusion to the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel, in which God punishes Babylonians who attempt to be godlike and to construct “a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and . . . make us a name” (Gen. 11.4). As a punishment for their hubris, the builders, who originally spoke one language, are suddenly made to speak many different ones so that they cannot understand each other and cannot complete the construction. Thus, the story can be seen as a negative exemplum of excessive ambition and pride, and Babylon—along with Assyria—was
indeed seen by many in the nineteenth century “as a cautionary tale, a site of sloth, sin, violence, and transgression” (Bohrer 49). It becomes clear later in Rossetti’s poem that he uses the decline of the northern Mesopotamian empire of Assyria as a warning to his contemporaries, but within the first stanza he also employs this reference to Babylon, another ancient Mesopotamian kingdom, to offer a critique of an institution that represents both the culture and the pride of nineteenth-century England. The formal, orderly Greek tradition with which the Museum is aligned—and to which the ironic reference to “the great porch” (7) alludes—is overshadowed in this first stanza, for in the narrator’s rather confrontational opening statement, he aligns the institution with an entirely different tradition, centred on a multiplicity of languages and cultures that later in the stanza becomes identified with the proverbial confusion of Babel. 

In this context, Rossetti’s perhaps puzzling opening line can be tied to the rest of the stanza since it refers to the plethora of languages that characterize both the holdings of the Museum and the biblical tale. From the beginning of the poem, the narrator sets out to undercut the authority of the Museum by displacing it from the coherent, unilinear tradition it has attempted to establish and replacing this order with a sense of chaos. This modern-day Babel even confuses the speaker. Thus, he says that he “know[s] not what” (4) he is looking for in the building, and, in this light, his statement “Round those still floors I tramp’d . . .” (6; ellipsis added) implies a perhaps perplexed and certainly restless circular motion that belies the notions of straightforward progress that the directors of the Museum hoped to impart. It is worthwhile to note that both at this time and in later years the sculpture galleries of the British Museum were arranged by culture of origin so that the “sequence [of rooms] could imply not merely a chronological development, but also,
in accordance with the precepts of high taste, a scheme of progress and perfection” beginning with Egyptian artifacts and “culminating” with the Parthenon Marbles (Bohrer 121). The circling of Rossetti’s narrator implicitly disrupts this teleological chain in a way that foreshadows the many ways in which the Assyrian bull will disrupt notions of progressive chronology throughout the rest of the poem. Moreover, the mapping of the speaker’s travels as “Round” (6) rather than as a line with a discernible goal suggests the poem’s recurrent concern with historical cycles rather than a direct chain of progression. Thus, this apparently simple, colloquial opening of the poem establishes through allusions to Babylon rather than Assyria the grounds on which both the Museum and British society will be criticized.

This simultaneous condemnation of the Museum and its larger social and cultural milieu continues in a later part of the poem in which the speaker describes what the Assyrian statue will experience once it is installed as a part of the Museum’s collections. The narrator further develops his critique of the institution when he describes it as “this hall / Where the blank windows blind the wall / From pedestal to pedestal” (61-3). The speaker envisions the institution as a long, narrow space, a description that recalls the sense of confinement that he experiences in the text’s first stanza. Moreover, it is a place of blindness where the windows do not offer any metaphorical insight or even a literal view; there is nothing to distract the viewer from the nearly endless array of objects arranged on pedestals, which, as Rossetti’s description of them suggests, lead the viewer endlessly forward and serve as a literal embodiment of the Museum’s narrative of linear progression. Yet, at the same time, the repetition and alliteration employed by Rossetti in the phrase “From pedestal to pedestal” undermine the teleological narrative embraced by
the Museum and suggest that the artifacts on display actually represent a motion of endless repetition rather than straightforward progress. Interestingly, the speaker makes his sense of pity for the winged bull explicit for the first time in this passage; he addresses the artifact as “thou poor god” (61) because it must now stand in this place with its innumerable rows of objects in a stifling atmosphere. At this point, again, the poem doubles its criticism of the Museum with a negative portrait of London at large by declaring that the only light that will reach the object is “The kind of light . . . / Which London takes the day to be” (64-5; ellipsis added). The light that, here, might be thought to represent vision and enlightenment is faulty; it is not a “true” daylight but is only thought to be so by the people of London. As in the first stanza, there is a sense that London is not as enlightened as its citizens think it to be, and, once again, this suggestion is brought forward through a critique of one of London’s most important and widely recognized cultural institutions.

Immediately after this segment, the text goes on to describe the various audience members that the “poor god” (61) will attract, and this section of the poem offers the text’s most detailed criticism of both the Museum and the people who visit it. It is worth quoting these descriptions, the first of which was later removed for the poem’s publication in 1870, at length:

Here cold-pinch’d clerks on yellow days
Shall stop and peer; and in sun-haze
Small clergy crimp their eyes to gaze;
And misses titter in their stays,
    Just fresh from “Layard’s Nineveh.”

Here school-foundations in the act
Of holiday, three files compact,
Shall learn to view thee as a fact
Connected with that zealous tract,
In the first stanza, Rossetti focuses on three specific groups: “clerks,” “clergy,” and young women. Taking a somewhat condescending perspective, the narrator suggests that none of these viewers sees the object in the way he does—as a criticism of their own society. In fact, he speaks of the clerks only in terms of the constraints with which they view the statue and rather superciliously describes them as “cold-pinched.” Moreover, the speaker implies that the clerks do not really look at the object in any meaningful way. They are said to “stop and peer” (67), but the fact that this phrase is abruptly truncated in the middle of the line, which goes on to describe the experience of the subsequent group of visitors, suggests that the clerks merely look at the artifact and pass onwards without seeing beyond the bull’s physical attributes or divining the greater cultural importance with which the speaker will invest the statue. In a similar fashion, the clergymen, whose own small-mindedness is suggested by Rossetti’s description of them as “Small clergy,” look at the artifact and “crimp their eyes to gaze”; with these words, the poem implies that their vision is limited by their own literal or metaphorical near-sightedness, their inability to see beyond what is directly in front of them. Finally, Rossetti refers to the “misses . . . in their stays,” whose actual, physical constraints—in the form of corsets—suggest how their own views are socially confined. Of the three groups described in this stanza, the young women have what is perhaps the most superficial interaction with the statue; while the men at least “peer” and “gaze,” these figures simply “titter,” moved only to vapid laughter by this novel statue whose appearance in London will, as the text will

95 The intervening stanza (71-5) describes the conversation of students from the Royal Academy during their lunch break. The poem is not as openly critical of this group as it is of the “clerks,” “clergy,” “misses,” and “school-foundations,” and I will return to the passage in much greater detail later in this chapter.
later propose, have such an impact on their own culture. Moreover, although the speaker notes that the young women are the only visitors who arrive at the Museum “Just fresh from ‘Layard’s Nineveh’” (70)—a reference, of course, to Layard’s *Nineveh and Its Remains*—the language in which the allusion to the book is couched suggests that their interest in Layard’s account lies in the current popularity of the novel subject and is not indicative of a deep, genuine interest or base of knowledge. It seems to be, for these women, a fashionable topic, and it is perhaps because of this fact that Rossetti’s description of these characters centres upon what the women are wearing. In the context of the stanza, these “misses” are followers of fashion, whether in their clothing or their reading interests. Moreover, when the young women confront the statue of which they have read, they “titter,” demonstrating that they have not absorbed Layard’s book’s insistence on the great aesthetic value of the objects that the amateur archaeologist unearthed (Bohrer 154), and Rossetti’s use of this rather unpoetic verb serves to reinforce in the reader’s mind the degraded nature of their vision. From Rossetti’s depiction of these three groups, it is clear that part of the pity for the “poor god” (61) that the speaker

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96 Both the Rossetti Archive and Barbara J. Black note that Rossetti read—at least in part—Layard’s 1849 “best-seller” (Black 141) when he was writing the first version of “The Burden of Nineveh” in 1850 (Rossetti Archive, “Burden”; Black 141).

97 It is worth noting that Rossetti’s account of the three groups of visitors in this stanza is perhaps most critical of these female viewers. Although the “clerks” and “clergy” clearly have an underdeveloped understanding of what the poem proposes to be the artifact’s significance, the women are even more at fault because they have read Layard’s work, in which the archaeologist argues in favour of an aesthetic appreciation of the winged bull and other Assyrian artifacts, and are still ignorant of the statue’s importance. This marked critique of the women’s lack of intellectual and aesthetic comprehension would seem to lend credence to Marsh’s claim that Rossetti, while “far from a misogynist, . . . always retained a rather traditional view of ‘profound simpleness of intellect’ as woman’s true inheritance” (*Painter* 49). More importantly, this segment of the poem, which was removed from the 1870 version, reminds readers of the strongly homosocial nature of both the P. R. B., whose members would have formed the initial audience for this poem when Rossetti wrote it in 1850, and Rossetti’s later involvement with Morris and Burne-Jones, who, as I mentioned earlier, were both leading members of the “Brotherhood” (qtd. in Houghton 723) that ran *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, in which “The Burden of Nineveh” was published for the first time.
feels exists because neither the Museum nor the people it attracts can offer an insightful contemplation of the artifact.

The reaction of the next group, which Rossetti discusses in lines 76 to 80, is even less admirable and appropriate in that it deliberately moulds its interpretation of the artifact to its own preconceived notions. The members of this group of visiting students will be told to view the statue only in terms of its purported connection to a “zealous tract” (79), which, Bentley proposes, might centre on controversies about Roman Catholicism in England (169); the only light in which these school-children “learn to view” the bull is “as a fact” (78) moulded by their instructors’ biased views of Rome as a contemporary incarnation of ancient Nineveh’s worldliness and eventual decline. The diction employed in Rossetti’s depiction of the groups’ visits to the Museum, moreover, emphasizes the cold, Gradgrind-esque way in which they are forced to see the statue. All of the end-rhymes in the stanza’s first four lines end on a harsh “-act” sound that contrasts with the much softer sounds that dominate the following passage, which, like many other stanzas in the poem, adopts language and structure similar to that of Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (Ford 139). This use of Keatsian diction in the subsequent stanza creates an even greater contrast between contemporary London and ancient Nineveh; while the former is governed by apparently immutable “fact,” the culture that created the winged bull is portrayed by Rossetti’s speaker as a world dominated by mystical faith, as the following lines demonstrate:

Deem’d they of this, those worshippers,
When, in some mythic chain of verse,
Indeed, Rossetti invests his description of ancient Ninevan civilization (or, at least, his own version of it) with a strong sense of nostalgia, and I will return to this concept and its relationship to Orientalism in much greater detail later in the chapter. For now, it is sufficient to note the fact that, when he declares that “man shall not again rehearse” the poetic prayers of the bull’s ancient ministers, the speaker’s words carry an implication that the narrator would prefer those days, characterized by “bittersweet ecstasy,” to his own of prosaic “school-foundations” and “cold-pinched clerks.”

The “mythic” aspects of Ninevan culture are a marked contrast to the sterile understanding encouraged by Rossetti’s contemporaries while visiting the Museum. Thus, Rossetti not only criticizes the standpoint taken by the “school-foundations,” but he also implicitly compares his own culture unfavourably with that of ancient Nineveh, thereby upsetting the narrative of progression that his society in a large measure endorses.

A part of the problem that these groups face when looking at the winged bull is that it appears to be so distant from every object they have encountered in the past. We

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99 This longing for an idealized past is evident in either the style or subject matter of many of Rossetti’s poems and paintings throughout this early stage in his career—and afterward; in fact, William Holman Hunt’s memoir describes Rossetti’s sketches at the time of their meeting in 1847 as “not of newly culled facts, but of knights rescuing ladies, of lovers in mediæval dress, illustrating stirring incidents of romantic poets” (Pre-Raphaelitism 1: 106). He later goes on to declare that, for Rossetti, “when men were different from the cultured of mediæval days they were not poetic in his eyes” (1: 147).

100 Rossetti’s use of the compound word “school-foundations” at this point may have other significance beyond the literal meaning of the word “foundation” as “an institution . . . established with an endowment and regulations for its maintenance” (“Foundation”). It may also proffer a subtle criticism of the manner in which the educational system reinforced the narrative of progress that, as we have seen, served as the basis for mainstream nineteenth-century conceptions of history and art. The students’ instructors ensure that they learn to think of the Assyrian bull in a very limited way that is almost entirely removed from the object’s own historical and cultural significance; thus, this “school-foundation” serves to perpetuate the “foundations” on which its larger society is based by both forcing the bull to conform to its own religious biases and, more importantly, by entirely overlooking the statue’s importance as an artifact with intrinsic artistic value that works toward unsettling notions of Greek supremacy and aesthetic progression.
have already seen how Assyrian artifacts were viewed by many as a threat to dominant cultural ideologies; the winged bull was the representative of “a new antiquity” (Bohrer 2), a wholly idiosyncratic part of the history of civilization. Whereas Assyria had always been known in theory through references to it and its decline in the Bible and in the writings of ancient historians, the discovery of the actual site of the ancient civilization and the subsequent excavations of it meant that the Victorians were the first Westerners in modern history to find proof of its existence (Bohrer 48-9). As in the case of the Museum’s Trustees, many cultural experts felt uncomfortable with the objects and the historical and artistic questions and issues they presented, and the Museum visitors that Rossetti’s poem describes seem to reflect some of this anxiety as they focus solely on the statue’s physical appearance or even look at it through the filter of their own biases instead of seeing what is—in the speaker’s mind—its true significance as an object that can unsettle accepted cultural hierarchies and traditions. Despite—or perhaps because of—this general oblivion on the part of the sculpture’s audience, the poem itself does a great deal to highlight the fact that the winged bull does not fit into any previously designed cultural narrative. Shifting now from Rossetti’s treatment of the British Museum and the apparently narrow-minded audience it attracts to his discussion of the Assyrian bull itself, we can see how, from the object’s first appearance in the text, its unclassifiable nature is emphasized.

The poem’s first reference to the bull occurs in the opening stanza, when, as the speaker exits the Museum, he sees that “they were hoisting in / A wingèd beast from Nineveh” (9-10). This initial statement about the statue establishes its contradictory nature, for the word beast has historically been used to signify “a quadruped, as
distinguished from birds, reptiles, fishes, insects, etc.” (“Beast”). Therefore, Rossetti’s brief, preliminary description of the statue as a “beast” with wings emphasizes the fact that the figure conflates two usually distinct categories. Moreover, in the space of these two lines, the poem also suggests the statue’s status within—or without—the cultural history embraced by the British Museum. The artifact is in the process of being “hoist[ed]” (9) into the building. Its position outside the Museum—which is maintained to the end of the poem—implies its marginal relation to the institution and its ethos, and the fact that the word “hoisting” is used has both literal and figurative resonance. Of course, the statue was actually hoisted up the front steps of the Museum, a situation that nicely captures the contrast between the Greek-Revival building and the—at the time—indecipherable ancient Near Eastern object it was intended to house. However, the poem turns this literal circumstance into a figurative one, for the use of the word “hoisting” also suggests the effort that needed to be exerted not just by the labourers who transported the large and heavy statue up the stairs but also by the institution itself in finding a way to incorporate the artifact into its collections without having it destroy the cultural narrative the Museum worked so hard to, in Bourdieu’s word, “consecrate.”

The two stanzas that follow also emphasize the unexpected nature of the artifact, which, as the poem’s description suggests, does not really fit into any pre-established categories. Even a segment that seems to consist of a basic physical description of the statue emphasizes its indefinable qualities. When Rossetti writes,

A human face the creature wore,
And hoofs behind and hoofs before,
And flanks with dark runes fretted o’er.
‘Twas bull, ‘twas mitred minotaur . . . (11-14; ellipsis added),
this description seems as though it cannot fully account for the object. The stanza’s first line suggests that the figure is both human and animal-like; it is not fully one or the other but an admixture of the two. Moreover, the strange image is covered “with dark runes” that could not be translated in 1850. The text’s use of the word dark suggests the impenetrability of the writing to scholars and further highlights the “mystery” (15) of the artifact. Finally, this segment ends with a description of the object as both a “bull” and a “mitred minotaur.” Again, these two labels, which appear in the same line, suggest the speaker’s inability to express just what the sculpture resembles or is. Interestingly, as with the reference to “the great porch” (7) in the previous stanza, the words “mitred minotaur” also, in ironic fashion, place the statue in juxtaposition with the classical Greek tradition embraced by the Museum, for the latter word calls to mind the aberrant offspring of Poseidon’s bull and Pasiphaë that was hidden in the labyrinth. Thus, even when the poem attempts to use a familiar narrative to describe the statue, the winged bull is still placed in a position of strangeness because it can be compared only to an abnormal figure within that narrative. The addition of the word mitred serves to make the image even more of an oxymoron since, through the poem’s reference to a bishop’s head covering, the text combines an allusion to traditional Christian liturgical vestments worn as a symbol of spiritual authority with a reference to the minotaur, a mythological figure from the classical tradition who was viewed as a sign of shame and hidden away. Thus, none of the descriptions that this stanza offers can situate the artifact comfortably within any category or narrative, and even the language that Rossetti uses at various points to refer to the statue echoes this uncertainty. Soon after the passage quoted above, the figure is described as “the thing” (22), a vague word that recalls the speaker’s earlier

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101 The cuneiform inscriptions on the artifacts from Nineveh were not translated until 1857 (Bohrer 277).
indeterminacy about whether it is a human or an animal, an object sacred or profane. Even more explicitly, the bull is later referred to as “the strange image” (27), highlighting both its foreignness and its disruptive nature. Located as they are within the narrator’s first impressions of the statue, these references emphasize the sculpture’s place outside the Museum both as a building and as a cultural representative of contemporary society.

Other aspects of the description of the bull throughout the poem also suggest the ways in which the statue disrupts narrow ideas of history and Western culture. For instance, the poem as a whole seems to vacillate between past and present in its discussion of the statue. The narrative, of course, begins in London in 1850, but, at the beginning of the narrator’s encounter with the bull, he turns rapidly in the space of a single stanza from the ancient past (26-7) to the intervening centuries when the statue lay buried (28-9) to the excavation of it a few months previously (29-30). Throughout the speaker’s meditation this pattern—or lack thereof—repeats itself, and a particularly striking example occurs in lines 41 to 60. In this space of fewer than twenty lines, the narrative shifts from contemporary London (41) to the time of the Old Testament and Jonah (42-3), to the destruction of Nineveh (48-50), to the period of the mythical founding of Babylon (54-6), to, quite specifically, 1849 and Layard’s excavations (57-60). In addition to these recurrent temporal disjunctions, the use that is made of ellipses in this passage is also worth noting; between the references to Semiramis, “the legendary queen and builder of Babylon” (Bohrer 50), and Layard’s discovery of Nimrud and Nineveh, the poem asks, “. . . . / Ay, and who else . . . .” (56-7; ellipses in text) has stood “Within [the statue’s] shadow” (51) in the long course of its history. These ellipses suggest a gap in the
narrative reflective of the fact that certain elements of the history of the object are
unknown and probably unknowable; they have been lost and cannot become part of a
cohesive, linear historical narrative. Because so much is unknown about the statue, these
ellipses that the poem employs are suggestive of lacunae in any narrative about the
“wingèd beast” that one might attempt to create.¹⁰²

This inability to contain the statue either through description or historicization
remains evident throughout the text; there are numerous points at which the object itself
resists any attempts to fix it either as a particular type of artifact or within a specific
historical period. In terms of the attempt to define the bull as an object, we can see many
instances in which the narrator’s descriptions highlight the multifaceted nature of the
image. Near the point at which the speaker finally returns to a consideration of
contemporary London at the end of the poem, he speaks of “The god forlorn [that] stood
wing’d and crown’d” (158). This description stresses the isolated status of the figure, but
it also reiterates the notion that the object is both human (with its crown), animalistic
(with its wings), and divine. This irresolvable and contradictory nature is not mitigated in
the course of the speaker’s subsequent meditation, for the last description of the figure in
the final two stanzas cannot go beyond the preceding construction of the statue’s
paradoxical nature. In a passage that serves as a pendant to all of the inchoate

¹⁰²Rossetti’s use of ellipses in this text is sparing; apart from the two in lines 56 and 57, ellipses only appear
at three other places in the poem (151, 202, and 207). In the first of these other instances, the ellipsis is,
like those discussed above, suggestive of a break or a gap when the narrator abruptly turns from the sort of
reverie in which he addresses the statue directly and says, “. . . . Here woke my thought” (151). The final
ellipses, which appear in the last two stanzas, are also used to suggest a kind of space between the speaker’s
description of the physical appearance of the statue and the more sweeping thoughts it raises within him
about the state of his own civilization. In all of these instances, Rossetti uses ellipses as markers of a gap or
a space, either in terms of our knowledge of a chronological history or the distance between reverie and
conscious thought as well as between description and contemplation.

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descriptions cited above—and, in particular, to the physical depiction of the bull offered at the beginning of the text—Rossetti writes,

. . . . Those heavy wings spread high
So sure of flight, which do not fly;
That set gaze never on the sky;
Those scriptured flanks it cannot see;
Its crown, a brow-contracting load;
Its planted feet which trust the sod: . . . . (202-7; ellipses in text)

At this stage, the bull has become a symbol of London’s own decline, but, as a physical object, the statue is also almost comically paradoxical. The purposes of its various physical elements have all been subverted. Its wings do not fly, and its eyes do not see. Moreover, its crown, a feature meant to be ennobling, only brings its head lower. Every aspect of the figure is a contradiction that serves to devalue it if we think of the object in terms either of practicality or of the classically trained sculptor’s notion of fitness. Yet Rossetti is able to employ the contradictory nature he constructs to offer a criticism of a society so concerned with placing all that it encounters into a single narrative that points to itself as the most highly developed culture.

Throughout the poem, Rossetti’s use of ellipses and his repeated (and ultimately failed) attempts to describe the winged bull suggest that the statue resists any effort to make it part of a cohesive historical narrative. At several points in the text, its absence from sight over the course of many centuries is emphasized. Near the beginning of the poem, the speaker ponders, “In what blind vigil [it] stood interr’d / For ages, till an English word / Broke silence first at Nineveh?” (28-30). The statue was virtually forgotten “For ages” and therefore had no definite place in a cultural narrative. Now it has resurfaced to challenge the version of history from which it has been omitted, and, ironically, it is the English who discovered it who have brought the dilemma it poses into
their own culture. A few lines later, Rossetti reiterates the object’s absence from a linear view of history when he describes how the bull experienced “No light, no shade, while older grew / By ages the old earth and sea” (34-5), and he perhaps most explicitly refers to the bull’s absence from a traditional historical narrative when he speaks of the Middle Eastern land “That knew thee not, O Nineveh!” (140). This line, which occurs during a description of Satan’s temptation of Christ in the desert (131-40), refers to the fact that even eighteen hundred years before the bull’s arrival in London its place and significance had already been forgotten.

However, the very novelty and foreignness of the rediscovered Assyrian bull hold the narrator’s attention and make the statue, in his mind, far more compelling than the rest of the Museum’s holdings. As I have argued earlier, the poem’s speaker displays impatience with his visit to the Museum and summarily dismisses its vast collections in the space of an hour, spending on them only about eight lines in a poem that consists of two hundred and ten. In contrast to Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” which Rossetti was “no doubt conscious that he would have to avoid imitating” (Ford 138), Rossetti’s meditation is inspired by an artifact that represents, as we have seen, an ancient culture that was perceived as wholly detached from the European tradition. Although he adopts Keatsian language in several places throughout the poem, these echoes of the earlier poet again serve to highlight the utter unfamiliarity of the Assyrian statue and its milieu. Whereas Keats’s questions emphasize the fact that the speaker cannot glean information about specific figures depicted on the urn, Rossetti’s queries focus not on elements of the sculpture itself but on many aspects of the culture that produced it, suggesting that the
inability to have complete information about the object is more widespread in the case of Assyria than that of ancient Greece.

Rossetti’s patent refusal to pinpoint concrete details about the statue and its past places his work in direct opposition to educational or scholarly treatments of Assyrian artifacts such as Layard’s *Nineveh and Its Remains*, and the speaker’s stance therefore destabilizes the will to knowledge that, as Said has demonstrated, is central to the Orientalist text, which is inevitably part of a discourse that “is ... a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world” (12). Whereas texts like Layard’s provide as many historical “facts” as possible in an attempt to assert “control” over an object that is both “alternative and novel” in terms of the conventional mid-Victorian understanding of history, Rossetti’s poem clearly emphasizes the symbolic aspects of the bull and the mysterious and—at least, within the poem—unknowable nature of its past. Unlike a treatment of the bull that explains in straightforward statements where it was found and how it was excavated, “The Burden of Nineveh” seeks to raise more questions than it answers. Indeed, the fact that the poem’s final line ends with a question mark suggests the extent to which the narrator views the statue as an object rife with suggestiveness and as an artifact that perhaps has more to say about contemporary British culture than its own ancient origins. In this manner, then, Rossetti’s description of the bull may offer an implicit criticism of more prosaic texts that assign whatever value they impart to the bull based solely on historical “facts” surrounding its existence and discovery, and, in so doing, “The Burden of Nineveh” clearly distances itself from the
typical Orientalist text’s pursuit of knowledge as a form of power and actually seems to revel in the unknowable.

Perhaps because of the speaker’s inability to achieve complete knowledge of the statue, the artifact exercises an almost hypnotic effect on him, and the object’s hold on the speaker’s thoughts is apparently inescapable. At the end of the first segment of his meditation, he states, “. . . . Here woke my thought” (151, ellipsis in text), yet the speaker reverts to a discussion of the bull after only six lines. Afterwards, he must once again employ the metaphor of awakening and make a decided attempt to leave behind his rather bleak meditations on the statue, saying, “Then waking up, I turn’d, because / That day my spirits might not pause / O’er any dead thing’s doleful laws” (161-3). He goes on in defiance of his sobering thoughts to list all the things that bring joy to his life—freedom, love, and friendship (166-7), but the fact that he has described the thoughts that the bull inspires in him as concrete “laws” suggests that what is at stake is more ponderous and binding than a simple flight of meditative fancy.

While Rossetti’s speaker acknowledges both implicitly and explicitly throughout the poem that he can only make suppositions about the statue’s past, he also clearly reiterates the notion that this artifact with its mysterious background has a definite message to convey to the citizens of contemporary London: that history is inevitably cyclical and that London—and, by extension, the British Empire—will one day find itself in the same ruined and forgotten position as ancient Assyria. This critique embodied by the statue, which, as I have noted earlier, is pointed out in every major scholarly discussion of “The Burden of Nineveh,” only serves to increase the artifact’s fascination for Rossetti’s speaker; although the object is in many ways unintelligible (from its
somewhat baffling physical appearance to the illegible “dark runes” inscribed on its side), its very incomprehensibility makes it function as a cautionary tale, a kind of *memento mori* that reminds the reader that the existence of a society as a whole is transitory and that the reason the sculpture’s past is unknown is that the culture that created it has long since crumbled.

This combination of incomprehensibility with a somber message makes the statue a powerful force over the speaker, and the artifact still holds sway over his thoughts even after his second awakening and attempt to end his consideration of the bull. The narrator’s determination to avoid any further thoughts of the artifact seems futile in the face of the statue’s import, and the speaker ends the poem in a state of continued meditation upon it. In fact, he revealingly describes himself as walking through the streets with his “sense half shut” (171), a state from which he does not recover by the end of the poem. From the speaker’s situation it would seem that the effect of the bull is too powerful to be avoided by those who grasp its putative significance, for he certainly does not suggest the possibility of the same vision befalling any of the clerks or young women who comprise the Museum’s more regular visitors. This hypnotic effect is apparently experienced by Rossetti’s speaker alone, and his susceptibility may be attributable in part to the fact, to which I would now like to return, that he seems to feel more of an affinity for the world of Nineveh than that of contemporary London.

From the opening stanzas of the poem, the narrator creates a stark contrast between the empires of ancient Assyria and nineteenth-century Britain. In the first stanza, as we have seen, he refers to his own city only as “the dirt and din” (7), but even more striking is the way in which the ostensibly light-hearted tone of the first stanza gives
way to the much more serious, contemplative language that immediately afterwards
describes the statue and the civilization it represents. Ford seems to ascribe the language
of the first stanza to a deliberate attempt on Rossetti’s part to distance “The Burden of
Nineveh” from “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (138-9), but the change to Rossetti’s more usual
sensual and dream-like style in the description of Nineveh also suggests that he—or, at
least, the speaker—feels more attuned to the ancient civilization than the modern one. In
contrast to the more choppy and undescriptive contents of the opening stanza, the first
description of Nineveh in the poem emphasizes heavily the senses of sight, sound, and
touch: “(What song did the brown maidens sing, / From purple mouths alternating, /
When that was woven languidly?)” (23-5). The word *languidly* here seems to characterize
the entire description, as the consonant-heavy lines slow the reader and highlight the
deliberate sensuality of the passage, in much the same way that the language of
Tennyson’s 1832 poem “The Lotos-Eaters,” with which Rossetti would no doubt have
been familiar, does. Yet, whereas Tennyson’s poem represents a critique of a life wasted
in “dreamful ease” (line 98), the romanticized young women of Nineveh form a markedly
positive contrast to the London women whom Rossetti slyly pokes fun at later when he
describes how they “titter in their stays” (69). Such marked shifts of language between
descriptions of Nineveh and London occur in other segments of the poem as well and
reflect the fact that, at least in the speaker’s mind, ancient Nineveh offers far more
sustenance for the imagination than contemporary London does.  

This nostalgia for the ancient East both partakes of and reverses the dichotomy of
the “picturesque” that art historian Linda Nochlin’s seminal 1983 essay “The Imaginary

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103 The same type of shift occurs, for instance, at line 61, in which Rossetti moves from a verbally dense
attempt to envision the Assyrian bull’s history to a straightforward and largely monosyllabic discussion of
the layout of the British Museum.
Orient” identifies. Nochlin argues that nineteenth-century artists, writers, and ethnographers longed to document what they considered the “picturesque” elements of other cultures—whether in Europe or the Middle East—so that their beauties, threatened by “incipient modification and cultural dilution,” could be preserved for the future, yet this attention to “customs, costumes, and religious rituals” was always already predicated on “the fact of destruction,” the idea that these traditional cultures were soon to disappear due to the impact of modernization and colonization (50). Moreover, as Nochlin goes on to note, this desire to preserve memories of disappearing cultures, which the artists and authors ostensibly admired, also served to denigrate people belonging to these societies in European eyes by “certify[ing] that the people encapsulated by [the picturesque], defined by its presence, are irredeemably different from, more backward than, and culturally inferior to those who construct and consume the picturesque product. They are irrevocably ‘Other’” (51). Yet, if we consider “The Burden of Nineveh” in light of Nochlin’s observations about the cult of the picturesque in nineteenth-century Europe, we find another way in which Rossetti subverts the assumptions of his contemporaries. While his depictions of ancient Assyria, like many picturesque works, are tinged with nostalgia for a culture that has already been threatened and destroyed—in this case, centuries ago—Rossetti’s reconstruction of ancient Nineveh is by no means intended to make his audience congratulate itself on its own superiority to, in Nochlin’s words, a “backward” and “culturally inferior” society. Instead, Rossetti employs elements of the picturesque—particularly its nostalgia and its attention to “customs” and “religious rituals”—to subvert the expectations of his English audience. By suggesting that it is the English, and not the Assyrians, who are culturally subordinate and that the narrative of
historical progress so closely embraced by institutional “agents of consecration” (Bourdieu, Field 121) and individuals alike is nothing more than a flawed hypothesis, the poem turns the concept of the picturesque—and its attendant ideological baggage—on its head and denies readers familiar with the genre the pleasure and security of placing themselves above this ancient Other.

In the poem’s (re)construction of Nineveh, it is easy to find elements of Rossetti’s usual highly descriptive and slightly archaic writing style that lead the reader to a sentiment of nostalgia and to the “lost spiritual dreamland” of which Jerome McGann has spoken (xxvi). Imagining the people who have prayed before the statue in ages past, Rossetti writes,

Within thy shadow, haply, once  
Sennacherib has knelt, whose sons  
Smote him between the altar-stones:  
Or pale Semiramis her zones  
Of gold, her incense brought to thee . . . . (51-5, ellipsis added)

Once again, we see Rossetti’s emphasis on the sensual, in the two meanings of the word; he both relies on elements appealing to the reader’s senses (sight, touch, and smell) and eroticizes “pale Semiramis.” Moreover, his depiction of Nineveh constructs it as a place of strong passions and religious devotion. Rossetti hints at the former by his reference to King Sennacherib, who, according to the Old Testament, was killed by his sons (Isa. 37.38), and he also emphasizes the religious faith of historical (or quasi-historical) figures like Sennacherib and Queen Semiramis, who are both linked to the statue by their prayers to it. Thus, when this description of Nineveh comes to an end, the contrast between Nineveh and London and ancient and modern is even more marked because the poem goes on, as we have seen, to characterize both the Museum and London at large as places
empty of real vision and understanding, “Where the blank windows blind the wall” (62). These passages suggest that the speaker is attempting to align the reader’s sympathies more with the ancient past than with the present, but they also seem to imply, through the way in which Rossetti employs the type of language that is so typical of his style and would later appear perhaps most (in)famously in his sonnet cycle *The House of Life*, that the speaker himself feels a greater affinity for the world he imagines than that in which he lives. He consistently represents Ninevan culture as one of faith and feeling, a place in which the ministers of the “Bull-god” (181) recited some tantalizingly lost “mythic chain of verse” (82) and “Yearn’d pale with bitter ecstasy” (85). In Rossetti’s imagining of it, Nineveh was a place in which the spiritual—which, for Rossetti, is also always closely linked to the sensual—took precedence over the material, unlike his own society, which he depicts as being governed by facts and the relentless materialism that those facts seem to imply.

Such an overtly romanticized construction of ancient Assyria does, of course, demonstrate that Rossetti’s speaker partakes of his own culture’s tendency to, as Said describes it, “invent” the Orient as “a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1). Depictions in English writing and art of the East as a place of hyper-sensuality, stasis, and mystery were ubiquitous in the nineteenth century; as MaryAnne Stevens notes in “Western Art and its Encounter with the Islamic World 1798-1914,” “The vision of an exotic Orient—passionate, cruel and intoxicating—. . . was shared by many Western visitors to the Near East” (18) and, perhaps more significantly, shaped much of the artwork and literature that depicted the region. Interestingly, Stevens’s description of this widespread conception of the East as
“passionate, cruel and intoxicating” seems perfectly to encapsulate Rossetti’s depiction of the bull’s history and its supposed links to Sennacherib and Semiramis, yet I think that it would be unjust simply to dismiss Rossetti’s use of Assyrian history as a facile appeal to his audience’s—or his own—appetite for the sensual and the exotic. I suggest instead that, while Rossetti’s exoticized depiction of Nineveh certainly contains elements of this tendency, he also complicates his use of this trope so that, instead of simply offering the reader a romanticized rendering of a timeless place, Rossetti actually employs this imaginary locale as a site from which he can highlight what he perceives as problems in his own culture.

In her 1991 book *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*, comparative literature scholar Lisa Lowe convincingly argues that two important texts in the British and French Orientalist traditions, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* and Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*, enable their authors to offer a critique of their own cultures by providing them with a means of projecting conflicts and dissensions within England and France onto the distant “safe” space of the Orient. She writes that these and other examples of eighteenth-century travel literature “addressed national anxieties about maintaining hegemony in an age of rapidly changing boundaries and territories. Yet [they] also regulated the social quarrels besetting the old regimes of the period by transfiguring internal challenges to the social order into fantasies of external otherness” (31). Although Lowe’s emphasis here is on travel writing of the 1700s, her notion of using the locale of the Orient as a means of critiquing one’s own culture is helpful to my reading of “The Burden of Nineveh” since Rossetti so clearly utilizes his romanticized version of Assyria as a criticism of mid-nineteenth-century British culture.
Indeed, the speaker seems to hold little hope throughout the poem that his own civilization will recognize its own flaws from a careful contemplation of the bull’s history, and he furthers the explicit discussion of his culture’s extreme pragmatism and soullessness by imagining a locale whose passion and sensual spirituality stand in marked contrast to his prosaic vision of contemporary England. In doing so, the poem upholds the common Orientalist binary that situates the East as a place of wild—perhaps even barbaric—passions and lack of restraint while England figures as the site of reason and order. Yet, while the association of these traits with each geographic locale conforms to our expectations of a traditional Orientalist text, the value system that accompanies it is entirely overturned so that, in Rossetti’s writing, British dependence solely on “fact” (“Burden” 78) becomes a sign of aridity and inferiority while Assyrian passion becomes an ideal to be upheld. Thus, in accordance with Lowe’s argument, Rossetti’s re-presentation of ancient Assyria becomes a means of exorcising his own dissatisfaction with British culture, and his imaginary vision of the bull’s past represents a safe place in which he is free to construct his vision of an ideal society.

Interestingly, Bentley argues in his discussion of political undercurrents in Rossetti’s work that the poet associates himself with the ancient civilization because he feels that he has been “brutalized” (167) by the modern one through the various political and artistic frustrations he experienced in the months immediately preceding the initial composition of “The Burden of Nineveh” in 1850. Bentley’s article points in particular to Rossetti’s discontent with “the brutal suppression of the revolutions of 1848” (163) in

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104 In Orientalism, Said describes this common dichotomy in the following words: “The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (40). Lowe also addresses this binary, saying in her discussion of Lettres persanes that the text “conform[s] to a traditional orientalist structure that opposes the tyranny and licentiousness of Persia to rational, civilized France” (33).
Italy and Hungary, but he also makes reference to a number of trials that Rossetti personally faced in 1849 and 1850, including the end of the brief publication of *The Germ* due to lack of sales and “the disastrous exhibition of [his painting] *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* in 1850” (167). Both the collapse of the Pre-Raphaelite magazine, which strongly “encourage[d] and enforce[d] an entire adherence to the simplicity of nature”\(^\text{105}\) in all types of art and called into question the supremacy of the Old Masters, and the vehement criticism received by *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, which attempted to put into practice the ideals expressed in *The Germ*, might have been seen by Rossetti as his contemporaries’ refusal to value or even understand his artistic aims—and those of the other members of the Brotherhood. Indeed, it is a well known fact that, after the harsh critical reception that *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* received, Rossetti refused to exhibit paintings in public again, “except on a tiny number of carefully controlled occasions” (Prettejohn 55). Thus, Bentley’s supposition that Rossetti felt “brutalized” by the modern world seems a fair judgment of the poet-artist’s frame of mind regarding his contemporaries at this time.

Bentley’s comments suggest that both the bull and the speaker share the status of an outsider in the text (167). Therefore, the meditation on the history of the bull allows the speaker to give form to his own social criticism, which so many scholars have identified as a central feature of the poem. In a way, then, the speaker moulds the statue to serve his own purposes; when he says near the end of the poem that “Within [the statue] I knew the cry lay bound / Of the dumb soul of Nineveh” (159-60), he characterizes the statue as “dumb” so that he can speak for it and offer his own

\(^{105}\) This description of the aims of *The Germ* appears anonymously on the back cover of the magazine’s first issue (page 50 in Hosmon’s reprinted version of the periodical).
interpretation of its significance. It is by now a critical commonplace, due in large part to
the work of Michel Foucault, that there is no such thing as straightforward, unmediated,
and objective representation of an object.\footnote{The link between power and knowledge, or “power/knowledge” as Foucault labels the idea, is a notion that runs throughout much of Foucault’s work. See, for example, his statement in “Prison Talk” that “[i]t is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (52). In a similar vein, he explains in more detail in \textit{Discipline and Punish} that power produces knowledge . . . ; . . . power and knowledge directly imply one another; . . . there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. . . . [T]he subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge. (27-8)} In \textit{Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices}, Stuart Hall notes that the meanings assigned to any artifact “are inevitably implicated in relations of power” (8, italics in text), and Edward Said would certainly characterize Rossetti’s appropriation of the bull as an act of Western domination of the Eastern “Other,” for the bull cannot explain its own “presence or history” (Said 6) but is instead subjugated by Rossetti’s foreign aesthetic and cultural concerns. The statue is “spoke[n] for and represented” (Said 6)\footnote{Said uses this description in a discussion of Gustave Flaubert’s representations of the “Egyptian courtesan” Kuchuk Hanem (6), but his insights are equally applicable to Rossetti’s appropriation of the Assyrian bull for his own purposes.} by the narrator, and its presence is always mediated by this figure, who takes it upon himself to interpret and disseminate the bull’s putative message. All of these factors, according to the argument that Said advances in \textit{Orientalism}, would make the situation of the bull in “The Burden of Nineveh” an instance of “the pattern of relative strength between East and West” (6). Yet, true to the ambiguity and ambivalence embraced by this text, Rossetti makes use of his position within the site of imperial power to call the very power structure upon which his appropriation of the bull relies into question. As Bentley rightly points out, at the time of the poem’s initial composition, Rossetti felt marginalized by mainstream British culture,
and this sentiment of marginality is clearly echoed by his narrator throughout the poem. The speaker is simultaneously a part of and aloof from imperial culture, so it seems only fitting that his relationship to the bull mirrors this vexed state. While the narrator’s claim of the right to speak for an ancient Assyrian artifact automatically implicates him in the imperial power structure, the subsequent use that he makes of the bull as a source of harsh social criticism works against his apparently imperialist, orientalizing stance.

A similar type of appropriation of voice that simultaneously calls its own imperial basis into question occurs in at least two other instances in the poem. Rossetti characterizes the explicitly English discovery of Nineveh as the first time silence was broken at the site (29-30) and, similarly, asks,

Oh! seem’d it not—that spell once broke,
As though the sculptured warriors woke,
As though the shaft the string forsook,
The cymbals clash’d, the chariots shook,
And there was life in Nineveh? (36-40)

when Layard’s excavators unearthed the site. At this point in the text, the speaker seems to embrace the notion of England as a discoverer with the ability to give some form of life to once-dead objects, yet, given the fact that the rest of the poem functions as a criticism of national and imperialistic hubris, one must wonder if the speaker presents this view of England somewhat ironically. Indeed, Rossetti himself calls into question this jingoistic view of England both by expressing the idea as a question instead of a declaration and by using the phrase “seem’d it not,” which expresses some doubt about whether these events actually happened. Moreover, the following lines reinforce this uncertainty when they say it was “As though the sculptured warriors woke” (emphasis added) and “As though the shaft the string forsook” (emphasis added). The words as
though suggest that one might imagine that these events occurred, but the poem itself is clearly noncommittal in its view of England as a life-imparting discovering force. Even in this passage, in which Rossetti’s speaker seemingly embraces the conventional opinion of the imperialists, he is actually quite careful to distance himself from their stance.

As we have seen, the narrator clearly has no affinity with the representative British social groups—the clerks, clergymen, young women, and schoolteachers—who visit the Museum, but between the descriptions of these other circles Rossetti has inserted a passage that outlines a group with which his speaker appears to have a much greater affinity. This stanza, which describes the activities and conversation of a number of “Antique-students”—that is, students of the Antique School of the Royal Academy—and makes an explicit reference to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, is entirely absent from the 1870 version of “The Burden of Nineveh,”108 and I want to spend the last part of this chapter discussing this passage since it represents an important facet of the poem’s social criticism that has, remarkably, gone unnoticed until now.

Immediately following his depictions of the clerks, clergy, and “misses,” Rossetti writes,

108 I would argue that Rossetti removed this stanza from the 1870 version of the poem for at least two reasons. First, this passage employs the same type of colloquial language as the original opening stanza, which, as I mentioned earlier, was entirely rewritten for the later version of the poem; thus, this segment on “the Antique-students” was probably also removed because its tone did not fit in with the “more serious and contemplative” (Riede 90) nature of the 1870 edition of the text. However, the fact that the stanza was deleted altogether instead of being rewritten also suggests that Rossetti felt that direct and critical references to the Royal Academy and its fraught relationship with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood no longer had a place in the work. As McGann rightly points out, the poem “clearly relates to Rossetti’s programmatic concerns about art and its relation to society, concerns that were most pressing for him in the years of his Pre-Raphaelite commitments in the late 40s and early 50s” (383). By the time of the poem’s second publication in 1870, of course, the Brotherhood had long since disbanded, and references to the group’s clash with the Royal Academy would only serve to date the text and, perhaps, make readers think of the author as a painter dabbling in writing rather than an author producing his first published volume of original poetry designed to “stake a claim to poetic recognition” (Marsh, Painter 367). Moreover, at this later stage of his career, Rossetti was interested in constructing himself as a successful and marketable artist (Marsh, Painter 269) and may have desired to distance himself somewhat from the controversies that initially surrounded the P. R. B. in his youth.
Here, while the Antique-students lunch,
Shall Art be slang’d o’er cheese and hunch,
Whether the great R. A.’s a bunch
Of gods or dogs, and whether Punch
Is right about the P. R. B. (71-5)

Once again, the poem draws a direct link between the Museum and its classical
collections and the Royal Academy, for it specifies that these are “Antique-students,”
who are eating lunch in the Museum while presumably spending the day sketching
statuary. However, this group seems to have a more intellectual conversation than the
others around it, for the students discuss larger topics like the current state of the British
art world. Moreover, these figures not only discuss it but criticize it freely, “slang[ing]”
Art\(^{109}\) and debating “Whether the great R. A.’s a bunch / Of gods or dogs.” The language,
itself full of slang in the literal sense of the word, suggests the youthful, boisterous nature
of this group, and the fact that some might consider members of the British art world’s
highest institution to be “dogs” implies that this group does not wholeheartedly accept the
distinctions made by the Academy—and, by extension, the British Museum. The
clipped, largely monosyllabic rhythm of the passage also recalls the language in which
the speaker introduces his opinions in the poem’s first stanza, again creating an implicit
link between the speaker and this group.

Most significantly, however, it is in this passage that the poem refers explicitly to
the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The final topic of the students’ discussion is “whether
Punch / Is right about the P. R. B.” These students are the only one of the four groups
that are described who express views that dissent from those of major cultural arbiters,
and their discussion of whether the R. A. is a worthy institution and whether the

\(^{109}\) The *OED* defines the verb *slang* as either “to rail in abusive or vulgar language” or “[t]o abuse or scold violently” (“Slang”).
P. R. B.’s quest to alter British art is justified casts their criticism of the art world in much the same light as the criticism of English society at large that the bull offers within the text. The P. R. B. stands in the same relationship to the R. A.—of a force within its confines\textsuperscript{110} that wants to change it—as the bull will to the British Museum. As we have seen, the Ninevan statue leads, in the speaker’s mind, to a questioning of cultural assumptions of history, linear progress, and Greco-Roman supremacy in much the same way that Rossetti and other members of the P. R. B. wanted to call into question the teachings of the R. A. that were based on old-fashioned precepts, complacency, and the idolization of the painters of the Italian Renaissance (Hunt, \textit{Pre-Raphaelitism} 1: 82-91).

Even more subtly, the placement of the letters “P. R. B.” at the end of the final line of the stanza suggests the group’s parallel relationship to “Nineveh,” the word that also appears at the end of the last line of every second stanza in the rest of the poem. Both the Brotherhood and the bull’s history represent confrontations of established—and interrelated—artistic and historical traditions, and the fact that the group of Antique-students discusses the P. R. B. and its relationship to the R. A. while the other groups in the Museum concentrate on the Assyrian statue may also suggest that the reader is meant to link the P. R. B. to the Ninevan bull as figures on the margins of an accepted tradition.

This parallel between the P. R. B. and the Assyrian bull locates them both as forces of criticism outside—while simultaneously existing within—mainstream British culture. The group of artists is able to offer a pointed critique of the Royal Academy from its position inside the institution’s school, and the bull’s similar status as an object

\textsuperscript{110} Although Rossetti himself never exhibited a painting at the Royal Academy during his lifetime, Millais and Hunt, the two most prominent of the Brothers, regularly exhibited work at the annual exhibitions during the late 1840s and 1850s and afterwards (Graves 4: 199-200, 5: 243-8), and, of course, the three men initially met thanks to their simultaneous enrollment in the R. A. Schools.
simultaneously within and marginalized by the British Museum and its cultural ideology is represented quite literally in the poem through the actual physical placement of the statue. In the first 150 lines, in which the speaker envisions the artifact taking its place inside the Museum’s galleries, the bull’s appearance is laughably foreign to visitors like the “misses . . . in their stays” and emblematizes the apparently unbridgeable gap between Assyrian and British culture. Yet when the speaker announces for the first time, “. . . Here woke my thought” (151, ellipsis in text), the statue is, in fact, still outside the Museum building, and we realize that the preceding portrait of the “poor god, within this hall” (61) has actually been the product of the speaker’s imagination. At the end of the poem, the bull still remains outside the galleries and ironically functions—to the poem’s speaker, at least—not as an emblem of cultural difference but as an indication that contemporary London may have more in common with ancient Nineveh than English insularity might care to consider. Thus, the two physical spaces (both inside and outside the Museum) that the statue occupies in the poem not only remind us of the uncertain status of the object in terms of the Museum authorities’ broader cultural and artistic assumptions but also allow the artifact to be utilized by the speaker in two entirely different ways. In the final fifty lines of “The Burden of Nineveh,” the contrast between poetic ancient Nineveh and prosaic contemporary London that Rossetti previously creates is abruptly abandoned. When the speaker “wak[es] up” (161) from his reverie for the second time, he sees more similarities than differences between the two cities. Yet Rossetti does more than simply align London with Nineveh at this point; his deliberate placement of the statue outside the Museum at the end of the poem also reminds the reader that, even if the artifact is—like the early P. R. B.—not readily accepted by
contemporary “agencies of consecration” (Bourdieu, *Field* 112) it can still have an impact on the broader cultural assumptions of privileged viewers like the poem’s speaker.

When the narrator returns in this final segment of the poem to a consideration of contemporary London, the conflation of London and Nineveh that many critics have noted (Boos 213; Rees 54; Bentley 172) comes to the forefront. As I have already mentioned in my discussion of the statue’s hypnotic effect on the speaker, the narrator first tries to turn away—both literally and metaphorically—from the “doleful laws” (163) of decline and the forgetfulness of history that, in his eyes, the statue represents, but his effort at lightheartedness is overcome, and he sees—as if in another vision—

. . . the crowds of kerb and rut
Go past as marshall’d to the strat
Of ranks in gypsum quaintly cut:
   It seem’d in one same pageantry
They follow’d forms which had been erst [.] (172-6; ellipsis added)

In these lines, the narrator first introduces the notion that the people of London who crowd the streets are not so very different from their Assyrian predecessors. Images of Assyrian friezes described in Layard’s book (Bentley 170) overtake the speaker’s vision and replace or modify his view of contemporary London, and the depiction of people walking by the Museum as a parallel to Assyrian statuary suggests an increasing similarity between the two cultures, a disturbing thought for the many contemporaries of Rossetti who were doing their utmost to devalue Assyrian art or, in some cases, mark it as the production of a degenerate culture (Bohrer 49-50) outside the classical lineage that was thought to have led to mid-nineteenth-century England. With this image, that lineage is replaced by a fresh one, one that points to England not as a beacon of progress but as a fellow sufferer of decadence and decline. The backdrop of this scene, the British
Museum, becomes aligned in this image with ancient Assyria, which is, ironically, the
place it tried so hard to keep outside its walls, and the fact that the English people
“follow’d forms which had been erst” suggests that all the bustle of an 1850s street is
only a repetition of what has happened before. According to this vision of the street as a
frieze, nothing has really progressed or changed during the intervening centuries.

Yet, while Rossetti apparently creates this explicit link between Nineveh and
London, his language is also carefully constructed to stop short of making a definitive
statement about the relationship between the two cultures. For example, at the beginning
of his vision of contemporary Londoners as figures in an ancient Assyrian frieze, the
speaker describes his “sense” as “half shut” (171), and these words suggest that the
description that follows is based not on a rational comparison but, instead, on an
unprovable intuitive understanding. Moreover, within his description of the figures
themselves, he says, “It seem’d in one same pageantry / They follow’d forms which had
been erst” (175-6), and his use of the word *seem’d* once again calls into question the
certainty of his declaration. It would be an overstatement to say that these gestures
towards uncertainty, which continue in subsequent lines, serve to disrupt altogether the
doubling of London and Nineveh that begins to take shape in this stanza; after all, this
conflation of the two cities is the primary theme of the poem’s last fifty lines. However,
the fact that this doubling is spoken of only in terms of appearance rather than as a
definitive fact reminds the reader of the poem’s earlier emphasis on the impossibility of
full knowledge and serves to distance the text once again from the more stereotypical
kind of Orientalist writing that attempts to distill a definite, factual meaning from every
object that it encounters.
This oscillation between biting criticism of London and an acknowledgment that none of the speaker’s ideas can be stated with absolute certainty continues in the following stanzas, in which the statue explicitly disrupts a progressive historical chronology and the speaker discusses a possible future for both the bull and English culture. At this point, the reader sees once again the “emphasis on cycles” (Boos 234) that is so central to “The Burden of Nineveh,” for the speaker suggests that London and the bull “may” (186) be buried under sand just as the statue was in Nineveh (181-90). However, more significantly for my discussion, the speaker also says that in the future he imagines “some may question which was first, / Of London or of Nineveh” (179-80). This vision of the future, while once again drawing attention to its own uncertainty through the use of the word may, is frightening in part because it erases traditionally accepted notions of history and continuity; in this imagined future, there will be no clear narrative of progression or of empires. The same type of disruption brought into being by a meditation on the bull occurs clearly in the following stanza, as well:

Or it may chance indeed that when
Man’s age is hoary among men,
His centuries threescore and ten,—
His furthest childhood shall seem then
More clear than later times may be [.] (191-5)

Once again, the speaker explicitly questions the notion of progress; indeed, he inverts it by pointing—albeit in a deliberately indefinite manner—to toward the possibility of a time when knowledge of the British Empire could be all but forgotten. The poem even brings this reversal of chronology into a religious context, saying that the re-discoverers of London’s ruins might

. . . hold us for some race
That walk’d not in Christ’s lowly ways
But bow’d its pride and vow’d its praise
Unto the god of Nineveh. (197-200, ellipsis added)

Given the popularity of the concept of Old Testament typology during the mid-nineteenth century and the fact that all forms of faith—even Greco-Roman pantheism—were seen by some as elements that led up to Christianity as humankind’s ultimate expression of spirituality, this particular teleological disturbance assumes an even deeper resonance.

Interestingly, the potential disruptions and disturbances that these passages point to seem to function as a subtle response to and criticism of the ways in which the bull and other Assyrian artifacts were constructed by the circle of Museum Trustees, artists, and art critics who commented upon them. For those like Sir Stratford Canning who employed the bull as an emblem of England’s imperial prowess in the archaeological “race” to recover the artifacts and bring them to Europe, Rossetti gestures toward a time when a reference to the British Empire may be emptied of all its connotations and significance. In this imagined time, England may lose not only its power but also its very concepts of time and progress. Moreover, the country’s notion of itself as the descendant of ancient Greece and Rome may be revealed as an ideological fiction, for, at this future time, people may not even remember at what point in history England existed. In response to those like the Athenæum author who limit the bull’s value to a purely historical sense in terms of what it reveals about ancient Assyrian society or about the “truth” of references in the Old Testament to Nineveh, Rossetti returns to the theme of the impossibility of having full historical knowledge of the bull and its civilization. He foregrounds this idea by imagining how the same statue may mistakenly be viewed by hypothetical archaeologists centuries later, and his supposition that these figures might

111 For a brief but informative discussion of the prevalence of typology in the nineteenth century, see Landow, *Typological* 7-13.
erroneously conclude that the English venerated the statue as a god reminds the reader that even strictly historical evaluations of the Assyrian artifacts and the role that they played in their culture are never entirely reliable because of the impossibility of having all of the knowledge necessary for such a judgment.

As the preceding discussion suggests, the appearance of the statue of the winged bull has the potential to disrupt London’s place in history in many ways, and perhaps the final insult occurs when the poem suggests that the future re-discoverers of London “may” (186) be “Some tribe of the Australian plough” (188). With these words, the narrator implies that the former centre of the British Empire could be forgotten while one of its colonies becomes a new centre that plunders the remains of London in the same way that London has pillaged Assyrian ruins for their archaeological treasures. In this imagined future, a once-great empire may be placed in a position of passivity, unable even to share its own history with future generations.

Perhaps because he recognizes this potential for the downfall of the British Empire, to which the other figures in the poem seem entirely oblivious, the speaker appears once again at this point to distance himself from London and its ideals. After he describes how the presence of the winged bull may confuse future understanding of the city’s religion, he says, “The smile rose first,—anon drew nigh / The thought: . . . .” (201-2, ellipsis in text). Rossetti’s use of an ellipsis here recalls his earlier employment of the punctuation in the poem as a means of highlighting the unknowable gaps in the winged bull’s history, and he continues this association between the ellipsis and the unknowable in these lines, in which the punctuation makes it difficult to determine to what the words “The thought,” which immediately precede the ellipsis, refer. Depending on one’s
interpretive stance, “The thought” may have been left unrecorded and replaced with the ellipsis; it may be outlined in the subsequent lines, which offer a final description of the statue that highlights its strangeness (202-7); or it may be recorded in the question that ends the poem seven lines later (209-10). In whatever manner we choose to interpret the speaker’s reference to his “thought,” readers cannot help but be aware of the ambiguity of this line, and the ellipses used throughout the poem therefore succeed in emphasizing the unknowable not only by disrupting readers’ attempts to understand the bull and its history but also by negating their efforts to pinpoint the thoughts and opinions of the speaker who presents the artifact to them.

However one interprets this ambiguous line, the poem ends with another question—“O Nineveh, was this thy God, / Thine also, mighty Nineveh?” (209-10)—which, while maintaining the text’s overarching emphasis on unanswered questions and indefinite suggestions, also deftly closes the gap between London and Nineveh that traditional patterns of thought might attempt to construct. In these last lines, it seems that all of the criticisms of England and the suggestions of its similarities to Nineveh that the speaker has proffered in the preceding stanzas reach a devastating conclusion, and, from his position as a commentator external to his culture’s attitudes and the British Museum’s propagation of them, the speaker can “smile” as he outlines the potential fall of so many of the ideas that his contemporaries hold dear. In the wake of his meditations, rigid ideals of superiority and progress are shown to be empty hopes that time may simply wash away.

The narrator and the “wingèd beast from Nineveh” share the status of being outside the norms of mid-nineteenth-century British culture, and, through his lengthy
meditations on the statue as an object outside the artistic and cultural traditions into which it is being “hoist[ed],” the speaker is able to comment on problems in these milieus and others. He begins with a criticism of the British Museum that places both him and the statue outside the cultural assumptions promulgated by the Museum and its sister institution, the Royal Academy. This deflation of the Museum both as an institution and as a representative of the culture of which it is a part continues throughout the text, as does the distancing (from a geographical, temporal, artistic, and religious standpoint) of the statue from the museum—and society—to which it is being introduced. In the course of both this distancing and this extensive critique, Rossetti draws an interesting parallel between the position of the Assyrian statue and that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and it is this parallel that suggests a new way of interpreting “The Burden of Nineveh.” For, as we have seen, many critics have discussed the various types of social criticism inherent in the text, but the relationship between the figure of the winged bull and the artistic ideals of Rossetti and the rest of the Pre-Raphaelites has been overlooked. In the poem, the statue figures as an object outside an accepted tradition that functions for the speaker as both a criticism of and a call for change within London society; the purpose of the P. R. B., still in existence at the time Rossetti began the poem in 1850, was to serve the same function for the British art world, offering a new style that was meant to revivify what it saw as the staid and outmoded art fostered by the training of the Royal Academy. Part of the way in which the Brotherhood attempted to create this different style was by turning to the inspiration of the Italian quattrocento artists, who were often considered unsuitable models for imitation by artists and R. A. members at the time. It is clear from contemporary sources that the various members of the P. R. B. imitated this style at least
in the early stages of their careers (Prettejohn 27-8, 32, 136); indeed, William Holman Hunt criticized Rossetti much later for allowing this influence to pervade too much of his work (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 1: 147, 2: 440). This turning for inspiration to a past that had been marginalized—much like that of Nineveh—is certainly a significant element in Rossetti’s *oeuvre* and clearly became part of his artistic ethos. Thus, the treatment of the bull in “The Burden of Nineveh” can be seen as an extension of Rossetti’s artistic ideals at this stage of his career. Focusing on a piece of ancient statuary that is outside the Greco-Roman tradition allows the author to offer not only a criticism of imperialism and sentiments of social superiority and progress but also of artistic traditions that had a large impact on his experiences as a young artist and, especially, as a student of the Royal Academy. Rossetti did not disagree with the R. A.’s dictum of turning to the past for inspiration, but he did differ in his consideration of which artists and artworks should be admired and emulated. As his brother’s writings suggest, Rossetti was outspoken in his opinions and denunciations of artists declared admirable by the R. A., and he uses the arrival of the Assyrian bull in London as an opportunity to render subtle criticisms of the British cultural world in the midst of his more overt critique of society at large. Rossetti’s poem seems to delight in showing how the rigid hierarchies and systems of valuation of the Royal Academy and the British Museum could be upset simply by the entrance of an object that had not been accounted for by their narratives, and the social criticism that he offers is predicated from the first stanza of the poem on a critique of the world of art, as well.

Surprisingly, while many critics have talked about the political and religious aspects of this text, virtually no attention has been paid to the specific ways in which the
work mirrors Rossetti’s artistic ideals and the opinions behind the development of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Of course, the stanzas in which this correlation between the poem and Rossetti’s early artistic ethos is most explicit—in the opening lines and in the passage describing “the Antique-students”—were either radically altered or disappeared entirely from the version of “The Burden of Nineveh” that was published in Rossetti’s 1870 *Poems*. Since this later edition, as I mentioned earlier, has become the canonical version of the text and since the earlier edition is frequently viewed, much like Rossetti’s juvenilia, as an inferior and somewhat inelegant draft in need of further refinement, critics of Rossetti have largely focused on the later version. However, because the 1870 edition lacks the more confrontational opening stanzas of the 1850 text, which clearly place the speaker at odds with the British Museum and its cherished ideologies, the framework necessary for Rossetti’s specific use of the bull as the focal point of a critique of mid-Victorian conceptions of art history and cultural progression is lost, and the bull becomes the conduit of a less complex criticism of imperialism and religious hypocrisy.

Yet, if we consider the 1850 version of “The Burden of Nineveh” not as an early and inferior draft of a poem that was later reworked but as an independent text that was clearly thought suitable for publication by its author, a more complex understanding of the poem and its employment of the figure of the Assyrian bull emerges. When the earlier edition of the poem, with its subsequently amended and deleted stanzas, is examined in terms of the ideas about art that Rossetti held as a young man, it becomes clear that his discussion of the Ninevan bull and the many ways in which he both deliberately distances it from and relates it to contemporary London are closely allied with the manner in which Rossetti hoped the art of the Pre-Raphaelites would change
British art. Through the statue, Rossetti, much as he did when looking for artistic inspiration, turns to an infrequently used part of the past that has a particular resonance for him, as the poem suggests that the Greco-Roman collections do not have for the speaker. The ambiguous past of the sculpture, outside an authorized tradition, allows the narrator to make use of it in unexpected ways, and the statue, when considered in light of Rossetti’s beliefs about art at the time, becomes an object around which a new tradition might be built, a less rigid one that is frightening in its ability to deflate pride and ideas of supremacy but may be ultimately liberating in the way in which it can destroy the tyranny of artistic hierarchies and teleological narratives and inspire a new awareness, in much the same way that the Pre-Raphaelites intended their art to do.

Throughout my analysis of “The Burden of Nineveh,” I have demonstrated the various ways in which Rossetti self-consciously creates a textual zone of uncertainty in the poem. First, the speaker constantly reiterates the fact that it is impossible to have complete knowledge of the statue’s past and the civilization from which it came. Second, the text redoubles our uncertainty of how the artifact should be understood in the context of the poem by shifting back and forth between standard Orientalist tropes that place the winged bull in a subordinate position and expressions of admiration that seek to elevate it and its culture above accepted artistic and cultural traditions. On one hand, the statue is the object of predictably imperialist gestures: its unusual appearance is upheld as an emblem of its “Otherness,” which remains undiminished even at the end of the poem; its voice is appropriated so that the speaker can use its presence to further his own agenda; and it becomes the subject of a heavily romanticized and exoticized history. Yet, on the other hand, the speaker also views the Assyrian bull as a representative of a superior
culture, which, unlike his own, maintained a strong sense of spirituality and sensuality, and as a reminder of the many flaws of the mainstream artistic, cultural, historical, and religious ideals espoused by the citizens of 1850s London. Indeed, as I have demonstrated, the poem even goes so far as to parallel the revolutionary qualities of the “Bull-god” and the P. R. B., a cause of primary importance to Rossetti at the time of the poem’s original composition in 1850.

These conflicting attitudes in the speaker’s approach to the winged bull can make it difficult for readers of the poem to interpret just what is the text’s stance toward the artifact from Nineveh. Since it is clearly admiring of Assyrian culture, the poem itself refuses to be read as a standard Orientalist text that, in Said’s sense of the term, seeks to “dominat[e], restructur[e], and hav[e] authority over the Orient” (3), yet, while the poem attempts to free itself from traditional valuations and hierarchies, it does not avoid the adoption of certain Orientalist topos, thereby making it equally impossible for the reader to consider the work as an entirely anti-colonial text. This multilayered textual ambiguity may be one reason why the 1850 version of the poem is so often ignored in favour of the 1870 edition, which is less conflicted due to the speaker’s obvious realignment of himself with cultural and artistic norms. While the narrator of the 1870 version retains his emphasis on the unknowable nature of the bull’s history and his oscillation between admiration for and subjugation of it, his own position in relation to ideals of cultural progression and artistic merit is much more straightforward than in the earlier version, for, with the numerous changes made to the text—the complete revision of the poem’s once-rebellious opening lines; the excision of satirical references to contemporaries like the “clerks,” “clergy,” and young “misses”; and, perhaps most importantly, the deletion
of pointed references to the R. A. and the P. R. B.—Rossetti recreates the speaker of the 1870 text as a figure who subscribes to dominant cultural ideologies. However, I think that the deeply conflicted position of the speaker in relation to his own society in the earlier version of the poem can actually help to explain his troubled attitude toward the bull in a way that is rendered less complex and more conservative by the later edition of the text.

In *Critical Terrains*, Lisa Lowe underpins her readings of a diverse range of Orientalist texts by declaring that Orientalism as a discursive formation is necessarily “profoundly heterogeneous” (*ix*). She writes,

I . . . argue strongly for the heterogeneity of the orientalist object, whose contradictions and lack of fixity mark precisely the moments of instability in the discourse; although orientalism may represent its objects as fixed or stable, contradictions and noncorrespondences in the discursive situation ultimately divulge the multivalence and indeterminability of those fictions. (*x*)

Lowe goes on to point out that this “instability” is most noticeable in instances in which “narratives of gendered, racial, national, and class differences complicate and interrupt the narrative of orientalism” (5). Lowe’s particular emphasis on the way in which other issues can intersect with and destabilize Orientalism as a discourse is, I think, particularly useful to my interpretation of the 1850 version of “The Burden of Nineveh,” in which the speaker’s remarkably complex relationship with the Assyrian bull leads him to employ Orientalist tropes while simultaneously undercutting their very foundations. These instances of the speaker’s conflicting views and desires reflect Rossetti’s own disenchantment with dominant British ideologies of art and history, and, to apply Lowe’s logic to the poem, such moments of oscillation and ambivalence occur most pointedly in the text when the poem’s orientalized subject matter intersects with Rossetti’s artistic and
cultural concerns as a member of an *avant-garde* artists’ movement. These issues external to Orientalism collide with and damage the stability of the larger discourse, and Rossetti’s multivalent representations of the “wingèd beast from Nineveh” thus not only align the bull with Pre-Raphaelite ideals but also point to, in Lowe’s words, “possible sites of subaltern resistance and intervention” (20) both in the discourse of Orientalism and, even more significantly for Rossetti, in the dominant cultural narrative embraced by the British Museum and the Royal Academy of Arts.
Chapter Four

“I SHOULD HAVE . . . CRIED LIKE A CHILD”:
ANXIETY AND AMBIVALENCE IN THE 1854-6 DIARIES AND LETTERS
OF WILLIAM HOLMAN HUNT

William Holman Hunt was, along with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Everett Millais, one of the founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and, when the Brotherhood and its principles came under attack by art critics in 1850 and 1851, Hunt’s work—such as *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids* (1850) and *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1851)—was roundly condemned alongside the paintings of the group’s other members. However, by the end of the decade, Hunt had already established a market for his work, as demonstrated by the fact that he was paid the previously “unheard-of sum of £5,500” (Wood 46) for his painting *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1860).

By the turn of the century, fifty years after the initial attacks on the Pre-Raphaelites, Hunt had become a consecrated painter with a reputation that spanned not just England but the

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112 As in the preceding chapters, I have chosen to date each painting according to the year in which it was first exhibited. This distinction is particularly important in the case of Hunt, who often retouched and frequently reworked his paintings over the course of his lifetime.

113 Among reviews that appeared in 1850, are, for instance, “The Exhibition of the Royal Academy” from *The Times* and “Royal Academy” from the *Athenæum*. For examples of press coverage from 1851, see “Exhibition of the Royal Academy” and “The Pre-Raphaelite Artists,” both from *The Times*. (Consult Works Cited for full publication information.) Hunt’s letters written during this period of difficulty suggest the despair he felt at the time. Two of these epistles from May 1851 (Eng. MS. 1216 fol. 16 and 1216 fol. 17), which are addressed to Coventry Patmore, are in the collections of the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, hereafter referred to as JRUL. (To avoid unnecessary interruptions in the body of the chapter, manuscripts from JRUL will henceforth be referred to in an abbreviated form; for instance, Eng. MS 1216 fol. 16 will be labeled JRUL 1216.16, with the number after the period referring either to folio [in the case of letters] or page number [in the case of diaries].)
rest of Europe and even England’s colonies, where *The Light of the World* (1904),\(^{114}\) Hunt’s depiction of a verse from the Book of Revelation, toured and was viewed by massive audiences in 1905 and 1906.\(^{115}\) This lengthy and well-received tour of a single artwork is just one indication of the status as an artist that Hunt enjoyed during his lifetime. In 1905, he was also awarded the Order of Merit by King Edward VII (Amor 266), and, finally, upon his death in 1910, Hunt’s obituary in *The Times* recalled the artist as “one of the most striking and most original painters of his time” (“Obituary”).

Despite such recognition, Hunt worried that his reputation was in decline even during his own lifetime, and he was right to do so. As Judith Bronkhurst notes in her invaluable *William Holman Hunt: A Catalogue Raisonné*, “[B]y the turn of the century a populist religious painter was anathema to the aesthetes” and entirely out of step with “avant-garde trends in European art” (1: 3); thus, while Hunt’s works continued to draw crowds of spectators in the British colonies, his reputation in the art world simultaneously suffered greatly\(^{116}\)—and continued to decline over subsequent decades. Victorian art, including the works of Hunt and other Pre-Raphaelites, was largely disdained in the first half of the twentieth century,\(^{117}\) and it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that “a general

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\(^{114}\) The version of *The Light of the World* that went on tour is actually Hunt’s third rendering of the iconic image, which was first exhibited in 1854 (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 289, 150).

\(^{115}\) For an account of the reception of *The Light of the World* in the colonies, see Jeremy Maas’ entertaining monograph *Holman Hunt and the Light of the World*, particularly Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight.

\(^{116}\) Hunt’s concern that he was being by-passed by new trends in the art world is evident in a letter written by the artist in 1890, in which he bluntly states, “I am, and have all my life been, an anachronism as a painter. I worked until within the last few years thinking that in time I might affect permanently a proportion of the men of my generation with my view, but this I see now was an entire mistake, and the taste for external realism or—on the other hand—dilettantism—is too strong for me to make any impression upon” (qtd. in Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 35). Hunt’s disdain for late-nineteenth-century trends in European art, especially Impressionism, is particularly evident in a passage from the final chapter of his 1905 memoirs, in which he rails against the *avant-garde*, declaring, “Present exhibitions of painting and sculpture, so full of productions that show disregard or defiance of the fundamental principles of sanity and reverence, supply proof that quackery is in highest favour” (2: 486).

\(^{117}\) The late art dealer Jeremy Maas recalls that, until the 1960s, “[t]he visual arts of that age enjoyed the status equivalent to that of a non-person; they were hardly ever mentioned in . . . academic circles; and if
revival” of interest in figures like Rossetti and Millais occurred (Maas, “Personal” 231, 233). Throughout this period, the work of Hunt, in particular, suffered neglect, and, even now, the paintings of the two other founders of the Brotherhood are more widely-known and more frequently reproduced in such popular genres as posters and greeting cards than are Hunt’s works. Moreover, scholars have devoted less attention to Hunt than to his two more famous Pre-Raphaelite brethren; while books and catalogues of Rossetti and—to a lesser extent—Millais abound, the last exhibition devoted exclusively to a retrospective of Hunt’s career was held at Liverpool’s Walker Art Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1969, forty years ago.\(^{118}\)

Various authors have attempted to trace the reasons behind this marked decline in Hunt’s reputation. The novelist Evelyn Waugh, who was related to both of Hunt’s wives, is perhaps one of the first to have offered a rationale. In an article from 1960 entitled “The Only Pre-Raphaelite,”\(^{119}\) Waugh states matter-of-factly that “[a] kind of cataract seems to seal the eyes of this half-century . . . to the invention, accomplishment, untiring vitality and dedicated purpose” (295) of Hunt’s artwork, and this declaration about Hunt’s reputation seems intent on explaining that Hunt has fallen from contemporary...
favour not because there is something lacking in his work but because contemporary viewers do not approach it with minds ready to appreciate its complexities.

Diana Holman-Hunt, the artist’s granddaughter, has more recently offered her own explanation of the reasons behind Hunt’s diminished status. In her introduction to Anne Clark Amor’s 1989 biography of Hunt, Holman-Hunt suggests that—in her mind—the most significant cause of Hunt’s downfall is that he is “best remembered as a Victorian religious painter with a moral message, [and is therefore] unlikely to attract as much notice from an increasingly irreligious public” (Introduction 8). Hunt, as I shall discuss in much greater detail later, certainly had an awareness of the constructed nature of the self that he presented to the public, and he did his utmost during his lifetime to create an image of himself as “the saint and the sage” (Waugh 295). His two-volume memoir, entitled *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, is a self-created monument to this representation of himself in which he repeatedly emphasizes art’s service to religion and clearly foregrounds such Christian paintings as *The Light of the World*, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, and *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1885)\(^{120}\) as the most significant productions of his career.\(^{121}\) Hunt was very successful in creating this reputation for himself during his lifetime; in a letter to his friend George Lillie Craik, he comments that, in his younger days, Frederick Walker,\(^{122}\) a contemporary of his, “thought from my having painted religious pictures that I must be demure and

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\(^{120}\) Once again, this date refers to only one of three extant oil versions of this painting. I have chosen the date of 1885 because it represents the first time any variation of the image was publicly displayed.

\(^{121}\) For Hunt’s opinion on the relationship between art and religion, see, for example, his description of God as “Heaven’s Artist” (1: xvi) and his assertion that “[a]ll art is a branch of that spirit of appeal from the Divine to the universe which has been working ever since our kind knew the difference between good and evil . . .” (2: 460).

\(^{122}\) George Lillie Craik (1837-1905) was an accountant and is not to be confused with his uncle, also named George Lillie Craik, who was a literary scholar (S. Mitchell; Hawes). Frederick Walker (1840-1875) was made an associate of the Royal Academy in 1871; he was also well-known during his lifetime as an illustrator and watercolourist (Newall).
dogmatic” (JRUL 1382.29). Thus, we can see that Hunt’s consistent representation of himself as “a serious religious painter” (Wood 104) was successfully established even during his own lifetime, and this view of the artist and his work certainly continues into the present century. Although he is widely acknowledged by critics as “England’s greatest religious artist” (Wood 106, Péteri 59) of the nineteenth century, Hunt’s work has lost its appeal to a wide audience. As the art dealer Christopher Wood rightly notes in his 1981 book *The Pre-Raphaelites*, Hunt’s paintings, “to our skeptical, twentieth-century eyes . . . seem too laboured, too sentimental and too evocative of the very kind of Victorian religiosity . . . we have deliberately rebelled against” (106). Thus, Hunt’s nearly relentless fashioning of himself during his own lifetime as a stolidly Christian painter has done his reputation harm in subsequent generations, which have been less admiring of Hunt’s work and have tended to label the central concerns of his career, as Herbert Sussman points out, as “simply bizarre” (*Masculinities* 166).

Despite this broad lack of appreciation for the paintings produced by Hunt, there has been a recent and ongoing attempt by some critics to reconsider both his life and works, and more scholarly criticism has been devoted to his *oeuvre* in recent years. Although Hunt’s art is still not as frequently studied as that of Rossetti and Millais, numerous articles have sought to explain aspects of individual paintings or elaborate on Hunt’s relationships with his contemporaries.123 Moreover, in 2006, Carol Jacobi published her book *William Holman Hunt: Painter, Painting, Paint*, the first monograph

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123 For studies of the former topic, see, for example, Michael Hancher’s very interesting article “Hunt’s Awakening Conscience” and Albert Boime’s detailed essay “William Holman Hunt’s *The Scapegoat*: Rite of Forgiveness/Transference of Blame.” The only book-length study of a particular theme in Hunt’s work is by literary critic and art historian George P. Landow, whose *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* was published in 1979. For a fascinating glimpse of Hunt’s voluminous correspondence, most of which remains unpublished, see James H. Coombs’s *A Pre-Raphaelite Friendship: The Correspondence of William Holman Hunt and John Lucas Tupper*.
on Hunt in almost thirty years, and, even more importantly, Judith Bronkhurst’s long-awaited *catalogue raisonné* of Hunt’s entire *oeuvre* was published the same year, thereby making a full, scholarly account of all of Hunt’s major and minor works readily accessible for the first time. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, the exhibition *Sin and Salvation: Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, which traveled from Manchester in 2008 to Toronto and Minneapolis in 2009, marks “the first exhibition of [Hunt’s] paintings outside Britain” (Minneapolis).

This moderate renewal of interest in Hunt has also done much to establish the artist as the only member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to have remained true to the group’s central tenet of “fidelity to nature” (Hares-Stryker 20) throughout his lengthy career. This notion, which William Michael Rossetti once expressed as a need “[t]o study Nature attentively, so as to know how to express [genuine ideas]” (qtd. in Lambourne 231), was the central tenet of the P. R. B. at the time of the group’s establishment in 1848, and even the subtitle of the Brotherhood’s short-lived periodical, *The Germ: Thoughts toward Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art*, demonstrates the group’s devotion to this principle, which distanced the P. R. B. even further from the teachings of the Royal Academy, of which, as we saw in Chapter Three, Rossetti and the other Brothers were so critical. Over the following years, as the members of the Brotherhood gradually went their separate ways, many of the Brothers moved away from this characteristic truth to nature that had defined the early work of the group, but Hunt stubbornly attempted to cling to the ideal for the rest of his long career. For example, while he painted *The Light of the World*, he worked from nine in the evening to five in the morning in the cold countryside in late fall in order to be able to depict the overgrown
orchard of the painting with verisimilitude (Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism* 1: 299), and this attention to realistic detail is also evident in the fact that the artist “actually rented a room in a ‘maison de covenance’ in order to ensure the correctness” (Barringer, *Reading* 94) of his depiction of the home of a “kept woman” in *The Awakening Conscience* (1854). Of course, this unrelenting pursuit of accuracy could lend itself to some unusual situations. According to his granddaughter, nearly forty years after the founding of the P. R. B., Hunt boiled the body of a horse in his London backyard in order to create an accurate anatomical model for the figure of the donkey ridden by Mary in *The Triumph of the Innocents* (Holman-Hunt, *Grandmothers* 41-2). Despite its oddness, this anecdote nicely demonstrates the lengths to which Hunt was willing to go in the service of his lifelong search for representational accuracy.

A large part of the recent critical interest in Hunt has been founded upon this perspective of the artist as the sole figure who remained faithful to this founding principle of Pre-Raphaelitism. Indeed, Amor’s 1989 biography of Hunt, which is the first full-length account of the artist’s life published since 1936, is entitled *William Holman Hunt: The True Pre-Raphaelite*, and, in accordance with the title’s implication, the book repeatedly asserts its central premise that Hunt, of all of the seven original members of the Brotherhood, “was left to carry on the work [of the P. R. B.] alone” (Amor 274). Amor’s biography is not the only text that has claimed such status for Hunt in recent years. Indeed, in a section of his study of the Pre-Raphaelite movement as a whole, Wood describes Hunt as “[t]he faithful Pre-Raphaelite” and goes on to declare that “Hunt was the only one of the original Brotherhood to remain faithful to its principles” (104); Bronkhurst similarly describes the artist as “the most intractable of the Pre-Raphaelites”
(Catalogue 1: 3) and makes repeated references to his “lifelong dedication to conveying truthfully the appearance of the natural world” (Catalogue 1: 6).

Moreover, Hunt repeatedly claims this status for himself in his own writings. Looking back after thirty years to his early painting Our English Coasts (1853),\(^\text{124}\) he declares in a letter that the work “could scarcely be fuller of tracts of original and discriminating observation of Nature” (JRUL 1382.4). Although this statement discusses an early work completed when the P. R. B. was still in existence, Hunt frequently makes the point that, throughout his career, he clung to this technique of “discriminating observation of Nature.” For example, he notes in his memoir that he “made it [his] business to visit many native carpenters at work, and had . . . searched out the traditional tools” (2: 276) for his depiction of Christ in his carpenter’s shop in The Shadow of Death (1873), and—at one point in his autobiography—he explicitly states, “I have retained later than either of my companions [Rossetti and Millais] did, the restrained handling of an experimentalist” (1: 150). Judging from this last statement in particular, Hunt was clearly quite proud of his loyalty to the Pre-Raphaelite creed, but even he frequently had to admit that stringent adherence to absolute fidelity to the appearance of an object, model, or scene was not always desirable—or, indeed, even possible.

In 1878, over a quarter of a century after he had begun the original version of The Light of the World, Hunt wrote to his friend John Lucas Tupper\(^\text{125}\) that he had at that earlier time been “determined to make the figure [of Christ] mystic in aspect and not suggesting any single person” (Coombs 246), an admission that certainly complicates Hunt’s emphasis in his memoirs on his commitment to paint every object in his famous

\(^{124}\) This painting is often referred to by an alternate title, Strayed Sheep.

\(^{125}\) Tupper (ca.1823-1879) was an author and artist who met Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti while they were all students of the Royal Academy (Coombs xvii-xix).
work—moonlight, plants, even the lantern—from his firsthand experience of it. While Hunt issued this statement about his work privately to a friend of many years, such slippages of Hunt’s self-representation as an unstinting follower of nature also make themselves apparent—albeit more subtly—in his autobiography. For example, despite the fact that Hunt devotes over thirty pages of the book (1: 463-97) to an account of his dangerous efforts to paint his first Middle-Eastern religious subject The Scapegoat (1856) on the shores of the Dead Sea and despite the 1856 Royal Academy exhibition catalogue’s unequivocal statement that “[t]he scene was painted at Oosdoom, on the margin of the salt-encrusted shallows of the Dead Sea” (qtd. in Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 180), Hunt’s autobiography, his most sustained effort to construct his own reputation, is forced to admit that the artist was actually unable to complete the painting at the site that it depicts. In the chapter following his account of his trip to the Dead Sea, Hunt seemingly cannot avoid passing references to his later completion of the canvas while he stayed in Jerusalem; although his allusions to further work on the painting are always short and are buried within more interesting and detailed narratives of Hunt’s varied experiences in Jerusalem, these brief references are crucial to our understanding of the inevitable gap that exists between Hunt’s representation of his own work and the actual facts of the production of his paintings.

This incongruity between representation and experience is, of course, a central issue in the reading of any personal memoir. As Paul John Eakin asserts in Fictions in Autobiography, “Autobiographers . . . perform . . . both as artists and historians, negotiating a narrative passage between the freedoms of imaginative creation on the one

126 For references in Hunt’s memoirs to his use of direct observation for his depictions of all of the items in the painting, see Pre-Raphaelitism 1: 289, 293, 295, 299, 308, and 309.
127 See, for instance, 2: 1, 2, 11, 12, 15.
hand and the constraints of biographical fact on the other” (3), and this complex
relationship between fiction and “fact” can be complicated even further by the relative
status of the author. In her 2003 book *The Victorian Artist: Artists’ Lifewritings in
Britain, ca. 1870-1910*, art historian Julie F. Codell notes that late-nineteenth-century
autobiographies of older artists in particular were written with a very definite agenda of
retrospectively re-establishing their authors’ identity and social standing towards the end
of their lives. In fact, in her discussion of this issue, Codell refers explicitly to Hunt
himself, and her comment that Hunt “constructed his role as revolutionary leader of
almost sixty years earlier for himself and . . . reenacted this role in his 1905
autobiography” (121) highlights the extent to which Hunt shaped his published narrative
according to the expectations and desires of himself and others—and deliberately re-
rewrote the narrative of the P. R. B. created by William Michael Rossetti that positioned
Dante Gabriel Rossetti as the group’s central figure. Indeed, the veracity of Hunt’s
autobiography has been called into question by a number of contemporary scholars, who,
like Prettejohn, realize that *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* is a
frequently unreliable source that represents “a legendary prehistory, concocted from oral
tradition, distant memories, and wishful thinking . . . . Hunt’s prehistory does not
represent verifiable fact” (23).128

I have drawn attention here to the discrepancies in his accounts of the
development of *The Scapegoat* in particular because, in the case of Hunt, the gap between
self-representation and lived experience, which runs throughout his memoir, is most

128 Like Prettejohn, art historian Marcia Pointon declares that Hunt’s memoir is a “composited production,
carefully organised to deliver the effect of authenticity” (34), and, while Bronkhurst commends “Hunt’s
acute descriptive eye and extraordinary powers of recall” in his autobiography, she also acknowledges the
questionable accuracy of many of his assertions and admits that he was both “prone to exaggeration” and
“consciously writing to a particular agenda” (*Catalogue 1: 22*).
evident in the artist’s various public and private accounts of his first, career-defining journey to the Middle East from January 13, 1854, to January 29, 1856. While Hunt devotes two hundred pages of his autobiography to what is meant to be a definitive public account of this journey, many letters written during the trip and, perhaps most importantly, Hunt’s own private travel journals are extant, and these fascinating texts, which are largely unpublished, often provide a marked counterpoint to Hunt’s published account of his experiences abroad. Thus, taking as its starting point this discrepancy between published reconstruction and private narrative, this chapter will focus in particular on Hunt’s private correspondence and journals from his travels in the Holy Land during his 1854-1856 journey and investigate the many and multi-faceted ways in which these unpublished texts not only undercut Hunt’s later representations of himself but also undermine twentieth- and twenty-first-century understandings of Hunt, who, besides frequently being defined by his religious beliefs, is often viewed as “the paradigm of the Orientalist explorer-adventurer-author characterized by Edward Said” (Boime 94) and as a figure whose “desire to see the East conforms to the general pattern of nineteenth-century Orientalism” (Barringer, Reading 119). In fact, these documents often call such perceptions of Hunt as an imperturbable imperialist into question. They frequently contain the words “uncertainty” and “anxiety” as Hunt bemoans everything from his worries about his reputation in England fading to anxieties that he cannot keep his temper when his local employees disobey him, and it is these many instances of anxiety and lack of control that highlight the extent to which our understanding of Hunt as a stolidly Evangelical, staunchly British proponent of Pre-Raphaelitism is an

129 These dates mark Hunt’s departure from and return to London and are cited in Bronkhurst’s painstakingly researched chronology of Hunt’s life in her catalogue raisonné (1: 43).
afterthought that was—and continues to be—imposed decades after Hunt’s travels in an attempt to transform the inchoate and often unsettling experiences of the artist in the Middle East into a cohesive, reassuring narrative that constructs these events as a defining period of his career.

Before discussing these diaries and letters themselves, however, it is important for me to provide a more nuanced understanding of the various kinds of significance that the artist assigned to his first visit to the Holy Land in his memoirs, which have done so much to shape contemporary perceptions of Hunt’s ideology and career. As I shall demonstrate, Hunt’s published writing presents his first Middle Eastern journey as a turning point of his artistic career, his life, and his Christian faith, and he uses it to differentiate himself both from other members of the P. R. B. and his artistic predecessors. I shall, therefore, devote the next segment of this chapter to a discussion of the canonical representation of Hunt’s travels in order to provide a background for my subsequent investigation of the many ways in which the artist’s personal accounts of his journey diverge from the highly edited, ordered, and stylized travel narrative presented in Hunt’s autobiography.

* * *

In January 1854, twenty-six-year-old Hunt left England to travel for the next year throughout Egypt and the area then known as Palestine, which encompassed “present-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria” (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 86).130 While Hunt was abroad, he moved around the region a great deal: he made prolonged visits to Cairo and Giza; sailed down the Nile; rented a house in Jerusalem; camped on the Dead Sea; and

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130 Hunt’s visit to Egypt and his responses to the area—in letters, watercolours, and oil paintings—are the subject of Chapter Five.
briefly visited Nazareth, Damascus, Beirut, and, finally, Constantinople. From there, Hunt returned to London, marking the end of what Bronkhurst describes as “a great burst of creative energy” (Catalogue 1: 30) in reference to the numerous watercolours, oil paintings, and sketches that Hunt executed during his travels. Over the course of his career, Hunt made three more trips to the Middle East in 1869-72, 1875-8, and 1892. Each of these lengthy sojourns resulted in at least one major work on a religious theme, and, as Prettejohn rightly points out, “The artist’s trips to Egypt and Palestine . . . carried to an extreme the Pre-Raphaelite practice of seeking an appropriate setting and painting it from direct observation” (112). Indeed, Hunt clearly viewed these trips as critical to his formation as an artist. The fact that he devotes a total of over 280 pages to his four Middle Eastern journeys in his memoir, which he insists is not simply an “autobiography” (2: 252) but a much-needed answer to questions about “the practice of the actual life of men pursuing the profession of art in England” (1: 2), suggests the extent to which Hunt felt that his travels were important elements that had contributed to the development of his career as an artist.

Other travel narratives of journeys made to the same area in the 1840s and 1850s that were published soon after their authors’ returns to England served the purpose of describing for their readers areas that were—for the most part—unfamiliar and scenes that had not yet been widely disseminated through photographs. Hunt’s narrative of his travels, however, differs from these texts since the artist has no intention of presenting

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131 As I have already noted, The Scapegoat was a product of the first voyage, and The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple was begun during the same trip and completed later in England. The subsequent journeys resulted in the definitive versions of both The Shadow of Death and The Triumph of the Innocents (1888), as well as The Miracle of Sacred Fire in the Church of the Sepulchre, Jerusalem (1899), respectively.

132 I am referring to such works as David Roberts’ six-volume pictorial travel narrative The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia (1842-9), Alexander Kinglake’s Eothen (1844), and Richard Burton’s Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah (1855-6).
a heretofore unseen version of the area he visits or of fulfilling the basic role of a Victorian travel narrative, which literary critic Barbara Korte defines in *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* as “contribut[ing] to the discourse of the Empire . . . [and] satisf[ying] a curiosity for foreign lands” (88). By the time of his memoir’s first publication in 1905, Hunt was aware that the area was no longer surrounded by the mystique that English readers created for it during the period in which he traveled there. Further archaeological and historical research, wider accessibility, and new means of disseminating photographic images to a mass audience had all made the area more widely known, even to those who had not seen it in person, and Hunt explicitly acknowledges this change in his writing, commenting that “[p]hotographs and

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133 Stevens’s essay “Western Art and its Encounter with the Islamic World 1798-1914” notes that the 1850s saw “the first flood of artists to the Near East and North Africa” (19), but, later in the century, many other tourists also visited the region, due to the ease of travel “from Alexandria to Cairo on the railway line built between the two cities in 1855 . . . [and] Thomas Cook’s organized tours [up the Nile], which began in 1869” (Bugler 29). Travel to the Holy Land, Hunt’s primary destination on his 1854-6 journey, also became much more accessible between the time of Hunt’s first visit and the publication of his memoir in 1905, as Billie Melman observes in her article “The Middle East/Arabia: ‘the cradle of Islam’” (108-9).

Many who visited these regions published accounts of their travels. Caroline Bugler’s essay “‘Innocents Abroad’: Nineteenth-Century Artists and Travellers in the Near East and North Africa” mentions Lady Duff Gordon’s *Letters from Egypt* (1865), Amelia Edwards’s *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1876), and Charles Montagu Doughty’s *Passages from Arabia deserta* (1888), just to name a few (29-31). A representative sampling of travel literature from the Holy Land during this period includes a two-volume work by Hunt’s friend and traveling companion the Reverend William Beamont called *Diary of a Journey to the East, in the Autumn of 1854* (1856), Frances Power Cobbe’s *Cities of the Past* (1864), and Burton’s *Unexplored Syria* (1872).

Ben-Arieh provides an excellent summary of the range of archaeological and historical writing about Jerusalem that proliferated in this period (1-11), including works like Charles Wilson’s three-volume *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem* (1866) and the journal, established in 1869, of the Palestine Exploration Fund, an English organization whose mission, in part, was “to further archaeological and historical research” of the area (Ben-Arieh 8-9).

Regarding the distribution of photographs of the Holy Land, Martin Gilbert observes in *Jerusalem: Rebirth of a City* that “[u]ntil 1854 Jerusalem had been known to those who could not visit it through prints, paintings, and engravings. But following the first photographs of the city, taken that year by Auguste Salzmann, its buildings and human scenes quickly became familiar in distant lands” (xvii) through the work, for example, of James Robertson, whose “reputation rests on his beautifully composed views of cities and landscapes throughout the Ottoman empire” (Henisch and Henisch); the American studio Underwood and Underwood, “whose first set of stereoscopic views of Jerusalem was issued in 1898” (Gilbert xvii); and more well-known photographers like Francis Frith, whose many publications include the two-volume *Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described* (1858-60) and *Sinai and Palestine* (1862). (For a complete list of Frith’s publications, see Douglas R. Nickel’s *Francis Frith in Egypt and Palestine: A Victorian Photographer Abroad* [226].)
exhaustive discussions have now made familiar to the world . . . the outside and the inside of the Mosque As Sakreh” (Pre-Raphaelitism 2: 9) in Jerusalem,\(^{134}\) which, at the time of Hunt’s visit to it in 1855, in contrast, would have been a striking novelty for English readers since few Western visitors had been permitted to enter the compound at that time. Nevertheless, Hunt goes on to provide an account of his visit to the site, and his insistence on doing so in spite of the fact that detailed accounts of the mosque were available by 1905 suggests once again that this part of his book is not simply a travel narrative. Hunt presents his experiences in the Middle East not as a guide for intrepid travelers or as an account of places unseen by those who remain in England; instead, he devotes a great deal of attention to his travels in his memoir because they had such a bearing on his own work and might, as an example, be helpful in the formation of subsequent artists.

Hunt’s text repeatedly points to the didactic status it hopes to achieve; apart from frequently inserting advice to young artists in the midst of the narrative, Hunt at one point explicitly asserts that the purpose of his writing is “to give the experience of living artists which should be of value to succeeding painters” (2: 316). Given the educational nature to which the text aspires, it becomes even clearer that Hunt considered the time he spent in the Middle East to be a central aspect of his career and a useful example to younger artists. However, he seems to attribute especial importance to his first journey there, for his account of this visit is substantially longer and more detailed than those of his subsequent trips. Furthermore, the narrative of this journey that Hunt offers becomes even more significant when it is compared to his description in the memoir of his very

\(^{134}\) This site, which is also commonly referred to as Qubbat es Sakhra, the Dome of the Rock, and—in the nineteenth century—the Mosque of Omar, is a sacred site for Jews, Muslims, and Christians (Osman 74), but access to the site for non-Muslims was restricted for much of the nineteenth century (Ben-Arieh 141-8).
first trip abroad to France, Belgium, and Holland with Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the autumn of 1849. Although the two young artists visited numerous sites and were able to view major works of art that were to influence their later work, Hunt’s account of the journey is very brief, comprising only eight pages of his book, a small section that is dwarfed by the more than 220-page account of his first Middle Eastern journey.

Indeed, at least one critic has suggested that this trip to Egypt and Palestine marks a new stage in both Hunt’s life and his career. For instance, in one of the few studies of Hunt’s memoir, Laura Marcus develops the interesting argument that Hunt’s book, in recounting the narrative of his life, offers “clearly demarcated distinctions between ‘life-stages,’ childhood, youth, maturity and age” (15); Marcus goes on to explain, moreover, that Hunt’s account of his “travels to the Orient constitute[s] ‘maturity’” (15) after the “youth”-ful period spent in the formation of the P. R. B. Although Hunt himself does not explicitly provide such clear divisions between various phases of his life, Marcus is correct to note that Hunt’s travels represent a new level of independence and adulthood for him within the context of the book, and, given the arduous editing to which Hunt submitted his memoir, it is safe to assume that he intended this phase of his life to be read as a significant step in his progress. In the chapter that describes his departure from the train station in London, he speaks of the Brotherhood as a finished movement, describing it as an organization “from which we had hoped so much, and which, it could not be

135 Although most studies of Hunt and many works on the Pre-Raphaelites in general make reference to Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, only a handful of scholars have offered extended analyses of the text itself. Among these few who offer sustained close readings of the work as a literary text are Codell, who discusses Hunt’s memoir in The Victorian Artist: Artists’ Lifewritings in Britain, ca. 1870-1910 and in the essay “The Artist Colonized: Holman Hunt’s ‘Biohistory,’ Masculinity, Nationalism and the English School”; Pointon, “The Artist as Ethnographer: Holman Hunt and the Holy Land”; Marcus, “Brothers in Their Anecdotage: Holman Hunt’s Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood”; and Bronkhurst, “An interesting series of adventures to look back upon’: William Holman Hunt’s Visit to the Dead Sea in November 1854.”
ignored, was now, at least in part, a signal failure” (1: 365). Hunt’s words about the partial “failure” of the P. R. B. do suggest that he views his subsequent travels as the next stage of his artistic progression. Moreover, in the still-unpublished private journal that Hunt kept during his travels, he again declares that he has reached a crossroads both in his career and his life. He notes that he has arrived “at the years that one takes a position for after days,” and he looks nostalgically to the days of the founding of the Brotherhood, describing them as a time “when boys still we knotted together . . .” (JRUL 1211.166).¹³⁶ Now, however, as he travels towards Beirut, Hunt looks to the future and wonders with some trepidation what his relationship with his former Brothers will be like when he returns to England, and he writes, “how shall we meet, as men of the world who have grown over the sentimentalities of their youth with a joke for every thing sacred in our past . . . [?]” (JRUL 1211.166).¹³⁷ It is clear from this private contemplation that Hunt considered the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to be part of his past, or his “youth,” as Marcus labels this stage of his life, and he was not the only one of his contemporaries to consider the Brotherhood defunct by the time of his departure.

When Christina Rossetti wrote the unpublished sonnet “The P. R. B.” in 1853, she attributed the decline or “decadence” (line 1) of the Brotherhood to a number of factors, including the fact that “Hunt is yearning for the land of Cheops” (3), and she ends the

¹³⁶ In citing JRUL Engl. MS 1211, the number that appears after the period denotes a page of the bound diary, rather than an individual letter or document, as is the case with all of the other JRUL manuscripts. This diary consists of 262 pages and encompasses nearly all of 1855, from the period following Hunt’s return to Jerusalem after the time spent at the Dead Sea painting The Scapegoat (i.e., February 1855) to his visit to the Crimea during his long return journey to England (i.e., December 1855).

¹³⁷ Bronkhurst accurately notes that the writing of Hunt’s diaries and letters can at times be difficult to understand since he “tended to write in very long sentences with idiosyncratic punctuation, e.g. points instead of commas . . . [and] often began sentences with lower-case letters” (Catalogue 1: 86). In the quotations from his private writing that form the basis of this chapter, I have attempted to leave the text just as Hunt wrote it; any emendations that are made by me for the sake of clarity are clearly marked in brackets.
poem by suggesting that the P. R. B. is “consummated” (14) and that all its members have gone their separate ways. Her thoughts on the splintering of the group are echoed in Hunt’s description of his departure in his memoir, and this segment of his writing displays a distinctly elegiac tone toward both the Brotherhood and its members. Hunt speaks of his close friend Millais, who accompanies him to the station, as though they may never see each other again (1: 365), and he makes this oblique reference to death explicit by ending the chapter with a quotation that accompanied Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s parting gift:

There’s that betwixt us been, which men remember
Till they forget themselves, till all’s forgot,
Till the deep sleep falls on them in that bed
From which no morrow’s mischief knocks them up. (1: 365)\(^{138}\)

By citing these lines as the last of his experiences in England, Hunt represents his departure as—at the very least—a movement from one phase of life to the next as he leaves behind the friends of his early adulthood for more solitary travels, but his inclusion of this quotation and its allusions to death also imply the danger inherent in such a journey at the time\(^ {139}\) and suggest that he and Rossetti viewed this parting as an indefinite—or even a final—one.

This notion of a departure for the East as a kind of death is common in travel narratives from this period. In Kinglake’s *Eothen*, a very popular account that Hunt read in 1852 (Bronkhurst, “Egypt” 23),\(^ {140}\) the narrator clearly depicts his movement from the

\(^{138}\) This poem was not written by Rossetti, and Hunt cites the quotation as “lines from [Sir Henry] Taylor’s [verse play] *Philip van Artevelde*” (1: 365).

\(^{139}\) In fact, Hunt’s memoir recounts various friends’ attempts to dissuade him from traveling to the region by offering dire warnings about “Syrian fever” and the likelihood of death (1: 349-50).

\(^{140}\) Kinglake’s account of his Middle Eastern travels in 1834-5 was read by many in the years following its initial publication in 1844; the narrative was so popular that “[i]t ran through six editions almost at once” (Morris xiv). Hunt also had the text in mind while he was writing his autobiography, for he includes
European West as a form of death. Kinglake’s departure from the city of Semlin, a place which the author characterizes as the easternmost bastion of “familiar life” (7), is constructed in much the same language of death and passage to new life that Hunt employs. Kinglake notes that no one can return to Semlin from the Ottoman Empire without enduring a quarantine of two weeks, and he writes that, as a consequence, his party “managed the work of departure from Semlin with nearly as much solemnity as if we had been departing this life” (8), thereby explicitly equating the movement that will take one away from Europe with an end of life—or, at least, an end of life as it is currently known to the traveller. A little later, Kinglake relates how his acquaintances from Semlin “asked if we were perfectly certain that we had wound up all our affairs in Christendom, and whether we had no parting requests to make” (8). This language, of course, echoes the kinds of questions asked of someone about to die, and it once again suggests the motif shared by both Kinglake and Hunt of linking the authors’ departures for the Middle East with a kind of death. In *Orientalism*, Said highlights this association of the East with death in much eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature when he writes, “The very possibility of development, transformation, human movement—in the deepest sense of the word—is denied the Orient and the Oriental” (208). Thus, Hunt’s use of this trope in his memoir attempts to link the artist’s account of his travels with the much wider discourse of Orientalism, including texts like *Eothen*, in order to make use of other authors’ accumulated “authority” (Said 23) to strengthen the reader’s perception of the “factual” nature of his own narrative.

references to *Eothen* in the exhibition notes he wrote to accompany *The Miracle of Sacred Fire*, which was completed in 1899 (Harrington 73).

141 Semlin is the former name of the city of Zemun, “just over the Sava [R]iver from Belgrade.” The city was considered “the frontier of the Ottoman Empire” at the time of Kinglake’s visit (Morris vii).
However, Hunt’s departure does not function solely as an emblem of Orientalist intertextuality. The artist’s description of his final parting from England serves, on a more personal level, to signal not only the death of his “youth” but also a movement forward into the new phase of adulthood. Moreover, Hunt himself viewed his departure from England as a period of growth for his art, as well, since his travels would allow him an opportunity to demonstrate how Pre-Raphaelite art could be adapted and utilized in the depiction of novel subjects and landscapes and to “widen the boundaries of what was conventionally considered permissible in art” (Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 5). When Hunt left London, he was determined to show the art-world that Pre-Raphaelite precepts were not just applicable to English landscapes and English subjects but could be applied in more diverse, innovative ways. In describing part of the rationale behind his trip in his memoir, Hunt writes that, at the time, he saw “the need of proving that P. R. B.-ism was of wide application, and that each expounder of its principles could find regions for enterprise which would show even to the least reflective that amongst the originators there was no following of one by the other” (1: 344). Hunt was also apparently vocal about this aspect of his trip when he discussed his work with other Englishmen he encountered abroad, for, in a letter of introduction written for Hunt by Robert Napier, who would later become Baron Napier of Magdala,142 the military leader explains that he “met [Hunt] at Jerusalem where he was painting sacred subjects with the advantage of local study and from living artless models, which may be a better system than the conventional methods of the Academy at Paris or at Rome” (JRUL 1383.8). Napier’s

142 According to T. R. Moreman’s entry on Napier in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Robert Cornelis Napier (1810-1890) is best remembered for his military role in the Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845-6, 1848-9) and Indian mutiny (1857), as well as for his leadership of “the Abyssinian expedition . . . mounted to compel the release of British captives” in 1867-8. He later became the “commander-in-chief in India” from 1870-76.
explanation of the reason for Hunt’s visit suggests that Hunt had explained to him how the work he pursued while living in Jerusalem was constructed around Pre-Raphaelite principles, which were, as I discussed in the preceding chapter, in marked opposition to “the conventional methods” embraced by the Royal Academy.

This aspect of Hunt’s motivation for traveling to the Middle East seems to have been an important goal for him since he mentions it not only in his memoir of fifty years later but also during his actual journey, but, at the same time that Hunt was intent on pushing the innovative nature of Pre-Raphaelitism even further, he was also very much aware of preceding artists who had traveled to the Middle East in the hopes of expanding their own careers. Among the most well-known of his British predecessors were the Scottish artist David Roberts, who in 1838-39 became “[o]ne of the first independent British artists” to travel to the Middle East (Stevens, Orientalists 223); David Wilkie, another Scottish painter who spent six months in the region in 1840 and 1841 attempting, like Hunt, “to investigate the possibility of painting biblical subjects in their authentic surroundings” (Stevens, Orientalists 231); and John Frederick Lewis, whom Hunt describes in his memoir as “the painter of Egyptian social scenes . . . [who spent] seven years in Egypt” (1: 270) and who became renowned for “[t]he watercolours of Egypt that [he] exhibited in the years following his return to England in 1851” (Stevens, Orientalists 202).¹⁴³ Hunt was very likely familiar with the six volumes of lithographs based on sketches from Roberts’ Middle Eastern travels that were published between 1842 and 1849 as The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia, and he refers to

¹⁴³ Although Hunt claims that Lewis spent seven years in Egypt, MaryAnne Stevens’ very useful book The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse states that the artist lived in Cairo for ten years, from 1841 to 1851 (202).
Roberts by name in his memoir when he recalls having to defend to a friend his own plan of living in the East (1: 348).  

Yet Hunt could, while acknowledging these predecessors, also easily differentiate himself from at least two of them. Roberts’s six-volume work stood as a monument to the artist’s ability to capture “the monuments, landscape, and people of the Near East” (Matyjaszkiewicz), and his interest in sweeping views of architecture and landscape effectively distanced him from Hunt’s minutely detailed Pre-Raphaelite style. Lewis, on the other hand, had a narrower focus on “colourful bazaars, mosques, streets, monuments, interiors, and people” (Bendiner, “Lewis”), but his depictions of these scenes, in spite of his long residence in Cairo, are more akin “to fantasy than to reality” (Bendiner, “Lewis”) and therefore would not have overlapped with Hunt’s Pre-Raphaelite realism.

More problematic, however, is Hunt’s relationship to David Wilkie, who died in 1841 during his return to England from the Holy Land. Wilkie, who was “[a]lways careful to lend truth to his historical works by working from evidences of their period” (Miles), had become interested in the application of this type of historical realism to depictions of biblical subjects in 1839, when he was commissioned by a patron to depict the Old Testament story of Samuel and Eli in the Temple (Tromans, Wilkie 213), and he soon departed for the Middle East, intent not just on including ethnographically accurate details in his work but also on using the journey as “a dramatic new strategy for achieving a modern Protestant art form” (Tromans, Wilkie 196). In fact, Nicholas Tromans’s fascinating 2007 study *David Wilkie: The People’s Painter* cites “Wilkie’s

144 Indeed, art historian Kenneth Bendiner notes in “The Portrayal of the Middle East in British Painting, 1835-1860” that illustrations by Roberts may be possible sources for the pose of the woman in Hunt’s painting *The Afterglow in Egypt* (1864) (109) and for his watercolour *The Sphinx, Gizeh, Looking towards the Pyramids of Sakkara* (1856) (105), both of which I discuss in Chapter Five.
claim that ‘a Martin Luther in painting is as much called for as in theology’” (197) as an explanation of the artist’s reasoning for his Eastern travels, and Wilkie’s assertion that he wished to be the artist who would create a new form of art for English Protestants that no longer relied on traditional stylized (and Catholic) religious iconography is certainly a precursor of Hunt’s desire of “adding to, and reinterpreting, a long tradition of religious painting in order to create a new style of sacred art,” an ideal that Bronkhurst dates from 1847, when Hunt began his later-abandoned painting Christ and the Two Marys (1906) (Catalogue 1: 123, 10). During the six months Wilkie spent in the Holy Land, he focused his attentions on “remains associated with the life of Christ and . . . the manners of the existing Jewish community” (Miles) and began two—or possibly three—oil sketches of scenes from the life of Christ (Tromans, Wilkie 200, 215). These never-completed paintings, Pilate Washing His Hands, Supper at Emmaus, and a representation of Christ’s presentation at the Temple, make use of details of architecture and costume that Wilkie witnessed firsthand during his travels, but it has been suggested that, by the end of his time in the Middle East, Wilkie had turned his back on his original goal of fusing ethnographic and topographical accuracy with religious subjects. Tromans points out that Wilkie gave up his project because, in the artist’s words, “[A]ll works of art . . . however universal the language may be in which they are embodied, are yet only understood by people of previously-conceived notions making use of that language; a disregard, therefore, of this might render the whole matter to be represented quite unintelligible” (qtd. in Wilkie 203). Wilkie feared that his attempt to bring a new dimension to religious art might be too much of a departure from the norm for audiences accustomed to an older,
less realistic iconography, and, due to the fact that he died on his return voyage to England, he was never able to resolve this conflict.

Although it eventually failed, Wilkie’s attempt to forge a new direction in religious art situates him as an important predecessor of Hunt, whose reputation by the end of the nineteenth century relied heavily on his status as a religious painter who had traveled extensively in the Middle East. Yet, likely because of this apparent similarity, Hunt’s reference to Wilkie in his memoir, which arises in the context of a discussion of Hunt’s reasons for traveling to the East in 1854, actually denigrates the work of the Scottish artist and highlights the distance between Hunt’s and Wilkie’s work. In the course of the conversation with his friend and fellow painter Augustus Egg, Hunt avers that Wilkie’s Middle Eastern sketches “would have had no great service for pictures had he lived to make use of them” (1: 348). By making this disparaging comment about the work of the other painter, Hunt handily disposes of the precursor who might pose a threat to the aura of originality surrounding Hunt’s enterprise by highlighting the fact that Wilkie did not intend actually to paint the scenes while remaining within the area and using local models; in pointing out this fact, Hunt subtly suggests that, although Wilkie’s plans came close to Pre-Raphaelite ideals, they were not as stringent since the earlier artist did not intend to do his work at the exact site he was depicting, as Hunt planned to do.

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145 For instance, in an exhibition pamphlet for The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple, the widely circulated periodical the Art-Journal is cited as the source of the following encomia: “[N]o Modern Picture is so extensively known or so generally appreciated. . . . It may unquestionably be regarded as one of the grandest achievements of the age in which we live” (Brochure).

146 In Hilarie Faberman’s entry on Augustus Leopold Egg (1816-1863) in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Egg is described as a “genre and history painter” and a good friend of Holman Hunt who helped to attract collectors to Hunt’s early work and even bought one of the Pre-Raphaelite’s paintings himself.

147 Péteri makes a similar argument about this distinction that Hunt creates in Victorian Approaches to Religion as Reflected in the Art of the Pre-Raphaelites (70).
Of course, this discussion of Hunt’s predecessors and the ways in which he saw his work differing from theirs leads quite naturally to the question of just what Hunt intended to paint during his time in the Middle East; notwithstanding the fact that contemporary scholars frequently declare that Hunt traveled in order to paint biblical scenes, this issue is surprisingly complex and is deeply entangled with the complicated issue of Hunt’s later re-presentation of himself to the public. The most common rationale that critics provide for Hunt’s decision to leave England is that he wanted to paint biblical scenes in the places at which they occurred, or, as Tim Barringer expresses the idea, to “displace the canonical . . . imagery of the Western tradition with a more empirical and authentic . . . version of biblical events, achieving the kind of ‘truths’ which earlier Pre-Raphaelite religious paintings had aimed to capture” (Reading 123). Amor, Hunt’s biographer, describes the reasoning behind Hunt’s trip in a similar—albeit more romanticized—way, saying, “It was Hunt’s dearest wish to travel to the Holy Land . . . to paint his pictures in the authentic setting of the Bible lands. This ambition had been with him from his early childhood, when his father read to him from the big illustrated family Bible . . .” (85-6); in a similar vein, Carol Jacobi has likewise recently declared that “[t]he central concern of his career was to represent the history of Christ as an authentic, non-relative set of events” (“Revealing” 2). Given these three diverse examples, it seems that the critical consensus regarding Hunt’s Middle Eastern journey is that he undertook his travels in order to apply the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of painting onsite to religious work in order to bring a new depth of authenticity to the representation of Christian narratives.

This explanation of his decision is certainly perpetuated by Hunt’s own self-representation, especially in his memoir, where he declares in defense of his travels,
“[M]y desire is very strong to use my powers to make more tangible Jesus Christ’s history and teaching” (1: 349). At another point in his autobiography, the artist avers that “my project of going to Syria had originated when I was a boy at school when the lessons from the New Testament were read” (1: 348), and such statements as these are often used by scholars to support their similar assessments of Hunt’s reasons for making his first journey to the Middle East. However, as I have already discussed, the text of *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* is far from reliable, and it is not difficult to believe that Hunt tweaked his version of his own life and that of the P. R. B. to further solidify the association of his name with serious religious art.

In fact, the letters that Hunt wrote during the years before the publication of his memoir strongly represent “the artist’s extreme sensitivity about his public image” (Parris, *Papers* 8). As early as 1893, Hunt described his autobiography, which would not even appear in print for another twelve years, as “this most serious taxing of my time and energies” (JRUL 1381.43), and his letters from this period contain scattered references to the painstaking process of editing and re-writing to which he submitted his work. For instance, in a number of letters written between 1893 and 1901, Hunt mentions how he collated earlier, already printed (but undistributed) copies of his memoir with his own manuscript in order to assemble a new version of the book;148 apparently, he and his second wife Edith would paste pages of the printed version alongside their own additions and emendations, a process that serves as a good example of the lengths to which Hunt would go in his insistence on having total control over the process of self-representation. In an earlier discussion of others’ writing about himself, Hunt complained, “I could

148 For references to this process, see JRUL 1381.42, 43, 45, and 47. These copies of an earlier version of the text appear to have been destroyed after Hunt made use of them in compiling the 1905 version of *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. 
discover that an article would be drawn up by some one . . . [but] unless I took as much
time in supervising and fighting for my own way where I should not have equal control it
would be certain to contain many mistakes as previous stories of my early life have and
so I felt obliged to do it myself” (JRUL 1382.12). Thus, despite the immense amount of
labour involved in compiling the memoir at a time when Hunt was beginning to lose his
eyesight (Amor 258), the artist was determined to have complete control over his
narrative, the ultimate re-presentation of himself to the public.

However, in spite of the heavily edited nature of the memoir, which so blatantly
seeks to align Hunt’s name with Christian painting,149 the largest obstacle to attributing
Hunt’s trip to the Middle East to his strong desire to paint religious works arises from a
letter that Hunt himself wrote at the time of his departure. In a previous letter, Millais
had informed him that “it is generally understood you are principally induced to go to the
East from religious notions” (qtd. in Holman-Hunt, Grandfather 117150), and in his
response Hunt offers a statement that turns modern assumptions about the reasons for his
travels upside-down. He unequivocally declares, “your account of my intention as
understood by my friends generally, to employ myself in the illustration of scriptural
subjects, which I learn is announced publicly in the Daily News as the object of my
travels, is most amusing when considered with the fact that I have not a single intention
formed about work of any kind” (qtd. in Holman-Hunt, Grandfather 117-8). This blunt
statement from the artist himself is surprising to anyone familiar with recent discussions

149 See, for example, Hunt’s statement that “the doings of that Divine Master in Syria never ceased to claim
my homage. The pursuit of painting only gave my childish [i.e., childhood] Palestine project distincter
purpose” (1: 349). This conflation of religion and art is also evident in the preface, which asserts that “[t]he
office of the artist should be looked upon as a priest’s service in the temple of Nature” and that God is
“Heaven’s Artist, who in overflowing bounty endowed the colourless world with prismatic radiance” (1:
xv). For similar comments, see 1: 40, 90, 369, and 370.
150 According to Holman-Hunt, this letter from Millais is dated February 7-13, 1854, and is to be found in
of Hunt’s work, which, as I have demonstrated, focus on the supposedly strong Christian intentions behind his Middle Eastern travels. Indeed, Hunt’s declaration is so damaging to his reputation as a religious artist that Hunt’s wife Edith deliberately deleted it from her husband’s memoir (Holman-Hunt, *Grandfather* 117). In the letter, Hunt seems to shrug off staunch religious sentiment as one of the defining reasons for his trip, and, like much of his private writing, this statement, which has, curiously, never been mentioned in scholarly discussions of his work offers us a good reason to examine Hunt and his travels anew. What Hunt’s response to Millais implies is that the motivation of the artist cannot be explained as easily as it often has been by such critics as Henry R. Harrington, who writes that “Hunt was drawn to the Holy Land in pursuit of an authentic religious vision” (73), or Bendiner, who also echoes Hunt’s later claims that his desire to paint religious works was the sole motivation for his journey (“Scapegoat” 124, 128).

While these and a number of other scholars have agreed that Hunt’s Christian faith was his primary “inspir[ation] . . . to paint sacred subjects in the Holy Land” (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 4), modern critics have not been able to arrive at a consensus regarding the nature of Hunt’s spiritual beliefs. Barringer, for example, registers this uncertainty about Hunt’s religious affiliations, describing the artist as “[c]learly sympathetic to Broad Church notions of Christ as a real, living presence” while also suggesting that Hunt “seems to have been most strongly attracted to Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on a literal reading of scripture” (*Reading* 116). Landow also suggests that Hunt’s beliefs are difficult to pinpoint, and he calls the artist’s version of Christianity “idiosyncratic” (“Missionaries” 27) in its attraction both to the evangelical nature of the Low Church and its “emphasis upon stern morality, typological interpretation of the Bible

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151 For a good, brief summary of these various stances and their relation to the P. R. B., see Péteri 9.
and the importance of conversion” and to the less dogmatic notion that “there were other roads to [spiritual] truth” in other faiths (“Missionaries” 31). As if to add to this confusion, Amor describes how the time Hunt spent with his patrons the Combes at Oxford in the early 1850s placed him “at the very centre of the Anglican High Church party in Oxford” (92), yet she also notes Hunt’s distrust of organized religion, citing a letter from 1877 in which he says, “Although I regard Christianity as the best system for the training of the world I regard its priests in a body as most pernicious in their exercise of authority . . . Men in authority are so sure to dogmatise and tyrannise I love therefore all resistance and freedom” (qtd. in Amor 218). As these examples suggest, it is impossible to issue a single label for Hunt’s beliefs, but Barringer seems to come closest in his description of an amalgamation of Low- and Broad-Church affiliations.

However, what a number of discussions of Hunt’s religiosity—and the general perception, which he himself created, of Hunt as a painter of religious art—overlook is the fact that Hunt acknowledged himself to have been an atheist in his youth. Perhaps not surprisingly, Hunt skirts a discussion of this phase in his memoir, calling it a “not long retained” idea held by the slightly silly and rebellious young members of the P. R. B. (1: 158-60); in fact, he almost denies his participation in it, saying that in 1848, the famous year of the Brotherhood’s foundation, he “was designing [his] ‘Christian’ picture to honour the obedience to Christ’s command that His doctrine should be preached to all the world . . .” (1: 160). In spite of Hunt’s public protestations, his private writings

152 Thomas Combe (1796-1872) was a senior partner of Oxford University Press, a very close friend of Hunt, and one of the first serious collectors of Pre-Raphaelite art. In fact, Colin Hughes avers that “the survival of the [Pre-Raphaelite] movement owed much to Combe’s patronage” since he purchased a number of paintings by Hunt, Millais, and Charles Collins (another original member of the P. R. B.) during the period in the early 1850s “when Pre-Raphaelite paintings were being savaged by the critics.”
153 The “Christian” picture of which Hunt speaks is A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids.
suggest that his association with atheism lasted longer than a few mere days or weeks. Landow notes that Hunt spoke of his youthful atheism in a letter to Ruskin written in 1880 and described himself prior to his reading of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* around 1847 as “a contemptuous unbeliever in any spiritual principles but the development of talent . . . [.] It was high time that I got something, and this something thus strangely gained was what first arrested me in my downward course. It was the voice of God. I read this in rapture and it sowed some seed of shame” (qtd. in *Typological* 6-7).\(^{154}\) This more serious description of Hunt’s spiritual state during the period of the formation of the P. R. B., which was never meant to be read by anyone other than Ruskin, suggests that the flippant public account of his atheism that Hunt offers in his memoir glosses over this period of unbelief and does its utmost to downplay it in order to preserve Hunt’s status as a great religious artist.

Just as his discussion with Millais of his reasons for traveling to the East does, Hunt’s personal correspondence with Ruskin suggests once again that such private documents by Hunt can provide fresh insight into the artist’s career and, especially, his relationship with religious painting and the Middle East. These two examples of discrepancies between his published writing and more private documents reveal that, during the early part of his career, Hunt was staunchly secure neither in his career aspirations nor in his religious conviction, although, as we have seen, a number of critics who base their statements on Hunt’s carefully edited public self-representation seem to assume this to be the case.

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\(^{154}\) Although Landow does not provide specific details about the date of this letter, Amor also refers to it and says that it was written in November 1880 but not sent until July 4, 1882 (230).
Considering the volume of unpublished documents that provide a wealth of information about Hunt, including, most importantly for this chapter, his frequent correspondence with a large number of his contemporaries and his two particularly detailed travel diaries of his 1854-6 journey to the Middle East, it is surprising that they are not utilized more frequently in discussions of the artist. Amor’s biography and Landow’s *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* occasionally quote from unpublished letters and diaries, and Bronkhurst’s *catalogue raisonné* makes extensive use of them in order to glean information about the chronology of Hunt’s life and the painstaking development of his many paintings and drawings. Closer to my own interest in the ways in which Hunt’s private writing undercuts the careful self-representation of his memoir is a brief comment in Barringer’s *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, which notes that “[a]lthough passages in the [1855 travel] diary make clear that [Hunt] often found himself powerless, lonely and frightened, the rhetoric of his published writings implies that throughout the trip he asserted an effortless imperial superiority” (121-2). However, by far the lengthiest and most detailed discussions of some of these unpublished documents appear in two articles by Judith Bronkhurst and Marcia Pointon. Bronkhurst’s essay largely makes use of Hunt’s 1854 diary account of working by the Dead Sea to mythologize further the difficulties and dangers that the artist faced in painting *The Scapegoat*; indeed, her discussion ends with the statement that knowledge of the 1854 journal “highlight[s] rather than detract[s] from the courage he exhibited during

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155 The first of these two documents is a fascinating—and somewhat lengthy—diary, which, as I mentioned earlier, contains descriptions of his experiences from February to December 1855; the second is a much shorter diary of sixteen pages that was written while he painted *The Scapegoat* on the shores of the Dead Sea in October 1854. Both of these manuscripts are now in the JRUL collections (MSs 1211 and 1210, respectively).

156 See Bronkhurst’s “‘An interesting series of adventures to look back upon’: William Holman Hunt’s Visit to the Dead Sea in November 1854” and Pointon’s “The Artist as Ethnographer: Holman Hunt and the Holy Land.”
the expedition to paint ‘The Scapegoat’” (125). Pointon, on the other hand, examines some of the material in Hunt’s diaries from a more critical, postcolonial standpoint, comparing it to published accounts in order to demonstrate how Hunt altered his narratives for publication so that “[t]he frustration and depression of the primary text [i.e., the diary] . . . is transformed in the secondary text [i.e., the memoir] into the account of a benevolent and all-powerful traveller attaining his goal with no difficulty” (25). While Pointon’s characterization of the differences between the diary and memoir is quite accurate, her discussion of them, which offers a close reading of only a single episode as a preliminary facet of its more central examination of “the represented body of Christ as the object of narcissistic desire” (22) in Hunt’s paintings, is very brief (23-5), and, while the essay makes passing references to Hunt’s sentiments of “fear and alienation” (39), it does little to explain how these feelings affected Hunt’s own artistic, religious, and national ideologies or how they might alter our own later perceptions of the artist.

In this chapter, I want to build on this foundation offered by Barringer, Bronkhurst, and Pointon and investigate in greater depth exactly how Hunt’s private accounts suggest the many and varied uncertainties with which he was confronted during his first trip to the Holy Land from 1854 to 1856. Hunt’s letters and diaries from this segment of his career, can, at their most basic level, initiate some very intriguing complications of our contemporary notion of Hunt as the quintessentially English and imperial “artist/explorer” (Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 17), but, on a broader scale, the differences among Hunt’s various self-representations also remind us, in the words of Homi K. Bhabha, of “the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the
articulation of cultural differences . . . [that] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies
of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity” (1). In other
words, the various kinds of “uncertainty” and “anxiety” that Hunt describes during his
travels highlight the fissures of the artist’s—and his nation’s—apparently hegemonic
imperialist stance. When we place the canonical memoir and the unpublished texts side
by side it is in the gaps and narrative slippages between them that we can witness the
process of exclusion, repression, and revision by which Hunt later attempted to define
himself, and, more importantly, through such a comparison we can develop a more
nuanced understanding of the artist as a figure who was both ambivalent about many of
the concepts that are now considered to define his career and highly aware of
performance as a necessary means of crafting one’s identity.

In fairness to past critics who have relied on the conception of Hunt that I am
attempting to overturn here, Hunt himself, as I have already demonstrated, made every
effort to reinforce this conception of himself and his career not only through published
texts like his memoir but also by other forms of self-representation, such as the self-
portrait that “he donated to the Galleria degli Uffizi” in Florence (1875) (Boime 94)
(figure 11). In this infrequently discussed work,157 Hunt, holding a palette, poses in a
“cross-over gown of striped Oriental cloth” (Stevens, Orientalists 193) that was said at a
1907 exhibition to be “the dress in common use in Syria” (qtd. in Stevens, Orientalists
193). Hunt’s attire is clearly meant as a reminder to his audience of the centrality of his

157 Hunt’s self-portrait is mentioned in Stevens, Orientalists 193-4; Boime 94; and Bronkhurst, Catalogue
1: 212-4. The only detailed discussion of it that I have encountered outside of Bronkhurst is George P.
Landow’s article “William Holman Hunt’s ‘Oriental Mania’ and His Uffizi Self-portrait.”
Middle Eastern travels to his artistic career,\textsuperscript{158} but its stripes and wide sash—along with

Hunt’s pose of leaning slightly to the right—also recall the clothing and position of Christ in *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, which, as I have already noted, was widely considered to be one of Hunt’s greatest works. By subtly reminding the viewer of one of his masterpieces, Hunt’s self-portrait acts as a precursor to the central themes of his memoir by bringing together symbols of his art (the palette), his religious beliefs (in the allusions to the figure of Christ), and his experiences as an Englishman abroad (through his exoticized attire).

Hunt’s mission of carefully crafted self-representation is also evident in another image of the artist: a photograph “taken in the garden of his London house” \textit{circa} 1895 (Barringer, *Reading* 131), in which an elderly Hunt reenacts the painting of *The Scapegoat* on the shores of the Dead Sea forty years earlier.\textsuperscript{159} Barringer describes the image as “extraordinary” (*Reading* 130), and, in this unusual portrait, the viewer is

\textsuperscript{158} A similar reading of Hunt’s clothing is offered in Stevens, *Orientalists* 194 and Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 212, which also alerts the reader to the fact that this robe was deliberately chosen by Hunt in this representation of himself for posterity on two other occasions. Bronkhurst notes that the artist “had been photographed in this costume by Julia Margaret Cameron in May 1864, and is wearing it in the 1865 portrait [of the artist in his studio] by John Ballantyne” (1: 212), a fact to which I will return in Chapter Five.
given a full-length view of Hunt in the explorer or traveler’s clothing that he wore during his expedition as he crouches over his easel while simultaneously staring intently at the camera—and the viewer—and cradling a large rifle. The intentions behind the artist’s pose are abundantly clear: as Sussman notes, the photograph represents Hunt’s “sense of himself as prophet/imperialist, as exotic yet manly religious artist” (*Masculinities* 164) and allows Hunt to “shape himself into an emblem of his own manly fusion of sacred purpose, artistic energy and imperialist machismo” (*Masculinities* 166). Nearing the end of his painting career, Hunt clearly wished to remind his audience once again of the three central tenets of his career: fidelity to nature, religious belief, and nationalism or imperialism.

These examples function as further evidence of the great deal of energy that Hunt expended promulgating this perspective on his career in the various media of painting, photography, and autobiography, and these diverse portraits—both visual and textual—amply demonstrate his profound awareness at this later stage of his career that one’s identity must constantly be performed and repeated. However, Hunt’s diaries and letters also show us that Hunt was aware of these issues even at the time when he was undergoing the experiences that these later depictions of himself reference and reiterate, and these private documents demonstrate that he was profoundly aware of both how artificially constructed and how problematic such sweeping notions of art, religion, and nationhood—along with that of masculinity—actually are. In his private writings from his journey to the Holy Land, Hunt, in contrast to what we are led to believe by his multi-media representations of himself, highlights his awareness of the performativity of his

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159 This photograph is more frequently discussed than Hunt’s self-portrait and is reproduced, among other places, in Barringer, *Reading* 131; Sussman, *Masculinities* 165; and Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 5.
role as the “manly” English religious artist traveling abroad and presents himself in a far more precarious position—in terms of his personal religion and morality, his views of England and its people, and his artistic doctrines and goals—than at any later point in his life.

Doubts about his stance in relation to all three of these subjects—and others—frequently reappear in journal entries and letters written during the Holy Land segment of Hunt’s 1854-6 trip, and these are, at least in part, a reflection of the artist’s ambivalent relationship to the Middle East. It is, on one hand, a region that he clearly admires. He describes it at several points as a place of ineffable beauties. For instance, in his diary Hunt speaks of an area near the Sea of Galilee, effusing, “I cannot say how much I delight in the beauty of this new scene” (JRUL 1211.149), and he echoes this sentiment of speechlessness in a later entry, in which he describes himself as “too poor for the occasion to say what delight the scene breeds in me” (JRUL 1211.160). Hunt’s most explicit statement of his inability to describe what he sees occurs in his first letter to Millais from Jerusalem, in which he tells his friend, “Before long I hope to write about this inner tabernacle of God’s love, and yet how to do so, is more than one can clearly see. for truly the wonderful beauty of the place exceeds anything ever described in words, and I fear [is] also quite out of the range of painting” (JRUL 1216.19). Here, Hunt’s use of superlatives becomes even more grandiose: not only is a description of Jerusalem beyond his linguistic capabilities, but it is also beyond the range of anyone else’s words. Even more importantly, Hunt declares the site to be potentially “quite out of the range of painting,” a surprising statement from an artist so determined to represent the beauties of nature on canvas. However, as Deborah Cherry notes in her discussion of
the artist Barbara Leigh Smith’s 1856 visit to Algeria in her 2000 study Beyond the Frame, Hunt’s words echo a sentiment “often acknowledged by western travellers” (75). In the context of her book’s wide-ranging examination of the ways in which Victorian visual culture registers and was “shaped by” the collision of “art . . . with politics, visual representation with political representation” (1), Cherry points to a similar description of Algeria offered by Leigh Smith in 1856 and argues that, in its emphasis on ineffability, desire oscillates with denial; seduction with repudiation. As the writer admits, visual pleasure was accompanied by retraction: although Algeria is picturesque, it is impossible to draw or paint. . . . Algeria is perceived not so much as oppositional to the west, but as beyond its frames of reference and visual representation . . . . (75)

Thus, even Hunt’s descriptions of the beautiful landscapes of the Middle East register his ambivalence towards the region, and his concerns about not being able to paint these scenes adequately serve as a precursor to the doubts he expresses about his own artistic talent and career later in his travels.

However, it is not just the landscapes in isolation that Hunt admires. He feels, as did many travelers to the region in this period, that the land is rife with associations with biblical history. Although Hunt, as I have shown, did not leave England with the goal of painting only religious pictures, he did consider his travels throughout the Middle East to be a religious experience. In the letter to Millais from Jerusalem that is cited above,

160 Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891) was a professional landscape artist and women’s rights activist who, for much of her adult life, divided her time between England and Algeria. She made her first visit to North Africa in the winter of 1856 (Hirsch).
161 Malcolm Warner offers a basic but helpful account of the origins and growth of artistic travel to the Middle East and its relationship to biblical paintings in his essay “The Question of Faith: Orientalism, Christianity, and Islam.”
162 Hunt’s aforementioned period of atheism had clearly ended prior to his departure for the Middle East. Some critics consider The Light of the World to be a result of Hunt’s conversion to Christianity (Landow, Typological 36-7; Boime 100; Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 151). Indeed, Bronkhurst notes that Hunt wrote to
he calls the city “this inner tabernacle of God’s love,” a description that suggests the extent to which the cityscape is coloured for the artist by the biblical narratives—in particular, the life of Christ—that are associated with it. Indeed, this influence over Hunt’s perspective on the area is evident in another letter he wrote in 1855, which happily declares of Jerusalem, “This blue sky, this hot sun, and the graceful mountains make me rejoice as with new wine, and deafen me to all that comes merely to my outer ears” (JRUL 1216.18). Here, Hunt’s use of the phrase “rejoice as with new wine” echoes the language of a verse in the Old Testament book of Zechariah, with which Hunt was doubtless familiar, in which God promises that “they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine” (Zech. 10.7). Whether or not Hunt deliberately made a reference to this verse when he wrote the letter is, of course, impossible to prove, but what is significant is that Hunt’s description of the landscape relies on this phrase reminiscent of the Old Testament, a fact that suggests the extent to which his experience of Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon was shaped by Christian narratives. Indeed, Landow also notes that Hunt sometimes viewed the landscapes he encountered during his travels through the lens of typology (Typological 15-16); in other words, the artist saw the land not just as a physical space but as an emblem of some other event or concept. For instance, when Hunt encounters the Dead Sea, he imagines its calm surface and “asphalte [sic] scum” as “the horrible figure of Sin—a varnished deceit—earth joys at hand but Hell gaping behind. a stealthy, terrible enemy for ever.”

Thomas Combe in 1853 that this work “was executed as the result of a conversion experience” (Catalogue 1: 151). Landow claims in William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism that Hunt converted “sometime in 1851 or 1852,” which is when the artist began work on the first version of The Light of the World, and he goes on to suggest that Hunt may even have experienced “a second conversion” during his travels in 1854 (62).

163 Landow, Typological 7-14 offers an excellent explanation of typology and its significance to various readings of the Bible in the mid-nineteenth century.
Finally, Hunt once said of his first sight of Jerusalem, “There was more than a ruined city there, one could see the Kingdom of Heaven rising above it” (qtd. in Stevens, *Orientalists* 188). Such statements demonstrate that when Hunt admires a landscape, it is difficult to know whether he appreciates it only for its natural beauty or whether he is combining his admiration of the physical aspect with a reference to its spiritual significance as well, for, as we have seen, Hunt frequently views the region in terms of its place in the Judeo-Christian narrative.

Of course, such insistence on the importance of the area’s past is deeply problematic since, when Hunt alludes to Jerusalem, for instance, as “this inner tabernacle of God’s love,” he subtly elides the fact that the city has grown and altered considerably since the time of Christ. Allowing one’s understanding of the area to be moulded entirely by Old- and New-Testament narratives consigns the region to the same kind of stasis in which no progress is possible—or even desirable—that Said famously critiques in *Orientalism* when he writes, “To look into Orientalism for a lively sense of an Oriental’s . . . social reality—as a contemporary inhabitant of the modern world—is to look in vain” (176). Hunt was by no means alone in this frequent association of the area with its past; as Warner rightly notes, “For other artists, the people, dress and customs of the contemporary Near East were as important a link with its biblical past as its geography and archaeological remains. It was generally accepted that these had been left miraculously unaffected by the passing millennia” (32). Therefore, for many visitors, the landscapes of Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon were beautiful above all because of the story of Jesus and his predecessors, the Old-Testament tribes, prophets, and kings, and it

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164 Landow also cites this text as evidence of Hunt’s tendency to “‘read’ events, things, and people as elaborate emblems” (*Typological* 14-15).
becomes impossible to distinguish between their admiration for the land as an aesthetic object and their reverence for it as the setting of the Christian narrative. To them, it would always be seen as a place where sacred events had touched the earth, a view echoed by the protagonist of Benjamin Disraeli’s 1847 novel *Tancred, or The New Crusade* when he declares, “[W]ho can believe that a country once sanctified by the Divine presence can ever be as other lands? Some celestial quality, distinguishing it from all other climes, must for ever linger about it” (123). Tancred’s pronouncement manages to combine this historicizing view of Palestine with a hint of a more aesthetic perspective when he notes that the area must maintain “[s]ome celestial quality” of appearance, but it is important for us to realize that, regardless of whether Tancred, Hunt, or other visitors adopted an aestheticizing or historicizing view of the land, both interpretations work to exclude the contemporary reality of the Orient; that is, they are both strategies of denial that depend upon eliding the lived, populated, human reality of the locale.

Because of the refusal to acknowledge the Middle East’s present reality that inheres in both views of the region that Hunt’s diaries and letters express, it is hardly surprising that Hunt often had negative reactions when he was confronted by the area’s contemporary inhabitants, and his criticisms are clearly influenced by his reading of other texts about the Middle East and the discourse of Orientalism at large. Indeed, Hunt’s comments in this respect are a prime example of the Saidian notion of the intertextuality of Orientalism and of the fact that “Orientalism fashioned . . . a body of texts and a philologically rooted process by which the Orient took on a discursive identity that made it unequal with the West” (156). As Diana Holman-Hunt points out, Hunt was a fairly well-informed traveler during his first visit to the East (*Grandfather* 131); his memoir
mentions that, during his time in Egypt in 1854, he was “re-reading Herodotus, Sir Gardiner [sic] Wilkinson, the Bible, and Lane’s *Modern Egyptians*” (1: 377). Of these four texts that Hunt mentions explicitly, only Edward William Lane’s *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* discusses contemporary life in the Middle East, yet even this work, which purports to discuss nineteenth-century Egypt, is also heavily dependent on the area’s past, a fact that becomes evident when we consider statements such as, “It is melancholy to contrast the present poverty of Egypt with its prosperity in ancient times” (307) or its discussion of “[a] curious relic of ancient Egyptian superstition” (226). Of the remaining three texts, both Herodotus and the Bible, of course, describe the ancient history of the area, and the work of Sir John Gardner Wilkinson, a nineteenth-century archaeologist who is often considered to be “the founder of British Egyptology” (Clayton 46), describes the civilizations and monuments of ancient Egypt. By looking at this list of Hunt’s reading material, we can already see how his knowledge about the region is firmly rooted in its historical past rather than its present, as was the case with so many other artists and tourists.

However, Hunt did read, in addition to Lane, other literature that describes the experiences of contemporary travelers in the Middle East. As Pointon notes, Hunt’s diaries “evince his familiarity with the conventions of nineteenth-century travel writing” (23), and she goes on to observe that the genre of “travel literature provided Hunt with one . . . discourse” (27) that clearly shaped the way in which the artist envisioned and

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165 The impact and popularity of Lane’s book is hard to overestimate. As Boime notes, it was “considered at the time the definitive text on Muslim life” (94), and Said states that “it was frequently read and cited, and it established its author’s reputation as an eminent figure in Orientalist scholarship” (158). *An Account* . . . was originally published in 1836 and was republished eight times by 1906 (Pointon 43).

166 Hunt does not mention the title of the work(s) by Wilkinson that he has read, but I provide a more detailed discussion of the archaeologist’s significance to Hunt in Chapter Five.
wrote of his time in the region. Indeed, Hunt mentions at several points in his private documents that he has read other contemporary travel narratives. He speaks, for instance, of a description of Nazareth published in an unnamed book by “Scottish Missionaries” (JRUL 1211.140), and, in his diary of his visit to the Dead Sea, he explicitly refers to his past reading and how it has shaped his understanding of events and actions, saying, “I remembered accounts of Arab encounters with Arab when these [stones] had been used first from hidden places for the purpose of distracting the traveller” (JRUL 1210.1). Given the fact that Hunt’s interest in the Middle East was—according to him—a lifelong one, it is hardly surprising that he was familiar with a broad range of writing on the area. Moreover, what is also evident from his own writing is the extent to which he was influenced by these texts and other elements of Orientalist discourse, for his own narratives certainly echo a number of the concerns expressed by other accounts.

One of Hunt’s central complaints throughout his journey, for example, centres on what he perceives as the laziness, greed, and opportunism that characterize inhabitants of the Middle East. Even by the relatively early time of Hunt’s first arrival in the region, this motif had become a commonplace in travel writing—and even in art. Warner notes that “Muslims were traditionally held to be superstitious, immoral, corrupt, [and] cruel” and argues that the paintings of David Roberts highlight their “extreme laziness” by depicting “Arabs idling away their time chatting and smoking as the great monuments behind them crumble from neglect” (36-7). They fared little better in terms of their representation in texts, and the writers of travel narratives constantly make reference to the locals’ seemingly endless requests for “backsheesh” or “backshish,” which Kinglake defines in *Eothen* as “a present of money usually made upon the conclusion of any sort of
treaty” (139). Hunt’s memoir, unsurprisingly, perpetuates these stereotypes. He says of his time in Jerusalem that “wherever I wandered I was followed . . . by boys and girls demanding *backshish*” (1: 412), and he complains that in Damascus “the landlord’s brother and others pestered me so effectively for additional *backshish* that I found when I had left that I had been fleeced even beyond measure” (2: 64). Because Hunt was so intent on presenting a very particular image of himself as the comfortably English adventurer-artist in his memoir, it should not surprise us that he wishes to provide such a traditional, stereotypical view of the Arabs in his published work, but the fact that Hunt adopts this same tone even in his diaries is certainly less expected and more interesting.

The very first paragraph of the diary that Hunt kept while he worked at the Dead Sea announces that he started late on his journey due to “curious Arab delays caused by stupidity and half cunning knavery” (JRUL 1210.1), thereby managing to conjure in a single phrase the spectres of Middle Easterners’ laziness, sneakiness, and greed. Such complaints become something of a refrain throughout this short journal, and, in particular, Hunt cites his dealings with a young man named Soleiman, who becomes his personal guide—and companion—on the journey. Hunt writes that Soleiman, upon learning how much Hunt intends to pay him, “took my hand to kiss, and said he would be my son, saying that I was very good. I was not overcome with this profession of faithfulness as I divined the motive easily enough . . . . I was obliged to constrain my almost departed ill humour when in 10 seconds he uttered the hateful word ‘backsheesh’” (JRUL 1210.6). Hunt seems quite self-assured in his belief that Soleiman’s friendliness is not motivated by altruism or any genuine feeling, and his assumption demonstrates

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167 According to a glossary in Stevens, the correct English spelling of the Arabic word is *baqshish*, which signifies “a present, [or] more commonly a gratuity” (8).
how his interaction with individuals during his travels is always already shaped by what he has read and heard rather than by what he has experienced for himself.

In another echo of common tropes, Hunt also compares a number of the Arabs he encounters to animals. He says of the sheikh whose territory he enters during his visit to the Dead Sea, “he is a tall savage, with a dusky long face which struck me to resemble a mules [sic]” (JRUL 1210.4), and, while on the boat that will take him to Constantinople, he compares the Arab pilgrims returning from Mecca to “a terrible swarm of vermin” (JRUL 1211.168). Such comparisons already had a long history by the time of Hunt’s arrival in the Middle East; as Shohat and Stam point out, “animalization” was a “key colonialist trope . . . rooted in a religious and philosophical tradition which drew sharp boundaries between the animal and the human, and where all animal-like characteristics of the self were to be suppressed” (137). Hunt’s comparisons of these figures to beasts, then, not only suggest a disdain that he has absorbed from his previous immersion in Orientalist discourse, but they also imply his strong desire to demarcate a boundary between himself and the locals that he encounters, an important aspect of his writing to which I shall return later.

From these brief examples, it is clear that the emphasis in Hunt’s private writing on such well-known stereotypes of Arab laziness, greed, and animal-like qualities replicates the vision of the world put forward by his orientalizing antecedents; however, I would suggest that Hunt is also not entirely unaware of the hegemonic nature of this discourse since, at various points in his diaries and letters, he explicitly disagrees with information that he has encountered in other accounts. For instance, he describes Sebastopol in a letter as “a larger and finer town than one would think from the
engravings” (JRUL 1216.4), thereby creating a contrast between his own eyewitness account to a friend and newspaper coverage of the Crimean War. Moreover, he laments that the charitable work of a local bishop in Jerusalem is trumpeted in English reports since the accounts are “in this place itself notoriously untrue” (JRUL 1211.153). There are many other occasions on which Hunt does not simply echo the claims of preceding travelers but instead explicitly disagrees with them: at one point, he rejects some visitors’ desire to find the exact locales of Old-Testament sites and, in particular, their insistence that Usdoom (on the shores of the Dead Sea) is the site of the punished city of Sodom (Amor 129), saying, “I believe that travellers weaken the testimony of the Bible to casual students in overloading a sceptical mind with evidence neither necessary nor to the point in many cases” (JRUL 1210.6).

While it might be argued that this emphasis on his own divergence from previous travelers merely represents the adoption of yet another common motif of travel literature, an attempt to establish the uniqueness of one’s own voice, it is important to notice that, in the instances in which Hunt’s opinion diverges from those expressed in earlier texts, his differing perspectives are centred on the places that he visits but not on the people whom he encounters. In his descriptions of interactions with the locals, Hunt is content to conform to expectations about his experiences, and he blithely opines that “the whole race of arabs were a blot on the face of the earth” (JRUL 1210.5) and that they are “the most lazy people in the world” (JRUL 1216.8).\footnote{Such condemnatory statements are not limited to Hunt’s diaries and letters, and his animosity towards contemporary inhabitants of the Middle East had apparently not cooled by the time he published his memoirs. See, for instance, his declaration in his memoir that it is impossible to go about one’s business peacefully “among half savages such as the Arabs” (1: 428) and his references to their laziness (1: 484) and “barbarism” (1: 482).} However, as I have shown, the artist disagrees with previous travelers about many of the sites that he sees, and his implication
that he is uniquely qualified to appreciate the landscapes he visits, since “these bright
Mountains, the clear sky, the deeper clearer lake[,] the golden fields . . . [are] vouchsafed
to [his] eyes” by God (JRUL 1211.148), highlights his vision of himself as a figure who
is superior to the “ordinary” traveler because his voyage is informed by his Pre-
Raphaelite admiration for nature and his strong belief “that nature was God’s handiwork”
(Bronkhurst, Catalogue 2: 298).169

In this difference between Hunt’s appreciation of the land and his poor estimation
of its people, the artist’s complex view of the region starts to take shape, and we can
clearly see the deep ambivalence that marks his relationship with the area. On one hand,
Hunt’s comments about Middle Easterners themselves are, as Boime notes, often “shot
through with imperialist ideology” (94). However, to label the artist as an unequivocal
supporter of “the Victorian imperialist vision” (Boime 111) is certainly an overstatement,
for in the conflict between Hunt’s appreciation of the land and his disdain for its
inhabitants we can see the first of many fissures that open in his private writing whenever
the artist attempts—consciously or not—to echo the opinions of the wider discourse of
Orientalism.

Such ambivalence extends to many other aspects of the artist’s experiences during
his visit to Palestine. Bronkhurst accurately characterizes Hunt’s diaries “as the
repository of his fears and uncertainties” (“Interesting” 113), and Pointon adds more
detail to this statement by briefly describing the “[f]ear of death, fear of exclusion and
invisibility, fear of annihilation . . . [that were] central to Hunt’s experiences during his
1854-55 travels” (39). While Pointon’s description suggests that Hunt’s fears were more

169 For a much more detailed discussion of Hunt’s deliberate attempts to distance himself from other
tourists, see Chapter Five.

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or less personal in nature, his private documents actually have much broader implications
for our comprehension of Hunt’s experiences in the Middle East, for, in these texts, we
see the artist questioning the much larger, more impersonal ideas of nationhood, religion,
and art, which, as I have shown, were so central to Hunt’s later re-presentation of himself
and remain so to scholars’ understandings of the artist.

Throughout his published writing, Hunt consistently presents himself as a man
who is certain of his vocation, and his memoir includes numerous accounts of the
perseverance that he had to demonstrate in the pursuit of his career.170 As I have
discussed, Hunt similarly casts his visit to the Middle East as a journey that he had
always planned to make,171 and he includes a lengthy segment in his memoir in which he
attempts to reconstruct—or reimagine—the conversations that he had with various
friends, including Augustus Egg, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Coventry Patmore,172 and John
Ruskin, who attempted to dissuade him from spending an extended period in the Middle
East (1: 348-50) for a number of reasons: that he would lose his hard-won professional
reputation, be unable to find scenery any better than that in England, do nothing to
improve the accuracy of his paintings, and perhaps even become seriously ill or die while
abroad. In the reconstruction of these discussions in Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-
Raphaelite Brotherhood, Hunt defends himself with eloquence and certainty against all of

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170 Hunt devotes a substantial part of the discussion of his childhood, for example, to describing his father’s
reluctance to allow him to pursue a career in art (1: 12-13, 28-30).
171 As I have already noted, Hunt’s memoir claims that his desire to visit Syria arose out of his reading of
the New Testament as a child (1: 348), and he also mentions his “plan . . . of going to Syria to paint sacred
subjects” in his account of a conversation with Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1848 (1: 149-50).
172 The author Patmore (1823-1896) is perhaps best remembered now for a series of poems collectively
referred to as The Angel in the House (1854-1863) (Maynard). He was a friend of the Pre-Raphaelites and
anonymously published two poems, “The Seasons” and “Stars and Moon,” and an essay, “Macbeth,” in the
first three issues of The Germ in January, February, and March 1850 (W. Rossetti, “Critical” 249, 253,
255).
these arguments and insists that his friends and colleagues could never dissuade him from his long-held plan.

However, Hunt’s diaries and letters record the fact that, once he arrived in the Middle East, he began to be deeply troubled by the very concerns that he had dismissed on the part of his friends. A fact that is perhaps surprising to those familiar with the conventional construction of Hunt is that he admits in his private writing to many doubts about his own career, a topic to which, like his period of atheism, his memoir never alludes at any length. Almost immediately after his arrival, Hunt began to worry that his artistic reputation would suffer because of his absence from England and that, as Ruskin and Egg argued, he would be forgotten. His concerns, like the uncertainty he expressed to Millais about painting religious pictures, suggest both that he was not certain the trip would be of value to his attempt to demonstrate the wider applicability of Pre-Raphaelitism and that he was more frightened of the potential personal risks involved in the journey than he publicly wished to acknowledge. Touching on the latter issue, his diary mentions briefly in its account of his return from the Dead Sea the fact that he had experienced “dreams and presentiments which had threatened my resolution to make this journey” (JRUL 1210.15), and this statement of fear is all the more surprising—and revealing—when we compare it to the intent stance of “sacred purpose, artistic energy and imperialist machismo” (Sussman, Masculinities 166) that the artist’s later photographed reenactment of the same scene embraces. A similar inversion occurs in the lengthy diary that describes the rest of his trip when Hunt seems surprised at his own ability to ascend a snowy mountain in Lebanon. He writes, “I am not a little elated at my good fortune in having achieved this part of my journey which so many in Damascus said
would be impossible at this season” (JRUL 1211.164), and his words suggest both that he
is not the fearless Englishman abroad that his later works strive so hard to imply and also
that his success is not the result of his own brave determination but is more a result of
fickle “good fortune.” Finally, what is perhaps Hunt’s most explicit statement of his
fears and anxieties in relation to the trip is expressed in a letter to his patron Martha
Combe from 1855 in which Hunt admits that he has entertained a “question of the
wisdom of this nomadic part of my career” and, furthermore, has experienced such strong
doubts that, “when considering the seriousness of the venture of two years of the best part
of my life in an untrodden way[,] I cannot always resist the insinuating attacks of
moodiness in my solitude” (JRUL 1213.11). In these statements, Hunt’s battle with his
doubts about the relevance—and even the usefulness—of his travels to his artistic career
is most evident, and his description of his journey as “this nomadic part of my career,”
with the implicit contrast that the statement develops between his constant departures and
a more established, settled lifestyle, may even hearken back to Ruskin and Patmore’s
comments that he would be able to develop more as an artist if he remained in England.

Many passages in Hunt’s letters and diaries attest to the fact that, throughout the
course of his months abroad, Hunt was repeatedly faced with similar concerns, and his
anxieties are most prevalent in his journal of the trip to the Dead Sea that he undertook in
November 1854 to paint *The Scapegoat*, which depicts a ceremony described in the Old
Testament book of Leviticus in which a goat is “driven from the temple on the Day of

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173 Martha Howell Bennett Combe (1806-1893) was the wife of Thomas Combe, the aforementioned senior
partner of Oxford University Press (Hughes). Diana Holman-Hunt describes the Combes as a surrogate
family for Hunt during this period of his life (Grandfather 92).
Atonement, bearing the sins of the community” (Boime 95). The subsequent and final segment of this chapter will therefore be devoted to a detailed discussion of Hunt’s Dead Sea journal, for its representation of the external and internal tribulations that the artist experienced in his pursuit of a perfectly realistic background for the painting that became his first religious Middle Eastern canvas can, in many ways, function as a microcosm of Hunt’s journey to the Holy Land. Indeed, in the context of this diary, we find the isolated artist repeatedly calling into question his artistic and religious credos, his sense of English behaviour and superiority, and his sense of his own masculinity, and from a careful close reading of this important text, which remains—somewhat inexplicably—unpublished, a picture emerges of Hunt as an artist who, in his pursuit of realism in his art, is forced to question the boundaries between “reality” and the construction of it, not just in terms of painting but in all aspects of his existence.

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Hunt made two visits to the Dead Sea over the course of 1854. For the first, a shorter sojourn that he undertook in October, Hunt spent three days in the vicinity of the sea and traveled with another Englishman, the Reverend William Beamont. Having decided on a subject to paint there, Hunt returned to the area for a second time in November 1854, and his journal of his visit, which lasted over two weeks, describes both his time at the seashore and the arrangements that he had to make in preparation for his

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174 This diary is JRUL MS1210. The library’s catalogue describes it as “[s]ixteen holograph pages, in pencil and ink” and notes that part of the journal is missing. As Bronkhurst notes, the missing “quarto is bound in with Hunt’s letters to Combe in the Bodleian Library,” and she lists the exact location of this segment, to which I did not have access, as “BL, MS Eng. lett. c.296 fols.46-7” (“Interesting” 112).

175 As I have already noted, Beamont’s *Diary of a Journey to the East, in the Autumn of 1854* was published two years later.
stay there. The fact that Hunt wrote this account of the trip on foolscap rather than in the bound diary that he used to record much of the rest of his Middle Eastern journey implies that he was making concessions to the exigencies of travel by trying to reduce the weight of his luggage, which was already heavy with painting supplies, but the separation of this narrative from the other, more complete diary (JRUL 1211) also suggests that Hunt may already have been aware that this story of his work by the Dead Sea could stand independently as a—or even the—central event of his entire journey. In fact, in a letter that Hunt wrote from Jerusalem to Thomas Combe the following year, the artist’s comments reinforce this notion of the centrality of his time at the Dead Sea. Hunt writes, “I kept a journal of my observations and adventures when there but at present it is too rough and must be written out before meeting English eyes but some day I hope to interest you with it for half an hour” (1213.12). In his correspondence, Hunt never mentions allowing people to read the longer diary of the rest of his trip, so his willingness to allow the Combes to have access to the shorter journal suggests the greater significance of this segment of his travels in his own eyes. Moreover, the style of the Dead Sea journal forms—even in its rough state—more of a cohesive narrative than does the other diary, which briefly details even the insignificant events of each day, and this difference again suggests that Hunt may have entertained a hope of circulating the account to a certain extent upon his return to England. If such circulation was indeed Hunt’s goal, it was only achieved decades later in his career when he wrote two articles for the *Contemporary Review* based on this diary and used material from the journal as the basis both for story-telling time with children at the home of his friends (Bronkhurst,

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176 Bronkhurst’s chronology states that Hunt’s trip lasted seventeen days, of which he spent November 17 to 26 on the shores of the Dead Sea (*Catalogue* 1: 43).
“Interesting” 124) and for his photographed reenactment of his time at Usdoom. Since Hunt publicized this part of his trip in published works like the *Contemporary Review* articles and, of course, the memoir and perpetuated the more legendary aspects of it in the publication of his photographed reenactment and during private time with family friends, it is not surprising that this trip to the shores of the Dead Sea is perhaps the most highly publicized segment of the artist’s career. For this reason alone, it would be worthwhile for me to offer a detailed examination of the narrative of Hunt’s private journal, which was used as the basis for other publications but never itself published in entirety, but the fact that the diary raises in a relatively succinct manner all of the doubts and anxieties that Hunt experienced during his 1854-6 travels in the Holy Land makes it even more important as a microcosm of his career-defining trip as a whole.

The diary begins with an account of Hunt’s ride from Jerusalem to Hebron on his way to the Dead Sea, and, within the first sentences, it connects itself to the larger discourse of Orientalism by embracing the stereotypes of Arab sneakiness and greed that, as I mentioned earlier, were perpetuated by many other accounts of Middle Eastern travel (JRUL 1210.1). This motif continues throughout the diary. At various other points on the first page, Hunt complains of the Arabs’ “presuming” and their “intention of taking me in” (JRUL 1210.1), and the prejudices that he expresses not only demonstrate the extent to which Hunt’s perception of these people was moulded by the writing of others but also provide a very early example of the artist attempting to assert his own power by

177 These two articles appeared under the title “Painting ‘The Scapegoat.’” Consult the Works Cited list for full publication information.
178 It is worth noting that Hunt did not write any similar short articles that focus exclusively on other segments of his 1854-6 travels; the rest of his trip is only publicly recounted in *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* and in a series of three articles, entitled “The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: A Fight for Art,” describing his early career that Hunt also wrote for the *Contemporary Review*.
179 Bronkhurst points out that the photograph was published during Hunt’s lifetime in A. Meynell and F. W. Farrar, *William Holman Hunt*, The Art Annual, 1893, 3 (“Interesting” 124).
reducing his foreign traveling companions to a collection of traits which he, through his reading, is aware of and prepared for.

After spending some time at Hebron, Hunt reaches the territory of the local sheikh under whose jurisdiction the area of Usdoom lies. For this second visit to the area, Hunt was unaccompanied by any of his countrymen and instead needed to hire some of the subjects of the sheikh as escorts and guards, and nearly three of the diary’s sixteen handwritten pages consist of details of Hunt’s negotiations with this local dignitary. Pointon offers a brief but insightful comparison of Hunt’s description of these events in this journal with that of his later memoir, and she rightly notes that he changed various seemingly insignificant details when writing the published version of the story in order to create a “subtle shift in power relations” (24) that places the artist in a position of superiority and control in relation to the sheikh. However, while this difference between the published and private accounts of the meeting is quite useful to our understanding of Hunt’s tireless revision of events for publication, Pointon does not take her very brief discussion of Hunt’s awareness of “power relations” far enough, for she fails to address the more subtle fact that a kind of behavioural moulding similar to that which occurred in the period between the writing of the Dead Sea diary and the publication of the memoir is also evident within the diary itself. Therefore, while her essay demonstrates the extent to which Hunt carefully edited his public self-representation to suit his agenda at the end of his career, it does not acknowledge the

\[180\] An important difference that Pointon describes, for instance, is the fact that Hunt’s diary states that, upon the artist’s arrival at the encampment, he “was asked to dismount as the Sheik came over” (JRUL 1210.3) while, in his memoir, “Hunt sends for the Sheik who has to walk up a hill and there is no suggestion of the artist being obliged to dismount” (Pointon 24). See Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism 1: 467 for this alternative account.
more complex process at work in the diary of Hunt conforming his behaviour to his own—and others’—expectations in the very moment in which these actions occur.

Indeed, we can see Hunt strive for the powerful pose that he adopts retroactively in his memoir in a number of the events that he describes in his diary. For example, the artist constructs himself as a representative of England to the locals when he delivers both a letter and a gift to the *sheikh* on behalf of James Finn, the British Consul at Jerusalem (JRUL 1210.4). Furthermore, by explicitly announcing, “this is a backsheesh from the English Consul for you” in the presence of “thirty or forty” of the *sheikh*’s subordinates (JRUL 1210.4), Hunt not only proclaims his own status as an Englishman but also implicitly aligns himself with Finn, who was influential throughout the region. Hunt’s deliberate attempt to ensconce himself within the context of imperial power is also evident from the actions he makes prior to his departure from the encampment. When the *sheikh* requests that Hunt make part of his payment for the men in advance, the artist tells him that the consul will inspect the written contract they have made when Hunt returns to Jerusalem, and Hunt notes that the *sheikh* “seemed quite as afraid of this as a lady is of fire arms” (JRUL 1210.5). Hunt’s simile quite obviously feminizes his interlocutor, and, by embracing this familiar trope of Orientalist discourse, the artist manages to establish himself in a position of power as the strong, authoritative Englishman curbing the cunning and greed of his “womanish” subordinate. Moreover, in this later interaction with the *sheikh*, Hunt also uses his acquaintance with Finn to his further advantage. He insists that the *sheikh* keep the contract with him until Hunt’s return because he hopes that “it might make him uneasy until my safe return” (JRUL 1210.5). By leaving a

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181 Finn (1806-1872) was originally a scholar of Hebrew and Arabic and served as British Consul in Jerusalem between 1845 and 1863 (Manley).
tangible representation of Hunt’s affiliation with Finn, who himself represents, by extension, the power of the British Empire, the artist leaves the sheikh with a physical reminder of his own links to the Empire, and Hunt seems to assume that England’s reputation as an imperialist power will be sufficient to affect the man’s behaviour for the artist’s own benefit.  

Besides these very deliberate attempts to align himself with the colonial power of England, another striking aspect of Hunt’s interaction with the sheikh is the artist’s clear awareness of the fact that his identity as an Englishman is not something that is constant and easily recognizable by others. Instead, Hunt realizes, his Englishness must be consistently performed for those around him. Since Hunt is frequently represented by critics as smugly secure in his national identity, it is very interesting to see that he actually had a much more complex understanding of English citizenship than many believe, and his comprehension of the process of “being English” is evident at many points in the Dead Sea journal. Early in the diary, before his arrival at the town of Hebron, Hunt is led to believe that he and his servants might be under attack by bandits, and he immediately “shouted out in my best and loudest Arabic . . . that I was an Englishman” (JRUL 1210.1). In his worry, Hunt feels that he must proclaim his nationality orally, and his decision to declare his Englishness aloud suggests that, at least in Hunt’s mind, his citizenship must be constantly and explicitly reiterated in order to function as a valid deterrent against mistreatment.

182 Of course, the fact that Hunt writes that the thought of the contract “might make him uneasy [italics added]” does suggest that the artist is aware that the sheikh may perhaps be unimpressed by Hunt’s association with the local English diplomat; thus, even in these early assertions of his Englishness, the artist’s words suggest that he is not entirely certain of the potency of his claims, a fact that I discuss later in greater detail.
Significantly, it seems that in many instances in which Hunt is unsure of himself or of the outcome of certain events, such as this potential robbery, he resorts to the performance of his national identity as a means of reasserting his control over the situation, and this tendency is particularly evident in a number of Hunt’s conversations with the sheikh. Hunt describes their first encounter in the following words:

I was asked to dismount as the Sheik came over to salute me. he is a tall savage, with a dusky long face which struck me to resemble a mules [sic]. he walked in a slow prowling manner and when I moved forward one step he grasped my hand and held it sedately grinning in my face as he does to his subjects before they bow their heads together in embracing, as it occurred to me that he was waiting for this last profession of friendship I stared at him in English fashion and nodded turning to give orders about my tent. (JRUL 1210.3-4)

As I suggested earlier in this chapter, Hunt’s explicit animalization of the other man, much like his later feminization of him, functions as a strategy for his subordination. However, the greater significance of this passage lies in the fact that it highlights the performative nature of Hunt’s behaviour. In Hunt’s mind, it is not sufficient to be recognized as an Englishman; instead, he must also act in a way that he feels represents his nationality. Thus, Hunt not only asserts his national affiliation by consciously engaging in behaviour that conflicts with the expectations of his host, but he also quite deliberately plays the role of the nonchalant traveler who is unimpressed by the sheikh’s expressions of friendship, offers a stereotypically cool English greeting, and is ostensibly more concerned with arranging his own affairs than ingratiating himself with the local ruler. Yet, at the same time that Hunt’s behaviour outwardly performs Englishness, the artist’s actions themselves are grounded in an essentialist idea of Englishness that relies on stereotypes of insularity and a “stiff upper lip” to define itself, and Hunt’s adoption of these traits as a marker of his own status as an Englishman suggests that, in spite of the
artist’s apparent belief that he is performing something real, the concept of Englishness is something that can be accessed only through its performance, for it has no existence other than in Hunt’s repeated enacting of it.

A similar awareness of the performative nature of nationality is even more evident in a conversation between Hunt and the sheikh, during which, as I mentioned earlier, Hunt presents the sheikh with a red coat from the English consul. Describing his conferral of the gift, Hunt writes,

seeing it to be a good opportunity as there were thirty or forty men looking on I took out the coat and put it upon his shoulders adding “this is a backsheesh from the English Consul for you” I think I performed my part with a sedateness and an air of importance which would have won repeated burst [sic] of laughter from my poor dead friend Walter Deverell.183 (JRUL 1210.4)

When Hunt speaks of his gathered audience and the fact that he “performed [his] part,” the very language that he uses implies that he is quite consciously embracing a theatrical role in his interaction with the sheikh. Furthermore, Hunt’s comment that the “sedateness” of his performance would have been recognized as very humorous by Deverell suggests both the extent to which such behaviour has been purposely adopted by Hunt for this occasion and also the fact that it perhaps contrasts with his more usual actions, an implication that again emphasizes the notion that he is consciously playing a part.

Said makes a series of comments in Orientalism that are very useful to my reading of this passage in Hunt’s diary. He notes that there is often a strong element of theatricality in representations of the Middle East in Orientalist texts; as Said expresses it, “The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole

183 Walter Howell Deverell (1827-1854) was an artist and “close friend of the Pre-Raphaelites” who “was greatly influenced by their artistic principles and practices” prior to his death at the age of twenty-six (Elkan).
East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be . . . a theatrical stage affixed to Europe” (63). Said’s emphasis on the dramatization of the region in the European imagination has been perpetuated by other scholars; Linda Nochlin’s foundational 1983 essay “The Imaginary Orient” expands Said’s observations into the realm of art history. Nochlin uses the painting Snake Charmer by Jean-Léon Gérôme,\(^{184}\) which depicts a boy performing before a group of Middle Eastern men, as a representative of depictions of the Middle East in nineteenth-century art as a whole, and she notes that, when approaching this painting,

> European audiences are clearly meant to look at both performer and audience as parts of the same spectacle . . . . The watchers huddled . . . in the background of Gérôme’s painting are as resolutely alienated from us as is the act they watch. . . . Our gaze is meant to include both the spectacle and its spectators as objects of picturesque delectation. (35)

Both Said and Nochlin are right to point out that many Victorians who depicted the Middle East—whether in text, visual art, or other kinds of representation—offered descriptions of the region that suggested that the local people they encountered were actors in a great drama being staged before them. Such a perspective, of course, reinforces the dynamics of power by placing the European author, artist, or traveler in the role of an omniscient audience member and making the local “actors” whom he or she sees subject to the visitor’s gaze, and Hunt’s published memoir at times explicitly embraces this perspective.

\(^{184}\) This painting is listed as The Serpent Charmer and dated 1880 in Gerald M. Ackerman’s The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme with a Catalogue Raisonné (244). Gérôme (1824-1904) was one of the most prominent French Orientalist painters of the nineteenth century; beginning in 1853, he traveled a number of times to the Middle East and executed “many pictures of Arab religion and justice, [and] North African animals and landscape” between 1857 and 1897 (Whiteley).
In a number of instances, Hunt employs the language of drama to depict the business occurring around him. For example, looking back on his first trip to the region from a distance of fifty years, he writes of the people he saw, “How swiftly transient . . . are the most slowly passing scenes! All the actors of that day have now passed away . . . [.] All have passed off the scene now . . . from . . . the great drama in which they took part; now, fifty years after, their places are taken by new actors, and even the stage itself has been changed” (1: 375). With its use of such words as scenes, actors, drama, and stage, Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood firmly aligns itself with the convention, which Said was the first to observe, of presenting all of the Middle East as a play being acted out for the benefit of the European visitor. However, the description in Hunt’s journal of the artist’s performance for the sheikh and his entourage reverses the usual roles of subject and object. In this case, the European traveler leaves his position as an audience member distanced from the action on “stage” and becomes, to borrow Hunt’s phrase, part of “the perennial dramas of the East” (Pre-Raphaelitism 1: 373), which, in this instance, have an audience of Middle Easterners. Although the reference to Deverell’s imagined laughter in Hunt’s description attempts to cast the artist’s involvement in the light of a joke, the need for Hunt to embrace the role of the representative of the English consul suggests that, despite the status he attributes simply to being an Englishman, he is not actually in a position of power in his relationship with the sheikh and must relinquish his figurative role as an audience-member in order to gain status in the eyes of the man with whom he must negotiate.

The actual lack of power experienced by Hunt in this relationship, which this dramatic reversal of roles highlights, is echoed in many other instances in the rest of
Hunt’s Dead Sea diary, for the artist often seems to feel that many aspects of his journey are not within his control. The complaint that Hunt most often reiterates is that his employees do not want to work, and, although his criticism may be rooted in the stereotypical notion of Arabs as lazy, it is also significant because it is a major cause of the feeling of being overwhelmed that Hunt manifests throughout much of his time at the Dead Sea.

Hunt often seems to feel that he has no authority with his local employees, and he writes frequently of trying to reassert his control over them in various contexts. In the course of these attempts, Hunt learns that simple verbal expressions are often insufficient, and to gain their obedience the artist sometimes has to resort to bribery. At one point, he even notes that he has to allow the men to slaughter a goat in order to quell “a threat made by the arabs to leave me” (JRUL 1210.11). This statement from his diary certainly stands in marked contrast to Hunt’s later photographed reenactment of his time at the Dead Sea, and, more importantly, it suggests once again that his performance of the role of the authoritative Englishman is a deeply flawed, ambivalent enterprise and that he must make use of more concrete methods to maintain a modicum of control over his situation.

During his time at the Dead Sea, Hunt was also very much aware of the difference between the experiences of the idealized, authoritative English tourist proferred by travel narratives and his own. On a number of occasions Hunt uses his diary to justify his behaviour and explain—even to himself—why he chose a particular course of action. For example, when his caravan stops to make camp for the evening at an hour much 185

References to this problem appear on nearly every page of the text; see, in particular, JRUL 1210.1, 2, 6, and 14.
earlier than Hunt had intended—and ordered—he notes that “it could not have been much
different any way for the Sun had already left all but the high hill tops” (JRUL 1210.7),
and, when his employees enjoy the “princely” luxury of feasting on lamb when he had
wanted them to eat some fowl from their limited supply of food, Hunt again diminishes
his initial annoyance, saying instead, “I saw more reason in the arrangement immediately
after” when the men begin to roast the lamb’s internal organs (JRUL 1210.7). Comically,
in these examples and others, Hunt—despite his protestations and orders to the
contrary—ends by doing whatever his employees originally wished to do, and his
explanations of why he acquiesces to their decisions after the fact seem to be just a
transparent attempt to retain his authority over them—even if he does so only in his own
eyes. Moreover, Hunt’s justificatory statements remind the reader that, in spite of his
assertion of the immediacy of his narrative when he explicitly declares that he is “writing
now on the spot” (JRUL 1210.8), the diary is, to borrow Pointon’s characterization,
“already an edited response, organized in the act of writing” (23) and is always already
shaped by his own expectations about the behaviour he should adopt.

In fact, there are a few entries in the diary in which readers can clearly see that
Hunt rewrites portions of the text to bolster his self-image and align it more strongly with
the “conviction of innate national superiority that [was] typical of the nineteenth-century
Englishman abroad” (Amor 55). For example, on the journal’s first page, he writes, “I
ordered the tent to be taken down and set up, fire to be lighted and dinner to be cooked,”
yet Hunt has obviously edited the sentence because the word proposed is clearly visible
but has been crossed out and replaced with the more authoritative term ordered.
Similarly, when Hunt describes his approach to the sheikh’s camp, he speaks of “my
errand to their Sheik” (JRUL 1210.3), but he originally wrote our instead of my and afterwards crossed out the plural pronoun, suggesting once again that, as he wrote his diary entry, Hunt felt that he needed to reassert his position as the head of the expedition and consciously edited his account in order to support that notion of himself.

Yet, despite these attempts at editing, Hunt’s diary demonstrates that the artist is very clearly not in control of his employees, as we have already seen, or even of his own emotions and moods. These two disparate threads of his complaints come together in the following frustrated statement:

at any time Arab punctuality and dispatch is [one] of the least satisfactory features as experienced by Franks [i.e., Europeans] and when their own interest is concerned in the delay it is a matter of dreadful vexation: notwithstanding the strongest efforts to control my humour while making necessary complaints and exhortations I was sorry to find myself possessed of so much anger as I rode along in front on my slow beast that even the beautiful sunshine could not dissipate for some time. (JRUL 1210.3)

The beginning of Hunt’s declaration is coloured by his reading of other texts and their stereotypical complaints about the shiftlessness of Arab workers. However, another significant aspect of this passage is its admission that Hunt even has difficulty controlling his own emotions, a revelation that is not apparent in his other, more public accounts of the same events. This inability to maintain his composure assaults him frequently; at another point during this expedition, he says,

the horror of these arabs is that one cannot have anything to do with them without losing ones [sic] temper. here was I, never an unreasonable man in considering the prejudices and wants of others, as I hope, this morning speaking with my throat full of spleen and seeing with a veil of [small blank in page] before my eyes[.] (JRUL 1210.5)
In both of these instances, Hunt attributes his anger to the difficulties engendered by his employees, but the diary describes many other moments at which the artist felt overwhelmed by his own emotions without an ostensible reason.

Throughout his life, Hunt was prone to depression and even delusions. Amor, citing a letter from 1879, notes that, at that time, Hunt “began to be increasingly obsessed with the notion that he was being persecuted by the Devil” (223-4), but this tendency was not just a later development. Even Hunt’s published memoir records a bout of depression that the artist endured in 1848 during which he seems to have believed that the devil had taken hold of him (1: 167-9). Although his Dead Sea diary records no such supernatural experiences, Hunt was indeed overtaken by a great deal of, in his own words, “uncertainty” (JRUL 1210.10) and “anxiety” (JRUL 1210.7) during his stay there. Certainly, the loneliness that Hunt endured contributed to his already developed tendency to brood, and some of the most explicit statements of weakness and doubt in all of his private documents appear in the relatively brief Dead Sea journal.

Hunt’s determination to stay on the shores of the sea in order to paint a perfectly realistic background for his work seems endangered even from the beginning of his account. When he describes his wrangling with the sheikh over the payment of his men, Hunt writes in frustration, “it almost became a matter of indifference to me, whether, with such difficulties to contend with, I succeeded in the object I have in mind or returned minus some napoleons and three or four days vainly spent” (JRUL 1210.5). Faced

186 Hunt complains in the journal of the isolation engendered by “this desolate place with no one to understand a word of English” (1210.10).
187 Interestingly, Hunt’s memoir also acknowledges Hunt’s inclination to regard a potential visit to the Dead Sea as “a foolish fancy of mine” (1: 469), but the context in which the published account mentions these feelings suggests not that they are genuine but that the artist expresses them only as a tactic for bargaining with the recalcitrant sheikh.
with the difficult logistics of planning his trip, for which he does not seem to have been prepared, Hunt’s devotion to his artistic ideal of “truth to nature” seems partially to crumble as he contemplates not working on the painting at the site he originally chose, but, significantly, Hunt’s doubts about the usefulness of his Dead Sea expedition linger long after he has finally struck an acceptable bargain with the sheikh.

After spending a few days at the shoreline, he writes in one of the most revealing passages in the entire account,

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\text{I can understand the use of Art in thinking how interesting a picture of such a scene would be and in thinking that I was doing right morally in undertaking a work of similar value in conveying important knowledge. I commended myself to God’s merciful protection from all the dangers by which I had ventured to challenge in this pursuit. I believe if I had not had this comfortable assurance of his presence and defence of me that I should have been overcome and cried like a child at the misery of my solitary position . . . . (JRUL 1210.8)}
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Although, at first glance, the opening sentence appears to declare a conviction that his work does both a service to “Art” and to morality, the language in which Hunt couches this statement instead points, on closer examination, to his profound uncertainty and ambivalence about such notions, for Hunt does not claim in a straightforward fashion that his work actually accomplishes these goals. Instead, he says tepidly that he “can understand” these concepts, and his words here seem to suggest a distance between “understand[ing]” an idea and believing it to be true. The only notion that Hunt wholeheartedly seems to believe in is God’s “presence and defence of [him],” and, as he says, this thought is the only one that can bring him comfort. By thus foregrounding the confidence of Hunt’s personal religious beliefs instead of his convictions about his painting’s contributions to art and morality, Hunt’s words negate—or at least call into question—his certainty about his own professional role and are indicative of the fact that,
throughout this account of his visit to the Dead Sea, Hunt repeatedly and fundamentally questions his original motivations for undertaking the journey.

This expression by Hunt of his belief in the personal protection offered to him by a higher power also suggests Hunt’s newly emergent religious standpoint. As we have already seen, Hunt himself admitted that his reputation at this time as a painter of “scriptural subjects” was somewhat overblown. At this stage of his career, he had, indeed, completed *The Light of the World*, which was an overtly religious work although quite different from the realistic, ethnographic paintings—like *The Scapegoat*—that he would later produce in the Middle East, and he had painted two earlier works with Christian overtones: *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids* and *The Awakening Conscience*.\(^{188}\) *The Scapegoat*, which Hunt laboured over during his time at the Dead Sea, is actually the first oil painting he completed that depicts events described in the Bible.\(^{189}\) Hunt had carefully scoured historical sources for information on the ancient rite of expiation symbolized by and resting upon the goat. He mentions, in particular, having consulted the Old Testament—especially Isaiah—and the Talmud (JRUL 1213.12),\(^{190}\) and he eventually incorporated

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\(^{188}\) Although *The Awakening Conscience*, unlike *A Converted British Family*, does not depict an explicitly Christian narrative, its frame contains a quotation from the book of Proverbs (25.20), so the work may be considered to have some religious overtones in addition to its treatment of the social issues of “fallen” and “kept” women.

\(^{189}\) Although *The Scapegoat* represents the first biblical scene that Hunt completed in oils, it is not the first that he began. As I mentioned earlier, in 1847, Hunt started to paint *Christ and the Two Marys*, a depiction of the Resurrection, but he subsequently abandoned the work (Landow, Typological 20, 32). Bronkhurst notes that Hunt began work on the same canvas again around 1897 or 1898 (*Catalogue* 1: 123).

\(^{190}\) Landow notes that Hunt included a long paragraph in the Royal Academy catalogue explaining the meaning of the scapegoat to ancient Judaism. . . . [H]e explained that two goats were chosen as part of the old levitical ritual for the Day of Atonement. One was offered to God as a propitiation for men’s sins, and while it was being sacrificed as a burnt offering the congregation present manifested their impatience by calling upon the priest to hasten the departure of the scapegoat, and afterwards by following the beast as he was led away by the man appointed, to a cliff.
quotations from both Leviticus (16.22) and Isaiah (53.4) into the frame (Landow, Typological 104). The painting also constitutes an important stage in Hunt’s career because it represents his first full-blown use of typological symbolism. Whereas in other paintings like A Converted British Family, The Awakening Conscience, and The Light of the World, Hunt had employed a large number of symbols that were meant to act as clues to the interpretation of the overall painting, The Scapegoat is the first instance in which Hunt displays his interest and belief in the notion that events described in the Old Testament, while remaining actual historical occurrences, were also meant to point forward to parallels in the New Testament, particularly in the life of Christ. This use of typology became a significant aspect of Hunt’s work and is evident in such major paintings as The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple and The Triumph of the Innocents, and the artist’s employment of typological symbolism became increasingly complex from the time of his visit to the Dead Sea onwards. Thus, The Scapegoat marks the advent of a new style in Hunt’s work, although this fact is not often mentioned by critics because, looking at the artist’s whole career in retrospect, it is perhaps too easy to align Hunt with this style of meticulously researched and detailed religious painting, for which he became so famous later in his life, without realizing that The Scapegoat represents the initial appearance of this aspect of his work.

about ten miles from Jerusalem; tormenting it by the way, and shouting, “Hasten, carry away our sins.” The red fillet which he depicted bound about the animal’s horns was placed there, [Hunt] adds, because of the belief that if God accepted the propitiation “the scarlet would become white . . . .” (Typological 105).

Bendiner, “Scapegoat” 128 reproduces the entire catalogue entry. 191 Landow’s monograph, William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism, offers a detailed study of the significance of typology to Hunt’s career as a whole and is one of the standard texts for discussions of Hunt’s art.
Hunt’s developing religious views were, at this point in his career, clearly becoming more closely entwined with his conception of his work as an artist, and the latter part of his journal contains a lengthy passage that describes both his original aim in painting at the Dead Sea and the goals that he held for his career:

I had thought that some valuable illustrations of scripture might be found here for the painter, but the time has not come yet for such labours Heaven help me to escape from despair of the worth of my vocation I would not for any worlds content myself to be a sort of caper-cutter upon canvass [sic]. an acrobat who [sic] turns and grimaces in the high road to the thousands passing by busy to evil or to good. I would rather be a sign-post to say where the path led even tho I were silent in urging men to walk on or to turn back. (JRUL 1210.12)

Although he expressed to Millais such initial uncertainty about visiting the East to paint religious works, Hunt clearly considers his time spent at the Dead Sea to have been devoted expressly to this purpose when he writes of his earlier hope that “some valuable illustrations of scripture might be found here.” Hunt’s description of his initial ambition suggests that he links his painting with a search for knowledge about the historical reality of Old-Testament events, and he thereby associates his own work with the “boom period for biblical archaeology” (Warner 32) that Europe experienced in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, Hunt’s declaration of his aim also subtly reminds the reader of the “manliness” of Hunt’s original goal. As Sussman discusses, men who chose painting as a career were often confronted with doubts about whether their profession was sufficiently “manly,” and, in his words, “the primary problematic for the early Victorian male artist became valorizing his practice or, in the applicable Victorian term, his ‘work’

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192 Warner offers a brief but helpful discussion of the main aspects of this widespread desire “to find the roots of the Christian truth in a concrete, observable reality” (32).
193 In *Victorian Masculinities*, Sussman differentiates between the words *male* and *maleness* on one hand and *masculinity* and *manliness* on the other, saying, “I use the term ‘male’ only in the biological sense and the term ‘maleness’ for fantasies about the essential nature of the ‘male,’ for that which the Victorians thought of as innate in men. I reserve the terms ‘masculinity’ and ‘manliness’ for those multifarious social constructions of the male current within the society” (12-13). I have followed his usage here.
as art producer with the criteria that defined bourgeois manhood—wealth, prestige and, most importantly, respectability” (*Masculinities* 114). One of the ways in which Sussman suggests that a male artist could quell such connotations of the “femininity” of his profession was to link his work with “the male sphere . . . [and] the area of masculine knowledge” (*Masculinities* 116), and he rightly argues that a number of the Pre-Raphaelites adopted this strategy for reasserting the masculinity of their chosen career by highlighting the scientific and historical accuracy of their paintings (*Masculinities* 117-8). Thus, Hunt’s statement of his hope that “valuable illustrations of scripture might be found” aligns his painting with a quest for knowledge, thereby simultaneously validating the purpose of his work and reinforcing its status as a “manly” pursuit by suggesting that, like an archaeologist, Hunt remains in the area to try to unearth something previously hidden or, at any rate, unavailable.

From a postcolonial perspective, Hunt’s phrase also, of course, ignores the fact that thousands of years separate the biblical scenes which he desires from the people and places that Hunt himself encounters, and his assumption that the sites have remained the same in the intervening millennia once again reminds the reader of Said’s lament that the discourse of Orientalism stifles the contemporary world of the Middle East and “assume[s] an unchanging Orient” (96) untouched by the passing of centuries.

Turning now to the second half of this important passage, we can see that, when Hunt speaks about his professional goals, the language he uses suggests his views about his moral stance as an artist, for he adopts such words as *path*, *road*, and *sign-post*, which suggest that art is a narrow way to be followed by a chosen few. Given his extensive reading of the Bible, Hunt would have known that these terms are heavily inflected by
their repeated use in both the Old and New Testaments, in which they are commonly employed as a metaphor for a righteous journey through life. His words thus clearly demonstrate that Hunt attributes a moral role to the work of the artist, who, in his construction, can function either as a mere entertainer, “an acrobat” whose work is empty of meaning and only a momentary distraction “to the thousands passing by,” or as “a sign-post,” who, quietly and from the margins of the road, stands as an indication of the right “path”—whether in terms of art, morals, or both. Hunt’s words suggest that, even relatively early in his career, he believes that a painting should express something of a painter’s worldview and that he has a greater responsibility in his choice of subject matter than the mere re-presentation of a beautiful or striking image. These ideas find much more detailed expression in Hunt’s published work of fifty years later, but they are significant in the context of his Dead Sea diary because they represent the first instance in the journals and letters of his 1854-6 travels in which a reader can clearly see that Hunt’s religious views have a definite impact on the subject matter he chooses.

However, the preceding statement is by no means meant to suggest that the views on the relationship between morality and art that Hunt declares in his later work were entirely developed and settled at this point. In fact, this first expression by Hunt of the moral nature he assigns to his work is obviously preceded by a statement of disillusionment and of doubt about the feasibility of his aims in traveling to the Dead Sea. Hunt worries about the worth of his work as a whole, saying, “Heaven help me to escape from despair of the worth of my vocation,” and he also expresses concern that the timing of his artistic mission is wrong, lamenting that “the time has not come yet for such labours.” What one wonders about the latter statement is whether Hunt means to say that

194 See, for example, Psalms 17.5, 23.3, Proverbs 2.13, 8.20, Isaiah 40.14, and Matthew 7.14.
“the time has not come” in terms of his own career or in his view of the readiness of the world at large for such a role to be carried out by painting, and one interesting aspect of this statement is that it allows Hunt to construct himself both as an avant-garde artist, preparing the world for a kind of art for which it is not yet ready, and as a type of modern-day prophet, as well, who, even if he has failed in his goal at this point, will perhaps be remembered as one who “said where the path led.” This role of the artist/prophet is one that Hunt went on to adopt explicitly later in his career, even going so far as to model the photograph of himself on his carte-de-visite upon the pose displayed on the card of Thomas Carlyle, the Victorian “prophet” par excellence (Sussman, Masculinities 158-9). Thus, once again, this passage contained in Hunt’s diary allows us to see the early development of the ideas and constructions that would shape Hunt’s subsequent career and our later scholarly understanding of him as an artist.

Hunt’s distinction between the two possible roles of an artist—“caper-cutter” and “acrobat” on one hand or silent “sign-post” on the other—also has interesting ramifications for my emphasis on the concepts of realism and performance in my reading of Hunt’s diaries and letters. In this passage, Hunt expresses his desire to adopt the latter role of “sign-post” for himself, and this characterization suggests that he wishes as an artist to combine the moral aspect of following a Christian “path,” which the sign marks, with his desire for a certain type of straightforward, indexical realism (symbolized by the function of the sign-post as a physical object). In other words, Hunt’s utmost idea for artists, as he expressed it in an 1855 letter to William Michael Rossetti, is to “go out” into the world “most religiously, in fact with something like the spirit of the Apostles, fearing

195 As I have already mentioned, Hunt maintained his pride in and actively promoted this construction of himself as an “experimentalist” (Pre-Raphaelitism 1: 150) until his death in 1910.
nothing, going amongst robbers and in deserts with impunity as men without anything to lose, and everything must be painted even the pebbles of the foreground from the place itself, unless on trial this prove impossible” (qtd. in Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 6; italics in text). Hunt’s declaration to his fellow Pre-Raphaelite highlights the blend of morality and intense realism that constitutes Hunt’s pictorial ideal, but his final admission that the notion of painting even the most insignificant details from nature might, in fact, “prove impossible” suggests his fear that he might fail in the ideal that he imposes upon himself and subsequent artists.

Such an inability to conform to his stringent notion of realism would certainly have been on the artist’s mind during the latter portion of his second visit to the Dead Sea. Hunt had earlier written in his Dead Sea journal of his “hope that I may be enabled to pursue my task . . . until all is done, which could not possibly be worked at at home” (JRUL 1210.9), and his subsequent realization that he would have to return to Jerusalem with the painting incomplete filled him with despair; in fact, in the paragraph immediately preceding Hunt’s discussion of the “caper-cutter” and the “sign-post,” he writes forlornly, “the arabs will not stay longer. I am tired out and brought to submit to my great disappointment. The loss of my object for in two days I can scarcely do enough of the intricate foreground, to enable me to finish at home; and so I fear all my past work is lost” (JRUL 1210.11-12). It is this anxiety caused by the failure of his dedication to exacting realism, I believe, that informs Hunt’s statement in the diary that he “would not for any worlds content [him]self to be a sort of caper-cutter upon canvas. an acrobat who . . . turns and grimaces in the high road,” for, with this failure, Hunt suddenly becomes afraid that he has been undermined as a painter of realistic scenes and is reduced from
depicting the “real” (through painting objects and scenes as they appear in nature) to

performing the role of the realist painter (by making the kinds of dangerous journeys in

search of subject matter that Hunt advocates in his letter to William Michael Rossetti but,

in the end, abandoning his dedication to “truth to nature” and becoming merely a recorder

of curiosities). When we add to this consideration of Hunt’s words our knowledge of his

intense awareness of notions of performativity, which he demonstrates in other arenas

during his trip, it becomes even more apparent that his division of artists into two

categories—“caper-cutter[s]” and “sign-post[s]”—is a reflection of this fear on Hunt’s

part that his attempt at realism may be reduced to a kind of sham, an effort to maintain

outwardly his devotion to Pre-Raphaelite conceptions of realism while simultaneously

being forced to admit—at least to himself—that such a pursuit is impossible.

Hunt wrote nothing in his Dead Sea diary on the day following this painful

realization, but, while still at Usdoom two days later, he speaks of “labour[ing]

ceaselessly” (JRUL 1210.12), so, at some point in the intervening period, he moved on

from his desire to abandon the painting altogether. However, Hunt, whom so many

critics describe as “the true Pre-Raphaelite” for his endless, vocal insistence on painting

“on the spot,” has clearly been forced to abandon such a notion at this point, for he

writes, “I did not complete much but I worked at parts which may be filled in from

memory” (JRUL 1210.12). Moreover, in the diary entry from the following day, Hunt

explicitly states that he will finish The Scapegoat at a later date, admitting,

What is done already inclines me to continue it at home in hopes of making a

picture of some interest in its components. it would not all be painted so

scrupulously from nature as I should like but at least I have made every exertion

to obtain the proper opportunity and some truth in its features must be the result I

hope. (JRUL 1210.13)
In the midst of Hunt’s new-found determination to continue *The Scapegoat* despite its not being completed at Usdoom, Hunt’s continuing ambivalence toward the work—and toward his own status as a proponent of Pre-Raphaelite realism—is evident in the tepidness and uncertainty of his language; his use of words and expressions like *in hopes*, *some interest*, and *some truth* suggests that the conflict between realism and performance that is evident in his earlier comments about the “caper-cutter” and the “sign-post” is still a predominating concern for the artist days later.

Predictably, Hunt, who frequently spoke of the ideals of Pre-Raphaelitism to Europeans whom he met abroad,\(^{196}\) did not publicize the fact that the only Middle Eastern oil painting that he completed while he remained abroad was not finished entirely by P. R. B. principles, and his deliberate misrepresentation of the status of the work in the R. A. catalogue, in which, as I noted earlier, he explicitly describes the canvas as having been “painted at Oosdoom” (qtd. in Bendiner, “Scapegoat” 128), further attempts to preserve the illusion, upon which the project of realism is based, that the “real” is singular and indelibly present rather than a composite of many different realities assembled by the artist. On one level, Hunt may have inserted this statement into the catalogue entry in order to alleviate his concerns about the marketability of the painting by highlighting its originality and the danger inherent in its creation, for the artist had worried before the exhibition that a Middle-Eastern work might not be desirable to an English public inundated with negative reports of the Crimean War (JRUL 1213.8) and was also concerned that the painting might not meet the aesthetic expectations of his audience. But, on another level, Hunt’s retroactive insistence on describing the painting as an

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\(^{196}\) Hunt’s diary and letters suggest that he discussed Pre-Raphaelitism with a number of people he encountered in the Middle East, including some officers on his ship in the Crimea (JRUL 1211.188) and, as I mentioned earlier, Robert Napier (JRUL 1383.8).
example of the directions in which Pre-Raphaelite fidelity to nature could be taken functions as a marker of his continuing ambivalence toward the work and its implications for his career.

In a letter to Thomas Combe that he wrote from Jaffa before *The Scapegoat’s* first exhibition in London, Hunt declares, “it is a curious picture. sometimes this fact has encouraged, and at other times discouraged me” (JRUL 1213.10), and this inability to evaluate the work is also evident in a later letter to Martha Combe. Writing from Jerusalem, Hunt tells her, “I had been waiting very anxiously to hear your opinion of the first of my experimental pictures and one which had cost me so much pains [sic] in the true sense of the word” (JRUL 1213.11). His use of the word “experimental” links the painting to the work of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as a whole in its attempt to re-shape the expectations of the mid-nineteenth-century art world, but the term also suggests Hunt’s uncertainty about both the potential outcome of his work on the individual painting and the canvas’s complication of his larger decision to leave England and apply Pre-Raphaelite techniques to a broader spectrum of subjects. His anxiety “to hear [her] opinion” of the first work he sent back to England from the Middle East serves as a subtle reminder of the career-related doubts that plagued Hunt throughout his travels and implies that this “experiment” of two years’ travel could end in artistic failure and professional ignominy as easily as it might end in fame and success.

Hunt expresses these concerns about the painting and its relationship to his career only in a private context to his close friends, but his claim in the R. A. catalogue that *The Scapegoat* had been painted entirely at the Dead Sea suggests that the deliberately selective self-representation that is so evident in Hunt’s later writing—and in
the photographed reenactment of the painting of *The Scapegoat*—had already begun by the time of the painting’s first exhibition in 1856. Moreover, since this painting was both the first example seen by the public of the kind of realistic religious canvases that, it was rumoured, the artist had gone to the Holy Land to paint and also his first major, finished attempt at demonstrating how Pre-Raphaelite ideals could be applied to different subjects and backgrounds, it is not surprising that Hunt’s catalogue description focuses on the way in which this work represents his aesthetic ideals; his reference to the completion of the work on site, despite its questionable accuracy, may be seen as a rewriting of events that publicly offers a subtle rebuttal to Hunt’s acquaintances, like Egg, D. G. Rossetti, Ruskin, and Patmore, who attempted to persuade the artist of the aesthetic uselessness of his journey, while obscuring the fact that such critics of his decision might, at least in the case of this one painting, have been correct.

Judging from the amount of time Hunt spent in his later career mythologizing the creation of *The Scapegoat* in text and image, it is safe to say that the artist considered the painting an important one. As we have seen from the account of Hunt’s visit to the Dead Sea in his diary, the genesis of the painting epitomizes many of the ideals and difficulties with which the artist was confronted from this early stage of his career. From an artistic or aesthetic perspective, the work demanded, in Hunt’s view, the stringent application of Pre-Raphaelite realism and accuracy, yet, when, as would happen in the future, Hunt was forced by external circumstances to admit that these demands that he placed upon his own work were at times impossible to satisfy, this realization led to a complete

197 Although Hunt consistently maintained his public stance of absolute representational and historical accuracy, similar situations arose while he worked on other, later paintings, like *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, in which Hunt based some of the decorative elements he incorporated not on Middle Eastern sources but on the Crystal Palace Alhambra at Sydenham and used models living in London (Holman-Hunt,
undermining of the rationale for his visit to the Dead Sea and, on a larger plane, his belief in the possibility of realism in art, which his subsequent public re-presentations of the work and the period of its creation attempt to conceal. The painting also demonstrates Hunt’s devotion to originality in art, since, as Bendiner notes, Hunt believed when he began the painting that the subject—and its typological implications—had never before been depicted (“Scapegoat” 124), and the topic of The Scapegoat indeed proved to be so obscure that some viewers who lacked the benefit of the catalogue’s explanation were unsure just what the work represented (Holman-Hunt, Grandfather 169-70). Finally, in terms of Hunt’s religious perspective, the painting depicts both his own orthodox view of the interrelationship between events in the Old and New Testaments and his belief in the literal reality of the biblical narrative, motifs that Hunt would employ in a number of future works, including his next religious painting, The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple, which he had begun in Jerusalem just prior to his visit to the Dead Sea (Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 43).

Perhaps because The Scapegoat is emblematic of these central aesthetic and religious concerns of Hunt’s career, the painting has garnered a significant amount of critical attention. Along with The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple, it is one of the two most frequently discussed paintings that Hunt worked on during his 1854-6 travels, and, in scholarly writing, it certainly overshadows the two non-religious Egyptian-themed oil paintings that Hunt also began during this trip, The Afterglow in Egypt and A Street Grandfather 169; Amor 151), and The Miracle of Sacred Fire, which was “painted almost four decades after Hunt witnessed the ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1855” (Barringer, Reading 127).

Bendiner also observes that Hunt later “became somewhat upset when he learned that the scapegoat subject had already been delineated by Jemima Blackburn, a minor illustrator” (“Scapegoat” 124). In an 1855 letter to Combe from Jerusalem, Hunt acknowledges this other design but still insists upon the originality of his own work, saying, “How curious that an etching of the Scapegoat should have been made since the subject as I believe has never be [sic] done before. I don’t care for any thing that could be designed in England as the interest of the illustration depends upon the locality so much” (JRUL 1213.5).
Scene in Cairo: The Lantern-Maker’s Courtship (1861), both of which I will discuss in Chapter Five. However, even though the painting itself has received so much critical attention, Hunt’s relatively brief diary of the creation of The Scapegoat can provide us with additional important insights into the artist’s Middle Eastern experiences. The Scapegoat is the only work that Hunt undertook during his time in the Holy Land that necessitated such a prolonged and dangerous venture away from an urban area, and it is also the only work from the period of his Middle Eastern travels for which Hunt describes his anxieties and uncertainties in such great detail. As I have demonstrated, Hunt’s private descriptions of his experiences during the painting of The Scapegoat serve as a thematic microcosm of the issues raised by his entire sojourn in the Holy Land. In his journal, Hunt, amidst his isolation and determination to preserve his novel experience in writing, offers a prolonged discussion of his beliefs, uncertainties, and anxieties about religion and morality, nationalism, and art and realism, and we do not often see such an unflinching questioning of these issues so central to Hunt—and to his later reputation—in the other diary and letters written during the rest of his time in the Holy Land. It is because of this unusual openness that the Dead Sea journal provides invaluable insight into Hunt’s attitudes and experiences while in the area and effectively complicates any notion of the artist as “the paradigm of the Orientalist explorer-adventurer-author” (Boime 94). Indeed, Hunt’s writing demonstrates that, although his thoughts of the region and its inhabitants were shaped by his previous acquaintance with certain tropes of

199 Scholarly articles focusing on The Scapegoat appeared as early as 1968, when interest in the Pre-Raphaelites as a whole was just beginning to develop. For the earliest article centred on the work, see Sussman’s “Hunt, Ruskin, and ‘The Scapegoat.’” Landow devotes a lengthy discussion to the painting in William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism (101-13), and, more recently, Bendiner’s essay “William Holman Hunt’s ‘The Scapegoat’” and, especially, Boime’s article “William Holman Hunt’s The Scapegoat: Rite of Forgiveness/Transference of Blame” have offered detailed analyses of the various levels of meaning inherent in the work. Bronkhurst’s catalogue offers an excellent examination of the painting and a list of the numerous authors who have discussed it (1: 179-81).
Orientalism, Hunt was by no means secure in his position as a “manly” English
proponent of artistic realism, and his writing consistently reveals his awareness of the
need to perform his role—whether as an Englishman or as a Pre-Raphaelite devotee of
realism—in order to achieve the status and reputation he desires.
Chapter Five

“THE DICTATOR OF HIS OWN TERMS”?:
CONSTRUCTIONS OF SELFHOOD, IDENTITY, AND DIFFERENCE
IN WILLIAM HOLMAN HUNT’S 1854 EGYPTIAN LETTERS AND PAINTINGS

Although the emphasis placed on William Holman Hunt’s first visit to the Holy Land by scholars and by the artist himself has raised this year-and-a-half-long portion of his career to quasi-mythological status, the preceding chapter attempted to deconstruct this myth and present a more complex reading of Hunt’s time in the Holy Land and, particularly, at the Dead Sea by focusing on the incidents that he leaves out of or alters in the published re-presentation of his travels there. As I demonstrated, Hunt omits from his later textual and visual accounts of his journey in Palestine many of the events that throw his retrospectively developed sense of artistic, moral, and national purpose into question. But another important aspect of Hunt’s later accounts of his journey is that they largely seem to overlook the fact that the artist’s first experiences in the Middle East did not take place in Palestine but in Egypt, where Hunt spent three months from February to May 1854. During this period, Hunt lived in both Cairo and Giza, and, upon his departure for Jerusalem, he sailed down the Nile from Cairo through the city of Seminood to the port of Damietta. Yet, despite the fact that this portion of Hunt’s travels represents a significant part of the time that the artist spent in the Middle East, only one scholarly article—Judith Bronkhurst’s 1998 essay “William Holman Hunt’s Visits to Egypt: Passion, Prejudice and Truth to Nature”—focuses solely on Hunt’s relationship to Egypt. Indeed, it seems certain that the artist himself contributed to this paucity of discussion of his time in
Egypt. Hunt devotes only twenty-five pages of *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* to his visit to the country, which is a particularly small section compared to the nearly two hundred pages he allots to his time in the Holy Land. Moreover, Hunt seems to have been a less dedicated letter-writer during his visit to Egypt, and he appears not to have kept a diary, as he did during the latter part of his travels.

However, as Bronkhurst’s article emphasizes, 1854 was “the artist’s most prolific year” (29), and this fact is due in large part to the significant number of paintings and drawings that Hunt either completed or began during his three months in Egypt. For instance, it was during this period that Hunt started to work on his first two Eastern oil paintings, *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern-Maker’s Courtship* (1861)200 and *The Afterglow in Egypt* (1864), and he also executed a surprisingly large number of watercolour drawings and pencil and pen sketches. In fact, Bronkhurst’s essay specifically characterizes Hunt’s artistic productions during this first part of his Middle Eastern travels as “a tremendous outburst of creative energy” (27), and this description alone suggests the importance of providing a more carefully detailed analysis of these works than they have heretofore received. Building on the foundation of Chapter Four’s examination of Hunt’s later self-representations, this chapter will expand my discussion of Hunt in the Middle East to consider the artist’s three months in Egypt as the root of the kinds of uncertainties that, as we have seen, he faced in the Holy Land. Much of this dissertation has focused on the notion of retrospective reconstructions of careers and ideals—whether in the context of William Michael Rossetti’s elision of young Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s imitation of Raphael’s cartoon, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s own rewriting of the 1850 version of “The Burden of Nineveh” to remove its more confrontational

200 The dates provided after paintings indicate, once again, the first date of exhibition.
passages, and, of course, Hunt’s conversion of his complicated experiences in the Holy
Land into the cohesive narrative of *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite
Brotherhood*. Thus, it seems not only important but logical to investigate in this final
chapter another period of Hunt’s career that has largely gone uncommented on by both
the artist and subsequent critics but that formed the foundation of his travels to the Holy
Land, which, as we have seen, are so frequently considered central to his *oeuvre*.

There are a number of possible reasons for Hunt’s own subsequent lack of
attention to his time in Egypt, and the most obvious of these is that he largely overlooked
it within his own account of his career since it did not conform to his retrospectively
constructed narrative of a lifelong desire to go to the Holy Land to paint biblical
canvases, which I discussed in Chapter Four. Another reason for Hunt’s reticence may
be that a visit to Egypt in the mid-1850s simply did not have the same aura of adventure
and bravery as a trip to the Holy Land did because Egypt had already become by this
period the first site of mass tourism “outside Europe and North America” (Hazbun 23).
Indeed, if, as literary critic James Buzard suggests in *The Beaten Track: European
Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918*, our notion of travel as an
admirable endeavour is predicated on “the practical difficulties involved in independent
travel” (33), then the ease with which European visitors poured into Cairo as early as the
1840s (Gregory, “Between” 31) would certainly have made journeys to Egypt seem less
exotic and exciting. In fact, as we shall see, one of the main themes of Hunt’s
correspondence from Egypt is his effort to distance himself from the many Europeans
around him by his constant insistence that he is not in Egypt to have a holiday but to
work, and this attempt to differentiate himself is evident not just in his disdain for his
fellow travelers but in his negative attitude towards both Egypt and its monuments, particularly the standard touristic sites of the Pyramids and the Sphinx. Hunt was also well aware not just of other European visitors but, as I suggested in the previous chapter, of certain British artists, such as John Frederick Lewis and David Roberts, who had preceded him to the Middle East. Lewis and Roberts, in particular, had spent a significant amount of time in Egypt and produced popular and widely-known representations of the Egyptian people and landscape. I will discuss these two artists in more detail later in this chapter, but, for now, it is important to note that Hunt knew during his time in Egypt—and afterward, when he wrote the definitive account of his career—that he needed to distinguish himself from these other artists in order to establish his own originality, just as he attempted to do during his time in the Holy Land.

These efforts by Hunt to define his own identity in contrast to his fellow European travelers and artists were also complicated by the artist’s desire to keep himself distinct from the local inhabitants of Cairo and Giza, an effort that would prove increasingly difficult because of Hunt’s keenness to use some of them as models for his artwork. Thus, even this preliminary discussion of Hunt’s anxiety to differentiate himself from various other groups suggests that this concern became an over-arching motif during Hunt’s time in Egypt. Indeed, the concept of “the anti-tourist tourist” that postcolonial critic Graham Huggan develops in his influential 2001 book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* is, I would argue, essential to our understanding of Hunt’s position during his three months in Egypt, for Hunt’s conception of other travelers and artists as, on the one hand, dilettantes only seeking pleasure and, on the other, as the
uninspired re-producers of touristic “‘sites’” and “‘sights’” (Gregory, “Scripting” 116)\textsuperscript{201} for audiences in Europe characterizes many of Hunt’s observations about Egypt. Moreover, one could even argue that Hunt’s repeated attempts to emphasize his own distinctness from the Egyptians function as a rejection of the kind of effort to “blend in” that characterized John Frederick Lewis’s decade in Egypt, during which the artist adopted local customs and dress (Stevens, Orientalists 202). Thus, the stance of the anti-tourist tourist that Hunt embraces defines the ways in which he presents his Egyptian experiences in his letters, and it is clearly linked to the central issues of masculinity, artistic vocation, and nationhood that, as I have shown in Chapter Four, were also of such concern to Hunt during the time that he spent in the Holy Land. This chapter will investigate the many and multifaceted ways in which Hunt’s anti-tourist sentiment moulds the artist’s unpublished textual accounts of his three months in Egypt and will end by considering how this motif and the artist’s concomitant attitudes toward Egypt shape both A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern-Maker’s Courtship and The Afterglow in Egypt as well as the numerous—and infrequently discussed—watercolour works that Hunt executed during his stay in Cairo and Giza in 1854.

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Before beginning an examination of Hunt’s response to Egypt, it is, of course, essential to consider Huggan’s notion of the anti-tourist tourist in more detail. Huggan points to the frequency with which a sentiment of disdain for other tourists appears in the writing of travelers, and he notes that “[o]ne of the central ironies of tourism . . . is that it

\textsuperscript{201} Gregory uses these two homonyms in his discussion of “the ways in which travel writing is intimately involved in the ‘staging’ of particular places: in the simultaneous production of ‘sites’ that are linked in a time-space itinerary and ‘sights’ that are organized into a hierarchy of cultural significance” (“Scripting” 116).
is motivated in part by its own attempted negation—by tourists’ plaintive need to
dissociate themselves from other tourists” (179). He goes on to label the kind of traveler
who expresses this desire as “the anti-tourist tourist—the [person] who . . . might describe
himself as a traveler, not a tourist; as a researcher, not a holidaymaker . . .” (196). The
final phrase of Huggan’s definition, which outlines the anti-tourist tourist’s distinction
between “research” and “holiday,” perfectly describes, as I shall demonstrate, Hunt’s
attitude during his time in Egypt, and Hunt’s frequent reiteration—throughout his travels—of his separation from other tourists suggests the precarious nature of this
construction of himself, which is based on a distinction that is ever-present in the mind of
the anti-tourist tourist but not always evident to an observer.

Huggan speaks of the anti-tourist tourist in a contemporary context, but this
phenomenon is not just a modern one. In The Beaten Track, which was published eight
years before Huggan’s work, Buzard offers a discussion of the tendency of many
nineteenth-century voyagers to define themselves as “travelers” as opposed to “tourists,”
and he argues that the word and concept of “tourist” had already acquired a pejorative
sense “by the middle of the nineteenth century” (1). According to Buzard, the word
“tourist” carried with it a host of assumptions about “a personality profile, a life-style,
perhaps a class identification, and a host of scenarios in which ‘the tourist’ performs
some characteristic act” (1), and he goes on to note that the term was also frequently
associated with the negative traits of passivity, dependence on the guidance of others,
excessive caution, and homogeneity (1-2). Another text important to discussions of
conceptions of tourists and tourism, Dean MacCannell’s The Tourist: A New Theory of
the Leisure Class, approaches the issue from a sociological perspective and adds to our
understanding of the assumptions behind the word “tourist” by pointing out that tourists are often characterized as “being satisfied with superficial experiences of other peoples and other places” (10). MacCannell argues that such a valuation of these visitors is based on a “rhetoric of moral superiority” (9) on the part of anti-tourist tourists that is itself predicated on the idea that these visitors fail “to see everything the way it ‘ought’ to be seen” (10). From this account of Huggan’s, Buzard’s, and MacCannell’s discussions of the anti-tourist tourist, we can readily see that the opposition between “tourist” and “traveler” has never been a simple division but has always been loaded with the baggage of distinctions based on notions of class, intellect, and even morality.

Both Buzard and MacCannell focus on the idea that this differentiation between travelers and tourists allows one to contribute to or create conceptions of culture by establishing what should be seen and how these sites should be viewed, and I would like to build on this idea of the broader role that the touristic stereotype can play in a slightly different way in relation to Hunt. When we examine the ways in which Hunt depicts himself in opposition to tourists, we can see how this self-image contributes to the artist’s construction of selfhood and reflects repeated attempts to fix Hunt’s identity at a time when he was clearly concerned not just about his status as an artist but also about the rationale for his trip, the availability of subjects for paintings, his own masculinity, and his position as an Englishman in the Middle East.

As I demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Hunt, despite his later representations of himself, experienced a great deal of uncertainty about the purpose of his trip to the Middle East and what he should paint while abroad, but this indeterminacy that he experienced in the Holy Land was also preceded by larger concerns that began prior to
the artist’s arrival in Palestine—or in Egypt, for that matter. When Hunt arrived in Alexandria early in 1854, the artist’s life was a nexus of uncertainty. On a professional level, as I mentioned in Chapter Four, Hunt was forced to consider the validity of his friend Augustus Egg’s attempt to dissuade the Pre-Raphaelite from his travels by predicting that the artist would lose the professional reputation that he had worked so hard to establish in England (Hunt, “Fight” 825), and, on a more personal note, Hunt had departed for the Middle East in the midst of a rather complicated quasi-romantic entanglement that had seen him take a working-class woman named Annie Miller into his financial protection so that he could educate and eventually marry her.202 Added to these uncertainties is the fact that Hunt seems to have arrived in Egypt without a clear idea of what he wanted to do there or where he wanted to go afterward. Hunt followed the usual touristic trajectory of quickly moving from Alexandria to Cairo and joined his friend and pupil Thomas Seddon203 in the Egyptian capital, but, while the brief account of Hunt’s time in Egypt in the artist’s article for the Contemporary Review suggests a methodical visit that was characterized by research and labour in preparation for his “more serious work” in the Holy Land (“Fight” 828), the posthumously published biography of Seddon provides a vision of a more desultory attempt by Hunt to find a purpose for himself on his first prolonged excursion abroad. In a passage of a letter to his brother, Seddon speaks of Hunt’s “despair at the difficulty of getting any women to sit” (56) as models, a situation which, Seddon suggests, could have been overcome with more advanced planning on

202 Anne Clark Amor provides a detailed account of Hunt’s tumultuous relationship with Annie Miller throughout her biography of the artist. See especially 76, 102-4, 138, 141-2, 146, 151-6, 162-3, 167-8, 178-9, and 191.
203 Seddon (1821-1856) was not a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but he is, according to Bronkhurst, remembered now as “the quintessential ‘prosaic’ Pre-Raphaelite, committed to faithful transcription of historic landscape.” He also traveled to the Holy Land with Hunt and died in Cairo during his second visit to the city in 1856 (“Seddon”).
Hunt’s part, and Seddon goes on to note soon afterward that the two men’s plan of camping at Sinai so that Hunt could paint there had been abandoned because Hunt realized somewhat belatedly that he could not paint the image of the Old-Testament figure of Jacob departing from his father’s house that he had planned (61). In addition to these examples cited by Seddon, Hunt’s constant and sometimes unpredictable movements between camping at Giza and staying at a hotel in Cairo, which were often occasioned by his dissatisfaction with the living conditions at both places, serve as an indication of both the absence of a direct trajectory of the kind highlighted by Hunt’s *Contemporary Review* article and as a contrast to the period of intense activity in London that Hunt had just completed.\(^{204}\) All of these details of Hunt’s time in Egypt suggest that Hunt may have envisioned himself at this early stage of his travels as being defined by what he was unable to accomplish, and this lack of an immediate conception of this period’s significance to his artistic career may be another reason behind Hunt’s adoption of the anti-tourist stance. In other words, Hunt made use of this role for himself because he did not have a readily available means of defining himself and the reasons for his trip, and the stance of the anti-tourist tourist allowed him—if not exactly to define himself—at least to distinguish himself from that which he, at least in his own eyes, was not.

In many instances in his letters, the artist displays a very strong desire to separate himself from the average kind of sightseeing tourist, and, on these occasions, Hunt offers some very explicit statements of his disdain for other English people abroad. For example, he writes to Millais of harbouring such “a desire to appear superior to the

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\(^{204}\) Hunt had to postpone his departure for the East on several occasions because of uncompleted work and, according to his autobiography, completed *The Awakening Conscience* on the same day that he left London en route to Paris (1: 365).
cockney visitors” (JRUL 1216.19) that he delays visiting the Pyramids, and his memoir refers to Hunt’s frustration with his traveling companion and fellow artist Thomas Seddon for committing the typical tourist’s act of writing both his own and Hunt’s names at the top of the Great Pyramid (1: 383). Hunt wants to ensure that he is not taken by anyone—whether fellow visitors or friends and artists in England—as an average tourist. Similarly, in an unpublished letter to James Clarke Hook, a landscape artist, Hunt subtly differentiates between tourists and painters. He describes his “curious” living arrangements at Giza, explaining, “a cave hewn in the rock, and perhaps for two thousand years a dark tomb, is my place of abode. this is no novelty however so many travelers in the present day do the same to some extent, but I have another tomb—a short distance from here which because it is open in front—I use as a studio” (JRUL 1216.8). With this description, Hunt acknowledges that he is not unlike other tourists in living in an ancient tomb, but he also clearly points out that, in addition to his living space, he has a dedicated working area, thereby reminding Hook that the primary purpose of his visit to Giza is work and not a mere holiday. Hunt continues this emphasis on his labour in another letter to his patron Thomas Combe, in which Hunt ironically declares that his time at Giza would be “the most delightful thing in the world” (qtd. in Stevens, Orientalists 187) if it were a vacation instead of a working trip. Here, the artist’s words once again remind his reader both of the clear distinction that Hunt makes between the rigours associated with his own work and the relaxation enjoyed by other visitors and of

205 As in the preceding chapter, the acronym JRUL is employed to indicate manuscripts in the collections of the John Rylands University Library, Manchester. The manuscripts will also be identified in the manner described earlier with the first number indicating the catalogue number and the digits after the period representing the folio number.

206 Hook (1819-1907) began his career painting historical subjects but gradually shifted to landscapes. He was made Associate of the Royal Academy in 1850 (Barringer, “Hook”).
Huggan’s discussion of the contrast that the anti-tourist tourist repeatedly draws between “a traveler” and “a tourist,” a “researcher” and “a holidaymaker” (196).

It is worth noting that, in their emphasis on Hunt’s status as a worker, the artist’s anti-tourist sentiments may even have had a larger significance beyond that of the contrast between tourist and traveler. Buzard argues that conceptions of the tourist were often linked in the nineteenth century to notions of femininity because of their emphasis on the typical tourist’s passivity, dependence, and need for protection (1-2, 82). As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, Hunt was already highly aware during his travels of perceptions of the artistic profession as a feminine pursuit that did not participate in “the bourgeois model of manhood as active engagement in the commercial and technological world” (Sussman, Masculinities 39), so we can also consider his repeated claims that he is a working traveler rather than a tourist not only as an adoption of the common prejudice against tourists but also as a subtle assertion of his own masculinity through an indication of his status as a purposeful worker.

In his desire to separate himself from other tourists, Hunt partakes of a trend that was hardly unusual among visitors to the Middle East—and to Egypt, in particular—during this period. As Bugler notes, arranged tours of Egypt were possible as early as the 1840s, and the increasing popularity of “organized tourism . . . allowed those who traveled independently the luxury of a certain sense of superiority” (29-30). Indeed, the fact that anti-tourist sentiments had become a staple of narratives of Egyptian travel is apparent when we consider that, four years before Hunt’s visit to Egypt, Gustave Flaubert had also complained in a letter to his mother of other travelers’ tendency to write their names on monuments (160) and characterized these actions as, in the words of Dennis.
Porter’s discussion of Flaubert in the Orient, a “futile gesture” and “a kind of poor man’s claim to fame and immortality” (182-3). 207

Interestingly, Hunt takes this construction of himself as a superior kind of visitor even farther, for he seems to want to distinguish himself not just from other tourists but from other types of artists, as well. During the nineteenth century, there was a distinct and widely accepted hierarchy of artistic genres, in which still lifes and animal paintings were considered the least serious or important of subjects while history painting was generally “deemed to be the highest form of art” (Cherry 57). Landscape painting, situated between these extremes, had neither the highest nor the lowest status, and, before the widespread use of photography, the Middle East drew a significant number of landscape artists hoping to find novel subjects in the area. 208 However, Hunt, in spite of his general disdain for the opinions promulgated by the Royal Academy, seems to have shared in the institution’s generic hierarchization, for he wrote in a letter to Millais from Egypt, “The country is very rich and attractive, but I am inclined to mislike it on that account, for I have no patience with the Fates when they tempt me to become a paysagiste [landscape painter]” (qtd. in Amor 111). Hunt goes on to reiterate his disdain for landscape painting in the same epistle, declaring that “it is difficult to refuse making a sketch of [the Pyramids] . . . but I would rather give the time otherwise.” Hunt portrays any urge he may have to depict the landscape as a temptation to be avoided, and his second statement suggests that he would consider a painting of the Pyramids as a waste of

207 Flaubert writes, “In the temples we read travelers’ names; they strike us as petty and futile. We never write ours; there are some that must have taken three days to carve, so deeply are they cut in the stone. There are some that you keep meeting everywhere—sublime persistence of stupidity” (160).
208 For a brief account of landscape artists traveling to the Middle East before the spread of photography, see Warner 32; for a discussion of the effect of these travels upon the conventions of landscape art, see Stevens, “Western” 19-20.
time that could be utilized for more important work, such as, perhaps, the two subject-pictures that he began while in Egypt. In a later letter to Millais, Hunt again declares his lack of desire to paint the scenery, lamenting, “The country offers nothing to me but landscapes . . . you know I want figures” (qtd. in Holman-Hunt, Grandfather 124).

Hunt, immersed as he was in the British art world, would no doubt have had the works of particular artists in mind when he criticized the tendency to rely on Egyptian landscapes for material, and chief among these artists would have been David Roberts, who, as I mentioned in the preceding chapter, achieved fame in the 1840s with his six-volume book of lithographs entitled The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia. The Egyptian segment of this series, which was based on Roberts’ original sketches, consists of hundreds of illustrations of “virtually every monument of note . . . , many from several viewpoints” (Stevens, Orientalists 223), which tourists traveled up and down the Nile to see, and the illustrations make rather traditional use of human “figures”—which Hunt insists that he wants to focus on—as tiny elements of the composition that function only to highlight the massive scale of the deserts and ruined temples that Roberts depicts. Following the hierarchy of artistic genres common to this period, Hunt would have likely looked on these works as admirable for their attempt to paint “on site” but, nevertheless, as a less serious form of art than figures painted in oil. Moreover, in Hunt’s eyes, emulating Roberts’ work would undermine his own devotion to the ideal of demonstrating how Pre-Raphaelite principles might be taken in new directions independent of those adopted by other artists (Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 29).

Another well-known artist that Hunt certainly had in mind at this time is John Frederick Lewis, whom I also discussed in Chapter Four. In a letter to Thomas Seddon
that Hunt wrote a few months prior to his own arrival in Egypt, the artist makes a direct reference to meeting Lewis “within a week or so” that attests to his familiarity with the work of his predecessor (Landow, “Seddon” 152), who was actually the complete opposite of Roberts in his emphasis on figures and on the kind of exotic domestic scenes (Bendiner, “Lewis”) that he had experienced during his lengthy residence in Cairo. However, as art historian Kenneth Bendiner emphasizes, the artist was not known for realistic portrayals of these scenes (“Lewis”), and, in fact, Lewis’ Orientalist oil paintings were not created in Egypt at all but in England after the artist’s return from his residency in the Middle East (Stevens, Orientalists 202), facts which would easily have negated any desire that Hunt may have once had to emulate Lewis.

Like Hunt’s anti-tourist stance, the artist’s determination to avoid the kind of Orientalist painting characterized by these two British artists reminds us that, while Hunt was not certain of the kind of painting he would be able to accomplish in Egypt (and the Middle East as a whole), he had a distinct conception of that which he did not want to do. Yet, even in the midst of his determination, as he told Millais, to paint “figures,” Hunt’s conception of what was possible for him as an artist became complicated by the difficulties that he encountered in finding models, and the artist was, in fact, forced to overturn his disdain for the “paysagiste” and draw a number of landscapes himself.

Stevens mentions that “Hunt’s output in . . . watercolours was prolific” during his second visit to Giza in late April and early May of 1854 because the artist was waiting for a “box of materials, including the canvas for The Afterglow in Egypt” to arrive from England (Orientalists 187), but this delayed shipment does not account for the drawings and other watercolours that Hunt executed at both Cairo and Giza prior to this second
visit. In fact, Bronkhurst’s characterization, which I cited earlier, of Hunt’s time in Egypt as “a tremendous outburst of creative energy” (“Passion” 27) provides a more comprehensive view of Hunt’s three months in Egypt that more accurately represents the eight separate watercolour paintings that Hunt produced at various points during his stays in both Cairo and Giza. These watercolours became moderately well known in England after Hunt’s return. One of them—*The Sphinx, Gizeh, Looking towards the Pyramids of Sakhrara*—was exhibited alongside *The Scapegoat* at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1856 (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 43), and both this work and another watercolour, *Cairo: Sunset on the Gebel Mokattum*,209 were shown at an exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite work in Russell Place the following year (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 2: 48, 50). Some of these Egyptian watercolours also likely formed the basis for Hunt’s election in 1869 as an “honorary associate member of the Old Water-Colour Society” (Staley 76), where he exhibited other watercolours in 1869, 1870, 1879, and in later years (Staley 76, 78).210 Hunt’s autobiography does not mention his election to this group, his role on its council, or the numerous exhibitions organized by it in which he participated,211 and this omission is reasonable if we keep in mind Chapter Four’s discussion of Hunt’s careful retrospective shaping of his career and, moreover, his desire to be remembered as a serious religious artist at a time when figure and history painting occupied a much

209 This painting was originally called *Sketch from a House in New Ca. [sic] Looking towards the Gebel Mokattam*, but it quickly acquired the shorter title by which it is known today (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 2: 48-9).

210 Bronkhurst notes that Hunt was elected to the O. W. S. without officially submitting his name for consideration (*Catalogue* 1:29) “on the strength of” another watercolour called *Il Ponte Vecchio, Firenze* (1868) (*Catalogue* 1: 17). However, because Hunt had also exhibited some of his Egyptian watercolours by 1869, I think that it is safe to say that these works contributed to the society’s decision to declare him an associate member.

“higher status” among artists than landscapes, which “seemed devoted primarily to pleasing the eye” (Prettejohn 174).

Scholars other than Staley have largely followed the artist’s lead in paying much less attention to Hunt’s watercolours than to his oil paintings. Apart from the obvious example of Bronkhurst’s catalogue raisonné and her article on Hunt in Egypt, accounts of Hunt’s career have tended to overlook these smaller productions in a different medium. For example, none of Hunt’s Egyptian watercolours are reproduced or even mentioned in either George P. Landow’s landmark 1979 study William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism or in Tim Barringer’s more recent Reading the Pre-Raphaelites, and Mary Bennett’s catalogue that accompanied the 1969 Hunt retrospective exhibition in Liverpool places the watercolours in the subsection entitled “Drawings” (72-4) and provides commentary only for Cairo: Sunset on the Gebel Mokattum (73). Two books that do discuss these works are Staley’s Pre-Raphaelite Landscape and Stevens’s The Orientalists, but it is fair to say that Hunt’s Egyptian watercolours are included in these books more for the fact that they illuminate a trend—Victorian landscape paintings in the former work and English Orientalism in the latter—than for their value to the career of Hunt himself.

In order for contemporary scholars to develop a full view of the influence of Hunt’s Middle Eastern travels on the artist, these Egyptian watercolours need to be included in accounts of his career rather than separated from it as anomalies. As I have shown, despite Hunt’s later ambivalence with regard to these works, they were known to his contemporaries from several exhibitions, and, because these watercolours represent the first paintings that Hunt completed during his first Middle Eastern journey, they ought
to form a central part of discussions of Hunt in the East. In this chapter, I want to overcome this critical deficiency by examining the watercolours within the framework of Hunt’s textual accounts of his experiences in Egypt, but, before I can examine the paintings themselves, I will return to a more detailed discussion of Hunt’s anti-tourist stance, which offers a useful starting point for understanding these works that are so often overlooked.

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It was Hunt’s combined attitude toward tourists and toward other artists and genres that led to his overwhelming disdain for the usual sites of admiration by visitors and representation by artists—the Pyramids. In fact, as I suggested earlier, this theme frequently recurs in Hunt’s correspondence from Egypt. In a letter written to Dante Gabriel Rossetti after his first stay at the Pyramids, Hunt sarcastically describes the monuments as “the three blocks” (Lutyens 58), and, in another epistle to Millais written from Cairo four days later, he unequivocally declares, “the pyramids themselves are, as one always knew extremely ugly blocks and arranged with most unpicturesque taste. . . . There are palm trees about which attract my passing admiration but for all else one might as well sketch in Hackney Marsh” (qtd. in Holman-Hunt, Grandfather 122). Hunt’s earlier description of the Pyramids to Rossetti clearly established the artist’s disdain by wresting the renowned monuments from their historical context and reducing them to featureless and meaningless heaps of stone, but the language that Hunt employs in the letter to his close friend Millais highlights even more clearly the extents to which Hunt would go to separate his own experiences from those of other tourists and artists. Once again, he depicts the monuments as dehistoricized “blocks,” but his statement that “one
always knew” their underwhelming nature is a positive assertion of Hunt’s distance from other tourists in a variety of ways.

The Pyramids at Giza were, of course, one of the most important tourist attractions in Egypt, and Florence Nightingale, who visited them during her 1849-50 tour of Egypt, wrote in letters to her family both of the obligatory nature of touring the Pyramids (168) and of the fact that “everybody knows [them] by picture” (178). Thus, Hunt’s statement to Millais that he “always knew” that the Pyramids were “ugly” at once suggests the distinction he wants to create between himself and other tourists in Egypt, who—he assumes in a typical anti-touristic stance—are “dupe[s] of fashion” (Buzard 1) enamoured of the ancient tombs simply because they have been told that they should be, but also, interestingly, makes this distinction retroactively by hinting that even before he arrived in Egypt he was superior to other visitors because he was not drawn to the region by the predictable lure of these sites.

Yet at the same time that Hunt makes this implicit effort to place his own viewpoints and experiences in opposition to those of other tourists, his words also hint that he cannot escape from the discourse of travel and tourism that he apparently has so much animosity towards. Indeed, Hunt’s reference to this prior knowledge of the Pyramids’ ugliness shows that, even before setting foot in Egypt, he, like every other visitor, was already very much immersed within the intertextual nature of the discourse of Orientalism, which, in Edward Said’s description, relies on “the restorative citation of antecedent authority” (176). In fact, as geographer Derek Gregory’s important 1999 article “Scripting Egypt: Orientalism and the Cultures of Travel” notes in its opening lines, a plethora of travel literature about Egypt already existed as early as 1845 (114),
and Hunt himself alludes to this burgeoning discourse in an 1855 letter to William Michael Rossetti, which speaks of “the thousand books of travel that come out every year” (qtd. in Staley 105). Gregory goes on to argue that these texts, which familiarized their readers with touristic “‘sites’” and “‘sights’” (116), helped to shape in advance visitors’ reactions to and constructions of their experiences while traveling so that “each trip in its turn contribute[d] to the layering and sedimentation of powerful imaginative geographies that shape (though they do not fully determine) the expectations and experiences of subsequent travelers” (117). Moreover, as both Said and Gregory suggest through their respective descriptions of the textual nature of Orientalism as a field of knowledge based on the citation of previous authors (Said 176-7) and as a process of “scripting,” many places visited by Europeans in Egypt (and other parts of the Middle East) came to occupy the western imagination as places represented in a text rather than actual sites.

Indeed, Hunt’s declaration that, even after seeing the Pyramids firsthand, his earlier low opinion of them remains unchanged demonstrates the extent to which the artist’s estimation of the monuments was not formed by the objects themselves but by earlier European textual and visual representations of them. Said writes of this phenomenon in relation to the Middle East as a whole, and it is helpful to borrow his description of a more generalized pattern to point out that, for Hunt, the Pyramids are “less a place than . . . a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that [seem] to have [their] origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone’s work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these” (177). In other words, Hunt cannot react to the Pyramids as though he is seeing them for the first
time because, for him, they are immured in earlier visitors’ re-presentations of them.

Thus, while Hunt’s assertion to Millais that “one always knew” of the Pyramids’ ugliness distances Hunt in his own mind from the stereotypical British tourist in Egypt, his statement also simultaneously undercuts that distinction by reminding the reader how pervasive and inescapable the discourse of Orientalist travel actually is.

It is worth noting that other elements of Hunt’s description of the Pyramids to Millais also occupy a similarly conflicted space and highlight Hunt’s deeply ambivalent relationship to the monuments, which becomes even clearer in the letters he wrote from Giza and, especially, in the watercolours that he completed nearby. When Hunt declares to his Pre-Raphaelite Brother that the Pyramids are “arranged with most unpicturesque taste,” his apparent intention is, once again, to differentiate himself from that which Hunt would view as the standard touristic response, but this statement, like the preceding one, subtly points to a conflict within Hunt’s own opinions. With the word “unpicturesque,” Hunt clearly alludes to the picturesque, “a set of aesthetic ideas about landscape and its depiction in art that flourished in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (“Picturesque”). The picturesque relied on very specific rules for depicting an outdoor scene, in which

> [t]he spectator’s eye is carefully directed to proceed from a foreground composed of . . . figures or fragments of ruined monuments, framed by trees, buildings or a projection of higher land, toward the middle distance containing the main subject of the view . . . , and finally to the background where land meets sky in a misty horizon. (Stevens, “Western” 19)

By the time of the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the picturesque was no longer as fashionable as it had been in the early part of the nineteenth century (“Picturesque”), but it had certainly left its mark on conventional depictions of landscape...
in British art even in the later period. In fact, in *Victorian Landscape Watercolors*, Scott Wilcox and Christopher Newall highlight the fact that the notion of the picturesque was still “lingering” in the British art world in the 1840s and continuing to “direct artists to favoured subjects and prompt them to treat the forms of nature according to established conventions” (32), such as those Stevens describes.

Because the picturesque relied heavily on such conventionalized depictions of scenery, those who wished to represent nature in this way were, as literary critic Alison Byerly notes, frequently forced to engage in “ludicrous contrivance” (25) in order to depict the landscape in the way considered suitable by the picturesque style. It was due in part to this stifling need to fit any scene into a particular preconceived mould that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood made a deliberate effort to turn away from picturesque principles in its members’ depictions of nature.

Because early Pre-Raphaelite art was so fundamentally in conflict with the widespread conventions of the picturesque, it is surprising that Hunt would employ the word “unpicturesque” to evaluate the Pyramids since his use of the term seems to reinscribe the more conventional construction of the landscape that the picturesque ideal embraces. However, this conflict in Hunt’s mind between Pre-Raphaelite ideology and more standard forms of artistic representation may point to the fact that Hunt, like many other artists who traveled to the Middle East in this period, realized on some level that the sights he saw in Egypt did not easily fit into European models of visual representation. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, Deborah Cherry points to Barbara Leigh Smith’s realization of this fact during her visit to Algeria as emblematic of the experiences of many other artist-travelers (75), and, in a similar vein, Stevens’ discussion of the
picturesque in relation to nineteenth-century British Orientalist art highlights the fact that a number of artists, including David Roberts and Hunt’s friend Edward Lear, had to adapt elements of the picturesque style in order to depict the Egyptian landscapes at Giza and Philae (“Western” 19). Thus, this gap between one’s usual style of visual representation and its inadequacy to convey fully an Egyptian scene may be one reason for Hunt’s rather uncharacteristic confusion of his usual Pre-Raphaelite mode of seeing with other artistic conventions that he would have considered inimical to it.

As the preceding paragraphs suggest, Hunt’s assertions to Millais and Rossetti of the “ugly” and “unpicturesque” nature of the Pyramids are not simply the product of a strong anti-tourist sentiment; they also, through a subtle undertext, point to Hunt’s own insecurities about his status as an anti-tourist tourist and, perhaps more importantly, suggest some uncertainty about the efficacy of European—and Pre-Raphaelite—modes of re-presenting Egyptian scenery. Hunt’s declaration to Millais in the same letter that only the palm trees “attract my passing admiration” attempts—consciously or otherwise—to reassert the primacy of nature to Pre-Raphaelite perception, but, because palm trees were already so much a part of European paintings that exoticized and Othered Egyptian landscapes, Hunt’s attraction to the trees also represents an anxious admission of his inability to escape the more conventional forms of landscape art that he ostensibly shuns. Given the way in which such uncertainties are interwoven throughout Hunt’s statements in this letter, one cannot help but wonder if the artist equates the scenery of the Pyramids with “Hackney Marsh,” an actual marsh near London, as a deliberate play on words that attempts to reestablish his opinion of the “hackneyed” nature of British touristic and

212 Since the late 1960s there has been a growing appreciation of Lear (1812-1888) as “a pioneering natural history draughtsman, as a powerful landscape painter . . . , and as a nonsense illustrator.” Lear first met Hunt in 1852 and became both a close friend and a student of the Pre-Raphaelite (Noakes).
artistic re-presentations of Egypt. Whatever the case may be, as I have shown, careful attention to the implications and subtexts of Hunt’s descriptions of the Pyramids to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and to Millais demonstrates that there is more at stake in these passages than disdainful sentiments towards tourists and other British artists. Indeed, reconsidering passages in Hunt’s letters that could easily be dismissed as straightforward anti-tourist sentiment allows readers to see the extent to which Hunt’s time in Egypt troubled his conceptions of his—and his art’s—status and purpose.

The Pyramids were clearly fraught with far more than touristic significance for Hunt, and, despite his repeated assertions of his dislike for them, these monuments reappear throughout the extant letters that the artist wrote from Egypt. Strange, although Hunt asked Millais to “[t]ear this up when you have read it” (JRUL 1216.19), Hunt chose to include the letter—along with the two illustrations that it contains—as a footnote to his description of Egypt in his memoir (1: 384-6). Incorporating transcriptions of letters (especially his own) into the text is a rarity within Hunt’s autobiography, but it seems that Hunt used this fifty-year-old account of his visit to the interior of the Pyramids as a way of claiming authority for himself in two ways. First, the letter functions as documentary evidence of his own firsthand knowledge of the Pyramids—and proof of his visit; as Gregory notes, “Recording information and impressions in diaries and notebooks [and, presumably, letters] served . . . to authenticate

213 Of course, the presence of the Pyramids in so many of the letters that are still in existence could be due to the fact that the letters’ recipients may have been more likely to retain correspondence written from and describing such world-famous sites. However, the sheer amount of energy that Hunt devotes to the descriptions of the Pyramids in his correspondence is, in my mind, sufficient to demonstrate the importance that the ancient monuments assumed for him during his three months in Egypt.
the presence of the tourist at the scene—and thereby confer representational authority” (“Scripting” 135). Second, presenting the epistle as a footnote creates a stylistic link between Hunt’s travel narrative and other Orientalist texts, which, as Said repeatedly points out in Orientalism, often contain a large number of notes and footnotes that quote from and refer to other Orientalist texts, thereby “reveal[ing] the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution” (24). Thus, the inclusion of the letter as a note lends additional authority to Hunt’s account by linking it to the style of authoritative Orientalist texts with which many of Hunt’s readers would also be familiar.

As it appears in Hunt’s autobiography, the letter begins by explicitly casting the artist as a figure superior to mere tourists; in the opening line, Hunt declares, “I never had any great admiration for the Pyramids such as most people manifest, and this, and perhaps a desire to appear superior to the cockney visitors, had made me leave the duty of particular examination to the last” (1: 384). Hunt clearly uses his purported lack of “great admiration” for the Pyramids to distinguish himself from “most people,” and he furthers this impression of his difference—and superiority—by referring to a visit to the tombs as a “duty” that he has put off instead of as a long-anticipated visit. Throughout the published version of the letter, Hunt continues to treat his excursion as a kind of task; he speaks of entering the edifice itself as “commencing my inner researches” (1: 384) and goes on to describe the experience as a kind of data-gathering exercise. In fact, his account focuses exclusively on factual information like the length and degree of incline of the various passageways (1: 384-5) and the measurements of the central chamber, which he finds disappointing because it is smaller than he expected (1: 386). Of course,
this emphasis on fact-gathering is yet another strategy that Hunt uses to highlight his own status as a masculine artist/researcher as opposed to a feminized tourist solely in search of picturesque experiences, and the placement of the letter as a footnote, while linking the text to the broader discourse of Orientalism, also minimizes the importance of Hunt’s visit to the Pyramids by suggesting that a description of the experience, which many readers would consider an essential component of an Egyptian travel narrative, is not a central aspect of his account of his time in Egypt.

However, despite these efforts to distinguish himself from other tourists and travel writers even within the published account, Hunt’s letter points to the ambivalence and constructed nature of his position as the anti-tourist tourist when he writes of his “desire to appear superior to the cockney visitors” (1: 384). This statement obviously relies on the class- and education-based prejudices against tourists that, according to Buzard, characterize anti-tourist sentiment (1), but the fact that Hunt describes the basis of his reluctance to tour the Pyramids as a “desire to appear superior” also amounts to an acknowledgment that, much as we saw in Chapter Four in terms of his position as an English artist, Hunt is fully aware not only of the performative nature of the role of the anti-tourist tourist but also of the necessity of constantly redrawing the blurring boundaries between himself and the other travelers around him. Moreover, his wish “to appear superior” goes even further to suggest that these distinctions between travelers are only based on appearances rather than actual fact.

This ambivalent stance is only briefly hinted at in the published version of Hunt’s letter to Millais, but Hunt’s relationship to other tourists—and, perhaps most importantly, to the Pyramids themselves—is actually elaborated much more fully in the manuscript
version of this letter to Millais, which is now in the collections of the John Rylands University Library. Although the version of this letter that is reprinted in Hunt’s autobiography is presented there as a virtually complete transcription with only two ellipses in three pages of text, the letter that was published is actually much shorter than the original version that was mailed to Millais. In the memoir, Hunt subtly changes the wording surrounding his comment about “cockney visitors” so that the words take on quite a different meaning than they originally had, and, more importantly, Hunt also leaves out both a page of meditations on the Great Pyramid that precedes the description of Hunt’s visit to its interior and another half-page that was added to the letter after he arrived in Jerusalem. These passages from the original letter offer a much more nuanced sense of Hunt’s relationship to other tourists and to the Pyramids than the excerpts of the epistle published in the memoir do, and they provide very necessary—but previously undiscussed—background to an examination of the two watercolours and five drawings containing the Pyramids that Hunt executed between February and May 1854.

As the preceding discussion suggests, the original version of Hunt’s letter does not begin with an explicit declaration of disdain for the Pyramids, as the version in his autobiography does, but even within this more private arena Hunt makes a subtle effort to distinguish himself—even if only in Millais’s and his own eyes—from the average tourist by implying his lack of interest in the ancient tombs. The letter that was actually sent to Millais opens by noting that Hunt “had been living within sight of the old pyramids for four months, and, within the shadow of them for some four weeks” (JRUL 1216.19), a fact which immediately stresses the artist’s lack of enthusiasm at the prospect of a closer view of the monuments. Moreover, he goes on to say that he was happy “to escape the
bother of arranging the manner and liabilities of my visit” since he “had to attend to a
great many matters both artistic and businesslike” before taking the tour because he left
his viewing of the Great Pyramid to the last possible moment before his departure from
Egypt. All of these statements serve to reinforce Hunt’s stance as an anti-tourist tourist,
but this persona that Hunt adopts for himself seems to slip away as Hunt moves
physically closer to the actual Pyramids.

After he describes his arrangement “with two of the Arabs” to lead him into the
pyramid, Hunt makes the comment about “cockney visitors.” However, whereas in the
published version of the letter Hunt attributes his lack of desire to visit the Pyramids to
both lack of “admiration” and his “desire to appear superior” to other travelers, the
wording in the original epistle is slightly different. Here, Hunt declares to Millais, “I
never had any of that great admiration for the pyramids which most people manifest, and
thus perhaps a desire to appear superior to the cockney visitors had made me leave the
duty to the last” (JRUL 1216. 19; emphasis added). Hunt’s original connection of the two
phrases with the words “and thus” places even more of an emphasis on the artist’s anti-
tourist stance by suggesting that it is the sole reason for both his lack of interest in the
Pyramids and his reluctance to visit them, while his description of his “desire to appear
superior” undercuts the uncertainty of this pose just as it does in the version of the letter
included in Hunt’s autobiography. In the published transcription of the letter, Hunt
abruptly ends this train of thought, and, after an ellipsis, moves on to a description of his
entrance into the Pyramid. However, the manuscript of the letter contains an additional
full page at this point that shows Hunt working through his conflicted relationship to the
Pyramids and developing, before he even enters the Great Pyramid, a distinctly personal view of the monument’s significance.

In fact, the passage of the letter that Hunt left out of his autobiography begins with a declaration that is surprising given the ideas expressed in the previous lines, for Hunt writes that his continual deferral of a tour of the Pyramids has actually caused him to gain “the advantage of a deeper interest in the matter” (JRUL 1216.19). In other words, Hunt’s determination to distance himself from the other Europeans visiting the monuments has, paradoxically, led to greater enthusiasm for the touristic site on his part, a fact which suggests the very unstable ground upon which the anti-tourist tourist’s definition of himself must stand. Hunt, of course, was neither the first nor the last to experience the anti-tourist tourist’s crisis of self-definition, which hinges on the fact that there is really no visible difference between the tourist and the anti-tourist tourist. Anti-tourist tourists are thus, as Buzard rightly points out, forced to distinguish themselves from other visitors by virtue of their own “purported inner difference” (153), often cast as a kind of greater knowledge or sensitivity, which is impossible to define and difficult to demonstrate without resorting to the types of touristic self-display that the anti-tourist tourist loathes (96-7). The vacillation in Hunt’s comments between outright scorn for “cockney visitors” and admissions—both implicit and explicit—that he is not so different from them reflects this instability and lack of concrete definition.

Moreover, Hunt’s ambivalence demonstrates that, in order to deal with the uncertainty of the role of the anti-tourist tourist, Hunt has adopted the technique of “role distance” that Buzard identifies as a common strategy among post-Romantic travelers.
Buzard, who borrows this concept from sociologist Erving Goffman, incorporates Goffman’s original definition into his discussion of “role distance” as the technique of establishing a “pointed separateness between the individual and his putative role” by denying the image of the self that is “implied in the role for all accepting performers.” Such behaviour does not include outright rejection of the role in question, but rather a set of actions that indicate “some measure of disaffection from, and resistance against, the role.” (121)

Buzard argues that, when applied to tourism, role distance allows the anti-tourist tourist to acknowledge his external similarities to others among his countrymen abroad while simultaneously “lay[ing] claim to an aristocracy of inner feeling, the projection of an ideology of originality and difference” (121-2), and this is precisely the technique that Hunt makes use of. As I have shown, Hunt’s explicit attempts to distinguish himself from other tourists often function to highlight the precariousness of the anti-tourist tourist’s position, and, in the full and unedited text of the letter to Millais, Hunt goes on to complicate his stance by acknowledging that he is not entirely different from other visitors because he has developed “a deeper interest” in visiting the Pyramids. Hunt’s statement here reflects the first aspect of Buzard’s interpretation of “role distance” because the artist admits that it is impossible for him to engage in “outright rejection of the [touristic] role” by jettisoning any point of similarity between himself and the “cockney visitors.” But Hunt quickly moves on to the second part of this trope—the registering of “‘some measure of disaffection from, and resistance against, the role’”—when he explains to Millais his reasons for wanting to have a guided tour of the Great Pyramid, which are highly idiosyncratic and still serve to distinguish Hunt from other visitors’ concerns about the age, size, or archaeological significance of the structures.
Hunt developed an interpretation—a reading, one might say—of the Great Pyramid that almost entirely negates its significance as an archaeological remnant of an ancient Egyptian dynasty and, instead, firmly places it within a nineteenth-century Evangelical Christian register. He writes at first of his dislike of the Pyramids as historical objects representing the ancient Egyptian past, declaring that “[t]he big blocks . . . were merely colossal tombs of pride” to him and that they had, ironically, not even served their original purpose of preserving rulers’ bodies from the “desecration” of nature and robbers (JRUL 1216.19). In the space of a few lines, Hunt dismisses the primary lure of the Pyramids for other visitors by refusing to acknowledge their archaeological and historical significance, and his comments thereby make an effort to remove the Pyramids from “the increasingly elaborate textual apparatus of Orientalism and, in particular, . . . the discourses of archaeology and tourism that policed their appropriation” (Gregory, “Between” 43).214 Yet, at the same time that Hunt attempts to disengage the Pyramids from the overarching significance attributed to them by the western Orientalist discourses of tourism and archaeology, he also, as we shall see, re-appropriates the monuments for his own use within a markedly Christian register. In doing so, Hunt demonstrates the nineteenth-century traveler’s inability to completely free himself from what literary critic Ali Behdad describes as “the ‘baggage’ of orientalist knowledge that has mediated the desire to produce an other discourse on the Orient” (15). Behdad’s larger point, which he makes in the book Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution, is

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214 Gregory makes this statement in relation to the opinion of ancient monuments that Gustave Flaubert expressed during his 1849-50 visit to the Middle East. Flaubert wrote that “the Egyptian temples [at Abu Simbel] bore me profoundly” (qtd. in Gregory, “Between” 43), an emotion that is similar to the initial reaction to the Pyramids that Hunt describes in his letter to Millais, and Gregory argues that this boredom was not the product of the ruins themselves but of Flaubert’s reaction to their “appropriation” by various western discourses.
that, when nineteenth-century authors and travelers attempted to remove themselves and their works from the larger discourse of Orientalism or to reject the discourse in some way, they were ultimately unable to do so without simply placing themselves and their texts “into an affiliation with another precursory mode of representation” (23), which only constituted another facet of a heterogeneous and amorphous Orientalism that gained strength through its absorption of apparently dissonant voices (33-4). Such is certainly the case with Hunt’s conception of the Pyramids, which actually functions to strengthen European appropriation of the tombs by denying their independent importance as symbols of ancient Egyptian history and only giving them value through a rather eccentric appeal to a Christian narrative that is largely foreign and external to them.

Hunt begins his re-consideration of the Pyramids by highlighting the fact that their significance to him was imposed not by the original builders and their own culture but by some external force when he declares, “but then it seemed there was more in the meaning of the thing than was ever intended, as sometimes with a silly person’s riddle” (JRUL 1216.19). Hunt’s comment reduces the actual historical use and context of the tombs to mere “silly”-ness and, furthermore, suggests that their importance in the nineteenth century has nothing to do with the original intentions of the builders. Indeed, Hunt makes this point about an external, godlike force even more strongly at the end of this passage when he states, “it seemed that they [the Pyramids] had been permitted to be erected and were now standing and perhaps might always stand as a help to our weak conceptions” (JRUL 1216.19) of events that, according to the Judeo-Christian tradition, had taken place nearby. This statement entirely negates the agency of the Egyptian builders by asserting that a higher power has always been the one figure truly in control.
of the monuments’ construction and of their endurance over the subsequent centuries, and Hunt’s comment recalls Alexander Kinglake’s declaration in *Eothen* that the *Arabian Nights* “must have sprung from the brain of a Greek . . . [because they] have about them so much of freshness and life . . . that they cannot have owed their conception to a mere Oriental, who, for creative purposes, is a thing dead and dry—a mental mummy that may have been a live King just after the flood, but has since lain balmed in spice” (68). Both Hunt’s and Kinglake’s statements deny the possibility that a Middle Eastern culture could create anything to be admired by a European society.

In fact, even when Hunt ostensibly credits the importance of ancient Egyptian civilization by averring that “it seemed to me that Kufus or Cheops or the other Pharaoh [sic] who had built [the Great Pyramid] as a mosaleum [sic] had rather built a monument to Egypt, which as the first land was to be remembered to the end” (JRUL 1216.19), a careful reading of his words demonstrates that, in actuality, he once again implies that the Pyramids have value only in a cultural context that is far removed from their own original one. First, Hunt’s uncertainty about the name of the pharaoh who ordered the construction of the Great Pyramid at Giza demonstrates his lack of concern for and engagement with Egyptian history, all the more so when we consider that he had probably read and could certainly easily refer to this information in the copy of John Gardner Wilkinson’s work that he carried with him on his travels. Moreover, when

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215 It is now commonly accepted that the Great Pyramid was built for “Khufu, king of Egypt, called Cheops by the Greeks” in “the middle of the third millennium BC[E]” (Romer 16).

216 As I mentioned in Chapter Four, Wilkinson (1797-1875) is widely considered “the founder of British Egyptology” (Clayton 46), and his name was well-known among English travelers throughout the nineteenth century (Fagan 175). Withey notes that Wilkinson traveled “to Egypt in 1821 and spent twelve years producing the first systematic survey of all major archaeological sites and the first chronology of Egyptian dynasties” (229), which was eventually published as *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* in 1837. The text was revised to include less “scholarly content” and more “practical information for travelers” and republished in 1843 as *Modern Egypt and Thebes* (Withey 229) and again in
Hunt describes the pyramid as “a monument to Egypt,” he conflates the time of building the Pyramids with later periods after the decline of the Egyptian dynasties, and this interpretation of the monuments suggests, in stereotypically orientalizing fashion, that Egyptian culture can only be appreciated not in and of itself but as a precursor to later civilizations who may look to Egypt as “the first land.”

Hunt embraces this idea of the Pyramids representing something far more significant that their own original cultural context, which he seems to find so uninteresting, and he develops this notion in the next segment of the letter into a definitive statement of what makes the tombs important in his own eyes. Like thousands of other European travelers to Egypt, Hunt “climbed to the summit of the oldest Pyramid” (JRUL 1216.19) before his journey into the interior of the monument. In his seminal 1988 study of nineteenth-century constructions of Egypt Colonising Egypt, Timothy Mitchell writes of the popularity of this effort to scale the tomb and notes that by the early Victorian era “[t]he Great Pyramid at Giza had . . . become a viewing platform. Teams of Bedouin were organized to heave and push the writer or tourist to the top, where two more Bedouin would carry the European on their shoulders to all four corners, to observe the view” (24).217 As one might by now expect of Hunt, who made such apparent efforts to distinguish himself from mere tourists and complains in his letters home of the disruptions to his work occasioned by other Englishmen at his Cairo hotel (qtd. in Millais 404), Hunt does not even mention to Millais that this infrastructure of

1847 as the Hand-book for Travelers in Egypt (Reid 71). Hunt does not specify which version of Wilkinson’s text he carried with him, but every version of the book would have explained who commissioned the Great Pyramid, Egypt’s most famous tourist site. For example, Cheops is listed as the builder in both the first edition of Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians (126-7) and an 1858 edition of A Handbook for Travelers in Egypt (161, 166).

217 Mitchell includes in his discussion and on the book’s cover a fascinating mid-nineteenth-century photograph of tourists and the numerous Bedouin who assist them in climbing the pyramid (25).
Bedouin guides and assistants was present to assist his climb; instead, he strips his account of this touristic context and presents the event as a strictly solitary endeavour devoid of all other tourists and guides.

This later re-presentation of the climb to Millais reiterates Hunt’s status as an anti-tourist tourist, but, at the same time, it also conforms to Mitchell’s description of tourists’ construction of the Pyramids as “viewing platform[s].” In Colonising Egypt, Mitchell argues that many writers, artists, and other travelers were overwhelmed by the visual, aural, and olfactory stimula that entry into Egyptian society could provide (21-2) and thus felt compelled “to separate [themselves] from the world and . . . constitute it as a panorama. This required . . . a position set apart and outside” (24). Thus, for many, the top of the Great Pyramid took on the role of this place “apart” and allowed the European visitor “to grasp the [Oriental] world as though it were a picture or exhibition” (24). This tendency on the part of nineteenth-century travelers to Egypt has been remarked upon by a number of scholars. In “Scripting Egypt,” Gregory writes of visitors’ need for “a secure viewing platform from which travelers could inspect and on occasion issue out into ‘the Orient’” (121), and he builds on this description of the “viewing platform” in his 2001 article “Colonial Nostalgia and Cultures of Travel: Spaces of Constructed Visibility in Egypt,” in which Gregory speaks of these “secure viewing platform[s] from which Egypt was assumed to be available as a ‘transparent space,’ fully open to the tourist gaze” (117).218

218 In both of these articles, Gregory’s observations about the “viewing platform” are linked to his discussions of the experiences of nineteenth-century travelers who journeyed up and down the Nile on a rented dahabeah or dahabeeah, a traditional type of “house boat” (Stevens, Orientalists 8), but his points about the boats creating distance between the visitor and the Middle Eastern landscape while simultaneously allowing the traveler to construct a panoramic view of his or her surroundings are, I would argue, equally applicable to the position of the European tourist at the top of the Great Pyramid.
Hunt certainly makes use of the Pyramids as a place from which to be separated from and look down upon the Egyptian landscape and its inhabitants, and, once again eliding the presence of the Bedouin who enabled him to achieve his position, he describes to Millais “sitting there and looking over the flat reach of sand divided by the fat nile [sic]” (JRUL 1216.19). Hunt’s position allows him a privileged view and a chance to order and frame his impressions of the landscape into a cohesive whole; indeed, this line offers one of the few descriptions of the landscape surrounding Giza that Hunt provides in any of his letters.

Given Hunt’s commanding position over the ground and the river, a reader who is reasonably well-versed in nineteenth-century travel writing might expect Hunt to launch at this point into what Mary Louise Pratt has famously described as “the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene” (201). Pratt argues that this type of description of a landscape is characteristic of much Victorian travel literature; in this scene, the explorer/adventurer usually stands on some kind of “promontory” (202) in order to gain a commanding view of the landscape below, which he then proceeds to describe through likening it to a painting; loading his language with large quantities of modifiers that suggest the richness of the land to be appropriated; and, finally, emphasizing “the relation of mastery predicated between the seer and the seen” (Pratt 204; italics in text). However, Hunt’s letter to Millais does not engage in a description of the land below the artist; the one brief sentence quoted above is the only depiction of the scenery that Hunt offers to Millais. Instead, rather idiosyncratically, Hunt turns the topographically rooted monarch-of-all-I-survey scene on its head and shifts instead to what I would describe as a temporally based monarch-of-all-I-survey scene.
Hunt writes to Millais that, while walking around the Pyramids on a daily basis during his last stay at Giza, it became difficult to look directly at the edifices “without feeling the time of their erection within reach of retrospection and with this all those events which because of the faintness of extreme distance seemed to have lost their really eternal importance in our eyes” (JRUL 1216.19). Here, with his use of phrases like “within reach” and “lost” events, Hunt casts himself as an adventurer on the cusp of a great discovery which requires him to traverse not miles of land but the “distance” of the “extreme” past; what he wishes to lay claim to is not a geographical space but a temporal one that provides him, as we shall soon see, with an increased comprehension of the biblical narrative of salvation.

In a marked parallel to the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene, Hunt finally achieves this desired outcome when he reaches the summit of the Great Pyramid; there, the edifice, which he describes to Millais as “a great mound to stand upon” (JRUL 1216.19) takes the place of the natural “promontory” such as a cliff or mountaintop from which more conventional explorers like Richard Burton launched into a profuse description of the ground below (Pratt 201-2). Hunt further aligns himself with these more traditional explorers when he declares to Millais that his position allows him a view that would be “obscured by many interruptions if regarded from the plain . . . [.] from here one could see the earliest events as familiarly as the affairs of a fathers [sic] childhood” (JRUL 1216.19). Here, Hunt reiterates the importance of being situated on a promontory, “a position set apart and outside” that lends one “a position of power” (T. Mitchell 24, 26), and, while the artist’s simile likening the view to “the affairs of a fathers childhood” suggests a degree of familiarity between Hunt as an observer and the view that he gazes

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upon, this comparison ultimately preserves the distance between Hunt and the scene below by implying that he has no direct involvement in it, in the same way that a son has no involvement in his father’s own childhood “affairs,” which preceded the son’s existence, and in the same way that explorers, in writing monarch-of-all-I-survey scenes, were always on the periphery of the place that they proceeded to describe.

However, while Hunt employs the tropes of the promontory and the all-powerful gaze that strengthen the link between himself and other travel writers, his description of his own view always depicts it in a temporal—rather than a geographical or topographical—light; Hunt’s scene is a time-scape rather than a landscape. Hunt’s earlier description to Millais of the Pyramids’ ability to bring “the time of their erection within reach of retrospection” foreshadows, as I argued earlier, the temporal quality of Hunt’s monarch-of-all-I-survey scene, and he makes this point even more explicit when he tells Millais that the Great Pyramid is valuable to him because it permits him “to look down to a time obscured by many interruptions if regarded from the plain” (JRUL 1216.19; emphasis added). By drawing the reader’s attention to the fact that his view is emphatically not of a place but of a time, Hunt maintains his distance and difference from the descriptions of mainstream travelers like Burton and Kinglake—and the thousands of European travelers who visited the Pyramids—while simultaneously making use of their language of colonial appropriation and domination, and his ambivalent reactions to the Pyramids, which we have seen here and in other letters, lead to a deeply idiosyncratic monarch-of-all-I-survey scene in which Hunt must imbue the Pyramids with a meaning that has absolutely nothing to do with the tombs themselves.
It is worthwhile to quote at length Hunt’s description to Millais of what he sees from the top of the Great Pyramid since these lines provide a sense of the way in which Hunt attempted to fix the significance of the Pyramids, which he approached so ambivalently, in his own mind. He writes,

I had almost seen timidly Abraham and Sarah stealing into the land with below the poor workmen being driven like cattle to rear this huge collection of stone and with the great patriarchs [sic] [page torn]ture219 I could think of how at the time the revelation of God was being lost altogether and how idolatry was spreading itself about the whole earth, as a comforting substitute for the truth of Gods [sic] omnipotence and eternity—all men’s patience had gone, God had not shown himself to them for several generations and so they had made Gods of their own, were making an after life of their own, as if the true God was an unwise King and could be dethroned for another, and this other one in their power, and the knowledge of this state teaches one the merciful necessity of God’s revelation to Abraham[.] (JRUL 1216.19)

Hunt ends this meditation by referring to the Old-Testament story of Abraham as the “commencement of the present dispensation” (JRUL 1216.19), the rule of a merciful Christian god that reached its apotheosis in Christ’s sacrificial death.

In her discussion of explorers’ reliance on the trope of the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene, Pratt notes that, although the moment of “discovery” is presented as a climactic event within adventure narratives, this construction is deceptive since “[t]he verbal painter must render momentously significant what is . . . practically a non-event” since “the act of discovery itself, for which all the untold lives were sacrificed and miseries endured, consisted of what in European culture counts as a purely passive experience—that of seeing” (Pratt 202-4). It is because of this absence of activity at the moment of discovery, Pratt argues, that explorers relied so heavily on specific stylistic and linguistic techniques to make their “discoveries” momentous, but, for Hunt, this

219 Although there is a small tear in the page at this point, given the remainder of the statement, it seems logical to assume that Hunt originally wrote “picture” here.
problematic aspect of the description is made even more complicated by the fact that the artist does not actually see anything in a literal fashion.

Of course, the Old-Testament events that Hunt describes—the patriarch Abraham’s sojourn in Egypt with his wife Sarah—have long since passed, and Hunt makes this lack of a literal visual aspect of the scene clear to Millais when he says that he “had almost seen Abraham and Sarah” (JRUL1216.19; emphasis added). From the beginning of his variation on the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene, Hunt calls into question its basis in the merely passive act of seeing, and his subsequent meditations demonstrate an attempt to move away from just seeing toward actively constructing the significance of the scene that he envisions. Hunt tells Millais that having “the great patriarchs [sic] picture” metaphorically before him allows him to contemplate more effectively Abraham’s larger significance within the Christian narrative of salvation, and, through this description, Hunt not only disengages his monarch-of-all-I-survey scene from its basis in the “passive experience” of literal sight but also emphasizes his own more active creativity as an artist. Hunt literalizes the more typical explorer’s attempt, in Pratt’s words, to “estheticize” the landscape by “order[ing it] in terms of background [and] foreground” like a painting (204). Here, he explicitly labels his vision a “picture,” but, instead of merely describing it, he contemplates its implications in much the same way that he would expect viewers of his own work to engage in active interpretation of the painting before them. This difference suggests that Hunt adapts the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene so that it becomes more closely aligned with his conception of his work as an artist, which, as I argued in Chapter Four, was a profession often criticized for its

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220 The narrative of Abraham appears in Chapters 11 to 25 of Genesis; Abraham’s time in Egypt is described in Gen. 12.10-20.
“feminine” lack of quantifiable activity. In the letter, Hunt outlines in a densely packed stream-of-consciousness style the active thought process that the “picture” leads him to engage in, and his monarch-of-all-I-survey scene is not about passive description but about active contemplating and working through a series of ideas. Hunt’s final realization—that Abraham is intimately tied to the narrative of salvation carried out in the New Testament—is presented by the artist as a discovery, which he has laboured physically, intellectually, and spiritually towards, that leads him to have “a real interest” (JRUL 1216.19) in the Pyramids.

This scene, in which Hunt sits atop the Great Pyramid and shares with his reader the thought processes that lead to his discovery, is the climactic scene of the letter, which continues, as I have already discussed, with Hunt’s account of the banality of his trip to the interior of the pyramid. Hunt’s own version of the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene makes use of some of the more typical aspects of this descriptive trope—the promontory, the dense use of language, and the motif of pictorialization—yet Hunt’s insistence on the solely imaginative status of the “picture” before him, and his decision to extrapolate larger ideas from the view rather than simply describe it, distances the scene from those written by other travelers and tourists and reminds the reader that Hunt, as he continually insists in his letters from Egypt, is not visiting these sites as a passive, feminized tourist intent only on viewing sights but as an active working artist who contemplates these scenes and filters them into his work.

In addition to allowing him to reassert once again his masculinity and non-touristic status, Hunt’s use of the framework of the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene and his implication that the Pyramids are significant not for their own historical context reinforce
his low opinion of Egyptian culture by suggesting that ancient Egypt’s greatest monuments have importance only when they are incorporated into a religious discourse that is entirely foreign and external to them. Yet, despite all of these suggestions of Hunt’s lack of appreciation for Egypt and his later assertion in his memoir that his impressions of the country were “very unimposing” (1: 371), we must keep in mind that the artist remained in the country for three months and that this time resulted in numerous finished watercolours and sketches, many of which contain the Pyramids themselves.

As the foregoing discussion emphasizes, Hunt’s relationship to Egypt and its sites was clearly ambivalent, and the artist’s discussion of the Pyramids of Giza in particular allows us to see not only the ways in which Hunt made use of the stance of the anti-tourist tourist to construct a place for himself within Egypt but also how that self-created role was already fissured and needed to be constantly reiterated and reinforced through appeals to art, biblical history, and the language of colonial domination and appropriation.

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In the preceding section of this chapter, I focused on the multivalent ways in which Hunt attempted to distance himself from both previous and contemporary travelers to Egypt, but by no means did this desire to be distinct from other tourists lead Hunt to the strategy embraced by many other long-term visitors to the Middle East of adopting local clothing and customs. Unlike well-known figures such as Lady Hester Stanhope, Edward William Lane and John Frederick Lewis, all of whom made use of Middle Eastern clothing and modes of living during their stays in Egypt and Syria, Hunt—in

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221 Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839) lived alone in Syria for the twenty-five years preceding her death (Lewis). In Chapter Eight of *Eothen*, Kinglake recounts his meeting with Stanhope, whom he describes as
spite of the later representation of himself in Eastern garb in his official Self-portrait (1875) and in John Ballantyne’s 1865 portrait of Hunt in his studio—insisted on maintaining a marked sartorial and behavioural distance from the locals throughout his time in Egypt. Indeed, even though many male nineteenth-century travelers adopted Eastern clothing while “traveling on their own or with a male companion” (Gregory, “Scripting” 126), Hunt did not ever wear Egyptian dress, and, moreover, he made his disdain for his traveling companion Thomas Seddon’s adoption of Eastern clothing abundantly apparent.

Contemporary critics of nineteenth-century Europeans in the Orient have offered a complex reading of the “Orientalist transvestism” (Behdad 59) practiced by Seddon—and a large number of prominent Europeans—that links the adoption of another culture’s clothing to a re-inscription of the traditional dynamic of western power over the Other (Behdad 59; T. Mitchell 27). However, Hunt clearly viewed the cultural cross-wearing Eastern-style men’s clothing (85) and smoking “tchibouques” (87). Between 1825 and 1828, Lane “lived exclusively in Muslim areas of Cairo, adopted local dress, and . . . spoke Arabic fluently, moving freely in Egyptian society and recording the close observations that made his work so valuable.” He was known among the local inhabitants as “Mansur Efendi” (Thompson). Although I mentioned John Frederick Lewis’s adoption of Eastern clothing earlier, it is worth mentioning that, in his 1846 travel narrative Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo, William Makepeace Thackeray devotes several pages to a description of his visit to Lewis’s home in Cairo; Thackeray writes that the artist “has established himself here in the most complete Oriental fashion” (325) and “has adapted himself outwardly . . . to the Oriental life” (328).

222 Ballantyne (1815-1897) was a Scottish painter of portraits, history subjects, and still lifes (Lamb). His portrait of Hunt, entitled simply William Holman Hunt, is reproduced in Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 106. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, Bronkhurst also notes that Hunt posed in the same Middle Eastern attire in a photograph taken by the renowned Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron in 1864 and points out, quite rightly, that the artist made use of the clothing at this later stage in his career to “indicate the importance Hunt invested in his role as artist/explorer” and to mark “his place in an historical, colonialist tradition” of orientalized portraiture (Catalogue 1: 212).

223 Behdad writes briefly of Flaubert as “a cultural transvestite,” and his discussion suggests that the French author’s adoption of Egyptian clothing in Cairo served to reinscribe Orientalism in a number of ways. First, although Flaubert constructed his cultural cross-dressing as “a form of cultural resistance to his Europeanness,” his transvestism was undertaken so that he could have greater knowledge of the Orient through admission to “holy shrines and obscure places from which Europeans were excluded”; thus, Flaubert’s “disguise” allowed him to have a greater sense that he had penetrated the putative secrecy of Egypt. Second, use of “the Other’s costume” allowed him to maintain traditional views of the exoticism of
dressing of Seddon as a weakening of the boundaries of European culture that was, as I shall argue, ultimately unsuccessful only because of the traveler’s inherent European-ness.

Hunt complained openly of Seddon’s espousal of Egyptian dress in a letter from Cairo to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He writes,

I never knew such an extraordinary combination of ability &c [sic] and absurdity as he is—his devout admiration of the Arabs is perfectly exasperating . . . he never tires in praising them. His adoption of the costume is simply amusing in the result for somehow the wind and other little circumstances disturb the arrangement with a familiarity never assumed towards a native .] (Lutyens 58)

With his use of words like “absurdity” and “exasperating,” Hunt’s disapproval in this passage is almost palpable, and it seems to centre on the fact that Seddon attempts to blur the boundaries between English and Arab—which, as we shall soon see, Hunt tried very hard to police—by removing the “visible markers” (Gregory, “Scripting” 126) of European clothing that would lend him a position of superiority and authority. Such a decision, in Hunt’s view, indicated a kind of willful, childlike naïveté, and Hunt’s use of the word “costume,” while referring, of course, to a national costume or traditional outfit, also suggests a form of disguise, a playful attempt to be something one is not. In this context, Seddon’s “adoption of the costume” becomes a somewhat childish act that absurdly attempts to elide his status as an Englishman.

Yet, in Hunt’s view, it is Seddon’s inherent Englishness that ultimately renders his attempt to blend into his surroundings unsuccessful. At the end of his description of the Other and reduced the foreign culture to superficial objects like “shaved head[s] and long pipes” that functioned as visible—but essentially meaningless—signals of difference (Behdad 59-60).

Mitchell writes in a similar vein of Edward William Lane’s use of “a deliberate disguise” while conducting research for An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians and argues that this sartorial and behavioural masquerade “allowed him . . . to observe [his Egyptian sources] in their own presence without himself being observed” (27); in other words, Lane’s adoption of an Oriental persona—while apparently blurring boundaries between European and Other—actually permitted the European to subject the Other to his gaze without recognition or interruption.
Seddon’s attire, Hunt reasserts his companion’s—and, by association, his own—distance from the Arabs. He emphasizes the fact that, although Seddon may at first glance resemble the Egyptians, the disarray of his clothing that is caused by the wind is something that never occurs among the “native[s]”; it functions as a “visible marker” of Seddon’s difference from the Arabs and his inability to be fully absorbed into the local culture. Hunt’s statement that a natural phenomenon like the wind highlights this disparity suggests that Seddon’s foreignness is also a natural, unalterable fact that cannot be disguised, and Hunt’s later description of his friend’s clothing as an indication of “the weaknesses of cockney nature” (Lutyens 58) both distances Hunt from Seddon’s touristic folly by reminding us of the “cockney visitors” Hunt wishes to avoid during his visit to the Pyramids and, most importantly, reinscribes Seddon’s inherent and incontrovertible Englishness.

Hunt easily dismisses the possibility that Seddon’s appearance might somehow endanger his English identity, but he seems to be more concerned about the threat to his friend’s Englishness that is posed by his adoption of local beliefs and customs. Hunt explains to Rossetti that Seddon believes that he can “handle serpents and scorpions with immunity” since “a few weeks ago he sat down gravely before a snake charmer . . . and went through the incantation to render him venom proof with . . . much solemnity and evident faith” (Lutyens 58-9). While Hunt speaks lightly of Seddon’s adoption of Egyptian costume and describes it simply as “amusing,” the register in which he speaks of Seddon’s belief in “the charm” (Lutyens 59) is decidedly different. Hunt tells Rossetti that Seddon’s credulity is a source of “shame” (Lutyens 58)—not only for Seddon but for Hunt himself, and his much stronger language suggests the seriousness of Seddon’s
actions in Hunt’s mind by casting them as a moral or ethical error. Hunt’s use of
decidedly condemnatory language continues when he describes Seddon’s participation in
the ritual as a “stupid degrading act” (Lutyens 59), and I would argue that this phrase is
key to understanding Hunt’s relationship to the local inhabitants of Cairo and Giza. As
we saw in my earlier discussion of Hunt’s attitude toward the Pyramids, it was very
important for the artist—like many other travelers—to separate himself physically from
the Arabs surrounding him, and he made use of the top of the Great Pyramid as a
“viewing platform” that would allow him to have access to Egyptian history while
maintaining his separation from the nation’s present reality. Yet what Seddon does by
engaging in the local “incantation to render him venom proof” erases the physiological
and metaphorical distance that Hunt is so intent upon creating; in Hunt’s eyes, this act is
“degrading” because it lowers Seddon from his position of putative authority and
superiority and situates him literally and figuratively in the same place as the Arabs,
whom Hunt xenophobically describes earlier in the letter as “the meanest sneaks in the
world” (Lutyens 58). Thus, while Hunt’s previous statements about Seddon’s attire
imply that the Pre-Raphaelite locates national identity as an inherent natural quality, the
vehemence of his description of Seddon’s evolving belief system reflects a realization on
Hunt’s part that this ethnic identity is not innate and immutable but can actually be called
into question through even a partial assimilation into local culture, which leads to a
blurring of boundaries between English and Arab, “us” and “them.”

Throughout Chapter Four’s discussion of Hunt’s relationship to the Arabs in the
Holy Land, I pointed to the explicit and implicit methods that Hunt employed to police
the boundaries between himself and those around him in light of his growing awareness
of the performative nature of many aspects of his identity, and I would argue that, here, Hunt’s bombastic, exaggerated description to Rossetti of Seddon’s activities is so strongly worded because it actually represents one of the first occasions on which Hunt was forced to confront the notion that basic aspects of one’s identity are fluid and need to be constantly performed and reenacted in order for them to have an effect on others. Here, then, is an important example of the ways in which careful attention to Hunt’s experiences in Egypt can help us to understand better the issues with which he was later confronted in the Holy Land.

Indeed, Hunt’s attempt to establish boundaries and his subsequent concern that these distinctions might become meaningless through one’s behaviour is evident when he writes that Seddon “went through the incantation . . . with so much solemnity and evident faith as any church ceremony could have received” (Lutyens 59). Here, Hunt clearly creates a hierarchy in which rituals of English Christianity are much more deserving of “solemnity” and “faith” than Arabic rites, yet the perturbation that Hunt expresses to Rossetti stems from the fact that Seddon does not maintain this hierarchy but, instead, seems to value and lend credence to both kinds of rituals on an equal basis. This blurring of boundaries is much more serious to Hunt than a mere adoption of dress, for it reflects both an external expression of community with the Arabs in the presence of a local

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224 As I mentioned earlier, Hunt did not keep a diary while he traveled in Egypt, so it is much more difficult to trace the development of his notion of performativity during this early phase of his travels than during his visit to the Holy Land. Moreover, as I have already pointed out, there is only a small number of his letters from Egypt in existence, but this paucity of material may also be due to the fact that Hunt was not as prolific a correspondent during this phase of his travels as he was once he was more settled in Jerusalem. In fact, in this letter to Rossetti, who was still a close friend of Hunt’s at this point, Hunt mentions that his last letter to his Pre-Raphaelite brother was sent from Malta (Lutyens 54), which indicates that Hunt did not write at all to Rossetti during his first month in Egypt, and his letter of May 8, 1854, to Millais, which describes Hunt’s visit to the Pyramids, was actually mailed five weeks later from Jerusalem (JRUL 1216.19). These two intra-textual references suggest that Hunt did not write a large number of letters during his time in Egypt, so it is indeed quite likely that Hunt’s letter to Rossetti represents a key early moment in Hunt’s increasing awareness of the performative nature of identity.
“snake charmer with the landlord of our hotel” (Lutyens 58-9) and an internal shift within Seddon’s belief system that renders him less likely to feel—and, perhaps more importantly, to behave—differently from those around him.

In fact, Hunt emphasizes the subsequent difference in Seddon’s behaviour in his account to Rossetti when he writes that “two or three days ago . . . he assured me that he had had several of these reptiles in his hands and he attributed his escape to the virtue of the charm” (Lutyens 59). By adopting belief in a local custom, Seddon’s behaviour also undergoes a shift that renders him, in Hunt’s eyes, less likely to behave like a culturally and socially distant English visitor; thus, when Hunt ends his description of his friend by saying that he is being “foolish” and “will get into some frightful danger” (Lutyens 59), the reader is led to wonder whether Hunt is speaking simply literally of “serpents and scorpions” or whether the artist is also concerned that Seddon endangers his position and safety as an Englishman by allowing Arab customs and beliefs to seep into and possibly alter his English identity, which is clearly no longer impervious to external factors.

Even at this early stage in his travels, when Hunt had only been in Egypt for one month, his repeated expressions of concern regarding cultural and racial boundaries and identities suggest a certain un-ease about the permeability and efficacy of such distinctions, and Hunt attempts to combat the uncertainty of his situation by adopting a version of Englishness that is based on force, fear, and violence. In the same letter to Rossetti, Hunt makes his earliest extant comments about the position of Europeans in Cairo.225 He writes emphatically that “no stranger can have peace in the East unless he

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225 The only earlier letters from Hunt’s visit to Egypt that I have been able to locate (but not consult) are both in the Bodleian Library (MS. Eng. lett. c. 296 fol. 25 and 26v). These letters were written to Thomas Combe and are dated February 1 and 11/12, 1854 (Bronkhurst, “Passion” 29), and February 21, 1854 (Bronkhurst, Catalogue 2: 263), respectively. The first describes, at least in part, Hunt’s early days in

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become the dictator of his own terms,” and he declares soon afterwards that “after the first fortnight of residence here how ever [sic] soft hearted or however prudent the European may be at other places he does not entertain such feelings here without a strongly defined limit” (Lutyens 56). On the most obvious level, Hunt’s use of such phrases as “dictator of his own terms” and “strongly defined limit” clearly signals an adoption of stereotypically imperial boundaries of power, and the letter continues to link European-ness with violence when Hunt explicitly declares that, in walking through the city, “the frank [i.e., European] walks composedly . . . as he takes his own time to go his own way by virtue of a reserve of power in his right hand which is used on whomever should by accident or design attempt to impede him. and this is called forth not infrequently” (Lutyens 56). Hunt’s description of the progression of “the frank” through the crowd emphasizes the figure’s independence, for, although he may be surrounded by an unruly homogeneous mob, the European is very much free to assert his own personhood and, as Hunt emphasizes through repetition, to “take his own time to go his own way.”

However, a closer look at Hunt’s description of this scene, which was played out countless times each day in mid-nineteenth-century Cairo, shows that, even during this early stage of his travels, Hunt was not so naïve as to think that innate Englishness was enough to win respect from the Cairenes. In his description of this generalized European man’s passage, Hunt subtly points to the importance of visible markers of identity and notes that it is “the sight of a black coat and a saucy look” (Lutyens 56) that has an effect
on the crowd, and his words highlight the importance not just of being European but of having a European appearance and using one’s clothing and even facial expressions as what Judith Butler calls “identificatory practices” that serve as “a reiteration of a norm or set of norms” (Butler 3, 12) and position an individual within a particular sexual—or, in this case, ethnic—group. Yet, for Hunt, these “identificatory practices” that align him with English imperial power are further problematized by the fact that these aspects of appearance and personality are culturally dependent and are therefore open to interpretation.

Hunt hints at the notion that such markers are dependent on location in some of the passages I cited earlier. For instance, when he writes that a foreign visitor to the East must “become the dictator of his own terms,” Hunt’s words show that this use of behaviour as a marker of difference and authority is not a finished product but must be a constant conscious process, and, in his subsequent statement about the behaviour of Europeans in Egypt, he explicitly states that a visitor’s attitude will take on certain traits “after the first fortnight of residence” in the East, a phrase that highlights once again the fact that the type of behaviour that Hunt identifies as typically European is, by his own description, not inherent but dependent on a very specific socio-cultural context.

To complicate Hunt’s notions of ethnic and national identity and difference even further, the artist realized not long after writing this epistle to Rossetti that identity—besides being fluid, performative, and culturally dependent—is also open to (mis)interpretation by others. In his autobiography, Hunt includes in the partial transcript of his letter to Millais of March 16, 1854, the following statement:

Certainly cultivate a beard. I am persuaded to overcome my Anglican prejudice in favour of a clean chin. I should not do so, however, if I found it disguised my
nationality, for that is worth every other pretension one travels with; it finds one in cringing obedience and fear from every native, even a dog when told one is an Englishman runs away yelping. With this nationality, indeed, and a fist I would undertake to knock down any two Arabs in the Usbeykia\textsuperscript{226} and walk away unmolested. (1: 381)

In \textit{Reading the Pre-Raphaelites}, Barringer cites this passage as an example of Hunt’s constant reassertion of “his identity as an Englishman” and of the “rhetoric of . . . effortless imperial superiority” apparent in Hunt’s autobiography (121-2), but this reading, which rightly takes into account the jingoistic character of Hunt’s assertions, does not consider the context of this quotation within the correspondence of Hunt and Millais.

Diana Holman-Hunt offers another perspective on the significance of this quotation to the two men by placing it alongside a letter Millais wrote earlier to Hunt in Cairo in which the Pre-Raphaelite told his traveling friend, “For divers reasons I think that it is necessary that I should cultivate a beard before joining you amongst those peculiarly addicted people, so according to Christian custom, I think I shall look less like a boy and escape without attention” (qtd. in Holman-Hunt, \textit{Grandfather} 122). Millais’s letter indicates that he would grow a beard to avoid the “attention” of “peculiarly addicted” or homosexual Arab men, and Hunt’s subsequent response that he, too, is “persuaded to overcome my Anglican prejudice in favour of a clean chin” thus amounts to an admission not only that he has “grow[n] a beard to escape being pestered by Arab homosexuals” (Bronkhurst, \textit{Catalogue} 1: 43) but also, in a broader sense, that his enactment of English masculinity and his adoption of the English fashion of a clean-shaven face (Holman-Hunt, \textit{Grandfather} 122) are open to the (mis)interpretation of the

\textsuperscript{226} The 1858 edition of Wilkinson’s \textit{Handbook for Travelers in Egypt} describes “the Usbeykia” or, as Wilkinson calls it, “the Uzbekéëh” as “an extensive square, containing about 450, 000 square feet . . . laid out as a garden” (115).
inhabitants of Cairo. Through these incidents, which Hunt omits from the framework of his letter to Millais that is reproduced in *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, we can see that Hunt was forced to realize quite early in his travels that an appearance that he considered a mark of “manly” English heterosexuality was actually considered quite the opposite in Egypt. Thus, Hunt was compelled to alter his own “Anglican” definition of English masculinity to conform to the expectations of Cairenes, and it may be his recognition of this fact that identity is constantly interpreted by others and must be re-orientated to fit their expectations that impelled Hunt to engage in the subsequent imperialist diatribe in his letter, which Barringer comments upon, in order to reassert a position of distance and masculine superiority that had apparently come under question recently.

In the context of Hunt’s multiple realizations of the unfixed quality of identity, Hunt’s bravado in saying that his Englishness “and a fist” would allow him “to knock down any two Arabs . . . and walk away unmolested” also threatens Barringer’s straightforward reading of this passage on another level. In this segment of the letter, Hunt does not rely on the simple fact or even the appearance of Englishness to allow him to go on his way. Instead, he places his trust in an English appearance combined with the more effective physical action of a fist, and I would argue that this reliance on violence represents an attempt on Hunt’s part to find a marker of his difference that is more concrete than appearance and beliefs, both of which are subject to individual decipherment and change. This construction of violence as a less fluid indicator of distance and difference becomes even more apparent when we consider that the statement about a beard that immediately precedes Hunt’s discussion of the significance of the fist

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is entangled with concerns about English, heterosexual male, and Christian identity; by overlooking this important contextual detail, Barringer’s reading of Hunt’s declaration highlights the rather obvious facet of its “imperial superiority” (Barringer, Reading 122) but elides the fact that this particular instance of “superiority” is predicated upon repeated questionings of basic aspects of Hunt’s identity and actually represents an attempt on the artist’s part to find some “identificatory practice” that is solid, stable, and not open to interpretation.

Hunt makes a similar link between violence and the assertion of English identity in a number of his early letters from Egypt. I have already quoted, for instance, his statement in the letter to Rossetti that “the frank” passes uninterrupted through the crowd “by virtue of a reserve of power in his right hand” (Lutyens 56), but perhaps nowhere is this assertion of violence as an indicator both of distance from the Arabs and of masculine British identity more obvious than in a scene that Hunt describes in the same letter to Millais in which Hunt discusses the significance of beards and fists. Not long after these statements, Hunt goes on to describe his difficult search in Cairo for models for his paintings, and his detailed narrative of a visit to a brothel that he made in the hope of finding suitable female models serves as a fascinating crystallization of all of the issues of subjectivity, interpretation, and the construction of identity that I have discussed up to this point.

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Hunt’s un-ease in relation to his position in the eyes of the Cairenes is perhaps most evident in the protracted difficulties that he encountered in finding models for his oil paintings. It is a well-known fact that Hunt had great difficulty in this process, and he
writes of his frustrations with both male and female models at some length in his autobiography (1: 386-9). This theme also surfaces in his letters to Millais (qtd. in Millais 230), and Hunt’s inability to find models became such a central feature of his time in Egypt that even Thomas Seddon, as I mentioned earlier, discusses Hunt’s frustrations in a letter to his brother (56). In his autobiography, Hunt attributes these difficulties to the locals’ superstition; when he writes that one young male model disappeared because he believed that Hunt’s “real purpose . . . was to obtain the portraits of true Moslems in great number, to return with these to England to call up Satan, and to bargain with him as to the price he would pay for the souls of my victims” (1: 388), Hunt places the blame for the lack of models squarely on the locals’ shoulders and, in doing so, lessens the sense of failure for himself. When faced with such attitudes as these, Hunt seems to ask his reader, how could any artist—regardless of nationality—succeed?

However, this attempt to mitigate his own sense of responsibility for the situation may only be a belated effort at reconstructing events in a way that does not directly call into question Hunt’s own position of supposed authority and control, for, as Bronkhurst notes, Hunt would have known from reading both *Eothen* and Lane’s *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* that it would be difficult to induce Cairene women to sit as models (*Catalogue* 1: 172). The fact that Hunt had this prior knowledge suggests that, although he was aware of the complicated nature of using local sitters due to cultural and religious prohibitions on both female models and the depiction of human figures in art, Hunt still arrived in Cairo under the impression that his position as a male English artist would, paradoxically, allow him to bypass these restrictions. In fact, Hunt’s lament in his autobiography suggests a strong link between Hunt’s art and
his own conceptions of imperial and masculine appropriation. The fact that he describes Egypt as a “kaleidoscope of noble pictures” (1: 389) suggests, as I argued earlier, that Hunt, like many other travelers, construes Egypt as a spectacle or exhibition put on solely for his own amusement, and his frustrated desire to “make one of them my own” (1: 389) positions him in a relationship of attempted ownership of the scenes and people that he attempts to depict.

Interestingly, Hunt’s traveling companion identified the artist’s unrelenting desire to exercise authority and make people his “own” as the source of Hunt’s difficulties with models. In a letter that he wrote from Giza to the Pre-Raphaelites’ older associate and friend Ford Madox Brown,227 Seddon remarks, “Poor Hunt is half bothered out of his life here in painting figures; but, between ourselves, I think he is rather exigent in expecting Arabs and Turks in this climate to sit still (standing) for six or eight hours. Don’t tell anyone this . . . . I think the thing is easily done if one were residing here and with patience” (113-4; italics in text). Seddon’s emphasis on Hunt’s exigent—or demanding—and impatient interactions with the local models suggests that Hunt’s desire to make these models his “own” in the closely linked artistic and imperial senses has been the cause of all of his difficulties, and Seddon’s conclusion that the artist “residing here” would more successfully attract models highlights the irony of the fact that Hunt’s efforts to assert his distance from the Arabs in the face of his own uncertainties about Englishness actually have the opposite effect from that which he intends. Instead of placing Hunt in a position of power over the locals, his insistence on his own transient status within Cairo and on his Englishness actually removes the possibility of using local

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227 For a detailed account of the relationship of Brown (1821-1893) to the Pre-Raphaelites, see Teresa Newman and Ray Watkinson’s 1991 monograph Ford Madox Brown and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle.
models. Thus, Hunt was unable to engage in Orientalism’s strategy of “construct[ing] Egypt as a transparent space, exposed to the gaze of the observer who had the power—and the duty—to sweep aside the mask or, in a visible sexualized project of discovery, to remove the veil” (Gregory, “Scripting” 115, italics in text). As Gregory’s description suggests, the concept of unveiling—whether in the metaphorical sense of exploration and “discovery” or in the literal sense of being allowed to see a female model’s face behind her veil—was linked to both imperialism and masculinity, so Hunt’s inability to find willing female models, in particular, can be seen as confounding his notions of English and male superiority.

Indeed, in a scene that is often cited in critics’ descriptions of Hunt’s difficulties with models, the themes of Hunt’s unease about his status in relation to the local inhabitants and his use of violence in an attempt to assert some kind of authority as an Englishman are readily apparent. After all of these setbacks, Hunt was left to rely on the recommendations of local inhabitants for models, and he notes that the difficulties that he encountered led him to “prejudice my moral reputation” (qtd. in Millais 230) by forcing him to consider prostitutes as potential sitters, a strategy that, given Hunt’s recent and intense religious conversion, he very likely would not have considered in England. This sense of Hunt’s lack of choice and control over his professional situation in Egypt is furthered at the beginning of his description to Millais of the rather eventful visit that Hunt made to a brothel in search of models; although his statement that he “knew it would not do to inquire too narrowly into the character of the people; so I followed [the servant] without question” (qtd. in Millais 230) registers his disapproval of the potential sitters’ character, it simultaneously places Hunt under the guidance and leadership of a
man who seems to have no consideration for the artist’s moral or ethical qualms about prostitution.  

Hunt’s description to Millais of his arrival at the brothel further emphasizes Hunt’s precarious position at the beginning of the visit when he writes that he arrived at “a house where at every door there was a fresh investigation of myself, in such sort as to make it appear a matter of the greatest good fortune when I found myself at the top of the house entering the guest-room” (qtd. in Millais 230-1). In contrast to his expectation that everything in Cairo would be, in Gregory’s words, “exposed to [his] gaze” (“Scripting” 115), Hunt finds himself made uncomfortable by the fact that he has become the object of the Other’s gaze, and, in the version of this letter printed in Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Hunt adds to this description of role reversal by noting that he “was followed by scrutinizing eyes through windows and door-cracks on each story” (1: 381). The fact that Hunt cannot actually see the people watching him heightens his sense of discomfort, and he quickly tries to reassert his position as the one who gazes when he is left alone upstairs and proceeds “to examine the objects in the room” (1: 381) as though they are placed on exhibit for him. This effort to reassert his “rightful” position as the figure who subjects others to his gaze is also evident in Hunt’s subsequent description of his meeting with the veiled female inhabitants of the establishment, whom he unceremoniously asks to unveil so that he can evaluate their suitability for his painting. This forced unveiling represents an assertion of both masculine and imperial domination and serves to reverse the earlier situation in which Hunt found himself.

228 It is worth noting here that, although Hunt does not indicate that any material has been omitted from his published version of the letter to Millais in his autobiography (1: 379-82), he leaves out both of these statements about “moral reputation” and “the character of the people,” a decision that is hardly surprising given his careful re-presentation of himself as a Christian artist.
“scrutinized” by the eyes of others, and he continues this attempt to reclaim this position for himself when he leaves the brothel.

Hunt’s departure from the building is the exact opposite of his quieter and more submissive entrance a few moments earlier, and he describes his leave-taking to Millais in the following words:

I took my departure by shying a gold piece as backshish to the old woman, while I took one by the neck with my left hand and gently hurled her on to the floor for having attempted to intercept my passage to the door, with my right I pushed the other houris against the wall; a fight with a man or two in going downstairs, and an encounter with several dogs in the yard, and I found myself in the street with my man behind me in a state of utter bewilderment at the turn affairs had taken. (1: 381-2)

Hunt’s description of the events, in which he is surrounded by a group of women, hardly seems to merit such a forceful reaction. Yet Hunt’s token gesture of distributing backshish, a small present or tip (Stevens, Orientalists 8), serves to reassert his position as a superior, and, far more importantly, his violent reactions function in a very obvious way as a means of reestablishing both his masculine domination and his status as the gazing subject when these traits have very recently been called into question.

All of the examples that I have discussed in this section attest to the precariousness of the social niche that Hunt tried to adopt for himself in Cairo and the artist’s own awareness of the many issues that made it impossible for him to believe wholeheartedly in the notion of an innate, unchanging identity, and I want to conclude this section of the chapter with a discussion of a previously unpublished letter to his friend and fellow artist James Clarke Hook that Hunt wrote from Giza less than two weeks before he and Seddon began their journey to Jerusalem. I have already briefly discussed the way in which Hunt describes his living and working quarters in a former
tomb near the Pyramids in this epistle, but what is most revealing is the letter’s acknowledgment of the fact that Hunt’s anti-tourist stance and the division of his energies between trying to “appear” English in the eyes of the Arabs while refusing to position himself alongside other European artists and travelers at times placed Hunt in a difficult situation in which he both isolated himself from his countrymen and suffered in the estimation of the local inhabitants. Hunt’s inability to align himself fully either with the English or with the Egyptians is evident in a segment of this letter that must be central to any discussion of Hunt’s experiences in the Middle East. This passage has not yet been discussed by any other scholar, but it is certainly worth quoting at length in order to demonstrate the extent to which Hunt’s identity was problematized by the expectations of those around him.

In the letter, Hunt complains of the number of local people who come to watch him paint and disrupt his work, saying,

> from the moment of my arrival at the place in the morning until night, I am surrounded by all the lazy and curious of the most lazy people in the world. Happily the excitement is falling off a little now, but at first it ran so high that no portable work within three or four miles was ever done out of sight of my paint brush, one man would bring a horse to clean down, another would come and say his prayers, and a third came and beat his wife, all came to eat and drink, and this in a circle within three or four feet of me: and I endured all as patiently as possible, thinking such disturbance but such as one might anticipate: but when one morning, as I sat amid the confusion, I discovered that a rather more exciting noise than usual was occasioned by an enthusiastic admirer who had brought his work in the shape of sheep to kill, which he had done just behind my picture, I must confess to have been taken aback somewhat, the which as I exhibited in an expression of disgust and revulsion, was a reason for regarding me with so much consideration for unmanliness that even the little boys and girls went through the scene in pantomime in my presence so often that I saw myself in danger of at last provoking unmitigated contempt which would most certainly have been my portion by this time had not Fortune most graciously in an evening walk with a gun, brought me into contact with an immense serpent, and given me the best of the encounter by conducting my volley of grape into its throat, just as it was rearing itself up: and the dead body of this reptile at my door, for I brought it
home on the point of my gun, has restored me to a position ten times higher than I ever held, for they all declare it to be larger than and of the most deadly kind they ever saw. I know it was all chance, for I am a very bad shot—but I look indifferent and take all the honours. (JRUL 1216.8)

This segment of Hunt’s letter to Hook represents a number of the central issues that the artist faced throughout his time in Egypt. First, Hunt’s emphasis on his foreignness serves to differentiate him from the Arabs, whom he pejoratively describes as “the most lazy people in the world,” and, second, his attempt to draw attention to his profession as an artist and the work that he engages in at Giza further separates him from the directionless locals and, moreover, reasserts the distinction that Hunt was always keen to establish between himself and European tourists who passed their time in idle sightseeing. Yet it is these very differences that cause Hunt to become a spectacle for the consumption of the local people. In the situation that Hunt describes in his letter, the roles of subject and object are reversed, and the artist, who is traditionally in a position of power and subjects the figures and landscapes he portrays to his all-encompassing gaze, actually becomes the object of the curiosity of others, a shift that unsettles his assumed superiority over them.

As I have already argued, Hunt experienced a similar objectification of himself on many separate occasions during his time in Egypt, but this scene that he describes to Hook is perhaps his most detailed and explicit expression of his understanding of his status as a spectacle for the enjoyment of others. In this instance, Hunt seems to be slightly disconcerted by all the attention he is receiving, and his discomfort may be related in part to the fact that he has no control over his position as an object. His emphasis on maintaining his “Englishness” through his appearance and demeanour seems to result in the local people viewing him as something of a novelty, and, ironically,
Hunt’s figurative distancing of himself from the local inhabitants results in increased physical proximity to them since many come, as he complains to Hook, “within three or four feet of [him]” to watch him work. The physical boundaries that Hunt tries to establish between himself and the Egyptians—and which he earlier criticized Seddon for attempting to efface—fall apart at this point, and, in the midst of complaining about becoming a spectacle, Hunt also seems to be discomfited by the fact that he is being absorbed into the daily life around Giza. His descriptions of the people who bring such everyday occurrences as their work, religious rituals, and domestic disputes around his easel again suggest the extent to which the boundaries Hunt attempts to create crumble, and Hunt’s discomfort arises in part from the fact that the artist is torn between two equally undesirable positions—that of seeming to be absorbed or assimilated into native life and that of becoming himself the exotic Other.

Further compounding Hunt’s un-ease, the artist’s reaction to the slaughter of the sheep also raises questions about his “manliness” in the eyes of his observers despite the fact that Hunt did his utmost to adopt a type of masculinity that, as I have shown, centred on physical strength and “forthright self-assertion” (Adams 74) during his travels. However, the kind of muscular masculinity that his letters to Millais consciously embrace disappears in the face of Hunt’s surprise at seeing an animal murdered so near to him. By demonstrating that he is “taken aback somewhat” and by openly offering “an expression of disgust and revulsion,” the artist creates a fissure in this heretofore “manly” presentation of himself that marks a lapse in his performance of the role of the self-assured, imperturbable English traveler, and this descent into what his observers view, in Hunt’s description, as “unmanliness” is significant on at least two levels.
First, as I discussed briefly in Chapter Four, for a Victorian man, the pursuit of art as a profession was fraught with questions of masculinity and frequently characterized by the need to reinstitute typical gender roles. Hunt was certainly well aware of these difficulties, which, as Herbert Sussman rightly notes in *Victorian Masculinities*, were exacerbated in Hunt’s case by his membership in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which, due in part to the homosocial overtones of its name, seemed to many critics of the 1840s “to move . . . into the dangerous zone of feminization and even effeminacy” (5-6).

Sussman points out that one way in which the Pre-Raphaelites combated such implications of effeminacy was to emphasize “[t]he strenuous physical hardship of their practice—the laborious search for the right wall or flowered bank, the long hours in darkness and cold waiting for the right shade of moonlight” in order to demonstrate that they were “not mere ‘brain-workers,’ but manly men engaged in physical activity and encountering bodily challenge” (118). Hunt’s representation of himself working in this very crowded space, which, he emphasizes, is hardly conducive to painting, serves to remind the reader of the travails that he is willing to undergo for his art, but it also, as Gregory points out in a general discussion of the trope common to Victorian artists of claiming to paint “on the spot” in Egypt, “suture[s] originality to authenticity and, in so doing, register[s] a claim for authority” (“Emperors” 204). This claim to authority, in turn, permits Hunt to present his art as a production that contributes to a “particularly masculine form of knowledge, knowledge of the material world, whose purpose is circulation among men” (Sussman, *Masculinities* 163), by “equat[ing] the labour of the artist with that of the new scientific historian” (Sussman, *Masculinities* 118). Yet the various elements of Hunt’s description of his working environment are called into
question by the Arabs’ perceptions of Hunt’s personal behaviour, which effectively
destroy the masculine aura that Hunt attempts to create for his work.

Moreover, the artist is further feminized by his position as the subject of the
Other’s gaze. I referred earlier to this role reversal as a disruption of Hunt’s assumed
superiority over the Arabs, but this shift in the positions of subject and object is also
markedly gendered since, as Laura Mulvey points out in her seminal discussion of the
gaze in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” the gaze is traditionally constructed as
that of an “active” male viewer watching a “passive” female subject (25). This reversal
of Hunt’s conventional position as the gazing subject must contribute to the discomfiture
that the account of his situation to Hook reflects, and it serves as a pendant to Hunt’s
previous experience at the brothel that he describes in his letter to Millais.

In another parallel between this incident at Giza and the earlier brothel scene,
Hunt’s position here as the feminized object of the gaze is combated through resorting to
violence as a demonstrable marker of masculine independence. However, unlike the
events in the brothel, which—at least in Hunt’s published account—end rather tidily with
the “bewilder[ed]” Arabs put in their place, Hunt’s use of violence here is shot through
with ambivalence and ambiguities. For example, Hunt makes it clear to Hook that the
subsequent actions that reassert his “manliness” in the eyes of the local inhabitants owe
more to “Fortune” and “chance” than to his own decisions and abilities, and he further
emphasizes his own passivity in the situation when he writes that “Fortune most
graciously . . . brought me into contact with an immense serpent” and, moreover, that it is
Fortune who “conduct[ed] my volley of grape into [the snake’s] throat.” To further
complicate Hunt’s position, although this act of violence against a potentially deadly
predator “restore[s]” Hunt to a position of ascendancy among the inhabitants of Giza, his statement that the status he now has is “ten times higher than I ever held” points to the earlier failure of his conscious efforts to highlight his own putative superiority over the Arabs.

Finally, in the last sentence of this passage from the letter to Hook, Hunt acknowledges the performative aspect of his new role as a superior hunter. He once again problematizes his newfound “position” by reiterating the fact that he does not truly deserve it, and his final statement—“but I look indifferent and take all the honours”—emphasizes the importance of one’s “look” or appearance and behaviour to a particular construction of identity even when one’s claim to that identity, as in Hunt’s case, is quite evidently unsubstantiated. Because of this statement’s implications for Hunt’s larger notions of gender, ethnic, and racial identity, it serves as a useful conclusion for my discussion of Hunt’s identity and his awareness of the perceptions of others in Egypt, for the final words of his account of his encounter with the snake remind us once again of the artist’s conscious desire to fulfill the role of both the anti-tourist and the powerful foreigner despite—or perhaps because of—his growing awareness of the multivalent complications that make the true realization of these roles impossible.

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Having focused on the ambiguous position in which Hunt’s various constructions of himself place him, I want to end this chapter by examining how the experiences that he describes in his letters mould the drawings, watercolours, and oils that Hunt produced while in Egypt. Traditionally, these works have been looked upon only as either precursors to Hunt’s religious paintings or as evidence of Hunt’s imperialist tendencies.
In her article on Hunt’s time in Egypt, Bronkhurst implicitly elides the independent significance of these paintings when she echoes in the midst of her discussion Hunt’s own retrospective statements that his “primary purpose in going to the East was to reach the Holy Land” (“Passion” 27). Adopting another approach, Barringer presents Hunt’s two major Egyptian works—A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern-Maker’s Courtship and The Afterglow in Egypt—as an ethnographic “genre painting” and a “fantasy of colonial plenty” (Reading 120-1), respectively, and, while these statements offer a straightforward and unarguable interpretation of Hunt’s most significant works from Cairo and Giza, I think that they do not go far enough to explain the social, cultural, and gender dynamics at work in these paintings—and in Hunt’s numerous watercolours, as well. These dynamics are closely related to the concerns about national and artistic identity and masculinity that Hunt voiced in his private correspondence from Egypt, so, now that I have discussed just how complex and multivalent these concerns were for Hunt, I shall attempt to map out how these textual utterances inform Hunt’s visual expressions.

As Allen Staley suggests in The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape, Hunt’s initial trip to the Middle East marked a shift in the genres in which the artist worked. He writes,

Before 1854 Hunt painted only an occasional pure landscape, as opposed to landscape backgrounds to other kinds of pictures. The earlier landscapes that we now know can be classified as studies or ancillary works rather than as independent pictures. It is worth nothing that Hunt did not exhibit any of his earlier landscapes until after his trip to the East . . . . (69)

Staley’s words imply that Hunt’s emphasis on landscapes during his time in Egypt and the Holy Land signals a new stage in the artist’s career and was enough of a shift that it also led Hunt to re-evaluate earlier work based on the landscapes he produced while
abroad. Thus, it seems only logical to begin my discussion of Hunt’s Middle Eastern landscapes by examining the watercolour drawing that appears to be the first painting that Hunt undertook in Egypt (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue 2*: 48).

*Cairo: Sunset on the Gebel Mokattum* (figure 12) is unique among Hunt’s watercolours for depicting a newer area of Cairo rather than the more famous nearby landscapes and monuments of Giza, and Hunt’s emphasis on “New Ca[iro]” in the work’s original title\(^\text{229}\) reflects the artist’s initial determination not to be lured into admiration for and depictions of the more traditional tourist sites. Hunt’s early disdain for the *paysagiste* is also echoed in the work, which focuses on the buildings that fill the centre of the image and on the wall and young women in the foreground and effectively relegates the landscape of the Mokattam hills to a relatively insignificant backdrop. Thus, even the basic structure of this small watercolour can be said to reveal Hunt’s anti-

\(^{229}\) As I mentioned earlier, the work was originally titled *Sketch from a House in New Ca. Looking towards the Gebel Mokattam*. 

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tourist stance and his surprisingly traditional and conservative evaluation of landscape
painting as a genre, and there are a number of other idiosyncratic elements within the
image itself that also mirror important elements of Hunt’s early experiences in Egypt.

In her *catalogue raisonné*, Bronkhurst notes that Hunt makes alterations to the
view that he would have had from this vantage point by entirely leaving out the Citadel, a
very prominent, centuries-old fortress, palace, and mosque, and ensuring that “the
prominent Christian belfry in the right foreground” (2: 44) dominates the other buildings
depicted here. These changes to the topography suggest that Hunt was reluctant simply
to draw the scene as he saw it. He may even have considered such a straightforward
translation of the scene to paper as a lack of originality and creative force, and it may be
this concern that is at the heart of his fear of becoming a *paysagiste*. Despite his well-
known later assertions that he always remained “true to nature” and painted each part of
an image as it appeared in life, which, as we have seen, he implies repeatedly during his
sojourn in Egypt, such passive receptivity to an object or scene’s existing appearance
would reduce an artist to a mere copyist, a figure who does not engage in any truly
creative work. This conundrum seems to have been readily apparent to Hunt when he
wrote his autobiography; the aging artist focuses in a number of passages on the
importance of not just using nature as the basis of “prosaic reproduction” (2: 367) but of
actively employing “the principle of selection” (2: 404) or “the exercise of
discrimination” (2: 363-4) to mould that which the painter sees into a pleasing image
“directed by the spirit of imaginative purpose” (2: 452). The words, such as
“exercise,” “directed,” and “purpose,” that Hunt employs to describe his aims subtly align

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230 For a brief description of the history of the Citadel, see Beattie 133.
231 Hunt also mentions this “principle of selection” or “the exercise of discrimination” at other points in his
autobiography; see, for instance, 2: 400.
the Pre-Raphaelites’ work not with an effeminate passivity of the kind that was hinted at by some of their earlier critics but with a more active—and, therefore, more masculine—shaping of raw material into a cohesive creative work. This emphasis not just on seeing but on shaping became, I would suggest, a way of combating others’ conceptions of art as a feminine pursuit, and it also became central to Hunt’s “continual search for a means of reconciling realism and symbolism, matter and spirit” (Landow, Typological viii) through the creation of scenes that were, at least ostensibly, historically or representationally accurate but could still be “read” as a narrative in which each object had been carefully considered and combined by the artist.

This concern with the active re-presentation of a scene to an audience seems to have shaped the watercolours that Hunt executed on his trip to Egypt, and, as we shall see, subtle variations to the actual views that he depicts characterize a number of these works. Bronkhurst suggests that the omission of the Citadel, which would be rather obvious to a viewer familiar with this scene, may “mak[e] a point about the clash of two cultures or the superiority, for [Hunt], of Christianity to Islam” (Catalogue 2: 49), and this reading rightly highlights the way in which this image can be viewed as much more than a simple “snapshot” and interpreted as having a larger message that, in the artist’s eyes, would demonstrate Hunt’s creative faculties of “selection” and, therefore, lift the work beyond the effort of a paysagiste and into the realm of narrative painting.

In his discussion of Cairo: Sunset in The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape, Staley discusses other elements of the watercolour like the “high vantage-point” (72) that the artist adopts and the presence of two young women in the far left foreground, which he describes as mere “appendages to the landscape” that “exist only to serve a compositional
function” (73). However, this rather brief discussion does not consider whether this perspective and these figures might serve a larger purpose in relation to the image. Given the near-obsessive fixation on details that is evident in works like *The Awakening Conscience* (1854) and *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1860) and the fact that each decorative element contributes to the works’ larger meanings, it is difficult to believe that Hunt would include such prominent details here on simply a structural or compositional basis.²³²

Indeed, if we consider this image in light of Hunt’s textual accounts of his experiences in Cairo, the elevated vantage-point becomes not just an example of Hunt’s efforts “to give his views some compositional structure” (Staley 72) but a clear attempt to translate the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene, which was so influential for Hunt, into an explicitly visual register. As I discussed earlier, Pratt emphasizes the visual aspect of these literary scenes and notes explicitly that, within them, “[t]he sight is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background, foreground, [and] symmetries” (204). I have shown the uses to which Hunt put such scenes in his Egyptian correspondence, but, in his watercolour of Cairo, Hunt removes this trope from a strictly textual register. In doing so, he creates a strong link between the position of social and cultural mastery that he attempts to achieve through his written accounts of his experiences and through his visual representations of them.

²³² Moreover, the value that Hunt placed on this watercolour as an example of his work is evident from two biographical facts. First, as Staley notes, Hunt kept this painting in the dining room of his own home until its sale in 1861 (72). Second, he exhibited this work alongside his earlier oil painting *Claudio and Isabella* (1853) and his masterpiece *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* at a gallery in 1861 (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 2: 49). These two facts, especially the latter, strongly suggest that Hunt considered this landscape as an effective example of his talents as a symbolic realist and as a pendant to his other major works.
The presence of the two young women in the corner reminds us once again of the centrality of the artist’s gaze. They may not be aware that they are being observed, but their presence, like the point of view of the painting, suggests that everything is open to the artist’s glance. Furthermore, although Bronkhurst does not note this fact, the activity of one of the girls, who is winnowing grain, heightens the narrative-based interpretation of this work as a comment upon “the superiority . . . of Christianity to Islam,” for, as Hunt no doubt knew, the imagery of winnowing, of separating chaff from grain, is constantly used in both the Old and New Testaments as a metaphor for dividing believers from non-believers, who will then be blown away by the wind or consumed by fire.233 In the larger context of this image, which so clearly privileges Christian architecture over Muslim, the action of this figure seems to have been deliberately chosen by the artist as a subtle gesture toward the landscape’s symbolic—rather than literal—significance.

The relatively straightforward imperializing stance that is emblematized by Hunt’s adoption of the monarch-of-all-I-survey point of view and his subtle gestures toward the superiority of Christianity is quickly problematized in the next work that Hunt began in Cairo, the oil painting entitled *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern-Maker’s Courtship* (figure 13).234 The subject matter of this image, which Hunt later described in his autobiography as an attempt by “a young tradesman” in the Cairo bazaar to see “the features [of his beloved] hidden under the black *burko* [sic]” (1: 385-6), continues the trend of the slightly earlier watercolour by focusing on the traditionally untouristic sites

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233 See, for instance, Job 21.18; Ps. 1.4, 35.5; Isa. 5.24, 17.13, 29.5; Jer. 23.28; Hos. 13.3; Matt. 3.12; and Luke 3.17.
234 Hunt actually completed two versions of this painting, and Bronkhurst notes that the second, smaller version may have been “begun in Cairo” like its larger companion (*Catalogue* 1: 170-1). For the purposes of this chapter, I will discuss only the larger, more well-known version of the painting, which Hunt showed at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1861 and which has subsequently been exhibited in the Walker Art Gallery’s 1969 retrospective of Hunt’s career and the Tate’s influential 1984 exhibition *The Pre-Raphaelites* (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 168).
of modern Cairo, and the painting is often discussed by critics as a foray by Hunt into ethnography (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 168; Barringer, *Reading* 121). Indeed, Hunt presented the work to the public in this way by including a discussion of the custom of veiling and its relation to romantic relations from Lane’s *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* as the sole note to explain the painting in the R. A. exhibition catalogue (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 168). As Said notes in his discussion of Lane’s text, ethnography represents the East as a place “for the European observer” and generally presents “the Orientalist ego” as a central organizing factor (158). Said’s words remind us of the fact that the knowledge collected by ethnographers like Lane is often converted into “a document of useful knowledge, knowledge arranged for and readily
accessible to anyone wishing to know the essentials of a foreign society” (Said 159). That is, these collections of fact are always embroiled in a previously established power relationship, and, in *A Street Scene*, this facet of ethnography is readily apparent in a number of elements that Hunt includes, which, as in *Cairo: Sunset*, move the image beyond simple depiction and into the realm of commentary.

For example, common European notions of Arab workers’ laziness are evident both in the idle posture of the lantern-maker and in the disarray of his booth, from which his work has been pushed aside. Moreover, the figure of the veiled young woman clearly plays upon what Behdad describes as the “stereotypes of Oriental life represented so abundantly in European paintings, postcards, and travel writing since the mid-seventeenth century—stereotypes such as . . . the Oriental woman as an object for voyeurism, and the veil as a repressive mask” (18). In addition, the column at the bottom left of the scene suggests that Egyptian civilization is past its prime and now lies in ruins, and the crowded perspective and emphasis on minute architectural details both help to depict the scene as one of chaos. All of these elements attest to Hunt’s embracing of standard Orientalist tropes in his relationships with Egyptians; indeed, Hunt’s discussions of the painting in his letters attest to his perception of the work as “an illustration of an unwise state of society which as it appears is fast falling to pieces” (qtd. in Parris, *Pre-Raphaelites* 16). This description of the painting by Hunt in a letter to Thomas Combe emphasizes the strong element of European ethnocentrism that is readily apparent in the painting, and, at the same time, the artist’s attempt to capture an image of a culture that “is fast falling to pieces” is redolent of Linda Nochlin’s discussion in “The Imaginary Orient” of the Orientalist “picturesque” as a means of “transform[ing] a dominated culture into subjects
of aesthetic delectation in an imagery in which exotic human beings are integrated with a presumably defining and overtly limiting décor” (51).\textsuperscript{235} As I discussed in Chapter Three in relation to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s representation of Nineveh, Nochlin goes on to argue that this attempt to capture one of the last moments of a disappearing culture, which characterizes this version of the picturesque, also serves “to certify that the people encapsulated by it, defined by its presence, are irredeemably different from, more backward than, and culturally inferior to those who construct and consume the picturesque product” (51). Thus, Hunt’s comment to Combe about \textit{A Street Scene} serves to reinforce on another level the ethnocentrism that is evident within elements of the painting itself.

While these relatively straightforward orientalizing tropes of laziness, sensuality, and decline are easy to locate within this canvas, there are other elements of \textit{A Street Scene} that point to the artist’s uneasiness with his position as the arbiter of the gaze. It was during his work on this painting in Cairo that Hunt began to encounter the difficulty of finding models (Bronkhurst, \textit{Catalogue} 1: 168), and the same types of ambivalences that called into question both his status as a European male artist and as a gazing subject in his textual accounts are evident through a careful consideration of one particular element of the image, which was Hunt’s first attempt at an oil painting in the Middle East.

The aspect of this canvas that is most intimately related to Hunt’s concerns about European male identity at this point is the figure of the European man in a black frock

\textsuperscript{235} I have chosen to separate this discussion of the Orientalist picturesque from my earlier treatment of the broader genre of picturesque landscape since the Orientalist picturesque of the kind that Nochlin describes focuses on people and their surroundings in a way that standard picturesque art, with its emphasis on landscapes depicted according to certain stylized conventions, does not.
coat at the far right edge of the painting. In discussions of *A Street Scene*, a number of critics have pointed to this character, for which Hunt’s close friend Millais posed in Hunt’s London studio in 1856 (Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism* 2: 105), and they all adopt the stance that Barringer does when he declares that the character of the European “surely represents Hunt’s own idealized self-image” (*Reading* 121) of distance from and violent control over the natives. In a similar statement, the entry for this painting in the Tate Gallery’s *The Pre-Raphaelites* exhibition catalogue links the figure with “Hunt’s own attitude toward the Egyptians” and draws an explicit comparison between “the top-hatted Englishman intimidating the natives” in the picture and Hunt’s statement about “knock[ing] down . . . Arabs in the Usbeykia” (Parris 161). And, finally, Bronkhurst’s *catalogue raisonné* focuses on the violence that the figure is in the midst of inflicting as a direct representation of “the European custom—so distasteful to present-day sensibilities—of beating Arabs out of their way in the crowded Cairo streets” (1: 169).

All of these readings of the figure of the European man focus on his purported status as a representative of a self-assured colonial enterprise, but this figure can also be interpreted as a representation of Hunt’s discomfiture during his time in Cairo. As I stated earlier, Hunt attempted to rely on clothing and more general physical appearance—along with violent action—as markers of difference, and these elements are clearly evident in the fictionalized Englishman’s black frock coat and glossy top hat, which visually separate him from the white tunic of the Arab alongside him. Yet such reliance on appearance and behaviour was constantly problematized for Hunt, and the artist’s realization of the fissures inherent in these aspects of his identity is evident in the placement of the European man in the painting, who, despite his visible attempt to assert
control over the other figures, appears to be in danger nevertheless of being absorbed into
the scene. We may not even notice his presence at first glance since he hardly occupies a
prominent position within the image, and he is, furthermore, entrapped on all sides by the
confusion of the marketplace. The person to his left hems him in from that direction,
while a camel carrying a large load blocks his motion forward. In spite of the fact that his
attire separates him visually from those around him, he still appears to be entangled by
the group of figures near him, and the sky, too, is closed off from him by the trellis
overhead. Moreover, the placement of the man’s body also hints at another problematic
aspect in the representation of European identity. By being situated with his back to the
viewer, the man becomes an object of the audience’s gaze in the same way that the
lantern-maker and his beloved do; it is physically impossible for him to meet the gaze of
the viewer with his own eyes as an equal. This turning of the back recalls Hunt’s own
status as an object of the gaze during his visit to the brothel in search of models for this
very painting, and it suggests a kind of powerlessness on the part of the figure to avoid
becoming part of the spectacle of the marketplace. All of these aspects of the depiction
of the European—his attempt to employ “identificatory practices” like clothing and
predictably violent behaviour, his apparent absorption into a place from which he tries to
separate himself, and his status as an object of the gaze—echo the concerns about identity
that are so prevalent in Hunt’s letters. Therefore I would argue that this figure does not
represent Hunt’s “idealized self-image” (Barringer, Reading 121) but serves instead as a
visual repository of all of the ambiguities and fissures of identity that Hunt experienced
and of his constant attempts in the letters to work out for himself the complicated
relationship among identity, action, perception, and appearance.236

236 Such insertion by Hunt of personal elements into his work was not unusual. In his 1995 article “Hunt’s
As my earlier discussion of Hunt’s Egyptian letters also demonstrates, one of the strategies that Hunt repeatedly adopts as a means of establishing more firmly—for his readers and for himself—his status as an anti-tourist tourist is that of showing disdain for the Pyramids, so it may be initially surprising to realize that these ancient monuments—along with the Sphinx, another popular tourist site at Giza—actually appear in no fewer than two watercolours and five informal sketches that Hunt executed in Egypt.237

Hunt’s most polished representations of the Pyramids and the Sphinx appear in a pair of watercolours that Hunt worked on during his two separate stays at Giza in 1854, and the first of these watercolours that Hunt began is simply called *The Great Pyramid* (1906) (figure 14). In her discussion of this work, Bronkhurst highlights Hunt’s statements of disdain for the Pyramids in his letters, and her juxtaposition of these declarations with her own observations that Hunt downplays the size of the Great

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237 The two watercolours are entitled *The Great Pyramid* (1906) and *The Sphinx, Gizeh, Looking towards the Pyramids of Sakhara* (1856). The five sketches in which Hunt depicts the Pyramids were included in the bodies of letters that he sent to his friends in England; Bronkhurst reproduces small versions of three of these images (*Catalogue* 2: 263-4), and Hunt himself reproduced the illustrations of the interiors of the Pyramids in his May 8, 1854, letter to Millais in *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1: 384-5).

Hunt also created an etching entitled *The Desolation of Egypt*, which depicts the artist encamped near the moonlit Sphinx; however, since Bronkhurst hypothesizes that the etching was executed in 1857 after Hunt’s return from the Middle East (*Catalogue* 2: 271), I have chosen not to discuss the image here and instead focus on works that were at least begun—if not completed—during Hunt’s three months in Egypt in 1854.
Pyramid, which is actually “the biggest single structure on earth” (Beattie 30), and that “Hunt has domesticated the image by according equal importance to the scene of everyday life on the Nile in the foreground” (Catalogue 2: 50) strongly suggests that there is a link between Hunt’s adoption of the role of the anti-tourist tourist and his depiction of the Pyramid in this watercolour.

Hunt’s determination not to provide a clichéd portrayal of this famous site is also apparent in other elements of the work. For example, much as he does with the Sphinx in the subsequent watercolour that I will examine, Hunt makes the Pyramid look more like a natural outcropping than a historical structure, and this re-imagining of the building removes it, as Hunt’s writings often do, from its own socio-historical context and effectively negates the primary source of its appeal to visitors—its centrality to a long-gone, mythologized, and somewhat mysterious ancient culture. Moreover, Hunt actively makes other attempts to de-romanticize his image of the Great Pyramid by refusing to allow it to be the sole focal point of the painting and by insisting on depicting it in harsh, broad daylight instead of the softer glow of moonlight, which, according to Gregory, drew many tourists to the Pyramids at night and created even more of a “romantic” aura.
around the tombs (“Scripting” 148). Finally, as Stevens notes in *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse*, Seddon completed a painting of the three major pyramids at Giza at the same time that Hunt was at work on *The Great Pyramid*, but there was a significant distinction between the work of Hunt and his companion:

> Seddon’s oil painting . . . present[s] a poetic image of the scene by recording the monuments silhouetted against a blazing sunset, imposing in their magnitude. Hunt, on the other hand, domesticate[s] the image in the medium of watercolour, concentrating on the play of light on the Great Pyramid and carefully observing the people and the bird life in the vicinity. (Stevens, *Orientalists* 186-7)

This comparison of the two drawings suggests that, even though Hunt was induced to spend some of his time painting the Pyramids, his fear of becoming either a tourist or a paysagiste—or both—led him to avoid assiduously the type of romanticization evident in the work of Seddon and many others.

Hunt completed his other watercolour of the monuments at Giza, *The Sphinx, Gizeh, Looking towards the Pyramids of Sakhara* (figure 15), during his second and final residence in the area (Staley 71), and this image continues the trend in Hunt’s writing and art of downplaying ancient monuments’ associations with Egyptian culture and instead

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238 Seddon’s painting is now lost (Stevens, *Orientalists* 186).
infusing them with an idiosyncratically personal significance. As the title of the painting suggests, the historically important region of Saqqara, “the world’s largest necropolis and site of the earliest pyramid” (Beattie 2), forms the backdrop of the image but is “relegate[d] . . . to the upper left-hand corner” (Parris, Pre-Raphaelites 269) at the far reaches of the landscape, and, as both Bronkhurst’s catalogue raisonné and the exhibition notes from the 2008 Lure of the East exhibition at the Tate Gallery point out, Hunt also chose to present a view from the back of the Sphinx that “ignores” the statue’s famously enigmatic face (Tate) and “concentrate[s] on the striations of the Sphinx as if it were purely a geographical phenomenon” (Bronkhurst 2: 50). As these descriptions imply, Hunt removes this pharaonic monument as well from its usual vaunted position as an example of the artistic abilities of ancient Egyptian civilization; in doing so, the artist clearly hints to the viewer that he was “most anxious to avoid being branded as a topographical watercolourist” (Parris, Pre-Raphaelites 269). However, Hunt’s insistent refusal to admire the Sphinx as an artifact of a once-great civilization is perhaps both a cause and a result of his determination to view the monument through a Christian lens that is entirely foreign and anachronistic to it, much like the perspectives of the “Small clergy” (“Burden” line 68) and “school-foundations” (“Burden” 76) in relation to the Assyrian bull that, as I discussed in Chapter Three, Rossetti so clearly critiques in the 1850 version of “The Burden of Nineveh.”

Like Hunt’s relationship to the Great Pyramid, which he could only view positively by removing it from its actual socio-historical context, the artist’s understanding of the Sphinx values the statue for a putative relationship to Christianity rather than for its own history. In Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,
Hunt records his conception of the Sphinx as “this ‘Watchful One’ . . . that is . . . lifting up its head to look always towards the rising sun for that Great Day in which the reign of absolute righteousness and happiness shall come” (2: 217). Bronkhurst explains this rather odd statement by describing Hunt’s view of the Sphinx “as some sort of precursor of Christianity” (Catalogue 2: 51), and Hunt’s construction of the Sphinx as a guardian watchful for a “Great Day . . . of . . . righteousness” certainly firmly places the monument within the New Testament’s anticipation of Christ’s second coming, an action that thoroughly negates the statue’s actual significance within the culture that created it.

Thus, while Hunt clearly refrains from evaluating the Sphinx in the more usual touristic or historical terms in order to mark his difference from other travelers and from artists like Seddon, who adopted more “topographical” representations of the monument (Parris, Pre-Raphaelites 270), his highly eccentric understanding of the statue, which dictates the unusual placement of the Sphinx in this watercolour, emphasizes the importance for Hunt of “reading” scenery and monuments in the much the same way that Hunt’s ideal viewer would read one of the artist’s works.

In addition to this unconventional representation of the Sphinx, the other striking aspect of this watercolour is the brightly coloured snake that occupies the lower left corner. Bronkhurst tentatively states that the presence of this creature, which has apparently been stoned to death, functions as a reference to Genesis 3.15 (Catalogue 2: 51), which describes God’s vow to the serpent in Eden that Eve’s “seed . . . shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” The form of the snake is, of course, representative of evil in this passage, but the fact that Hunt depicts the animal as already dead suggests that evil has already been conquered. Given Hunt’s interest in typology,
the artist would have been well aware of the traditional association of this verse with Christ’s Passion, so the presence of this dead snake next to the Sphinx points both to Christ’s death and to the second coming. Thus, the artist creates an entirely Christian chronology around the monument, and through this subtle association of images and ideas, Hunt, as he does in his earlier watercolour *Cairo: Sunset on the Gebel Mokattum* and in his letter describing his visit to the Great Pyramid, hints at his belief that Christianity supersedes both ancient and modern Egyptian faiths.

Yet, in the typical way that Hunt has of associating various levels of meaning with an image, the snake seems also to have a strongly personal significance. In *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, Staley suggests that the animal might represent an in-joke with Seddon, who, as we have seen, “had a passion for snakes and snake-charmers” (70), and Staley notes a few pages later that the presence of the creature “makes the image less self-contained, because it implies an action and an actor who is not shown” (73). This description of the snake’s presence as the result of an external actor calls to mind the position of the artist himself just outside the image and suggests that there is a link between the figure of the dead snake and Hunt’s experience with the poisonous serpent that he describes in the letter to James Clarke Hook. Hunt’s textual representation of the actual snake that he encountered focuses, as I have argued, on the artist’s use of the animal as a way of reasserting his “manly” status, which had been called into question, but, as I demonstrated, Hunt’s description of these events points to the ambivalence and performativity of his masculine role. If we consider the snake that appears in *The Sphinx* as an emblem of the animal described in Hunt’s letter to Hook, then the visually represented snake takes on a much larger personal importance to the artist by
demonstrating the way in which the very landscape of Egypt was, for Hunt, shot through with questions and uncertainties about his relationship to those around him. Indeed, these uncertainties and his attempts to overcome them through various appeals to performativity, action, and appearance marked the Egyptian monuments, landscapes, and cities for Hunt in the same way that this snake marks the landscape of Giza depicted in *The Sphinx*.

In contrast to Hunt’s two highly polished watercolours, the sketches of the exteriors of the Pyramids that were included in three letters to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Millais, and Thomas Combe are quite informal and are meant to serve as—for the most part—humorous illustrations of events that Hunt describes in the text of these epistles; because of this fact, the monuments themselves always appear only as background fixtures that are subordinated to images depicting events directly experienced by Hunt and Seddon, a fact that is hardly surprising given Hunt’s determined anti-tourist stance and his derogatory comments about “the three big blocks” (Lutyens 58) in the bodies of these very letters. However, it is worth examining one of these images in more detail since it not only indicates Hunt’s anti-tourist stance by relegating the Pyramids to an inconsequential background but also represents in a visual register the many tactics that Hunt employed to distinguish himself from all of the other people—Arab and European—surrounding him.

In this image that Hunt sent to Combe, the artist depicts himself seated before an easel on the banks of the Nile at Giza, but Hunt faces away from the Pyramids and
focuses his attention instead on a young fellāhah or peasant woman near the river. At its most basic level, this image attests to Hunt’s adoption of an anti-tourist pose in two ways. First, the unimportance of the Pyramids to the artist is made evident by the facts that the figure’s gaze is directed away from the monuments, that the Pyramids are very faintly penciled in contrast to the emphatically darker lines which delineate the artist’s body and easel, and that the artist’s head and hat block our view of the largest pyramid. Second, Hunt uses this self-portrait explicitly to remind the recipient that he is not sightseeing idly at Giza like a “regular” tourist but is instead hard at work on a new creation. Conveniently for the artist, these elements of the image, which distinguish him from other European visitors to Giza, also emphasize the “manliness” of his artistic project by showing him immersed in creative work; moreover, this work is executed on site on difficult terrain and, therefore, has a greater claim to a kind of authenticity that enables Hunt’s work to contribute to a “manly” discourse of useful knowledge.

Bronkhurst notes that this self-portrait of Hunt represents “the artist painting The Afterglow in Egypt” (Catalogue 2: 264), and it was during his work on this large oil painting, a discussion of which will conclude this chapter, that Hunt expressed the reaction to his audience member’s slaughter of the sheep that caused him to be accused of “unmanliness” by the adults and children surrounding him. Thus, the sketch’s emphasis on active and creative work as a symbol of the artist’s “manliness” functions to reassert Hunt’s self-perception after it had been shaken. This purpose is further served by the

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239 This image is reproduced in Holman-Hunt, Grandfather 97 and Bronkhurst, Catalogue 2: 264. Following the label Bronkhurst gives this untitled work, it is listed in my Works Cited as “Portrait of the Artist Painting The Afterglow in Egypt.”

240 The canvas that the easel in the illustration contains does not give an indication of what the artist is drawing, so it seems that Bronkhurst quite justifiably bases her assumption on the fact that the young fellāhah in the distance stands in a pose much like that of the woman in the finished painting.
multiple knives and guns that the artist holds while he works, which, from a compositional sense, work as a barrier between himself and the local inhabitants, who, he complains to Hook, remain “in a circle within three or four feet of me” (JRUL 1216.8); these weapons, moreover, associate Hunt’s pictorial labours with the “manly” tasks of discovery and exploration. Finally, the fact that Hunt’s gaze centres on the young woman rather than the inanimate Pyramids attempts to combat any imputations of the artist’s “unmanliness” by suggesting that he is not a spectacle for the locals but is instead subjecting them to the gaze of the male English artist.

Since this casual self-portrait of the artist depicts him working on the preliminary stages of *The Afterglow in Egypt*, which depicts a *fellāhah* in a scene of natural abundance, it seems fitting to conclude this chapter by briefly discussing this oil painting. *The Afterglow* (figure 16) is perhaps the most well-known of Hunt’s Egyptian works, and

![Figure 16. W. H. Hunt, *The Afterglow in Egypt*, 1854-63 (exh. 1864). Southampton Art Gallery.](image)

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it has been included in many exhibits of Orientalist art, such as the 1984 Royal Academy of Arts exhibition *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse* (Stevens 192), the 2005 Manchester Art Gallery show *Black Victorians* (Marsh 138-9), and the 2008 *Lure of the East* exhibition at the Tate Britain (Tromans 144).\(^{241}\) Hunt began his work on this painting during his second stay at Giza (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 172) after his difficulties with finding models in Cairo, and, upon its completion in England, *The Afterglow* was hailed by a number of critics, including those from the *Spectator*, the *Saturday Review*, and the *Daily Telegraph* as “a new departure for Hunt” due, at least in part, to the overt sensuality of the image (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 172). Indeed, the other oil paintings that Hunt conceived during his first Middle Eastern trip—*A Street Scene in Cairo*, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, and *The Scapegoat*—all have a strong moral (or at least didactic) element, and we have seen how this attempt to create a narrative that runs throughout each image also functions, albeit to a lesser extent, in Hunt’s Egyptian watercolours. Yet *The Afterglow* lacks this ability to lend itself easily to a straightforward “reading,” and, as Landow notes, even the eminent Victorian art critic Ernest Chesneau\(^{242}\) was “puzzled” by the exact meaning of this work (*Typological* 163-4). In hindsight, we can see that part of this confusion must have stemmed from the fact that *The Afterglow* is something of an anomaly in Hunt’s *oeuvre* up to this point because it depicts a woman more akin to the voluptuous “stunners” for which Dante Gabriel Rossetti would later become famous.

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\(^{241}\) As in the case of *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern-Maker’s Courtship*, there are two versions of *The Afterglow in Egypt* in existence. I have chosen once again to focus on the earlier version of the painting since the second one was not begun until 1860 (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 190).

\(^{242}\) Chesneau (1833-1890) was a prominent French art critic who wrote for a number of important nineteenth-century periodicals, including *L’Opinion nationale*, *Le Constitutionnel*, *L’Artiste*, and the *Revue des deux mondes* (Asfour).
The overt sensuality of this figure has drawn the attention of many scholars, and, in *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, Barringer rightly points out that “the painting is charged with coded sexual desire” amid scenery that represents “a fantasy of colonial plenty” (*Reading* 120). While Barringer argues that this portrayal of the young woman stems from Hunt’s determined and unquestioning belief in “British imperialism” (*Reading* 120), I would argue that the rationale behind Hunt’s creation of this painting may actually have been quite the opposite. I have shown how Hunt’s largely unsuccessful search for models caused the artist to be objectified by the locals and to feel powerless in the face of cultural and religious restrictions on modeling, and I have also demonstrated how this difficult situation led Hunt to realize that the East could not always be, in Gregory’s words, “a transparent space” to be “exposed” and unveiled at will by the European visitor (“Scripting” 115). In order to embark on a figure-painting like *The Afterglow*, which focuses on an unveiled and erotically displayed young woman, Hunt was forced to leave Cairo and search out a model among the *fellāhīn* working in the fields near the Pyramids. Because, as Hunt had read in Kinglake’s *Eothen* and Lane’s *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, these women were not restricted from modeling and did not generally wear a veil, the artist sought them out as a means of finding a model upon whom he could exercise the orientalizing gaze that was so frequently and repeatedly frustrated within the city. Indeed, examining *The Afterglow* within the context of Hunt’s previous experiences in Cairo and Giza suggests that there is a less obvious or stereotypical level to the unmistakable sensuality in the depiction of this woman, which is not just emblematic of the attraction and repulsion that Hunt felt towards the Other but may also be a working out of Hunt’s own insecurities, in which the artist—feeling
himself to be a spectacle for the consumption of the locals—turns his own gaze onto someone else in a way that reasserts by its openly sensual Othering stance both his masculinity and his status as an English outsider.

Hunt’s correspondence from Egypt, which is usually only briefly excerpted by critics in order to provide basic contextual information for the artist’s works, has, until this point, never been discussed as a cohesive whole, but, as my examination of the corpus of these letters proves, these documents can provide us with a complex image of Hunt’s time in Egypt that far exceeds the usual brief sentences or paragraphs that are devoted to it in accounts of the artist’s first Middle Eastern trip. Throughout these pieces of correspondence complicated themes of anti-tourist sentiment, blurred boundaries, identity, selfhood, and performativity appear repeatedly, and the sophisticated nature of these dilemmas alone suggests that the three months that Hunt spent in Egypt were not just a precursor to his visit to the Holy Land. In fact, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the concerns that Hunt expresses in his letters show a complex understanding on the part of the artist of the many ways in which identity is repeatedly constructed, and paying attention to the many incarnations and implications of Hunt’s anti-tourist stance not only lends us a comprehensive point of entry into his correspondence but also leads to the realization that Hunt’s Egyptian paintings and, in particular, his watercolours have, for the most part, been undervalued as artifacts that attest to the ambiguity of imperialist discourse. Throughout his time in Egypt, Hunt was subjected to questions from himself and others about aspects of his identity, yet Hunt’s trip to Egypt has been largely ignored due to the artist’s subsequent desire to highlight his connection to the Holy Land. Thus, this chapter has aimed to initiate a discussion of this critical segment of Hunt’s artistic
development by arguing that the artist’s anti-tourist stance led to an ambiguous position for him that subsequently informed the watercolours, drawings, and oil paintings that Hunt executed during this three-month period.
The preceding chapters have drawn both implicit and explicit comparisons between Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt. For instance, I have shown how their various reactions against the Royal Academy directly inform their work, leading to a biting critique of the art world in Rossetti’s “Burden of Nineveh” and an emphasis on realism—and subsequent anxiety about its achievability—in the paintings, sketches, diaries and letters of William Holman Hunt. Moreover, the last two chapters on Hunt remind us of the extent to which the artist’s reputation is based not just on paintings and drawings but on text and suggest that, for Hunt, like Rossetti, text and image can never be entirely independent. While Chapters Two through Five offer discussions that focus on Rossetti and Hunt more or less separately from one another, the unifying goal of this study is to highlight the significance of representations of the Middle East in the works of Rossetti and Hunt and to argue that these depictions are worthy of consideration not just in the paintings that Hunt created during his various sojourns in the Holy Land but within Rossetti’s juvenilia and his long poem “The Burden of Nineveh,” as well as in Hunt’s watercolours and published and unpublished writing. Indeed, representing the Middle East in these widely varying genres allowed both author-artists a forum in which they could test ideas regarding the role of the avant-garde author and artist and engage—whether consciously or not—in a complication of the basic tenets of Orientalism.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, the usual scholarly approach to these two figures is to consider them either in isolation or simply as two personalities among the larger group represented by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and its associates, and I would
argue that one reason for critics’ widespread failure to recognize the points of convergence in the careers of Rossetti and Hunt and the usefulness of comparing the work of these two figures is that contemporary criticism, in large part, is still dependent on Hunt’s selective, retrospective account of himself and Rossetti in *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. Elizabeth Prettejohn rightly notes that Hunt’s memoir “does not represent verifiable fact,” but, despite its unreliability, the narrative “remains the most important account” of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (23). Prettejohn also emphasizes the fact that Hunt’s autobiography has also been “[t]he most influential version of the myth” of the P. R. B. and that “[e]ven the other Pre-Raphaelite Brothers tended to draw on Hunt’s version in their own later writings, with only mild protests about his partiality” (23), which, as I have shown in Chapter Four, was largely expended on efforts to establish Hunt as the most faithful of the Pre-Raphaelites, an attitude that has largely been embraced by contemporary scholars.

In the context of his autobiography, Hunt also makes great efforts to distinguish his own career from that of Rossetti, and he speaks of his former colleague’s post-P. R. B. work in distinctly disdainful and moralizing tones. At one point, he writes, “This obedience to natural invention was, it will be seen, but transient, and never afterwards revived in his oil practice, indeed he soon branched off into a treatment, sensuous and august, which, as some thought, gradually grew to be overpowering, as is the odour of voluptuous perfumes in a closed room” (2: 363). Hunt makes the putative contrast between his own work and that of Rossetti even more explicit later in the text when he declares, “The more sensuous phase of taste developed in Rossetti’s later period was of
hothouse fancifulness, and breathed disdain for the robust, out-of-door growth of native Pre-Raphaelitism” (2: 436), which, of course, Hunt felt that he himself embodied.  

These efforts to draw a line of demarcation between the two artists have been perpetuated—without Hunt’s strongly moralizing tone—by many critics, and Rossetti’s statement in 1862 that “all the things that artists brought from the East were always all alike and equally uninteresting” (qtd. in Tromans, Lure 20) seems to suggest that, given Hunt’s concerted efforts to use realistic portrayals of the Middle East as the defining facet of his career, the gulf between these two author-artists is impassable. However, I would argue that the later work of these two figures is not quite as different as it appears to be at first glance, and I want to end this study by offering a brief—and by no means definitive—reading of two of their later paintings, Rossetti’s The Beloved (1866) (figure 17) and Hunt’s The Shadow of Death (1873) (figure 18).  

Figure 17. D. G. Rossetti, The Beloved, 1866. Tate Britain.

243 For similar descriptions of Rossetti’s work that focus on the “voluptuous,” “ornamental,” “sensuous,” and “over-luxurious” qualities that, according to Hunt, inhere in Rossetti’s later paintings, see 2: 143, 164, 364, 387, and 420.
244 As I mentioned in Chapter One, The Beloved “was considerably altered by Rossetti in 1873”; for a brief list of the changes that the artist made, see Parris, Pre-Raphaelites 211. The Rossetti Archive notes that “[n]o reproductions of the original oil painting exist, but the painting was photographed during the repainting process” (The Beloved). As I also noted previously, The Shadow of Death exists in three versions; here, I discuss the largest version of the work.
If we were to consider these paintings very cursorily, we might say that there is little basis for comparison between them. *The Beloved* is an overtly erotic representation of a verse from the Old Testament’s Song of Solomon, while, in *The Shadow of Death,* Hunt depicts an imaginary scene in the life of Christ that occurs in the midst of a dazzlingly realistic carpenter’s workshop. If we were to extrapolate further and consider these paintings not just in terms of subject matter but in regards to their place within the traditionally constructed *oeuvres* of these two artists, we might also regard Rossetti’s work as another in his series of post-1860 “stunners” and follow the Rossetti Archive in describing the work simply as “decorative in the extreme” (*The Beloved*). On an equally straightforward level, Hunt’s painting seems most easily characterized as a continuation of the artist’s project of defining himself in relation to the Holy Land. Indeed, Hunt attempted to further this link by writing “Jerusalem” next to his initials on the painting and by emphasizing in the pamphlet that he wrote to accompany its exhibition (Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 225) that he had undertaken this work in Bethlehem, Nazareth,
and Jerusalem (qtd. in Bennett 50). Moreover, Hunt’s pamphlet also emphasized the painting’s grounding in historical fact (Bronkhurst, Catalogue 1: 225), which represents another attempt on the part of the artist to relate this work to his earlier ones.

Yet, in spite of these apparent differences between the two images, they share a number of less obvious similarities. First, both works make use of a very eclectic mixture of artifacts from a number of cultures, many of which have nothing at all to do with the purported socio-historical context of each image. For example, Hunt’s pamphlet mentions that the artist includes tools of carpentry and decorative elements from Italian, Etruscan, Assyrian, Egyptian, and Persian sources (qtd. in Bennett 50), and Parris notes that, in a similar vein, Rossetti steps outside ancient Hebrew culture and uses Japanese clothing and “Peruvian featherwork” for the attire of his central figure (Pre-Raphaelites 211).

Second, in the process of describing their working habits, both artists actually stress the importance of the Pre-Raphaelite principle of painting from nature to these two works. In a letter to the woman who originally commissioned The Beloved, Rossetti speaks of his difficulties in finding a suitable model for the central figure and ends his discussion by noting, “I need hardly say that to paint it from any study, without nature, would be impossible” (qtd. in Surtees 105). My earlier discussion of Hunt’s pamphlet to accompany The Shadow of Death suggests the extent to which the artist linked this painting with his larger project of religious realism, and his statement in an 1870 letter from Jerusalem to his friend John Lucas Tupper that he carried a smaller version of the canvas with him to “carpenters [sic] shops and other places where the proper accessories could be found” (Coombs 129) demonstrates the extent to which Hunt was determined to

245 Bennett quotes a large portion of this pamphlet on 49-50.
take his efforts. Yet Rossetti’s brief statement of the importance of painting his model from nature suggests that Hunt’s later construction of Rossetti as an artist who indulged in only a “transient” (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 2: 363) period of attention to nature is problematic, to say the least.

Moreover, both of these apparently disparate paintings show the impact of the work of the Old Masters, a fact that recalls my earlier discovery of Rossetti’s 1839 imitation of Raphael and suggests, once again, that the Pre-Raphaelites’ relationship to their artistic predecessors is not as simple as we have often been led to think. Rossetti’s later admiration for and emulation of Titian is quite well-known, and the Rossetti Archive describes *The Beloved* as “a classic example of [Rossetti’s] adaptation of Titian and the school of Venice” (*The Beloved*). However, in regards to *The Shadow of Death*, Hunt’s connection to the Old Masters is more complicated. Although Hunt was always careful to distinguish his own depictions of Christ from earlier ones and commented on this painting in particular that “amongst the old masters there is not a single one representing Jesus Christ working as a carpenter” (qtd. in Bronkhurst, *Catalogue* 1: 226), Bronkhurst’s *catalogue raisonné* lists a number of ways in which Hunt’s “study of the Old Masters during his stay in Italy in the 1860s” influenced *The Shadow of Death*, including the image’s size, its positioning of the figure of Mary, and its depiction of “a semi-nude male figure” (1: 226).²⁴⁶

Finally, both *The Beloved* and *The Shadow of Death* share an element of strong eroticization. This aspect of *The Beloved* is obvious—from the verse from the Song of

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²⁴⁶ Pointon also suggests that the pose of Mary “echoes [that of] the kneeling maid in Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*” (38).
Solomon inscribed on the frame to the popular Orientalist theme of the woman unveiling for the (male) spectator’s gaze to, as F. G. Stephens describes it, the bridesmaids’ interest in “the effect of the disclosure [of the bride] on the coming man” (qtd. in Parris, *Pre-Raphaelites* 211). Indeed, this painting’s emphasis on the male gaze reminds us of the similar construction of the young peasant woman in Hunt’s *Afterglow in Egypt*. Yet, according to Marcia Pointon, Hunt’s later religious painting *The Shadow of Death* also shares this element of eroticism. She argues that the position of Mary, which, she suggests, was influenced by Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*, places, by extension, “the taut semi-naked body of Christ” in the position given to Venus in Titian’s work, “one of the most familiar images of Western female eroticized nudity” (38), and she goes on to say that viewers “are arrested by the gesture of Christ whose masochistically taut body, complete with sinews, body hair, sweat and dilated veins is offered up to us” (41) in what she characterizes as “a pose which can mean surrender in the moment of defeat or availability in a sexual sense” (43). Pointon characterizes this eroticization of Christ as “a very conspicuous slippage between secular and religious models that makes it difficult to categorize paintings within the traditional genre system” (38), and I would argue that this description could as easily be applied to *The Beloved*, which presents an ostensibly biblical theme but places it within a markedly secular—and sexual—register.

These similarities between *The Beloved* and *The Shadow of Death* should, I think, lead us to look anew at these works and to consider once again the possibility that there are more links to be drawn between the frequently divided figures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt. As the preceding chapters emphasize, both Rossetti

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247 The Rossetti Archive identifies the two verses that appear on the frame as Song of Solomon 1.2 and Psalms 45.14 (*The Beloved*), the former of which states, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.”
and Hunt make use of depictions of the Middle East as a means of working out their anxieties. In Rossetti’s juvenilia and “The Burden of Nineveh,” as well as in Hunt’s unpublished writings and Egyptian sketches and watercolours, we can see that these two author-artists attempt to determine and fix in their own minds the functions of art and literature, the interplay between texts and images, the need for and efficacy of the P. R. B.’s particular kind of artistic reform, and the impossibility or undesirability of full realism.

Indeed, the fact that Hunt created three separate versions of *The Shadow of Death* and wrote a pamphlet to explicate the work to his audience suggests that the artist viewed this painting as an opportunity to fix in his own mind and that of his viewers the status of the work as a descendant of such “realist” works as *The Scapegoat* and *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, which would solidify his position as the pre-eminent artist of religious realism in England. Yet, at the same time, these efforts to assert this position for himself were, as in many other instances, retrospectively constructed; basing her discussion on an entry that Hunt wrote in his diary in 1872 while working on the painting, Bronkhurst notes that the artist himself was forced to realize that “[t]he ideal of truth to nature on a canvas . . . [this] size . . . was virtually unattainable” (*Catalogue 1*: 226). Thus, while Hunt was able to use this representation of the ancient Middle East to further his goals for his broader artistic career, once again, the actual production of the image points to his insecurities and ambivalence and highlights the fact that these details needed to be over-written in order for him to achieve the professional position that he desired.
While Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who had embarked in 1859 on a new style of art that anticipated the Aesthetic movement (Surtees 68-9), was, unlike Hunt, clearly not concerned with the plausibility of a uniquely Pre-Raphaelite form of religious realism, his use of a Middle Eastern setting in *The Beloved* recalls the depictions of the region and its inhabitants in his juvenilia that, as I discussed in Chapter Two, rely on emotional impact, dramatic import, and “poetic design” rather than ethnographic realism, and this image suggests that his early association of Middle Eastern narratives with this kind of invocation of feeling continued into his later works.

The foregoing discussion of *The Beloved* and *The Shadow of Death*, two important and well-known works from the *oeuvres* of Rossetti and Hunt, has necessarily been quite brief, but it highlights the ways in which trends that I emphasized in the author-artists’ earlier relationships to the Middle East continued to inform their later works. While it is impossible to consider all the representations of the Middle East in the vast corpus of the Pre-Raphaelites, I have chosen major examples from the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt in an attempt to challenge contemporary critics to reconsider our division of these two figures and, more importantly, to provide a framework for subsequent discussions of the varied and complex depictions of the Middle East in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites.
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