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Elizabeth Siddal: a Complex Muse

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Introduction

Ever since I was in middle school I have always been fascinated by Elizabeth Siddal. All I knew about her when I was younger was that she had sat as a model for Millais' *Ophelia* (1851–1852). Indeed, I selected this painting and the strange legend behind it as my topic for my art project for my final exam both in middle school and in high school. Only later did I discover her talent as both a painter and a poetess. I vividly remember reading her brief verses for the first time and thinking that they were speaking to my soul. It is a great opportunity for me to be able to analyze her life and her work in detail for this project.

The aim of this research is to discover the 'veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna'[1] by analyzing the figure of Elizabeth Siddal both as a muse and a creator of works of art in order to differentiate two aspects: how she was perceived by others and how she actually was. As reported by Hassett in her own analysis of this enigmatic personality, 'given the historical denigration of Siddal's poetry, to undertake a critical study without offering aesthetic assurances makes little sense so I would like to affirm at the outset that Siddal is a good poet'[2]. Indubitably, poetry (and art in general) is very subjective but it is worth underlining that Elizabeth had the right credentials to become a great poet. It is a shame that (as further analyzed later), being a woman she did not have the same opportunities her male colleagues had and was subject to the negative reviews of her work by the predominantly male literary criticism of her time.

Each chapter of my project represents and analyzes one side of this enigmatic figure. The first chapter is a biographical introduction to her life in which I try to describe her as objectively as possible, then, in the second chapter, I discuss how she was depicted by the Rossettis (both Dante Gabriel, his brother and his sister) as a frail and weak dying dove. Chapter 3 focuses on the theme of the mad and suicidal muse. Indubitably the history of art has been characterized by many examples of this kind of muse: Zelda Fitzgerald is frequently described as crazy and Marie-Thérèse Walter (Picasso's muse) is remembered for committing suicide in 1977. However, when analyzing the life of an artist it is fundamental to collocate he/she within a socio-cultural context and, from that point of view, chapter 3 also focuses on the role played by necrophilia in the Victorian Age and

[1] D. Alighieri, *Convivio* (Segrate: Einaudi, 2000), p. 33. 'The truth hidden under beauteous fiction', [D. Alighieri, *The Convivio of Dante Alighieri* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1903), p. 63.]
[2] C. Hassett, "Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry: A Problem and Some Suggestions", *Victorian Poetry*, 1997, 35.4, p. 454.

how it affected the perception people had of Elizabeth as a dying muse. Chapter 4 deals with the stereotype of the *donna angelo,* based on the model forged by the poets of the Stilnovo. Moreover, a comparison between the different muses of Rossetti also appears in this section. Finally, the last chapter draws the conclusion to this work with an analysis of the small literary and pictorial production of Siddal within the context of gender studies. As reported by Parker, the relationship between artist and muse has frequently been linked to gender issues. Indeed, when establishing the role of the female muse as subordinate to that of the artist (he has the talent while she is a mere object to be admired), women get associated with 'the passive, inspiring role rather than that of active creator'[3]. This issue, together with the cultural factors that characterize patriarchal societies, have led women to struggle to be recognized and valued as artists themselves.[4] The final section of my project (focusing on the literary work of Siddal) is titled *The Muse writes back* which is a clear reference to the excellent essay by Parker with the same title.

As far as the sources I selected are concerned, some of them represent the pillars of my project. First of all, indubitably the work made by Jan Marsh in many of her books has been fundamental to rescue Elizabeth's life and works from the shadow of her husband (most of all Marsh's book *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* published in 1989). Moreover, Marsh has played an important role in giving a voice to many female artists that were associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Those texts have been essential to lay the foundation of this work since they are detailed and they take into account the perception the public had of Siddal in different moments in history. Violet Hunt was also a useful source with her book *The Wife of Rossetti Her Life and Death, etc.* published in 1932 in which she claimed that she was a close friend of Lizzie. For this reason, she should be considered as a reliable source.

As far as the story of Dante Gabriel Rossetti is concerned, many biographies have been published throughout the years. The list includes: Henry Marillier's *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life* (1899), Judy and Brian Dobbs' *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Alien Victorian* (1977) and Stanley Weintraub's *Four Rossettis* of the same year. After reading all of these texts, I selected Oswald Doughty's *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a Victorian Romantic* (1949) as the main resource for the biographical information regarding Rossetti for several reasons. First of all, he focuses

[3] S. Parker, "The Muse Writes Back: Lyric Poetry and Female Poetic Identity" in G. Dowd and N. Rulyova (eds) *Genre Trajectories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 89.
[4] *ibidem*.

on the events of Rossetti's biography much more than on his art (unlike the other books). Moreover, it is the only biography that dedicated time to discuss in detail the relationship with Siddal. Indeed, as supported by Marsh, other biographies (for example William Tirebuck's *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: his work and influence* published in 1882) barely mention Elizabeth. In Tirebuck's pages women appear as' abstractions, dreams, musings, lethargic spirits coming to the borderland of matter and keeping aloof from it in spiritual pride'.[5] On entering the art world with the Pre-Raphaelites, Elizabeth lost her identity. Indeed, as explained later she literally lost her name (her real surname is Siddall) to adopt a distorted version of her identity proposed by Rossetti. It was allegedly Dante Gabriel who proposed her to change her name (to Siddal) to make it more appealing for the art market. Furthermore, in letters written by her contemporaries and friends she is rarely called by her name but rather by several nicknames (the Sid, Gug, Guggum, dove, Ida, etc.).[6]

Chapter 3 deals with a comparison between Siddal and Ophelia, the character she modelled for in Millais' painting in 1851. As far as this topic is concerned, I have found it interesting to read the illuminating *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, a collection of essays edited by Deanne Williams and Kaara Peterson which focuses on several re-interpretations of the Shakespearean heroine. Moreover, the creation of this chapter has allowed me to get to know something more about the perception of sickness in the Victorian Age and the relationship the Victorians had with necrophilia. The play written by Shakespeare has also been an inevitable companion for the writing of this chapter. Similarly, Dante Alighieri's *Vita Nuova* has been fundamental for chapter 4 which focuses on the perception people frequently had and have of Siddal as a *donna angelo*. Finally, as far as the last chapter is concerned, together with all of Marsh's texts on the topic, Serena Trowbridge's collection of Elizabeth's verses with a brief analysis of each poem has been essential.

[5] W.E. Tirebuck, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Work and Influence: including a Brief Survey of recent Art tendencies* (London: E. Stock, 1882), p. 32.
[6] G. Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 134.

Not much has been written throughout the years on the life and the work of Elizabeth Siddal so hopefully this project will provide another perspective on the analysis of this peculiar figure. Indubitably a lot more could be said and discovered about this enigmatic woman but hopefully this project will allow readers to grasp an idea of who she really was.

Chapter 1: Who Is Elizabeth Siddal?

In this chapter I will provide a brief introduction to the life of Siddal. It contains biographical information regarding her life and some introductory concepts to begin the analysis of how she was perceived by others. In each chapter I will select an image as a reference, more frequently a painting. In this case I selected a photograph in order to present Lizzie as objectively as possible.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, possibly by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

By its own definition, a 'muse' is a 'person or personified force who is the source of inspiration for a creative artist'[7]. The term inevitably evokes the nine Greek Goddesses, daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, who symbolize art and science. They have always been associated with charm and beauty but they are usually seen as tools for great artists to find a way to express themselves through art. They have never been perceived as active creators or geniuses themselves even if, traditionally, they were believed to speak through the artists. As stated by Bronfen, in the course of centuries, the Muses were assigned 'a merely decorative status' or seen as 'reincarnated in specific human beings' thus assuming that the poet's 'creative potency is sufficient'[8]. Throughout the centuries many

[7] www.oxfordenglishdictionary.com [accessed 01.4.2020]
[8] E. Bronfen "Dialogue with the Dead: the Deceased Beloved as Muse", in R. Barreca (ed) *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), p. 245.

artists found their own living or dead muses, that were most frequently women. Elizabeth Siddal is one of those women, alongside Victorine Meurent (Édouard Manet's muse) and Fanny Brawne, the protagonist of many of Keats' sonnets. Elizabeth Siddal is better known as the model of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood but not many know that she also inspired other artists even after her death. Like a Victorian Beatrice (to which, as further analyzed later, she has frequently been associated) she was the reference for the character of Sibyl Vane, Dorian Gray's love interest.[9] Wilde was not the only artist that was dazzled by this enigmatic individual since, even nowadays, singers and actresses like Florence Welch and Lily Cole, consider Siddal as a style icon and a source of inspiration. Being such an enigmatic figure, many modern artists have been fascinated by her and they decided to include her in their work (e.g. *Lizzie* by Eva Wanjek and the graphic novel *How They Met Themselves* by Neil Gaiman).

There are few facts that can be considered certain when it comes to analyzing the life of this woman. Her birthday has been highly discussed (especially by Edwards in *Elizabeth Siddal: the Age problem* who claims that she told everyone she was younger because she wanted to appear youthful) and it has only recently been fixed on 25 July 1829. The 'age problem' as Edwards calls it, also interferes with the perception people had of her throughout the years. Stating that she was several years younger than her husband and that she was only sixteen when she was discovered (as claimed by some sources) places her in a position of inferiority, with regards to the artists she worked with.[10] On the contrary, placing her birthday in 1829, allowed biographers to understand she was 21 when she first modelled for the Brothers.

She was one of Charles Siddall's seven children and she was born as Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall but she adopted a different spelling for her family name (Siddal), probably under Rossetti's influence. She was born at her family's house at 7 Charles Street, Hatton Garden, London and, although there are no proofs of her education, her poems are evidences of the fact that she could read and write and of the inspiration derived from reading Tennyson. This famous English poet is also one of the greatest influences of the Brotherhood. In one of his letters Arthur Hughes, a later member of the Brotherhood, claimed that Elizabeth had started reading Tennyson's works after finding

[9] E. Orlando, "Passionate Love-Letters to a Dead Girl: Elizabeth Siddall in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray", *Victoriographies,* 2017, 7.2, p. 101.
[10] M. R. Edwards, "Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal. The Age Problem", *The Burlington Magazine*, 1977, 119.887, pp. 110-12.

a few of his poems on a piece of paper which she brought home and used as an envelope for a piece of butter. [11]

When it comes to her origins, different sources claim different things. This is something that happens frequently with such enigmatic figures especially since in the Victorian Age there were no strict rules regarding census and certificates. Marsh, the author of *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (among other works on the topic) decided to divide the book that is still considered a Bible when it comes to analyzing the life of Siddal, based on how her figure was requalified throughout the years. She stated that 'the factual.information [regarding Siddal's life] functioned chiefly as a framework within which biographers sketched their own preoccupations'. [12] Indeed, as discussed later, depending on the source many historical events regarding her life are told differently. A perfect example of this problem is the investigation regarding her father's occupation which influenced the economic condition she grew up in. William Michael Rossetti (the brother of Dante Gabriel) is, as stated in the following chapter, one of the key references not to comprehend the events in her life but rather to see how she was perceived by her contemporaries and most of all by the Rossettis. When investigating Mr. Charles Siddall's job, William claims he was a Sheffield cutler while he was well aware (due to his relationship with Elizabeth's brothers) that he worked as an ironmonger. The term 'cutler', as stated by Marsh, suggests a lower social status thus placing Elizabeth several rungs over the Rossettis.[13] According to Violet Hunt she was 'born and bred in a slum'.[14]

[11] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 53.
[12] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 107.
[13] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 35.
[14] V. Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti Her Life and Death, etc.* (London: John Lane, 1932), p. 45.

Walter Deverell, Twelfth Night, 1850.

Many sources agree that she was discovered by Walter Deverell while working in a milliners' shop in Cranbourne Alley. [15] Deverell is normally associated to the Brotherhood even though it is frequently claimed that his greatest artistic merit was 'discovering' Siddal. Allegedly, Deverell went shopping with his mother and he was hypnotized by Elizabeth's beauty, therefore he sent his mother to ask the girl if she wanted to model for him. She sat for him as Viola in his painting *Twelfth Night* (1850) before being introduced to the Brotherhood. Dante Gabriel Rossetti modelled for Orsino's jest (Feste) while Deverell portrayed himself as Duke Orsino. As chronicled by Hawksley, Deverell could not manage to give justice to Elizabeth's locks of hair so, as prophetic as it may seem, Rossetti painted them for him. [16]

Interestingly enough, her first role was that of a young girl that dresses as a boy to survive in her world. Likewise, Siddal would have needed to become a man to succeed with her work in the Victorian Age. Indeed, she was herself an artist but the aim of my work is to demonstrate that her story has much more frequently been told by others than by herself. Indeed, rarely her poems are taken into consideration when analyzing her biography and this might be due to the fact that she was not a prolific poet. 16 poems and some fragments are the only proofs we have of her poetical career. As stated by Marsh,

[15] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* p. 41; E. Orlando, *op. ci*t., p. 105; L. Bradley, "Elizabeth Siddal: Drawn into the Pre-Raphaelite Circle", *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, 1992, 18.2, p. 139
[16] L. Hawksley, *Essential Pre-Raphaelites* (Bath: Parragon Pub., 2001), p. 24.

'her pictures were largely ignored, and her poems quoted only as evidence of her excessive, self-absorbed misery'.[17] The best example of this phenomenon is William Michael Rossetti's work since he referenced her in many of his books about his brother and he even wrote an entire book about her and his words are considered as undeniable truths by many. What is clear though, reading his lines, is his misogynistic view point on her life and her work and the fact that he himself knew little about her. For example, in many sections of the book he claims she was younger than she actually was and he constantly emphasizes her sickness even if he keeps repeating that he met her only rarely. This sickness (that will be later discussed in details) has also been questioned by many researchers that disagree on her condition. Did she suffer from pneumonia? Bulimia? Anorexia nervosa? A shared belief regards the fact that she was clinically depressed after she suffered a miscarriage in 1861. This led many to state that the overdose of laudanum that caused her death on 11 February 1862 was self-induced, since there is no evidence she had previously been addicted to the substance.

Her relationship with Deverell has also been profusely discussed. William Ibbitt, an alleged cousin and friend of Lizzie and the author of the obituary notice regarding her death, claimed that 'Tizzie' (as he called her) 'was first engaged as a saleswoman in a milliner's shop in London, where a young artist, I forget his name – fell in love with her when he escorted his sister' (a different side of the story) 'to choose a bonnet. He wished to marry her but died shortly after from consumption'.[18] Another source of reference when studying the figure of Elizabeth Siddal is Viola Hunt's *The Wife of Rossetti Her Life and Death, etc* in which she proposed a romanticized approach to events and she also supported the hypothesis of a love interest between Deverell and Elizabeth. [19]

Lizzie, the Sid or Guggum (as she was called by Dante Gabriel) had an iconic look that brought her to popularity. William Rossetti described her as: 'tall, finely formed with a lofty neck and regular yet somewhat uncommon features, greenish-blue unsparkling eyes, large perfect eyelids, brilliant complexion and lavish heavy wreath of coppery-golden hair.'[20] The father of John Ruskin (a sort of Giorgio Vasari of the Victorian Age who played a fundamental role in the success of the Brotherhood) once stated that by her

[17] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* p. 104.
[18] I. M. Gilchrist, 18.5.1928, Sheffield LS.
[19] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 109.
[20] W.M. Rossetti, (ed.), *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Family-Letters with a Memoir* (London: Ellis & Elvey, 1895), p. 171.

looks and her manner she might have been a countess. [21] Georgiana Burne-Jones in her *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* described Lizzie as follows: 'Lizzie's slander, elegant figure -tall for those days, but never knew her actual height – comes back to me, in a graceful and simple dress, the incarnate opposite of the 'tailor-made' young lady'.[22] She then referenced 'her beautiful deep-red hair loosely fastened up' and her complexion that 'looked as if a rose tint lay beneath the dark skin'[23] . According to Violet Hunt she was actually first noticed by the Irish poet William Allingham who then introduced her to Deverell [24] since she was thin enough to look good in man's clothes as Viola but he found 'her pale face, abundant red hair, and long thin limbs . . . strange and affecting'. Moreover, he 'did not admire Miss Siddall except for her complexion. Gentle, with the manners of a lady, she did not say much probably had very little to say, always seemed in a dream..'[25] Hunt herself in describing Lizzie said: 'Miss Siddal's hair, of course – not her eyes too pale, or her nose, too round – was her best asset as far as painters were concerned.'[26] According to Marsh, Lizzie was considered as a talented but not beautiful model, capable of wearing strange outfits and holding difficult poses. [27] Being always described from the physical viewpoint as tall, beautiful and ethereal, words have rarely been spent to describe her behavior and her personality even if she is frequently associated with melancholia and shyness. Hughes described her as 'exceedingly quiet, speaking very little' [28] while, according to Uphuas, many, including Rossetti, ignored her real personality and created a role for her to play fully compliant with their own artistic projects. [29] Violet Hunt claimed that Elizabeth did not strive to be liked or to make others comfortable and she also defined her as 'not friendly or chatty'. She then added that 'like Beatrice' she was used to denying others everything but her salutation. [30]

Many sources agree that the meeting with Deverell occurred in 1849, just a year after the foundation of the Brotherhood, the year in which they were starting to gain

[21] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit*.,* p. 53.
[22] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit*.,* p. 64.
[23] *ibidem.*
[24] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 19.
[25] *idem,* p. 25.
[26] *idem,* p. 32.
[27] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit*.,* p. 162.
[28] *idem,* p. 53.
[29] A. Uphaus, "Elizabeth Siddal: Creator and Created", *The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society*, 2008, 16.1, pp. 30-43.
[30] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 45.

popularity. [31] Posing for many members of the Pre- Raphaelite Brotherhood led her to become the stunner, the wife and the apple of Rossetti's eyes, who started to believe that his lover was a sort of lucky charm and decided to make her his. Unfortunately, the love he felt for Elizabeth did not stop him from pursuing other girls, mainly prostitutes and models. As far as this aspect is concerned, it is important to point out that, at that time, being a model was considered not that much different than being a prostitute and Elizabeth herself was criticized for her representation of Viola in *Twelfth Night* since in the painting she was dressed as a man and she showed her legs a lot. Indeed, this was not considered proper behavior for a Victorian Woman and this might be the reason why many contemporaries (including Ibbitt) avoided mentioning her occupation as a model.

This was not the only struggle women had to face at that time. Suffice it to say that the suffragette movement (which led to the women's suffrage in 1928) was established in England only in 1869. For female artists in Elizabeth's time gaining recognition was a constant struggle. For instance, women were excluded from the Royal Academy Schools, although some women were among the funding members of the Academy. As further discussed in the last chapter, women struggled to receive an education, especially an artistic one. Their only chance was to marry an artist or to be the daughter of one.

It is important to dedicate a few words to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood when talking about their muse. The Tate Museum defines them as a 'secret society of young artists founded in London in 1848' and 'Britain's first modern art movement'[32]. They wanted to create art in opposition to the Royal Academy standards and they took early Renaissance paintings as inspirations. The term Pre-Raphaelite as stated by Jan Marsh in *Pre-raphaelite Women Artists* 'in invoking the perceived purity of early Renaissance art, symbolized the modern, earnest searching for pictorial truth, beauty and moral meaning that underpins both its content and its form'.[33] The name itself is a reference to the Italian painter Raphael since they rejected all the artistic production that had come after the great Renaissance painter. The Brotherhood was founded by William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (among others) who established a series of artistic declarations to base their artistic production on. These declarations were clearly

[31] L. Bradley, *op. cit.,* p. 139; S. Arcara, *Elizabeth Siddal. Di Rivi e Gigli.* (Bari: Palomar, 2009) p. 49; A. Uphaus, *op. cit.,* p. 30.
[32] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/pre-raphaelite [accessed 05.04.2020]
[33] J. Marsh and P. Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* (Manchester: Manchester City Art Galleries, 1997), p. 9.

listed in William Michael Rossetti's *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters, with a Memoir* as follows: '1. To have genuine ideas to express; 2. to study Nature attentively, so as to know how to express them; 3. to sympathise with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote; and 4. and most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.' [34] According to Bradley, 'while Millais and Hunt pursued the dual goals of being true to nature and developing a new repertoire of subjects from literature, religion and modern life, [...] Rossetti's subjects were bound up with the Bible or with the Italian poet Dante Alighieri, the painter's namesake and Dante's idealized lover and muse, Beatrice.'[35]

Thanks to the praises made by John Ruskin on *The Times* the Brotherhood began to achieve success. In 1855 John Ruskin also began a patronage of Elizabeth Siddal in order to encourage her to work and he also counted her among the five geniuses he had known in his life. In 1857 she was the only female artist to appear in a Pre-Raphaelite paintings exhibition in Marylebone and in 1991 a whole exhibition was reserved to her work. Unfortunately, she is frequently remembered for her toxic relationship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and for her death due to a laudanum overdose and not for her numerous pictorial works and her poems. The marriage between the two took place at St Clements Church, Hastings, on 23 May 1860 after a long period of sickness for Siddal. [36]

In 1851 William Holman Hunt also depicted Elizabeth Siddal as a Shakespearean heroine but she no longer appears in *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1851) in the role of Sylvia. Indeed, after Ruskin emphasized the 'commonness' of features in the girl's face, Hunt repainted it. [37] In 1851, she went (probably for the first time) to model for Dante Gabriel for the figure of Delia in the sketch of *The Return of Tibullus to Delia* (1851) in which she appears sucking her hair. After that she slowly began to avoid working with artists that were not Rossetti for whom she posed as the Virgin Mary, Dante's Beatrice and, most of all, as herself. The representations of Rossetti's lover are considered among the best works of the painter and they perfectly embody the tenderness with which he looked at his wife, especially when she was sick. In the series of portraits painted by Rossetti while his wife was staying in Hastings (hoping that a different climate

[34] J. Marsh and P. Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists,* cit., p. 56.
[35] L. Bradley, *op. cit.,* p. 137.
[36] *idem*., p. 141.
[37] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 162.

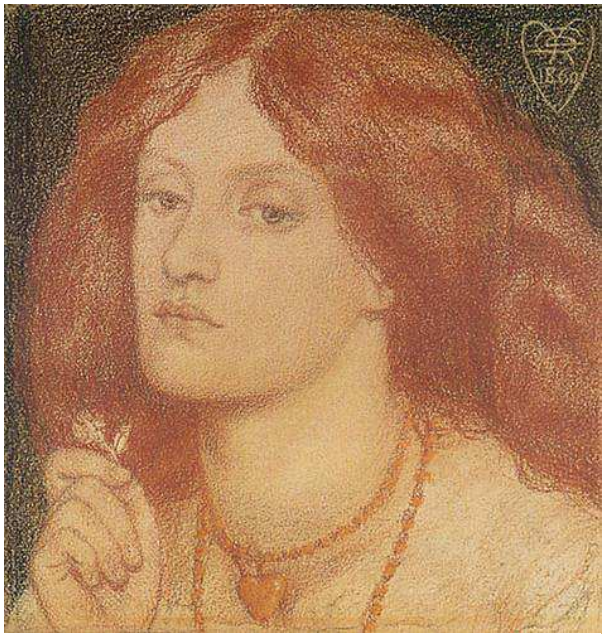
might improve her health), Siddal is depicted as a melancholic and submissive sleeping beauty thus perpetuating the myth that she only existed as an object for Rossetti to adore and take care of.

One of the most important works she modelled for is Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Regina Cordium* (1860). This image was made in more than one version and it was supposed to represent Dante Gabriel's wife. In September 1860, right after their honeymoon to Paris, Rossetti finished the first version, the drawing, while the second one, an oil on panel, was completed after a few months.[38] Cristina Hernández González underlined the differences between painting and drawing, since she perceived them as evidence of Rossetti's supremacy on Siddal.[39] Indubitably, the drawing shows a "realer" Siddal, maybe even happier, while in the painting she looks sad, distant from the rest of the world. The first great difference regards the hair since, while in the drawing it is falling freely down her shoulders, in the painting, it is more controlled and combed. It seems to have been accurately placed by the artist in order to create a more harmonious composition.[40] The colors have also been darkened thus making everything seem more natural. According to Vernoy, these changes between the first and the second version indicate the control Rossetti was exercising on his model's body as well as on her social status. The ornaments, the jewels, the hair, the light makeup and the golden background are the "instruments" Rossetti uses to transform a humble "saleswoman" into a Queen.[41] The point Gabriel might have been willing to make was that the social stratification, so deeply rooted in the Victorian context, was malleable and flexible in the world of art. Indeed, the accessories are mere markers of a certain social status and, according to Rossetti, social classes, were becoming a fiction in terms of appearance and thus, subject to representation. The other great difference regards the eyes since in the drawing she apparently looks at the viewer while in the painting she avoids eye contact and she also seems rather tired.[42] As further discussed later, the glance plays a fundamental role in the analysis of the role of women as subjects of artistic works. Indeed, the look Siddal offers her audience in Rossetti's paintings is generally sleepy while the way she stares at the

[38] C. Hernández González, "Regina Cordium: las voces quebradas de Elizabeth Siddal", in: Romano, Yolanda and Velázquez García, Sara, Las inéditas: voces femeninas más allá del silencio (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad Salamanca, 2018), p. 425.
[39] *idem*, pp. 425-426.
[40] *idem.,* pp. 429-430.
[41] L.B. Vernoy, *The Value of a Body: Anatomy Lessons in Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Visual Culture. PhD thesis* (San Diego: University of California, 2012), p. 161.
[42] C. Hernández González, *op. cit.,* p. 430.

audience in her self-portrait is rather different. The same thing can be said about the hand holding the flower since, while in the drawing her hand looks lively, in the painting it seems to be clinging to the flower (which looks larger). According to Hernández González these differences should be taken into account when considering Rossetti perspective in the perception everyone has of Siddal.[43] Maybe the drawing represents the real Elizabeth while the painting is Rossetti's vision of her.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Regina Cordium, 1860


Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Regina Cordium, 1860

Her life was embedded in art and art haunted her even after she died. A frequently remembered macabre anecdote regards the exhumation of her body from the Highgate Cemetery since Rossetti wanted to save his manuscript of poems he had buried with her as a token of love. This act has frequently been perceived as very disturbing even though Rossetti tried to justify himself in a letter to his friend Swinburne stating that: 'no one so much as herself would have approved of my doing this. Had it been possible to her I should have found the book on my pillow the night she was buried'.[44] Jan Marsh's books begins in that Cemetery in which she found the following situation: 'the undergrowth and overgrowth were such that we could find no name grave, though we stripped and scraped ivy and moss from a dozen headstones'.[45] This description could be interpreted as

[43] C. Hernández González, *op. cit.,* p. 430.
[44] E. Orlando, *op. cit*., p. 114.
[45] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 2.

evidence of the fact that Elizabeth had been forgotten and her grave was not that frequently visited.

Louise Tounder, while analyzing the role of Elizabeth's hair for a queer reading of this enigmatic figure, stated that there is a comparison to be made between the disturbing legend of the exhumation and this description provided by Marsh.[46] As further analyzed later, Charles Augustus Howell created and spread the legend that on opening the coffin to recover the manuscript, he realized that Elizabeth's hair had covered the whole coffin. Indubitably, hair is known to grow even after the death thus making hair both a fragile (since it is easy to break) and a tough element (since it outlives the body). In a way the 'ivy and moss'[47] overgrowing on Lizzie's tomb might be perceived as Lizzie's hair continuing their growth. Another element can be added to these similarities, as reported by Tounder: Bram Stoker's *The Secret Of the Growing Gold* (1892).[48] One of the protagonists of this short story is a woman whose hair grows through the cracks in the floor and kills a married couple. Similarly, the 'visualization of Elizabeth's tress as an overflowing, uncontrollable power testifies to Victorian concerns that all the discursive cultural efforts to contain and tame hair could not restrain women's energy'.[49] Indeed, in the Victorian Age, hair was perceived as a symbol of the unstoppable energy of women since it is something that crosses the boundaries of the body. Hair was also considered as a fundamental element in the representations of ideal women (both in painting and literature) in the Victorian Age, as further discussed in the fourth chapter.

Elizabeth's love for art was undeniable so much so that she was ready to die for art's sake. As discussed later, the legend says that while posing for Millais in a bathtub for the role of *Ophelia* (1851–1852), the painting she is probably most famous for, the candles that were supposed to keep her warm died out leaving her freezing cold. This led to a terrible cough that accompanied her for her whole life probably causing her to start taking laudanum.[50]

When studying the life and work of Elizabeth Siddal, much credit should be given to Jan Marsh since she redeemed Siddal's individuality and saved her from the shadow of her husband. Her poems were not published in a single volume in her lifetime and only

[46] L. Tondeur, "Elizabeth Siddal's Hair: A Methodology for Queer Reading", *Women: a Cultural Review*, 2011, 22.4, p. 379.
[47] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 2.
[48] L. Tondeur, *op. cit.,* p. 372.
[49] *ibidem*.
[50] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 54.

recently they are starting to be included in Pre-Raphaelites anthologies even if they are rarely analyzed in depth. Marsh proposes a peculiar description of Siddal: 'silent enigma'.[51] It is a rather appropriate definition for someone whose life has rarely been told and, when told, it was only through the words and the unusual anecdotes of others.

[51] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 39.

Chapter 2
Through their looking glass: Elizabeth as perceived by others

This chapter begins with biographical information about Dante Gabriel Rossetti and a brief introduction to his art and to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Then I decided to analyses the lives of other members of his family in order to give some sense of how the Rossettis were educated and their artistic influences. Section 2.1 focuses on the works of Dante Gabriel, Christina and William Michael and how they shaped the perception people have of Elizabeth.

In order to understand why Elizabeth Siddal's voice is rarely heard through the echoes of other voices trying to tell her story, it is important to comprehend from where those voices derive. In particular, it is fundamental to start with the Rossettis since their work has frequently been considered as a privileged access to her world. All of the books written on Siddal mention the importance of the Rossettis in understanding the perception people had of her at that age (among them Marsh and Trowbridge). Indeed, Dante Gabriel's poetry and his paintings, together with some poems by his sister were apparently inspired by Lizzie while William Michael, with his contradictory descriptions, has been considered by scholars of the Pre-Raphaelite movement for years as the only reliable source for the study of Lizzie's life.

As stated by Oswald Doughty it would have been impossible for anyone to write a biography of Dante Gabriel Rossetti meticulously enough to please him.[52] Indeed, this author tried to do it regardless and chose 'a Victorian romantic' as a definition for the hero in his story.

Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti was born on 12 May 1828, son of Gabriele Pasquale Giuseppe Rossetti - a teacher of Italian in London - and Frances Mary Lavinia

[52] O. Doughty, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a Victorian Romantic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 5

Polidori. [53] His father was exiled in England due to his revolutionary nationalist ideas. He was a fervent reader of Dante Alighieri and, in 1825, he published Dante's *Inferno*, with a *Comento Analitico* by him. This volume was highly criticized at first especially since Gabriele supported the idea that Dante belonged to a secret society called: I fedeli d'amore. The members of this society believed that only through the detachment from human conditions the meeting with God was possible. Also, they claimed that women were means to reach God since, for the members of this group, women symbolized heavenly beauty rather than carnal pleasure. This last element, as reported later, could be considered as a perfect summary of all the beliefs Rossetti had regarding the fairer sex and beauty in general. Frances on the other hand, had a father who worked as a professor of Italian. [54] Giuseppe and Frances shared a strong bond, an interest in literature and four children: Maria Francesca, Gabriel Charles Dante, William Michael and Christina Georgina. Interestingly enough, the original family name of Gabriele's ancestors was Della Gherardesca but, since many family members had red hair, they began to be known as the 'Rossettis'.[55] As reported by Doughty, Gabriel and Christina were 'uncommon children'[56] since they were creative and imaginative but they also shared a vicious temper. Gabriele was known for his hospitality and their house soon became almost a literary circle in which prominent figures discussed politics and art. Important writers and musician such as Ugo Foscolo, Mazzini and Paganini frequently participated.[57] As a child, Gabriel showed great interest in reading and painting and the influence of the father's interest for Dante can be observed in his children's work since they all, at one point or another, referenced the Italian author. School did not interest Gabriel and, as claimed by Doughty, 'introspection, fancy, imagination, intuition, sympathy, rather than knowledge, were to form the basis of Rossetti's intellectual life, nor did he ever show any interest in the acquisition of mere encyclopedic information'.[58]

In 1841, he started attending a Bloomsbury drawing school, the same prestigious school that, three years prior, had trained Millais. In 1845 he accessed the Antique School of the Royal Academy but, 'loving art but detesting technical training',[59] he found Antique School as useless as the previous one he had attended and became rather

[53] *idem,* p. 27.
[54] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 27.
[55] G. Rossetti and W.M. Rossetti, *Gabriele Rossetti: An Autobiography*. (London: Sands, 1901), p.7.
[56] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 36.
[57] *idem,* p. 35.
[58] *idem*, p. 50.
[59] *idem,* p. 51.

disobedient and rebellious. At that same time, he also started to write poetry and, despite the disappointment deriving from the school he was attending, those were rather interesting years for him due to the many acquaintances he made. Despite the fact that he is known for his paintings, as stated by William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel considered himself primarily a poet[60] and, in order to combine his passions, he later created the so-called "picture poems" or "poem-paintings". William claimed that 'Dante Rossetti was a poet – a poet who expressed himself in verse and in form and colour'.[61]

1848 marked a turning point for Dante's life. In that year he met the other future members of the Brotherhood and he chose painting over poetry as a career. He started working at Ford Madox Brown's studio and he got in contact with Holman Hunt and with John Everett-Millais. The three artists started discussing their shared artistic beliefs against contemporary taste and they decided to establish a Brotherhood.[62] Soon Gabriel involved his brother William, the art student James Collins and a student sculptor: Thomas Woolner. At the same time Hunt added F.G. Stephens to the group. They started having regular meetings and in one of those meetings they decided to name themselves 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood'. [63]Joining the Brotherhood and working on his paintings, led Rossetti to decide to leave the Academy in 1848. His first important work was *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* which was finished in 1849 and appeared in the Free Exhibition the same year.

Dante's sister Christina was the model for Mary (depicted as a little girl) while his mother Frances sat as Anne (Mary's mother).[64] The first years of Rossetti's production are characterized by a strong religious element (as proven by *Ecce Ancella Domini* of the following year).

[60] W.M. Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters* (London: Hurst and Blackett Limited, 1900), p. 3.
[61] *ibidem.*
[62] O. Doughty, op. cit., p. 51.
[63] *idem,* p. 51.
[64] *idem,* p. 79.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Girlhood of Mary Virgin, 1849

The Brotherhood also decided to keep a journal to annotate the decisions that were taken during each meeting of the group. William Michael, having no talent for painting, was chosen as the writer of this journal, which is considered a fundamental source when analyzing the life of the brothers.[65] They also had their own magazine titled *The Germ*, which contained poetry, illustrations and essays by members of the group.[66] The title was chosen to underline the importance they attributed to nature. This magazine also saw the first attempts of Christina Rossetti with poetry since she first published *Dream Land* and *An End* under the pseudonym Ellen Alleyn in this magazine. [67]

The date of the first encounter with Lizzie is unknown but it is certain that, after meeting her, he started claiming her as his only model and, as stated by Doughty, 'soon Lizzie was established as a favourite model of the Preraphaelite Brotherhood; and red-gold hair became, under Rossetti's influence, a Preraphaelite passion'.[68] Elizabeth's first work with Rossetti is *Rossovestita* in 1850, after which she became omnipresent in his paintings until her death.[69] Like the protagonist of his tale *Hand and Soul* (1849), which appeared in the first issue of *The Germ* and which will be discussed later, Dante

[65] O. Doughty, *op. cit*., p. 51.
[66] *ibidem*.
[67] www.Rossettiarchive.com [accessed 11.06.2020]
[68] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 118.
[69] *ibidem.*

immediately started worshipping his newly found Beatrice. As Ford Madox Brown remembered, when Rossetti met her, he felt that 'his destiny was defined'[70] and he started identifying himself with his famous Italian namesake. According to Violet Hunt, 'Gabriel always wanted red hair'. Hunt then added 'which you had, of course' addressing Elizabeth directly.[71]

William Michael Rossetti (25 September 1829 – 5 February 1919), besides being a member of the Brotherhood and the author of their Journal, was also a writer and a critic of his own. Above all, he is remembered for his work on writers such as Walt Whitman, Chaucer, P.B. Shelley and, most of all, the biography of his brother. As previously mentioned, it would have been rather difficult for anyone to write Rossetti's biography but being both his brother and a colleague, William had real insights on the life of Dante. Indeed, William published several books on his brother (including his family letters) but they should not be considered entirely truthful since, in many passages he is vague and ambiguous. For example, as far as the engagement between Dante Gabriel and Lizzie is concerned, William 'believed' that 'perhaps' before the end of 1851 or the beginning of 1852, 'they were engaged'. [72]

William Allingham's letters with Rossetti are useful to define his relationship with Siddal. As stated by Allingham, Lizzie's relationship with the Rossettis was not great.[73] Indeed, she allegedly first met Mrs. Rossetti in April 1855[74] and, as claimed by Doughty, Christina did not admire Elizabeth as Dante would have wished[75] and this might be the reason why Dante Gabriel decided to leave his family house and rent a house of his own at No. 14, Chatham Place. The small apartment included a large studio, a small bedroom and a living-room.[76] Lizzie's visits to his place started becoming more and more frequent and, around that time she apparently also began to paint under his guidance and, also, to write small literary compositions.[77] According to Violet Hunt (1932), Dante 'made her take up painting so that she might have something to do when he was not with her'.[78] Those are the years could be described as 'bohemian' due to the many artistic gatherings

[70] W.M. Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, cit., p. 155.
[71] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 12.
[72] W.M. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal." *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs 1*, no. 3, 1903, p. 277.
[73] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* p. 165.
[74] *ibidem*.
[75] O. Doughty, *op. cit*., p. 127.
[76] *idem,* p. 128.
[77] *ibidem*.
[78] Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 55.

with the other members of the Brotherhood and due to the fact that, as stated by Doughty in many passages of his book on Rossetti, Dante and Lizzie were enjoying their lives with parties.[79] In those years he also started giving Lizzie many pet names like Guggum, Gug and Dove. Indeed, in many of his letters, instead of writing Elizabeth's name, he used to draw a little dove. [80]

After that slowly Lizzie's health started declining and she was sent to Hastings, hoping that the good weather was going to influence her positively. As described by Doughty, this period at Hastings was rather difficult for Rossetti since he fell in an 'apathetic' [81] mood and his exchange of letters with Allingham shows that he was not ready to commit to his Guggum. On returning to the city however, he showed a little tenderness for her: 'when I look at her sometimes, working or too ill to work, and think how many without one tithe of her genius or greatness of spirit have granted them abundant health and opportunity to labour though the little they can do or will do, while perhaps her soul is never to bloom.'[82] Due to this difficult situation he found it hard to focus on painting, consequently his economic condition became rather complicated.[83] As stated by Hunt (1932), he did not want people to know he was poor 'so sat grouting alone all day in his wretched study where the rain came in. […] he exaggerated his depression like he exaggerated his poverty'.[84] Thankfully, Ruskin offered him a job as art professor, so in January 1855 he took his first class. Ruskin's relationship with Lizzie (which will be explored later in this dissertation), began around that time. According to Doughty, Ruskin was willing to help Dante Gabriel exaggerating whatever admiration 'Lizzie's quaint little works aroused'[85] and he bought all the paintings then and there. Ruskin definitely changed the destiny of the Brotherhood and, more specifically, of Rossetti, since he commissioned him several paintings thus granting his financial stability. The Pre-Raphaelite exhibition in 1857 was the evidence of how successful the Brotherhood was and how far they had gone.[86] At home, Gabriel found a tense environment since Lizzie was struggling with her mental health and she was frequently jealous, not for nothing. Indeed, something was happening. One day Morris became intimate with one of

[79] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* pp. 145, 209.
[80] J. Marsh*, The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* p. 47.
[81] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 162.
[82] *idem*., p. 127.
[83] *idem.,* p. 128.
[84] V. Hunt,*. op. cit., p.* 55.
[85] O. Doughty, *op. cit.*., p. 162.
[86] *idem*, p. 216.

their models: Jane Burden, who was actually 'discovered' by Gabriel. The legend has it that Jane and Gabriel fell in love at first sight and that he would have married her if he were not living with Lizzie. [87] Surely she became Rossetti's favorite model in that period. This might seem like a simple change, but it actually led to a drastic shift in the pictorial imagery of the Brotherhood. Another anecdote narrated by Doughty regards the fact that Rossetti, being in love with Morris' soon to be wife, did not attend the wedding of the two. [88] Since Jane was married and Lizzie was gone for a period of time (she went recovering in Matlock), allegedly Rossetti went back to his old ladies' man lifestyle. Also, being still fascinated with ginger hair, he convinced Fanny Cornforth, whose real name was Sarah Cox, to model for him.[89] As claimed by Doughty, 'Gabriel's growing alienation from Lizzie and his reaction to Janey's marriage, seem to have thrown him into the arms of Fanny, the model for *Bocca Baciata*.' (1859).[90] As if that was not enough, he also became intimate with another pre-Raphaelite model: Annie Miller.[91] Regardless of all of these affairs and probably due to Lizzie's poor health, he married Elizabeth on 23 May 1860 but 'their marriage, delayed beyond the freshness of youth and early passion, borrowed inevitably the bitterness of the mocking years'.[92] She signed her wedding certificate, as claimed by Violet Hunt, as 'Elizabeth Siddall' (old spelling of her family name) thus underling her need for self-affirmation.[93] Around that period he wrote the poem 'The Song of the Bower' which includes clear references to his lost lover Fanny ('Yet shows me that her way is parted from my way... Out of sight, beyond light, at what goal may we meet?').[94] On returning from the honeymoon in Paris, Lizzie was sent to Brighton with her sister to recover before going back to Chatham Place.[95] Their life seemed brighter at that time and their home was restored as a social circle for intellectuals. In this time of happiness, another good news came: Lizzie was pregnant.[96] However, unfortunately, on 2 May 1861 Lizzie lost her child.[97] This led her fragile health to aggravate. Her condition was a great concern for Dante who made several portraits of her

[87] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 238.
[88] *idem,* p. 246.
[89] *idem*, p. 255.
[90] *ibidem*.
[91] *idem.,* p. 257.
[92] *idem.,* p. 270.
[93] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 239.
[94] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 271.
[95] *ibidem*.
[96] *idem,* p. 266.
[97] S. Trowbridge, *My Ladys Soul. The Poems of Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets Limited, 2018), p.21.

at that time, including *Regina Cordium*, probably the last painting she modeled for.[98] Indeed, on returning from a dinner with Swinburne on 10 February 1862, Rossetti entered his wife's room finding her dead and smelling of laudanum. Many sources claim that he called several doctors to examine her before accepting she was really dead and writing in his journal 'as much as in a hundred years she's dead, yet is to-day the day on which she died.' [99]

As chronicled by Doughty, Rossetti found consolation after the tragedy by working on a play called *The Wife's Tragedy* which has unfortunately disappeared since then. All there is left is a comment by a one of Dante's friends who describes it as 'lost or destroyed – a mature production called *The Wife's Tragedy*, which only a very few have seen, and which was based upon a fact of the author's acquaintance'.[100] Apparently, Dante started accusing himself of real or presumed wrongs he might have done to his wife and became obsessed with her stating that she was still in their home haunting him.[101] As claimed by Stephanie Chatfield, he saw her ghost every night for two years.[102] On the day of the funeral, a week after her death, Gabriel placed a Bible and a red-edged manuscript of his poems in the coffin, the only copy he owned of those literary masterpieces. [103]

Rossetti, in this critical mental state found distraction in Fanny's arms and began painting her not as he used to paint Lizzie but as an 'alluring symbol of purely animal beauty and desire'.[104] The difference between Rossetti's models will be further analyzed later.

Around that time, he started arguing with Ruskin because he believed that he was selling his and Lizzie's paintings without his permission which led the relationship between the critic and the Brotherhood to crumble.

In the middle of the night on 5 October 1869, due to his economic difficulties and pushed by Charles Augustus Howell, an art-dealer, Rossetti decided to exhume his poems from his wife's grave. The exhumation was physically carried out by Howell, aided by Tebbs (a lawyer) and Dr Llewelyn Williams. [105] Rossetti himself wrote about the episode in a letter he sent to Howell reminding him how essential 'absolute secrecy' on the matter

[98] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 289.
[99] *idem,* p. 293.
[100] *idem,* p. 301.
[101] *idem,* p. 301.
[102] See S. Chatfield, "Lizzie Siddal Emerges from the Ghostly Mist" in Lizziesiddal.com (2018). [accessed 11.06.2020]
[103] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 302.
[104] *idem.,* p. 316.
[105] *idem,* pp. 526-527.

was.[106] Critics who want to propose a feminist reading of Siddal (like Marsh) tend to see this act as yet another violence against women: Elizabeth was tortured and abused even after her death. This idea is also supported by an anecdote that was circulating which hinted at the fact that the painting *Beata Beatrix* might have been painted in person after she had passed away.[107] Howell is considered responsible for the circulation of another curious anecdote regarding Lizzie. Indeed, he was the first to mention how, in the coffin, the body of Siddal had remained intact and her beauty was still unquestionable. Also, he mentioned how her long coppery hair had grown so much that they had covered the whole coffin. [108] According to Tondeur, by providing this description, Howell was trying to fix Elizabeth's beauty thus making it eternal and unchanging.[109] Indeed, hair is known to grow even after the death of the body but it is rather peculiar that while the manuscript Rossetti wanted to recover was worm-eaten and hard to read, Lizzie's body was described as aethereal with her most beautiful feature covering her whole decomposing body. Once Gabriel got his hands back on the manuscript, he decided to publish the poems in a volume called *Poems by D.G. Rossetti* in 1870.[110] Since this first publication did not receive the success he was hoping for, his mental health started to be unstable.[111] On 9 April 1882, he passed away[112] after several years of mental instability and addiction to laudanum. He is now buried at Birchington-on-Sea, Kent.[113]

His relationship with Jane Morris is believed to have started around 1865 and lasted, on different levels, until his passing. She indubitably inspired Gabriel to write several poems and paint some of his best works. She decided to distance herself from him since she discovered his addiction to laudanum and chloral hydrate. [114]

Many scholars, including Jan Marsh[115], highly criticized Doughty's representation of Siddal. Not only is she described paradoxically both as a sweet angel and as hysterical and lazy, but he also claims she started painting and writing 'under his [Rossetti's]

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[106] W.M. Rossetti (ed.), *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Family-Letters with a Memoir* (London: Ellis & Elvey, 1895), p. 265.
[107] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 28.
[108] *ibidem*.
[109] L. Tondeur, "Elizabeth Siddal's Hair: A Methodology for Queer Reading", *Women: a Cultural Review*, 2011, 22.4, p. 381.
[110] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 136.
[111] *ibidem.*
[112] *idem*., p. 644.
[113] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 11.06.2020]
[114] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 11.06.2020]
[115] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., pp. 121-127.

guidance' [116] and he defines her work as 'plaintive lock-sick [sic] verses, all pathos and self-pity'.[117]

Critics and biographers like Doughty and Antinucci tend to distinguish three different phases of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's career, embodied by three muses: the first phase (with Elizabeth Siddal as lover and muse) is full of religious and medieval references, the second phase (embodied by Fanny Cornforth) is characterized by Renaissance *femmes fatales* while the last is symbolized by Jane Morris, the ruling Goddess.[118] Raffaella Antinucci analyzed Rossetti's production in depth. She stated that the first two phases of his career, perfectly summarize the typical Victorian feminine portrayals, characterized by duality: on one side the 'holy woman' and on the other the 'fallen woman'.[119] As previously seen, Dante's first paintings are full of religious elements and his sister Christina appears as Virgin Mary while, some years later, Lizzie appears as the typical *donna angelo* of the Italian literary tradition. On the contrary, in *Found* (an unfished oil painting of the 1850s) his later model Fanny Cornforth embodies a reluctant prostitute. While working on this painting, Rossetti was also finishing 'Jenny', a long poem in which he meditates on the life of a prostitute. In Rossetti's archive, an interesting catalogue of his production, in a comment to a sketch of Fanny's face, she is described as an actual prostitute which might lead the audience to believe that she was the inspiration behind the painting and the poem.[120] On the other hand, a different reading is also possible: the references to prostitution could be seen as allegoric images for the role of the artist. In a letter to Brown on 28 May 1873, Gabriel stated: 'I have often said that to be an artist is just the same thing as to be a whore, as far as dependence on the whims and fancies of individuals is concerned.'[121] Indeed, especially in his late works, women in his paintings symbolize art itself since, according to Antinucci 'like the archetypical woman […], art can reconcile the opposites'. [122] Also, as stated by Marsh, 'the women were presented in terms of duality […]; spiritual Elizabeth and carnal Fanny were opposing aspects of femininity'.[123]

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[116] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 129.
[117] *ibidem.*
[118] R. Antinucci, "'Amulet, Talisman, and Oracle': Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Dichotomy of Feminine Beauty", *RSV*, XIV-XV, n. 28-29, July 2009-January 2010, pp. 57-69
[119] *idem*, p. 59.
[120] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 11.06.2020]
[121] See D.G. Rossetti, *Letters of D.G.R.*, ed. O. Doughty, J. Wahl (Oxford: Oxford, 1965)
[122] R. Antinucci, *op. cit.,* p. 69.
[123] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*l, cit*.,* p. 110.

Jane Morris as Proserpina, 1874

Fanny Cornfoth in Bocca Baciata, 1859

Annie Miller as Helen of Troy, 1863

2.1 The Muse of the Rossettis

As stated by Orlando, it is rather interesting that Elizabeth is usually known with the name he gave her (Siddal) even if they have only been married for the last twenty months of her life and he probably married her simply because he was certain she was going to die. [124]Also, when her name appears in an art manual, it is only to mark her role as pre-Raphaelite muse and never as an artist herself.

As underlined by Francine Prose (2002) 'Lizzie was accustomed to being portrayed in a state of moribund repose or actually dead, as Millais's waterlogged Ophelia'.[125] Prose also highlights the fact that Rossetti's other muses were portrayed differently: 'their bodies, their faces, and most of all their hair look terrifyingly alive. Their eyes gave liquidly out of the canvas, enticing and inviting -so unlike Lizzie's eyes, which in Gabriel's rendering are always lidded, downcast, evasive'. [126] The best example is the juxtaposition between paintings like *Bocca Baciata* or *Helen of Troy* with the

[124] E. Orlando, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
[125] F. Prose, *The Lives of the Muses: Nine Women and the Artists They Inspired* (London: Aurum Press, 2002), p. 124.
[126] *ibidem.*

portraits of Lizzie's Dante made while in Hastings. In those sketches his lover can be seen enjoying simple every-day-life activities: reading, sleeping and working at her drawing. Indeed, at that time she was working on her *Clerk Saunders*.

Elizabeth Siddal, 1855

Elizabeth Siddal 1855

According to Arcara, there is a strong contraposition between the 'sensual celebration of female beauty in the famous Rossettian oil portraits' [127] (like *Bocca Baciata* for example) and these sketches of Siddal since they 'reveal the supremacy of the artist's/lover's objectifying gaze: the model/beloved is captured in the passivity of sleep, defenseless and unaware of being observed. She becomes a reified being, immobilized in a state of complete submission to the laws of pictorial representation, an enigmatic beauty devoid of subjectivity because she is unconscious.' [128] Painting Lizzie as a 'Sleeping Beauty'[129] places her in the stereotypical female subordinate position of vulnerability. From this point of view, Dante Gabriel's depictions of Elizabeth as a powerless Sleeping Beauty can be perceived as a reestablishment of the painter's (and more generally Victorian) ideal of weak femininity. These sketches can be perceived as evidence of the fact that, at that time, Elizabeth was already addicted to laudanum which can cause sleepiness. As further analyzed later, the same idea should be taken into consideration when discussing *Beata Beatrix*.

[127] S. Arcara, "Sleep and Liberation: the Opiate World of Elizabeth Siddal" in B. Laurent (ed.), *Sleeping Beauties in Victorian Britain: Cultural, Literary and Artistic Explorations of a Myth (*Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), p. 101.
[128] *ibidem*.
[129] *idem*, pp. 95-120.

Indubitably, as supported by Bradley, these sketches have shaped the idea of Siddal as a victim and as a woman suffering for her health [130], due to the fact that she is presented with what Shefer defines as 'look of illness'.[131] On the contrary, as a result of modern readings of Siddal, these representations began to be interpreted more practically as portrayals of a model who tried to find positions that were easier to hold for a long period of time as poses. Bradley also commented on an element that is worth mentioning: the fact that these drawings are rather realistic while 'typically, Rossetti was not a realist. His style evolved from a set of pinched, angular mannerisms to a much broader, more "fleshly" approach beginning in the late 1850s'.[132] Moreover, these sketches are similar to those he had previously made of his family members (for example Christina's portraits of 1847 and 1848). This aspect could be read as a sign of the growing intimacy between the two.[133] In other words, depicting her like he used to paint the members of his family could have meant that he was starting to recognize her as one of them.

Rossetti perceived her as a weak little dove and, in many letters of those years, when talking about her, he said she was 'very ill' or 'very unwell'. [134] As reported by Hunt, in a letter to Brown he also referred to Dr. Wilkinson and wrote: 'he finds that the poor dear has contracted a curvature of the spine, and says she ought not to paint at present, but this, of course, she must. He says her case is a very anxious but by no means a hopeless one.' [135] Leaving aside the alleged sickness (that will be further discussed later), it is rather important to mention how he spoke of her as a 'meek, unconscious dove'.[136]

Anna Howitt and Bessie Parkes were also staying in Hastings around that time and they admitted founding Lizzie apparently healthy, smiling while 'sitting on the top of the East Cliff' with her lover or sharing her room with him for several hours while he depicted her. [137] Although, at first, the idea that she needed his help due to her physical and mental condition, made him feel powerful, soon, as claimed by Hunt, it became clear that 'he was not in love with The Sid. He was in love then, and always would be, with youth and health'.[138]

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[130] L. Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[131] E. Shefer, "Deverell, Rossetti, Siddal, and "The Bird in the Cage", *Art Bulletin*, 1985, 67.3, pp. 444.
[132] L. Bradley, *op. cit.*, 142.
[133] *ibidem*.
[134] W.M. Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, cit., p. 36.
[135] V. Hunt, *op cit*., p. 63.
[136] *idem*, p. 70.
[137] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 169.
[138] V. Hunt, *op cit*., p. 129.

A recurrent thesis, when analyzing the relationship between Lizzie and Dante Gabriel, is that Rossetti did not fully support his wife's artistic career because he believed that, as stated by Antinucci, women were objects to admire and conveyers of art.[139] Hunt also stated that Rossetti 'had no respect for [women] and would bear no reproach from one of these chosen vessels of joy'. [140]

A fundamental resource when studying the dynamics of their relationship is *Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddall* by Griselda Pollock. In this volume, the author states that Elizabeth function is that of a 'sign' of the genius of her husband. She is always described as terribly ill, destined to die and simultaneously as the beautiful and glowing beloved muse and wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. She is presented almost as a mirror of him. She is constructed as a creature relative to Rossetti and even her own talent is frequently perceived as the result of Rossetti's teaching.[141] As a matter of fact, most of the documents of the time concerning her life and her work were written by men (most of all by William Michael Rossetti, as later discussed in details) who, as supported by Marsh and Trowbridge[142], did not merely chronicled the main events of her life and judged her work objectively (even though artistic commentaries are hardly objective), but rather proposed their own perspective on gender relationships. They tend to present her from Dante Gabriel's viewpoint as a 'weak dove' which did not take care of the house and did not satisfy him sexually, thus justifying Rossetti's cravings for a different partner. [143] Doughty also proposed a similar portrait of Lizzie describing a 'natural morbidity deepened into definite hysteria'[144] and describing their home as a hospital or a jail since 'Lizzie's housekeeping was more original than efficient'.[145]

The relationship with Christina Rossetti is also frequently analyzed. William, once again, revealed himself as an unreliable source when he claimed that Christina and Lizzie did not like each other, and that Rossetti considered his sister's appreciation for his lover to be inconsistent, before changing his mind in later publications.[146] The fact that they

[139] R. Antinucci, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[140] *ibidem*.
[141] See G. Pollock, *op. cit*.
[142] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
[143] See J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit.
[144] O. Doughty, *op. cit*., p. 289.
[145] *ibidem.*
[146] W.M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (London: Cassell & Company, 1889), p. 254.

were not close is also supported by Violet Hunt. [147] Like the other Rossettis Christina did not know Lizzie until the marriage and in a letter following the news of the wedding she stated: 'I hope we shall be good friends some day'. Something important to emphasize is the fact that, as stated by William Michael, when Christina was gathering some poems for her book *The Prince's Progress and other Poems* in 1865, she proposed Dante to include some of Elizabeth's poems so she asked him to send her some. On reading Lizzie's verses for the first time Christina found them 'full of beauty', 'painful' and 'almost too hopelessly sad for publication *en masse*'. Indeed, the volume was printed with no verse by Lizzie in it. [148]

Christina Georgina was born on 5 December 1830, she died at 64 and is now buried at Highgate Cemetery. Lizzie was buried in Rossetti's family tomb with Christina while Dante rests at All Saints Church in Birchington. Christina was a rather famous poet and her book *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) achieved a modest success. She is described by Violet Hunt as 'careful', 'delicate' and 'obsessed with the idea of moral salvage'. [149] The common descriptions of Elizabeth Siddal' religious beliefs are very different. While Christina is described as overly-religious, William wrote that he 'never perceived her [Lizzie] to have any religion' [150] and this idea is also supported by Marsh who defined her as only a 'casual worshipper'.[151]

Christina's poem 'In an Artist's Studio' is allegedly about Lizzie. This poem is a standard Petrarchan sonnet, composed of 14 stanzas that can be divided into two quatrains and two tercets. This choice might have been influenced by her father, Gabriele Rossetti, who was a fervent Petrarchan reader. The first part of the poem focuses on the description of the Studio as a room full of portraits of the same woman depicted as 'a queen in opal or in ruby dress, a nameless girl in freshest summer greens, a saint, an angel'.[152] As shared by Ford Madox Brown (whose letters have been gathered by William Michael Rossetti), Rossetti's studio was 'full of Guggums, God knows how many'.[153] Brown used to say it was 'like a monomania with him'.[154] Indeed, almost 60 portraits of The Sid have been

[147] See V. Hunt, *op cit*., pp. 64-65.
[148] W.M. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.", cit., p. 292.
[149] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. XII.
[150] W.M. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.", cit., p. 274.
[151] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 74.
[152] W.M. Rossetti (ed.), *Poems of Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 308.
[153] F.M. Brown, *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown*, ed. Virginia Surtees (London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 148.
[154] *Idem*, p. 148.

found in his apartment, without considering all those other painting she modelled for.[155] The last passage of the poem ('Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright; Not as she is, but as she fills his dream') seems to agree with the thesis supported by Prose that Rossetti had unintentionally shaped his lover to match his ideal of womanhood: Dante's Beatrice, a beautiful muse destined to die. [156] In this poem Christina also seems to criticize her brother's approach to art since the image of the artists using the model as 'food' for inspiration ('He feeds upon her face by day and night') implies an exploitation on the part of the artist. Indubitably, Rossetti has frequently been held responsible for Lizzie's talent and work but rarely she and the other muses of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are given any credit, despite the fact that this is probably the artistic movement that owes most of its success to the subjects of the paintings. The 'artist' of the poem is obsessed with his muse, so much so that she becomes like a drug to him and like a beautiful object to admire.

In the 19th century especially, male artists had a tendency to depict women either as prostitutes (like Fanny in *Found*) or as saints and virgins.[157] Christina seems to be telling the reader that the model is trained to play both of these roles effortlessly.

In considering this poem as a reference to Gabriel's portraits of his beloved dove (more specifically those made in Hastings) a simple question arises: are those paintings realistic representations or are they to be read as a mere renditions of how he wanted her to be? Allegedly, even though this poem was published after Christina's death in 1896, its composition should be placed on December 24, 1856 which might led the reader to believe that it is actually referring to the paintings of the Hastings group, made the previous year.[158]

Another interpretation is possible since, while still very young, Christina got engaged to James Collinson, another member of the Brotherhood and, even if the engagement was broken in 1850 due to his conversion to Catholicism, he might have inspired the poem. [159]

[155] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 12.4.2020]
[156] F. Prose, *The Lives of the Muses: Nine Women and the Artists They Inspired, op cit*., pp. 107-110.
[157] Antinucci, Raffaella, *op. cit*., p. 57.
[158] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 12.04.2020]
[159] C. Rossetti, *Selected poems* (New York: Penguin, 2008), p. 2.

The poem 'The Portrait' by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, has frequently been associated to Lizzie as well. It was a reinterpretation of his dramatic monologue *On Mary's Portrait Which I Painted Six Years Ago* (1847) [160] which was a section of the unfinished *St. Agnes of Intercession*. Dante Alighieri's influence is clear in this poem, especially *New Life* which, as analyzed in depth later, played a fundamental role in Rossetti's own life. In particular the verse 'In painting her I shrin'd her face'[161] references a kind of love that is sacred and almost religious. This verse has frequently been read has a reference to *Beata Beatrix*. As Beatrice's death does not leave Dante feeling hopeless but rather realizing that a higher kind of love is possible, probably the death of Lizzie allowed Gabriel to understand that there could have been something more. Similarly to *Hand and Soul* (1849), an important theme appears in this poem: the use of art as a sort of sacramental operation. [162] It appears worth mentioning the fact that the religious nature of Dante Gabriel's earthly love, should not be defined as Christian. His mother was a fervent Anglican but during his adolescence, he began to lose his faith unlike Christina and other members of the Brotherhood like Hunt, who were strong believers.[163] Despite this fact, the whole Christian imaginary was still very present in his art.[164] As stated by Zweig, Rossetti 'explores the possibility that love for a woman can be sublimated to satisfy spiritual yearnings.'[165] In a way, he believed in beauty, the beauty of his muses. This poem was published in the so-called *Exhumation Proofs*, which were printed on 30 October 1869 after the exhumation of the manuscript from Elizabeth's coffin, thus supporting the thesis that this poem is about her. The first line of this poem ('This is her picture as she was') and the last verses of Christina's 'In an Artist's Studio' ('not as she is, but was when hope shone bright') seem to communicate with each other since they both refer, in a way, to the immortalizing power of art. [166] The same theme also appears in 'Sonnet XV' by Shakespeare.

According to Gates, for many years Lizzie managed to keep Dante Gabriel's attention through sickness and her promises of an imminent death. 'She wanted to appear

[160] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 12.06.2020]
[161] D.G. Rossetti, *The poetical works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1899), p. 128.
[162] See D.G. Rossetti, *Hand and Soul* (London: T.N. Foulis, 1910).
[163] O. Doughty, *op. cit*., p. 289.
[164] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 12.06.2020]
[165] R. Zweig, "'Death—In—Love': Rossetti and the Victorian Journey Back to Dante" In: R. Barreca (ed.) *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), p. 182.
[166] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 12.06.2020]

mortal' says Gates 'not merely to be immortalized in paint'.[167] At home and in his paintings, she became what he wanted her to be, an angelic beauty, a loving wife, a dying muse and soon she could not escape those roles since she became immortal through art looking like that.

Shefer supports the thesis that 'Heart's Heaven', written by Rossetti around 1881 is also about Elizabeth. [168] In the first stanza of the poem ('Sometimes she is a child within mine arms, Cowering beneath dark wings that love must chase, With still tears showering and averted face) the author associates his lover to a child and a wounded bird. Rossetti's passion for birds is known since he spent his last years surrounded by them in his house.[169] The fact that he used to call Lizzie his dove might support the thesis that the poem is about her and the fact that this bird is wounded, might be a reference to her illness. Not only was he used to call her dove (in a Valentine poem he also called her 'dear dove divine'[170]) but, in a letter to Brown he also compares her to a pigeon. [171] Christina apparently also compared her to a dove in her poem *Listening* (written after their meeting).[172]After Lizzie's death Gabriel also compared the voices he heard in his house (that he believed where hers) to bird-voices and, some days before the exhumation he also claimed that the chirping of a chaffinch was Guggum's voice serving as a warning. [173]

Finally, when analyzing the life of Siddal, the role of William Michael Rossetti must be taken into account. Described by Trowbridge as 'the self-appointed guardian of his family's reputation' [174], he was the only source information regarding his sister-in-law right after her death and this has indubitably shaped the perception people have of her. It is important to point out, as mentioned by Pollock, that William Michael's texts should not be considered as evidence since they were written several years after the events which he claims to narrate in detail. [175] He started by publishing some articles on the *Art Journal* and then collecting his brother's work in 1886 with an introduction referring to the meeting between the two lovers. It was in this last book that he incorrectly mentioned

[167] B.T. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 2.
[168] E. Shefer, *op. cit.*, p. 441.
[169] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 01.04.2020]
[170] E. Shefer, *op. cit.*, p. 443.
[171] *idem*, p. 441.
[172] *idem*, p. 443.
[173] *idem*, p. 446.
[174] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit*., p. 17.
[175] G. Pollock, *op. cit*., p. 212.

Lizzie's father occupation. In the second edition of this volume, he changed Lizzie's occupation from 'milliner's assistant' to 'dressmaker's assistant' which might seem like not a big deal but it was a small step towards a correct narration of her story.[176] As stated by Marsh, each new edition of the book presented some changes in the narrative but slowly the description of a stereotypical Victorian woman began to arise.[177] For example, he claimed she was younger than she actually was (common mistake, as previously mentioned) in order to present her as a virginal beauty.[178] He then described her way of talking as: 'of a chaffy kind- its tone sarcastic, its substance lightsome. It was like the speech of a person who wanted to turn off the conversation'.[179] The colour of her eyes brought to surface some discrepancies since he described her eyes as 'greenish-blue'[180] while Swinburne wrote they were a 'luminous grey green', and Georgiana Burne-Jones defined them as 'golden brown - agate colour is the only word I can find to describe them - and wonderfully luminous'.[181]

William also proceeded to blame Lizzie for the collapse of the Brotherhood and of the marriage with Dante. Indeed he claimed 'married life cannot be happy when one of the spouses is perpetually and grievously ill'.[182]

As claimed by Uphaus and supported by Marsh, the fact that William often described Lizzies as disagreeable could be read as a sign of his jealousy for his brother.[183] Towards his brother he also seemed to have contrasting feelings describing him in ambiguous terms. He was also rather vague and confusing when talking about the meetings with Siddal (in some sections of his *Memoir* he claimed never to have met her[184] but in an article in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, he stated 'I need hardly say that myself knew her and remember her well' [185]). William also listed a total of 24 of her works, including her self-portrait, stating that it was 'the most competent piece of execution that she ever produced'.[186] He gave all the credit for her interest in art to his brother saying that she apparently was never interested in painting before meeting Dante. On the contrary, when W.G. Wells, an historian, decided to ask on the *Daily Telegraph*

[176] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 38.
[177] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 64.
[178] W.M. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.", cit., p. 273.
[179] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 51.
[180] *idem,* p. 44.
[181] *idem,* p. 64.
[182] E. Orlando, *op. cit.,* p. 119.
[183] A. Uphaus, *op. cit.,* p. 32.
[184] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 45.
[185] W.M. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.", cit., p. 273.
[186] *idem*, p. 277.

if anyone had known Siddal, he received a letter from a girl, signing herself A.S. and stating that she had attended the Sheffield School of Art with Elizabeth. Probably due to its almost anonymous nature, this source has rarely received the credit it should have. If proven true, this might be a great evidence of the fact that she was fond of the art even before meeting Rossetti. The point Wells wanted to make was that frequently the Rossettis had omitted or modified some aspects of Lizzie's life probably because they were ashamed of her humble origins. Allegedly she also proposed some of her paintings to Deverell because she wanted to access a School of Design where he worked.[187]

The sexual nature of the relationship between Rossetti and Siddal (which will be further analyzed later) was also discussed by Rossetti who claimed that their living together 'had nothing in it suspicious or ambiguous, or conjectured by any one to be so'.[188]

Another interesting element is that, as reported in William's *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters* (1900), on keeping the journal of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, William encountered a difficulty: one day Dante decided to remove several pages from the Journal. William supposed that he might have seen something he did not want to be recorded about himself or, more likely, about Elizabeth. 'The portion destroyed by my Brother' wrote William 'amounted, I dare say, to a fair fifth of the whole'. At this point speculation is only possible regarding the contents of the Journal. [189]

The most important contribution to the narration of his sister-in-law's story is the gathering of her poems and he stated she had a 'genuine faculty for verse'. However, he underlined the scarcity of poems she had produced.[190]

When analyzing the life of Elizabeth Siddal through their lenses, it is important to point out that the Rossetti should also be read inside their sociocultural context thus avoiding a misinterpretation of their work. For example, Symons once stated: 'I have never forgotten how passionately Eleonora Duse said to me in 1900 [..] "All Rossetti is in that story of his MS. buried in his wife's coffin. He could do it; he could repent of it; but he should have gone and taken it back himself: he sent his friends".[191]

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[187] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* p. 98.
[188] W.M. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.", cit*.,* p. 277.
[189] W.M. Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters* (London: Hurst and Blackett Limited, 1900), p. 208.
[190] W.M. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.", cit*.,* p. 287.
[191] A. Symons, *Studies in Strange Souls* (London: Charles J Sawyer, 1929), p. 25.

At the same time, everything regarding her life can be read through the feminist lenses as yet another case of female exploitation and as the story of another silenced woman. For example the fact that, in William's accounts she is described as the stereotypical Victorian woman she was not, can be read as an attempt of the family to shape her life and to justify Dante's choices. Definitely, the social context of the Victorian Age should be taken into account when exploring the documents regarding Lizzie's life, as analyzed by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* and in the following chapter.

Chapter 3
A Written Fate

In this chapter I will analyze the painting made by John Everett Millais between 1851 and 1852 to understand how it has shaped the perception people have of Elizabeth and how it modified the ideal Ophelia. Section 3.1 focuses on madness and how it affected both Elizabeth and the role of Ophelia in *Hamlet*. Section 3.2 deals with illness and addiction and how they impacted Elizabeth's life and shaped her role of weak dying dove. Finally, in section 3.3 I placed the *topos* of the dying beauty in the socio-cultural context of the Victorian age, so deeply obsessed with death and beautiful girls.

John Everett Millais, Ophelia, 1851-1852

During the spring of 1851 John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt decided to go to Surrey to paint *en plein air*. Millais selected the Hogsmill River as a setting for the painting that might be described as one of the greatest masterpieces of British art: *Ophelia* (1851-52). The painting was made in two very different moments: first, he spent four months in the countryside painting an actual watercourse and plants and then he asked Elizabeth Siddal to model for it in his Gower Street studio in London. By the time Elizabeth sat for it, it was winter and the only possible setting for this part of the painting process was a bathtub, so she had to pose in one for days.[192] According to Violet Hunt, it

[192] www.tate.org.uk [accessed 13.06.2020]

was Millais' mother's idea to put Lizzie in the bathtub[193], an idea that revealed itself as not convenient. The legend has it that Millais brought some oil lamps or candles and put them under the bathtub to keep the water warm. During one of the sittings, the lamps stated going down but Millais, too focused on his art, did not notice and Lizzie, trying her best to be a good model, did not complain. [194] This well-known incident was first mentioned by Arthur Hughes who also referenced a request made by Mr. Siddall [195]. Indeed, as stated also by Violet Hunt, 'Miss Siddal's father […] had brought an action against the young painter claiming fifty pounds for the injury to his daughter's health, but […] Millais had settled the matter by paying the doctor's bill and […] she herself had admitted that she was none the worse for the chill.'.[196] Siddal never fully recovered from the illness caused by this inadvertence. As stated by Marsh, some people described it as a simple cold, but others (including Perni in his essay on Ophelia[197]) defined it as a pneumonia or 'life-threatening ailments'.[198] As further discussed later, this sickness was the alleged cause of her first use of laudanum.

Despite the first harsh critics, the painting was later received with great enthusiasm and it was shown at the Royal Academy in 1852 winning many prizes and being hailed by all the critics. The representations of plants and flowers in this painting led Millais to become an icon in the artistic world of that era. As far as this element is concerned, it is important to mention that the flowers described in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* differ slightly from those depicted by Millais. In act IV scene 5, Ophelia sings about columbines, about rue, ('there's rue for you; and here's some for me: we may call it herb-grace o' Sundays'[199]), about daisies and violets. Later in the play (Act IV scene 7) Queen Gertrude describes Ophelia's death by underlining the presence of many flowers like 'daisies, and long purples'. Like the flowers in the play probably had a symbolic meaning (rue was apparently associated with grief and loss), so did the flowers selected by Millais. In particular, there is a flower that is very prominent in the painting but does not appear in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and that is a poppy. It apparently had no meaning in the 16th century, when Hamlet was written but it had a clear meaning in the 19th century since it

[193] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 43.
[194] www.tate.org.uk [accessed 13.06.2020]
[195] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 54
[196] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 45.
[197] R. Perni, "At the Margins: Ophelia in Modern and Contemporary Photography" in D. Williams and K. Peterson, *The Afterlife of Ophelia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 199.
[198] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 55.
[199] W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), p. 92.

was the flower associated with opium and therefore the flower linked to sleep and death and that is why it was so prominently placed there in the painting. Interestingly enough, Elizabeth died because of a laudanum overdose and laudanum is a tincture of opium. This flower also appears in *Beata Beatrix* and, for this reason, it is frequently associated with Siddal. Being the symbol of death, this flower is also depicted in other paintings, for example Richard Redgrave's *Ophelia Wearing Her Garlands* (1842).

The roses in the painting might be a reference to Laertes addressing Ophelia as 'rose of May' [200] (Act IV, scene 5) while the daisies and the willow usually symbolize pain and lost love. Columbines and violets, on the other hand, represent faithfulness. The flowers in the painting, with their vivid colors, seem indifferent to Ophelia's suffering and death. The association girl-flower obviously hints at youth and young beautiful girls were the greatest source of inspiration for the members of the Brotherhood. One day Swinburne, a poet and critic associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, stated that paradise surely was 'a rosegarden full of stunners'.[201] Also, since they were depicted from real, they were so detailed that, as stated by Millais' son, a professor of botany once, unable to bring his students to the countryside to admire those flowers, took them to the museum to see Millais' painting.[202] Indeed, due to the fact that he spent more of less four months representing nature in Surrey, flowers blooming in different moments of the year appear together in *Ophelia*. It was considered rather unconventional to dedicate much more time to the background than to the subject of the painting, but this is what Millais decided to do. [203] The experience in the countryside was so tiring for the artist that, in a letter to Mrs. Thomas Combe he claimed that 'the painting of a picture under such circumstances would be a greater punishment to a murderer than hanging'.[204]

As far as Ophelia's dress is concerned, it trapped some air thus keeping the girl afloat and it was spread into the water as described in the play by Queen Gertrude: 'Her clothes spread wide; And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up'[205]. In another letter to Mrs. Combe, Millais said: 'Today I have purchased a really splendid lady's ancient dress - all flowered over in silver embroidery - and I am going to paint it for "Ophelia". You

[200] W. Shakespeare, *op. cit.,* p. 91.
[201] J. Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 10.
[202] www.tate.org.uk [accessed 13.06.2020]
[203] www.tate.org.uk [accessed 13.06.2020]
[204] J.G. Millais, *The life and letters of Sir John Everett Millais* (London: Methuen, 1899), p. 120.
[205] W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* cit., p. 100.

may imagine it is something rather good when I tell you it cost me, old and dirty as it is, four pounds'.[206]

The way in which Ophelia is represented by John Everett-Millais is rather unconventional. Indeed, Hamlet was the one of the most frequently staged of Shakespeare's plays at that time and it was also a great source of inspiration for painters, especially the members of the Brotherhood. Dijkstra has claimed that this character gained importance in the public eye after the Pre-Raphaelites depicted her. [207] Additionally, in an essay by Lerer, which appears in the book *The Afterlife of Ophelia* edited by Peterson and Deanne, the author claimed that 'Ophelia's iconography had crystallized by the mid-nineteenth century into a blend of floral beauty and crazed vision.'[208] The author also underlined the importance of Millais' painting in establishing an iconic image of the Shakespearean heroine. [209] Modern examples of the influence this painting had on the art world are drowning scenes in movies like *Melancholia* (2011) and *Vertigo* (1958).

Ophelia is probably the most famous work of art Elizabeth Siddal modelled for and the attitude of the Shakespearean character in this passage of the play (passive, self-destructive and mad) is frequently associated with Lizzie herself. William Michael Rossetti claimed that this was the painting his sister-in-law modelled for that had a greater resemblance with her.[210] Georgina Burne-Jones similarly reported that she believed that Siddal 'looked like Gabriel's Ophelia when she cried'.[211] It seems as if Elizabeth got in touch with her inner Ophelia and decided to be like her living and dying a mystery. As reported by Uphaus, John Everett-Millais probably chose Lizzie as a model for this painting because he saw in her the 'capacity for such complete surrender'.[212] Many aspects of Lizzie's life and the perception everyone has of her are perfectly depicted in this painting: her alleged madness, her addiction (symbolized by the poppies in the painting) and her alleged suicide. All those elements should be considered as perceived by the Victorian socio-cultural context. For example, as I will prove later, the way in

[206] J.G. Millais*, op. cit.,* p. 162.
[207] B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 37.
[208] S. Lerer, ""I've got a feeling for Ophelia": Childhood and Performance" in D. Williams and K. Peterson, *The Afterlife of Ophelia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 18.
[209] *Ibidem*.
[210] See W.M. Rossetti, "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.", cit., p. 277.
[211] B.T. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 2.
[212] A. Uphaus, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

which the dead female body was perceived in the Victorian Age was very peculiar, as can be evidenced in the growing popularity of post-mortem photography in Victorian England.[213]

Like Lizzie, Ophelia is an enigmatic character. Indeed, both Siddal and Ophelia fascinate their audiences. For instance, even if Ophelia only appears in 5 scenes (Hamlet is composed of 20 scenes in total), she is remembered by the audience as one of the protagonists and she is usually a personality people sympathize with. Surely, many young girls can relate to her story since she is in love with a man she has been warned against by her father. [214] The fact that she respects her father's will allows the audience to perceive as a good daughter but also as submissive to the male characters in the play. Hamlet, on the contrary, seems unable to trust all female characters because of his mother's unfaithfulness. When Hamlet, in a moment of anger, tells her 'Get thee to a nunnery, farewell', she replies evoking God's for protection over him ('O heavenly powers, restore him!'). [215] This gesture makes her appear even more like a good girl.

According to Lerer, Shakespearean women, but most of all Ophelia, became 'templates for the measurement of nineteenth-century female identity'.[216] Ophelia embodies everything a Victorian woman had to be: young, innocent and ready to die for love. The fact that Ophelias are normally represented with white dresses (Millais, Waterhouse and Dicksee all had the same idea) might be perceived as a way of underlining her youthful innocence and virginity. Furthermore, in Act I Scene 3 Laertes explains to Ophelia that Hamlet, like all the men of that age, only wants to take away her innocence. This scene might have been created to present her as a chaste, obedient daughter.[217]

Although the reason behind her madness and her death is never clearly stated in the play, whether it is due to her father's death or Hamlet's rejection, the Victorians only perceived her powerlessness and how she is manipulated by the men in her life. Cunha stated that 'to die' in the Victorian age 'was the final offering of a woman to the man she was meant to serve and [..] muses like Elaine, Ophelia, The Lady of Shalott and Mariana, were representations of the woman gone mad for not having a man to surrender to'.[218]

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[213] J. Marsh and p. Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement*, cit., p. 68.
[214] S. Falchi, "Re-mediating Ophelia with Pre-Raphaelite Eyes" in *Interlitteraria* 20. 171 (2015), p. 172.
[215] W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* cit*.,* p. 55.
[216] S. Lerer, *op. cit*., p. 13.
[217] W. Shakespeare*, Hamlet,* cit*.,* pp. 15-17.
[218] M. Cunha, "'Behind Those Screens'. Bringing Women Forth: Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal", *Anglo Saxonica*, 2020, 17, 10.5, p. 1.

Alfred Tennyson played a fundamental role in the development of this idea portraying *The Lady of Shalott* (1832) as a woman whose sacrificial will remained unsatisfied. The only possibilities for women like those mentioned by Cunha were death or madness. Menzer analyzed Ophelia's lines and claimed that her role is located inside a strict hierarchy and a patriarchal universe. Indeed, throughout the play she addresses 'my lord' 27 times, 'my good lord' once, 'my honored lord' once and 'Lord Hamlet' twice. On the other hand, she addresses a woman only once (Queen Gertrude).[219] Perni underlined a similar aspect regarding Act I scene 3, when Ophelia says 'I do not know, my lord, what I should think'. Her father replies 'Marry, I will teach you; think yourself a baby'[220] thus underlining her subordinate role.

Peterson and Williams present a characteristic of Ophelia which, unfortunately, could also apply to Elizabeth:

> Representations of Ophelia dying, a drowning death that is already a mediated representation, repeat and perform her initial textual elision, consistently allowing representation to substitute for the absence of a real history/story. Whether she is depicted drowning in a bucolic landscape or as the poster-girl for antisuicide teen psychology studies, we see how Ophelia is paradoxically both a free-floating figure depicting the story of her death as told in Shakespeare's play-text and severed from her origins as a character whose story or history is always-already pointedly articulated or reconstrued for her, ventriloquized even, by other characters in Hamlet.[221]

Similarly and as previously mentioned, Elizabeth's story has been framed by someone else's narration. Also, it is worth mentioning that Ophelia's death is described by Queen Gertrude, who was not a witness but who provides an interpretation of events thus framing Ophelia into a story that is not her own. Likewise, many mysteries are still unsolved concerning the night of Siddal's passing. When asked to comment on Millais' painting on the Tate Museum website, Bronfen developed a similar idea stating that: 'Ophelia is forever framed by someone's else's story.'[222] Menzen asserted a related

[219] P. Menzer, "Ophelia's wake" in Williams, Deanne and Peterson, Kaara, *The Afterlife of Ophelia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 143.
[220] R. Perni, "At the Margins: Ophelia in Modern and Contemporary Photography" in Williams, Deanne and Peterson, Kaara, *The Afterlife of Ophelia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 194.
[221] D. Williams and K. Peterson, *op. cit.,* p. 3.
[222] www.tate.org.uk [accessed 15.06.2020]

concept stating that, if the young boy who had to play Ophelia in a play only received his lines, he would have suffered an asymmetry of information from the other characters.[223]

Peterson and Williams supported the thesis that Millais' rendition of Ophelia 'rather than the figure herself, has more recently become the impetus for artists' statements about the nature of art itself and artists'.[224] Something similar can be said about the short story *Hand and Soul* written by Rossetti in 1849. As seen later, the protagonist of this work is a painter (Chiaro dell' Erma) who lost all inspiration but finds it thanks to the apparition of a beautiful lady that symbolizes Art. If the character of Ophelia is perceived as Art, artists are allowed to develop performances based on their own personality thus making the character their own, like Elizabeth did.

As stated by Falchi, like many other women in history, Ophelia is rarely spoken of in the play and for this reason many different readings of this character have been proposed throughout the centuries.[225] For example in the 18th century, the daughter of Polonius was considered indecorous and the sections she appeared in were frequently cut or edited. Falchi also states that in the Victorian Age, Ophelia was 'the single most represented subject of English literary painting'.[226] However, the moment chosen by Millais (which was not staged but merely narrated by Gertrude in the play) was rarely selected by other painters, who tended to prefer other passages. For example John William Waterhouse chose the moment right before Ophelia falls into water while Rossetti selected the moment in which *Horatio discovers the Madness of Ophelia* (1864). Lerer defined Ophelia as 'exquisite' meaning exceptionally beautiful and he also underlined that the adjective 'had become the property of sentimental verse, of overwrought aesthetic criticism, and, in some cases, of a distinctive, Victorian Catholic revival. In this latter context, the word resonated with particularly Italian, aestheticized sainthood.'[227] The link with Dante's Beatrice, that will be further discussed later, seems inevitable.

Another element which can be associated to both Elizabeth and Ophelia is underlined by Menzer. He has claimed that Ophelia is 'dispossessed',[228] in the sense that she has no belongings. Indeed, the only things she owns are Hamlet's letters and her own self and, as narrated by Queen Gertrude, when Ophelia dies, she loses her final

[223] P. Menzer, *op. cit*., p. 142.
[224] D. Williams and k. Peterson, *op. cit.,* p. 3.
[225] S. Falchi,, *op. cit*., p. 171.
[226] *idem*., p. 175.
[227] S. Lerer, *op.cit.,* pp. 14-15.
[228] P. Menzer, *op. cit.,* p. 146.

possession: her body. Similarly, Elizabeth brought her version of her story to the grave and she, in a way, self-immolated for art by inspiring others with and after her death. Perni states that focusing on the model's story, no matter how similar to the role she is playing she is, allows the model to maintain her identity. [229]

The theme of death is also presented in a poem by William Allingham who, as already mentioned, knew Lizzie personally. According to Violet Hunt, Allingham wrote the poem inspired by Elizabeth the first night they met. Like *Ophelia*, this work of art can be seen both as a warning and as a premonition of the tragic end of Elizabeth [230]. This poem, titled 'The Cold Wedding' refers to a weeding between a young girl and Death with lines like 'The groom is Death' and 'A match most fair, this silent pair, now to each other given for ever'. The verses were reported inaccurately in Hunt but the poem was mentioned by Trowbridge as one of the works of art inspired by Lizzie.[231] In truth it is rather complicated to find this poem in other sources and it seems only to appear in Hunt's volume.

At the time of the event, many different stories and rumors circulated at the same time concerning Elizabeth's death. In her book on Rossetti, Patricia Waugh has claimed that there were two versions about Lizzie's death spreading at that time. The first one regarded the fact that Rossetti was spending time at the Working Men's college while Lizzie was at home deciding to take her own life. The other version was that he was not at the Working Men's college but he was with a woman and, returning home, he found his wife unconscious and was left with the feeling that he was to blame[232]. It is also frequently claimed that Rossetti and Siddal had spent the evening of 10 February 1862 with Algernon Swinburne at the Sablonière Hotel in Leicester Square. After returning home, she was found dead some hours later. [233]

The question whether Lizzie's passing was intentional or not will remain unanswered. Similarly, Ophelia's story is also perceived in the play in two contrasting ways. On one side, Queen Gertrude claims that Ophelia 'fell in the weeping brook' while the possibility of her suicide is in line with the characterization made of her in the previous acts. The fact that the event itself is not staged but narrated might be seen as a strategy to

[229] R. Perni, *op. cit*., p. 225.
[230] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 27.
[231] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.,* p. 111.
[232] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* pp. 88-89.
[233] E. Siddal, *Poems-Poesie. La musa ispiratrice dei Preraffaelliti*. 4th ed. (Venezia: Damocle, 2013), p. 9.

give the audience the power to imagine any scenario. It is up to the audience to decide whether they want to trust Queen Gertrude or to picture a different ending for Ophelia.

To this day the reason behind Elizabeth Siddal's death remains unknown, even for those who were closest to her and spent the very last hours with her. [234] Angeli stated that her mother (Lucy Madox Brown), her father (William Michael Rossetti) and Ford Madox-Brown were aware of the circumstances that led to Lizzie's death but she did not give any more information about it in her book. [235]

As specified by Orlando, Wilde also used to propose his own version of the events that led to Lizzie's death. 'He [Swinburne] was heard to say that [on the night of her overdose] Lizzie had acted silly at dinner [Swinburne was present and presumably spread the word] and that Gabriel, losing patience, had thrust her into a cab, taken her home, and pressed the bottle of laudanum into her hands, shrieking, 'Take the lot''. [236]

3.1 The Mad Muse: Mad Ophelia, Mad Elizabeth

As stated by Barbara Gates, the figure of Ophelia became a model of reference for insanity in the Victorian Age.[237] Asylum superintendents with cameras used to dress up inmates in Ophelia-like costumes in order to get "authentic" photos of madness.[238] Moreover, actresses who had to play the part of this heroine on stage often visited the asylum to search for real-life mad women.[239] For this reason artists like Millais and John William Waterhouse had the Shakespearean character surrounded by flowers in mind when they thought of suicidal mad women.

According to Perni, 'Ophelia has become a figure for those speaking from or about the margins'. [240] This occurred as a result of the enigmatic nature of this character. As mentioned above, since she is such a mysterious figure, the performances of Ophelia became sort of outlets of self-expression thus turning her into a general Other. 'This other occupies a necessarily marginal space: a psychiatric hospital, […], a domestic

[234] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 299.
[235] H. Angeli Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies* (London: H. Hamilton, 1949), p. 196.
[236] E. Orlando, *op. cit.,* p. 108.
[237] See B.T. Gates, *op. cit.*
[238] E. Sholwalter, *The Female Malady* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 90-92.
[239] *ibidem.*
[240] R. Perni, *op. cit.,* p. 208.

environment […]; a rural area […]. Furthermore, evidenced as Ophelia's body, the other manifests itself in a great variety of forms: the diluted, the vulnerable, the sexually ambiguous, the transitional, the altogether absent.'[241] As previously stated, the reason behind Ophelia's madness is uncertain but the songs she sings when she loses her mind can help the audience understand her better. Indeed, in act IV scene 5 she sings 'They say the owl was a baker's daughter' [242] which, according to Chapman [243] is a reference to a tale in which Christ asks the daughter of a baker for bread. She only bakes a small amount because she knows that that was what her father would have wanted. This action is perceived by Christ as selfish and, for this reason, she is punished and transformed into an owl. Similarly, Ophelia is transformed into a mad woman simply because she did what her father considered right (not seeing Hamlet ever again). In another song, she sings about a girl having sexual intercourses with a man because he made her believe that he would have married her. When she loses her virginity to him and reminds him about his promise, he says he would have married her if she had not slept with him. The audience may be shocked at this song at first, because Ophelia appeared as chaste and innocent throughout the play until this moment. This scene represents a turning point for this character since she is transformed into an icon of sexuality (although the real explosion of her sexual appeal occurs after her death).

In *The Wife of Rossetti*, Viola Hunt hinted at the fact that Elizabeth's madness might have been caused by some tragic events she had to face in 1861. Indeed, on 2 May 1861, she suffered a stillbirth and a miscarriage later that year. Hunt claimed that:

> 'She had taken much joy in preparing the usual layette and cradle, swathed and wreathed with lace and ribbon, and now she would sit alone for hours on her low stool in the middle of the River Room rocking it, ready and empty. When the Joneses, her first visitors, came they found her so and, as they entered and Ned was about to close the door, she cried out in a wild sort of voice, "Hush, Ned! You'll wake it!"'[244]

[241] See R. Perni, *op. cit*..
[242] W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* cit*.,* p. 88.
[243] A.A. Chapman, "Ophelia's "Old Lauds": Madness And Hagiography In Hamlet." In *Medieval & Renaissance Drama In England 20. (*2007).
[244] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 270.

The last line is painfully referred to her unborn child. As reported by Violet Hunt, Elizabeth had the idea that Dante was to blame for the death of their baby.[245] He was known for his affairs, the most significant relationship being that with Fanny Cornforth (defined by Mégroz as 'his mistress for more years than any other woman'[246]). Indeed, the fact that the relationship between Dante and Lizzie was rather troubled is shared by many scholars including Marsh and Arcara. Hunt even went as far as to describe the miscarriage as follows:

> They had a violent quarrel due to his fault. 'Fanny' as a mistress, and the excitement and emotion of this quarrel brought on a miscarriage. The same thing happened when the second baby was on its way. She felt what was coming then and said, 'there, you have killed this baby, too.' She had another miscarriage, and a miserable life all the time she lived with him. [247]

It is worth mentioning that, according to Violet Hunt, all the Siddalls were crazy. She stated: 'as for hers [Lizzie's], nervous people all of them! Young Lydia could not sleep unless she half sat up in bed or bear the usual constriction of stays. Harry was weak-minded and Clara died insane.' She then added that 'people said that it was because they all wore their hair too long'. [248] This is clearly based on the superficial beliefs of that time.

As discussed in the following section, women in the Victorian age had to comply to certain aesthetical rules in order to be appealing to men. One of the traits a woman was supposed to have, according to Dijkstra, was madness.[249] Indeed, those women were 'caught in the patterns of a society which had come to see even expression of insanity as representative of devotion to the male'. [250]

Helen Angeli, a relative of Dante Gabriel's, described Lizzie as an addict, obsessed with the idea of death.[251] Like in other cases, it is important to consider the aims of this source in narrating Lizzie's story. Indeed, when in her book *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his Friends and Enemies*, Angeli referred to Elizabeth, it was only to justify

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[245] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 270.
[246] R.D. Mégroz, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter Poet of Heaven in Earth* (New York: Haskell House Published Ltd., 1971), p. 66-67.
[247] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 98.
[248] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. IX.
[249] B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 37.
[250] *idem,* p. 37.
[251] H. Angeli Rossetti*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies* (London: H. Hamilton, 1949), p. 203.

Rossetti's behavior and portray him as a loving husband. [252] Indubitably, Siddal's obsession with death can be seen in her verses and this might be perceived as a sign of a sort of mental disorder.

3.2 The Sick Muse: Illness Leads to Addiction

Like everything else regarding her life, her health is also described differently by various sources probably because of the fact that nineteenth century medicine was not that accurate. As stated by Cunha, 'the fact that we find many accounts of Elizabeth's poor health speaks to the gender bias of the time but also to the meaning of disease'.[253] As far as the struggles regarding health are concerned, many diagnoses had been made throughout her life. As stated by Arcara, 'Siddal's illness (which may have been anorexia) remained unidentified: a number of medical diagnoses were made at the time, from an improbable 'curvature of the spine', to 'neurasthenia' and nervous breakdown, which were attributed by doctors to the efforts made by the frail Siddal in her attempts at artistic creation (some doctors even advised her to stop painting)'.[254] In a letter to Brown, Rossetti claimed that in March 1854 Dr. Wilkinson (who was taking care of her) had said: 'she ought not to paint at present' to which Rossetti had commented 'but this, of course, she must!' [255]

Elizabeth's friends seemed to have contrasting ideas about her condition. As proven by Marsh, her friend Georgiana Burne-Jones once wondered 'how was it possible for her to suffer so much without developing a specific disease?'.[256] At the same time, Georgiana Burne-Jones also wrote a letter to her sister the day after Lizzie's death comparing the deathbed to the bed Lizzie spent so much time in because of her illness.[257]

Marsh speculated on the fact that the sickness Elizabeth allegedly had might have been a mere invention made by Dante since his preoccupation and her death are insufficient evidence on both sides.[258] It cannot be stated firmly whether she was really sick or not. Indeed, in many letters to his family and friends Dante Gabriel keeps

[252] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 129.
[253] M. Cunha, *op. cit.,* p. 4.
[254] S. Arcara, *op. cit.,* p. 104.
[255] W.M. Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters.* cit., pp. 43-44.
[256] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 64.
[257] www.Lizziesiddal.com [accessed 14.06.2020]
[258] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 63.

underling the fact that his lover was very ill and destined to die soon while other friends of the couple that were close to Lizzie never mention her sickness but they only refer to a general frailty and a weak mental state. Also, as supported by Cunha, there is no evidence that Lizzie ever suffered from physical ailments.[259]

In *Over Her Dead Body*, Bronfen has stated that it was still uncertain whether she was really ill and melancholic from the beginning of her life or whether she had molded herself into the icon her husband wanted her to be: 'She may have staged her life as a prolonged illness, always short of impending death, to gain Rossetti's attention otherwise diverted by his own amorous fickleness'.[260] Francine Prose, reporting Ford Madox Brown's journal in which he asked, 'Why does he not marry her?', has claimed:, 'Not until Lizzie nearly died did Gabriel get a marriage license, confiding to William, "I still trust to God we may be enabled to use it"'.[261] Prose also added that 'Although she had been at death's door only days before and was thought to be too ill to attend the ceremony in a drafty church, she and Gabriel were finally married in 1860'.[262] This version might be supported by the fact that Violet Hunt in a passage of her book implied that he had finally decided to marry her only because she was very ill and on the verge of death. Hunt also defined her as an 'invalid'.[263] This term is central in the analysis of Victorian aesthetics. Indeed, as stated by Cunha, 'to be physically weak was a sign of purity in women'.[264] Gilbert and Gubar also supported the idea that in the Victorian Age being the angel of the house meant being sick and close to death.[265]

The origin of the pain she seemed to feel was also unknown. Did it derive from the accident with the candles in Millais' bathtub? Had she always been frail? Or was she consumed by the difficulties of married life? It seems as if the miscarriage affected her more mentally than physically but one hypothesis arose in the last decades. Accepting the fact that she was actually rather frail (as many people were and are), maybe she exaggerated her condition a little to please Rossetti and to fit in a specific beauty standard of that age (as explained later). This last theory is supported by the fact that a doctor who examined her in 1855 stated that 'Rossetti's apprehensions concerning her health were

[259] M. Cunha, *op. cit.,* p. 4.
[260] E. Bronfen *op. cit.*, p. 172.
[261] F. Prose, *op. cit.,* p. 113.
[262] *idem,* p. 121.
[263] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 131.
[264] M. Cunha, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[265] S. Gilber and S. Gubar, *op. cit*., p. 55.

greater than her conditions called for.' [266] Also, biases in medicine based on gender should be taken into account. At that time (as stated by Cunha) sick women were normally diagnosed with hysteria whose symptoms varied from depression to general frailness.[267] As far as hysteria is concerned, it was frequently called 'female disease' because it was believed to be caused by the female reproductive system.[268] It is worth mentioning that Lizzie's sister-in-law Christina was frequently described as weak and always sick as well. However, Elizabeth's condition did not apparently stop her from enjoying her life and travelling (for example, she reportedly went to Paris) and if she ever lived a solitary life not receiving guests, it was due to her inclinations and not to her illness.

As far as sexual intercourses between Rossetti and Siddal are concerned, there are several contrasting opinions. On one hand, Marsh states that for years Rossetti avoided commitment and sexual intercourses while Lizzie saw sex 'as a route to marriage'[269]. Marsh also supposed that, after several years, Rossetti decided to enjoy his first sexual experience with Fanny before going back to Lizzie's deathbed and marrying her.[270] In 1870 Rossetti published his collection of poems which included 'Nuptial Sleep', a poem with distinct references to sex and 'The Kiss', which has a strong erotic charge. Robert Buchanan notoriously criticized Rossetti's verses claiming that he had discussed private matters and he was also referring to a dead woman, thus implying that necrophilia was involved. [271] Only years later Rossetti revealed that those poems addressed other women. Also, Marsh stated that 'in the myth-making around the exhumation, a distinct erotic charge is palpable' which transforms Rossetti's decision into a sort of sexual harassment of her dead wife's body.[272]

Apparently, there is no evidence of any physical relationship between the two before the marriage. On the other hand, in his depiction of Rossetti's life, Mégroz justified the famous painter for his affairs with other women stating that Lizzie 'would not be entirely his before marriage'. [273] The thesis was supported by Waugh. [274] Both Mégroz and Rosaline Glynn Grylls agreed on the fact that Elizabeth was to blame for the

[266] A. Uphaus, *op. cit*., p. 40.
[267] Cunha, Mariana, *op. cit.,* p. 5.
[268] S. Gilber and S. Gubar, *op. cit*., p. 53.
[269] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit*.,* p. 108.
[270] *idem*, p. XVIII.
[271] www.Rossettiarchive.com [accessed 11.06.2020]
[272] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* p. 29.
[273] Mégroz, Rodolphe Louis, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[274] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit*.,* p. 86.

unsuccessful sexual life Gabriel had to live and oftentimes they refer to her as 'frigid'[275]. Violet Hunt, despite wanting to arouse sympathy for the invalid dove, frequently accused her of refusing Rossetti's sexual propositions.[276] Hunt even suggested that, had Elizabeth enjoyed sex more, the tragic element of her life might have been avoided. Apparently no source can be considered reliable when focusing on this topic and only the lovers knew what their married life was like.

The topic of sexual intercourses is also worth analyzing when considering the relationship between artist and model. Indeed, it was a common belief of that age that models would have sexual relationships with the artists they were portrayed by, thus placing them on the same social level as prostitutes. Also, the fact that the artist had complete control over his model/muse could have sexual implications. As previously mentioned, this might be the reason why Lizzie's occupation is rarely mentioned in documents about her of that age.[277]

Her physical state should also be taken into account when analyzing her sexual life. In *The Sexual Experience of Women Diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa*, Wiederman, Pryor and Morgan researched the sexual responses of women affected by those disorders. According to the researchers, 'women with anorexia nervosa' (the disorder that is frequently attributed to Lizzie) 'are less likely than women with bulimia to engage in intercourses'. The result of their feeling of unpreparedness is to avoid eating or engage in excessive exercise. The refusal of engaging in sexual activities can be linked to their refusal of their bodies.[278] Although there is no proof of her having an eating disorder, as reported by Shefer, in a letter Ford Madox Brown described her as: 'never eating anything to speak of'. [279] In analyzing the condition of woman in the nineteenth-century, Gilbert and Gubar have claimed that:

> 'such diseases of maladjustment to the physical and social environment as anorexia […] did and do strike a disproportionate number of women. […] Such diseases are cause by patriarchal socialization in several ways. Most obviously, of course, any young girl, but especially a lively or imaginative one, is likely to experience her education I docility,

[275] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit*.,* p. 131.
[276] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 197.
[277] M. Cunha, *op. cit.,* p. 3.
[278] M.W. Wiederman, T. Pryor and C.D. Morgan, *The Sexual Experience of Women diagnosed with Aanorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa*. Int. J. Eat. Disord., 1996, 19, pp. 109-118.
[279] E. Shefer, *op. cit.,* p. 444.

> submissiveness, self-lessness as in some sense sickening. To be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained in ill health […]. Learning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns anxiety about [..] her own flesh. Peering obsessively into the real as well as metaphoric looking glasses that surround her, she desires literally to "reduce" her own body.'[280]

Indubitably, Lizzie could have been defined as 'imaginative', and she probably suffered for her condition of object worth admiring. Her occupation was strictly based on physical appearances and this might have led her to become obsessed with her body.

The theme of starvation is frequently portrayed by female writers as a way of locking the rest of the world out since refusing food is perceived as a way of rejecting the patriarchal society. Silence is also a recurring theme in female writers' works and it is linked to starvation since they both require keeping one's mouth shut. Christina Rossetti herself wrote a poem called 'Golden Silences' which ends with a shout breaking the deadly silence.[281] In a passage of her famous *Goblin Market*, she also refers to a girl who is starving and 'She sucked and sucked and sucked the more fruits which that unknown orchard bore'.[282] As seen later the theme of starvation and the craving of food presented in this poem also appears in Siddal's work.

As stated by Hayter in "*The Laudanum Bottle Loomed Large": Opium in the English Literary World in the 19th Century*, the use of laudanum was frequent among Victorians on occasion for minor ailments and aches. [283] Hunt is also a useful resource to discover Lizzie's relationship with that drug. As already mentioned, most of the sources regarding Elizabeth's life should not be considered entirely reliable but Violet claimed she knew her personally when she was young. She also began her book by stating that 'the truth about Rossetti has been told, more or less: the truth about the woman he married, never'.[284] Hunt's ambition is to narrate the never-before-told story of Lizzie. As far as her addiction is concerned, Violet Hunt stated that Lizzie initiated Dante Gabriel in his use of drugs as a remedy for sorrows. Also, she described Elizabeth as ingesting 'quarts of

[280] S. Gilber and S. Gubar, *op. cit*., p. 54.
[281] C. Rossetti, *Poems* (London: Macmillan and co., 1891), p. 360.
[282] *idem,* p. 5.
[283] A. Hayter, "'The Laudanum Bottle Loomed Large': Opium in the English Literary World in the Nineteenth Century", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature 11.4* (1980), p. 38.
[284] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. VII.

laudanum'.[285] Something similar was stated by William Rossetti, who claimed she took this drug 'by medical orders as a palliative against tormenting neuralgia'.[286] This idea is also supported by Prose who added that:

> At the inquest following her death, Gabriel testified that 'he had known her to take as much as a 100 drops at a time' of opium dissolved in alcohol. Through much of the 1850s, Lizzie downed prodigious doses of the narcotic routinely prescribed to soothe the psychic and psychological complaints of nineteenth-century invalids and malingerers – especially women.'. [287]

Another peculiar anecdote is narrated by Hunt. Allegedly, in one of Lizzie's verses there appears to be a reference to her favorite drug.[288] The verses are proposed by Hunt as continuation of Lizzie's poem titled 'Autumnal Leaves are Falling'. The alleged second stanza of this poem begins with: 'Lauden autumn' which has been read by Hunt as a reference to laudanum. According to Trowbridge though, this verse belongs to William Morris since it appears in his *Poems by the Way* as *Verses for Pictures*.[289]

Millais' vision of Ophelia, defined by Perni as a 'fetishized depiction'[290], contains dramatic hints at Lizzie's death, caused by a laudanum overdose. Not only does Ophelia die young the same way Lizzie did, but there is also a clear reference to laudanum, represented by the poppy.

Laudanum, as suggested by Hayter, was more frequently associated with women artists, who were interested in the psychological effect of this drug. Artists like Gaskell and Mary Shelley were known for their use of this opiate[291]. Berridge and Edwards also underlined the fact that this drug was a 'well-known means for suicide' but 'the male suicide rate from opium always far exceeded the female'.[292] Authors of books of fiction inspired by Elizabeth's life such as Eva Wanjek's *Lizzie* (2017) played with the suicide possibility. Wanjek also imagined that Charles Augustus Howell might have provided Lizzie the drug in order to induce the death thus inspiring Rossetti to create other great masterpieces. [293]

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[285] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 332.
[286] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 298.
[287] F. Prose, *op. cit.,* p. 115.
[288] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 283.
[289] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.,* p. 33.
[290] R. Perni, *op. cit.,* p. 197.
[291] A. Hayter, *op. cit.,* p. 38.
[292] V. Berridge and G. Edwards, *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-century England* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 81.
[293] E. Wanjek, *Lizzie* (Neri Pozza, Vicenza, 2017).

As previously stated, Waugh claimed the possibility that Elizabeth's death was not an accident but actually a suicide[294]. This hypothesis is also supported by Chatfield[295] and Arcara. Arcara even underlined the fact that many sources that are considered reliable (like the *Victorian Prose and Poetry* volume in the *Oxford Anthology of English Literature series* 8 [296]) propose suicide as the only option to justify Lizzie's death.[297] Moreover, Violet Hunt added that Holman Hunt had told her that Lizzie had lived an unhappy life and she had decided to end it by her own hand.[298] Hunt also included an alleged suicide note that Lizzie had pinned to her nightgown stating 'My life is so miserable I wish no more of it.' The note was allegedly destroyed by Rossetti, in order to suppress the scandal that would have been caused by Lizzie's suicide confirmation.[299] Indeed, at that time committing suicide was a crime. Angeli admitted that there was actually a suicide note but it stated 'Take care of Harry" (her brother). [300] As reported by Frye, Elizabeth died 'accidentally and casually and by misfortune' or at least that was the statement on an inquest on her death published some days after the tragedy. [301] Some of the sources that suggest that her death was an intentional act tend to compare Elizabeth to Sylvia Plath since they both decided to take their own life on 11 February.[302] Plath (1932-1963) was a well-known American novelist, poet and short-story writer, frequently associated with Lizzie also because of her relationship with another artists: Ted Hughes. The couple also shared the location of the honeymoon with the Rossettis (Paris) and the tragic event of a miscarriage. Hughes also suffered tremendously after Plath's passing (even if they had already been separated for six months) and believed that it was going to be the end of his life as well.

[294] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* pp. 88-89.
[295] S. Chatfield, "Lizzie Siddal Emerges from the Ghostly Mist" in Lizziesiddal.com [accessed 11.06.2020]
[296] L. Trilling and H. Bloom (eds.), *Victorian Prose and Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 616.
[297] S. Arcara, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
[298] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 305.
[299] *ibidem*.
[300] H. Angeli Rossetti, *, op. cit.,* p. 197.
[301] P. Fyfe, "Accidental Death: Lizzie Siddal and the Poetics of the Coroner's Inquest", *Victorian Review*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2014, p. 1.
[302] See E. Siddal, *Poems-Poesie. La musa ispiratrice dei Preraffaelliti*. 4th ed.

3. 3 The Burial of the Muse: Necrophilia in the Victorian Age

According to Cunha, in the nineteenth century men desired to 'conquer a woman who cannot even fight, to have total power over a body'. [303] The dead woman appears, from that viewpoint as an object to admire and to take advantage of, to enjoy, like art. The literary production of that era perfectly embodies this idea, as proven by works like *Fosca* published in 1869 by the Italian author Igino Ugo Tarchetti which focuses on the *topos* of the weak and sick woman. However the protagonist of *Fosca* is aware that the sexual attraction he fells for a sick woman is consciously unhealthy.

When considering why Ophelia by Millais had such an impact on the artistic world of that time, the role of necrophilia in Victorian society must be taken into account. In his book *The Philosophy of Composition* Edgar Allan Poe stated: 'The death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world'. [304] This quote perfectly represents the problematic idealization of the female death in the Victorian age. Poe himself was apparently influenced by a dying muse: his wife Virginia Clemm who allegedly inspired the poem *Annabel Lee* about a dying young girl. According to Mulhall, the fascination with dead female bodies of that time was linked to a perception of the perfect woman as submissive, passive and controllable. [305] Also, the fashion trends of that time preferred pale and thin girls, inspiring many writers on the web today to claim that tuberculosis had shaped Victorian ideal of fashion and beauty. Elizabeth with her pale skin and thin body, was the perfect muse for that era. As stated by Gilbert and Gubar, 'nineteenth-century culture seems to have actually admonished women to be ill. In other words, the "female disease" from which Victorian women suffered were not always byproducts of their training in femininity; they were the goals of such trainings'.[306] This fascination for death, so perfectly depicted by Millais, brought Lizzie to fame. Moreover, the character of Sybil Vane created by Oscar Wilde as also inspired by Elizabeth. Sybil also takes her own life in the novel by Wilde and her death is recognized as a work of art that is going to inspire many. After Sybil's suicide, Lord Henry claims that 'Sometimes,

[303] M. Cunha, *op. cit.,* p. 2.
[304] E.A. Poe, *The raven; and, the philosophy of composition* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1906), p. 29.
[305] B. Mulhall, "The Romanticization of the Dead Female Body in Victorian and Contemporary Culture", *Aisthesis Vol 8* No 2, 2017.
[306] S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit.,* p. 54.

however, a tragedy that possesses artistic elements of beauty crosses our lives.'[307] Not only was Victorian Britain fascinated by dying young girls but British people of that period were also intrigued by the concept and the idea of death itself. This 'cultural obsession' [308] apparently started in 1861 when Queen Victoria lost her husband to a disease. She displayed her grief publicly thus establishing a cultural interest in sickness and death.[309]

As mentioned in chapter one, throughout the centuries the idea of the role of the muse has changed and she started to be perceived as a decorative element or as reincarnated in specific human beings thus considering the poet's abilities as sufficient. Bronfen stated that this shift could be perceived as yet another way for the artist to take control of his muses' bodies. [310] The muses of the Victorian age did not offer their voices to the artists (like they did in Ancient Greece) but they gave their whole bodies and lives to art. In that bathtub Lizzie was ready to die for art's sake and, in a way she died in order to inspire her husband to create a masterpiece. As stated by Orlando, after the exhumation Elizabeth's status of a girl exploited, in life and death, for art's sake is finally cemented.[311] According to Bronfen, death transforms the body of a woman into a source of inspiration since it gives substance to absence and loss. Bronfen also claims that each artist should choose between a living woman and a dead muse however the poetic creation is possible only if the erotic energy is mitigated. [312] As supported by Laurent, the pre-Raphaelite perception of women was rather androcentric, depicting women as passive, innocent, melancholic and in perpetual states of contemplation. Arcara also focused on Elizabeth Siddal by stating that she, in particular, became a mythical figure since her representations of Ophelia and Beatrice intertwined with her personal life (her addiction and her death) to the extent that she is hardly separable from the roles she played and she became 'the emblem of ultra-romantic, languishing femininity'. [313] Indubitably, the Pre-Raphaelite perception of women – and of Lizzie in particular – was deeply influenced by the Victorian perception of women. The role of women in his society might have been what Oscar Wilde was thinking about while admiring *Beata Beatrix* in his own house. Indeed,

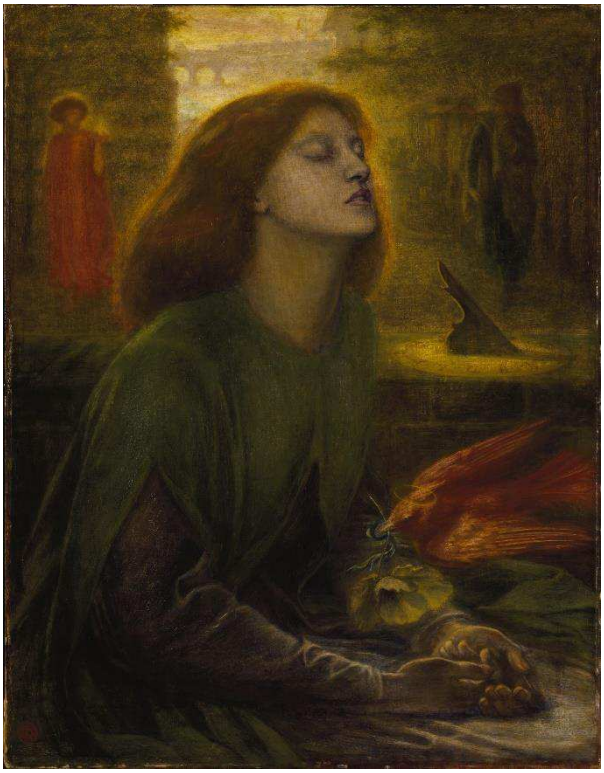
[307] O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1968), p. 105.
[308] R. Brown, *The Art of Suicide (*London: Reaktion Books, 2001), p. 154.
[309] P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 319.
[310] E. Bronfen, *op. cit.,* p. 243.
[311] E. Orlando, "'That I May not Faint, or Die, or Swoon': Reviving Pre-Raphaelite Women", *Women's Studies,* 2009, 38.6, p. 622.
[312] E. Bronfen, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
[313] S. Arcara, *op. cit.,* p. 96.

in 1893 Wilde rented Lady Mount-Temple's house in which the most famous version of Rossetti's painting was displayed. Apparently, in that very house he wrote both *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *An Ideal Husband* (1899). This plays show that Wilde, while pondering over *Beata Beatrix*, might have realized 'how damaging it is for women – especially women artists like Elizabeth Siddall – to be feverishly replicated and fetishised as beautiful corpses in visual culture.'[314] Lizzie was always described as weak and ready to die. 'Her life was still her own, though death was implicit in it'; this is how Violet Hunt described Lizzie's condition after the visit of Dr. Acland. [315] Even the description written next to her grave describes her as 'consumptive, always weak and ailing'.[316] Not only is her death frequently perceived as an inevitable step for the artistic creation, but she is also frequently blamed for Rossetti's later schizophrenia. Indeed, as stated by Marsh, 'in his worst moments, Gabriel heard whispers in the walls' and he was haunted by his dead wife. [317] Hunt called Rossetti a 'madman' who could not accept the death of his beloved 'breaking all the china in the flat'.[318] Reportedly Rossetti organized some séances and he asked Lizzie's spirit questions. During one of those meetings, according to the psychic, Lizzie admitted she had been knocking on Dante's bedroom walls frightening Fanny.[319] Similarly Morris defined her as a 'wraith', a ghost [320] and Orlando claimed 'Elizabeth Siddall was consigned to the status of a phantom even while living, as seen in the remarks of her many admirers and as evidenced by the number of times she posed as a romantic tragedienne' (Ophelia and Beatrice). [321]

[314] E. Orlando, *op. cit.,* p.116.
[315] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 63.
[316] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* p. 3.
[317] *idem,* p. 15.
[318] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 297.
[319] F. Prose, *op. cit.,* p. 136.
[320] E. Orlando, *op. cit.,* p. 107.
[321] *ibidem*.

Chapter 4
Dante's Beatrice: The *Donna Angelo* as Muse

The fourth chapter deals with the figure of the *donna angelo* in the Pre-Raphaelite imagery. In particular, I will focus on how Dante Alighieri was a source of inspiration both for Rossetti and the other Brothers. In section 4.1 I will discuss I detail the differences between the muses of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Lizzie, Fanny, Jane and Alexa.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Beata Beatrix, 1870

Beata Beatrix, based on Dante Alighieri's unrequited love interest Beatrice Portinari, was created in several different replicas (including two oil paintings, a chalk sketch and a watercolor). The original oil painting was bought for 300 guineas, while, almost six years later, the replica commissioned by the philanthropist William Graham, was paid £1000. Rossetti began the first version of the painting in 1877 while the latter remained unfinished, since the artist died in 1882. Allegedly, Ford Madox Brown finished

the work for his friend.[322] Various letters support the thesis that Rossetti had started the painting sometime before the death of Lizzie[323]; as reported by Dunstan, William Michael Rossetti's accounts should be considered responsible for the popularity of the painting.[324] Apparently, it was not until Dante Gabriel's passing that the artist reached popularity. Not only was he a mysterious character, thus making it hard for the public to know about his personal life, but he also rarely took part in exhibitions with the Brotherhood. The first information the public received about his life was through his brother's memoirs.

When it comes to analyzing *Beata Beatrix* it is important to point out that it was William Michael who invented and shared the anecdote that the painting was inspired by and based on Lizzie. This idea was later supported by the biographers and scholars of the Royal Academy who wrote the catalogue entries for the two retrospective Rossetti exhibitions held in 1883 in which the painting was described as: 'a portrait of the painter's wife, done after her death'.[325] In other words, thanks to William Michael Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix* has frequently been interpreted as Dante's final expression of devotion to his dove. As previously said, William wanted to defend the reputation of his family even at the expense of altering reality. Consequently the creation of *Beata Beatrix* was considered 'part of the mourning process'[326], but also a rather disturbing act, just like the exhumation. However, again like the exhumation of the poems, this painting could be considered as a financially motivated action. As suggested by a letter Dante Gabriel wrote to his mother on 24 August 1866 stating: 'I hope a goodish sum will come in all at once and enable me for the first time to open a banking account at the end of this year with a goodish sum'.[327]

The title of the painting is a direct reference to the *Vita Nuova* by Dante Alighieri. From the beginning of the book (chapter I, section II), it is clearly stated that the whole text refers to Beatrice Portinari, 'la quale fu chiamata da molti Beatrice li quali non sapeano che si chiamare'.[328] Although many scholars (like Gabriele Rossetti, Dante's father, for example) thought that Beatrice was a mere allegorical figure standing for Italy or for wisdom[329], Dante Gabriel was convinced that Beatrice was a real woman.[330] In the

[322] See L. Hawksley, *Essential Pre-Raphaelites* (Bath: Parragon Pub., 2001) p. 118.
[323] www.Rossettiarchive.com [accessed 11.06.2020]
[324] A. Dunstan, "The Myth of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Beata Beatrix' as Memorial Painting*", The British Art Journal*, 2001, 11.1, p. 89.
[325] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 25.
[326] *idem* p. 302.
[327] A. Dunstan, *op. cit.*., p. 90.
[328] D. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2017), p. 35.
[329] O. Doughty, *op. cit.,* p. 46.
[330] J. J., Lee, *Venus Imaginaria: Reflections on Alexa Wilding, Her Life, and Her Role as Muse in the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti - MA thesis*, (College Park: University of Maryland, 2006), p. 7.

Vita Nuova, Dante's description of Beatrice, also increases the doubts since she is described as a 'miracle' more than once (*Vita Nuova,* XXI, XXVI, XXIX).[331] The actual expression 'Beatrice Beata' appears in section XXVIII when referring to her death and her assumption into Heaven. Dante Gabriel used the Latin version of the woman's name as a title. As reported by Pesce, 'the picture must of course be viewed not as a representation of the incident of the death of Beatrice, but as an ideal of the subject, symbolized by a trance or sudden spiritual transfiguration. Beatrice is visibly rapt into Heaven, seeing as it were through her shut lids (as Dante says at the close of the *Vita Nuova*) Him who is blessed throughout all ages'. [332] As previously stated the eyes play a fundamental role in determining the agency of the painted subject and in this case they are used to convey surrender and rapture, like in the other portraits of Siddal made by Rossetti. However, it could also be perceived as an image of closure, a sort of wall built between the subject depicted and the viewer. It seems as if Rossetti wanted to keep Beatrice/Elizabeth's gaze exclusively for himself. The skin is also rather bruised thus underlining the premature passing of the woman and her general sickness.

According to Bradley, there is a strong difference between the painting and the preparatory sketch since in the latter, Lizzie looks more human and real, 'a real woman, frail but present'.[333]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Sketch for Beata Beatrix, 1850

[331] D. G. Rossetti, *The New Life (*London: Ellis and Elvey, 1899), pp. 30, 40, 43.
[332] V. Pesce, "*Beata Beatrix*: la *Vita Nuova* e i quadri di Dante Gabriel Rossetti", *Dante e l'Arte 2*, 2015, p. 213.
[333] L. Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

As stated by Arcara, Lizzie is frequently remembered as the heroines she represented: 'Ophelia and Beatrice, elusive objects of male love doomed to an early death.'[334] Indubitably the loss of his beloved must have been a traumatic experience for Rossetti, who, as previously mentioned, kept on "seeing" Lizzie as a ghost and felt lost without her. This might be the reason why he decided to portray her as Dante's Beatrice. He wanted to give Elizabeth the same power Beatrice had to guide her Dante while dead. Also, as claimed by Prose, Dante Gabriel (maybe unconsciously) searched for a woman to match his fantasies about Beatrice and Dante. [335] He felt a deep connection with his Italian namesake and he wanted a *donna angelo* to love and to be inspired by. It seems as if, from the very first day, she was destined to play this role both in her husband's life and in his art. According to Trowbridge, *Beata Beatix* achieved success because it worked as an outline and Elizabeth herself became a vehicle in this painting 'for male desire and for poetic longing, which makes it difficult to see her as a creative figure in her own right'.[336]

Many of the elements that appear in this painting have a symbolic meaning, like the flowers in Millais' *Ophelia*. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in a letter to William Graham in 1873 explained some of those symbols stating: 'the radiant bird, a messenger of death, drops the white poppy between her open hands' and in the background 'Dante himself is seen to pass gazing towards the figure of Love opposite, in whose hand the waning life of his lady flickers as a flame'. [337] The well and the tree are both embodiments of the concept of rebirth and the circle of life. Both Love and the dove are painted in red, colour of passion, although Rossetti claimed that the bird was a messenger of death rather than passion or hope, as established by Christian tradition. Beatrice's dress in the painting should be perceived as a reference to the thirtieth canto of *The Divine Comedy* (1472) in which Dante's love interest is described as 'a virgin' who 'appear'd, beneath green mantle, robed in hue of living flame'.[338] The hour of Beatrice's passing, which occurred at nine o'clock on 9 June 1290, is represented by the sundial in the painting. Number nine, as explained both in *Vita Nuova* and in *The Divine Comedy* (1472), has a strong symbolic meaning.

[334] S. Arcara, *op. cit*., p. 97.
[335] F. Prose, *op. cit.,* p. 104.
[336] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.,* p. 9.
[337] V. Pesce, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
[338] D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* (New York: Collier, 1901), p. 266.

> Io dico che, secondo l'usanza d'Arabia, l'anima sua nobilissima si partio ne la prima ora del nono giorno del mese; e secondo l'usanza di Siria, ella si partio nel nono mese de l'anno, però che lo primo mese è ivi Tisirin primo, lo quale a noi è Ottobre; e secondo l'usanza nostra, ella si partio in quello anno de la nostra indizione, cioè de li anni Domini, in cui lo perfetto numero nove volte era compiuto in quello centinaio nel quale in questo mondo ella fue posta, ed ella fue de li cristiani del terzodecimo centinaio. Perché questo numero fosse in tanto amico di lei, questa potrebbe essere una ragione: con ciò sia cosa che, secondo Tolomeo e secondo la cristiana veritade, nove siano li cieli che si muovono, e, secondo comune oppinione astrologa, li detti cieli adoperino qua giuso secondo la loro abitudine insieme, questo numero fue amico di lei per dare ad intendere che ne la sua generazione tutti e nove li mobili cieli perfettissimamente s'aveano insieme. Questa è una ragione di ciò; ma più sottilmente pensando, e secondo la infallibile veritade, questo numero fue ella medesima; per similitudine dico, e ciò intendo così. Lo numero del tre è la radice del nove, però che, sanza numero altro alcuno, per sé medesimo fa nove, sì come vedemo manifestamente che tre via tre fa nove. Dunque se lo tre è fattore per sé medesimo del nove, e lo fattore per sé medesimo de li miracoli è tre, cioè Padre e Figlio e Spirito Santo, li quali sono tre e uno, questa donna fue accompagnata da questo numero del nove a dare ad intendere ch'ella era uno nove, cioè uno miracolo, la cui radice, cioè del miracolo, è solamente la mirabile Trinitade. Forse ancora per più sottile persona si vederebbe in ciò più sottile ragione; ma questa è quella ch'io ne veggio, e che più mi piace.[339]

Interestingly enough, the Latin version of Beatrice's name (the one used by Rossetti) ends with IX, nine in Roman numerals. The picture frame, which was designed personally by Rossetti, contains additional references to death and mourning, including the date of Beatrice's death and a phrase from Jeremiah's *Lamentations*, also reported by

[339]D. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2017), p. 144. I say, then, that according to the division of time in Italy, her most noble spirit departed from among us in the first hour of the ninth day of the month; and according to the division of time in Syria, in the ninth month of the year: seeing that Tismim, which with us is October, is there the first month. Also she was taken from among us in that year of our reckoning (to wit, of the years of our Lord) in which the perfect number was nine times multiplied within that century wherein she was born into the world: which is to say, the thirteenth century of Christians. And touching the reason why this number was so closely allied unto her, it may peradventure be this. According to Ptolemy (and also to the Christian verity), the revolving heavens are nine; and according to the common opinion among astrologers, these nine heavens together have influence over the earth. Wherefore it would appear that this number was thus allied unto her for the purpose of signifying that, at her birth, all these nine heavens were at perfect unity with each other as to their influence. This is one reason that may be brought: but more narrowly considering, and according to the infallible truth, this number was her own self: that is to say, by similitude. As thus. The number three is the root of the number nine; seeing that without the interposition of any other number, being multiplied merely by itself, it produceth nine, as we manifestly perceive that three times three are nine. Thus, three being of itself the efficient of nine, and the Great Efficient of Miracles being of Himself Three Persons (to wit: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), which, being Three, are also One:—this lady was accompanied by the number nine to the end that men might clearly perceive her to be a nine, that is, a miracle, whose only root is the Holy Trinity. It may be that a more subtile person would find for this thing a reason of greater subtilty: but such is the reason that I find, and that liketh me best. [D. G. Rossetti, *The New Life* (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1899) p. 43].

Dante in the *Vita Nuova*: 'Quomodo sedet sola civitas' ('how doth the city sit solitary'[340]). This should be read as a reference to the fact that the whole city of Florence suffered for Beatrice's passing. The city in the background (whose houses and buildings seem to be leaning on the balustrade) could be Florence. For instance, the bridge behind Beatrice's head could be Ponte Vecchio. On the contrary, a more autobiographical reading of the painting might lead viewers to believe the bridge to be Battersea on the River Thames. In Dante Gabriel Rossetti's mind, 'it is not at all intended to represent Death…but to render it under the resemblance of a trance, in which Beatrice seated at the balcony overlooking the City is suddenly rapt from Earth to Heaven'. [341] The painting, as stated by Dante Gabriel in a letter to Charles Lyell in 1848, belongs to a series of works inspired by the book by Dante Alighieri. The series was supposed to be composed of ten paintings but only four are clearly recognizable in Rossetti's production. Indubitably, it was a great source of inspiration for Rossetti. In a way, it might be said that Rossetti started working on the translation having his pictorial projects in mind. His translation was published only in 1861 in the volume *The Early Italian Poets from Ciullo d'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri* and later in a new edition in 1902 edited by Roux e Viarengo and accompanied by his illustrations. There are many thematic similarities between the *Vita Nuova* and Dante Gabriel's poems. However, there are also many differences in the vision of the world of the two poets. Indubitably, Dante's works are imbedded in his social and cultural Italian context. An example of their differences can be found in Zweig: 'Christian symbols occur in his [Rossetti's] poetry not simply because of the piety of his mother and sisters but because Dante uses them and gives them the full weight of grave conviction'. On the contrary it is well known that religion was very important for Dante and how meaningful each symbol was for him. [342] In a way, as supported by Ellis, Rossetti's poems are 'a weakened form of Dante's'[343] (meaning with less emotional depth and symbolical value) since the 'Victorian romantic'[344] was almost obsessed by the poet of the Dolce Stil Novo but he did not have his talent. As reported by Pesce, Dante Gabriel's fascination with Italian poetry (especially the so-called Stil Novo) began in his twenties.[345] *The Divine Comedy* was, together with the *Vita Nuova*, one of the greatest sources of inspiration for

[340] D. Alighieri, *op. cit.,* p. 58.
[341] E. Orlando, *op. cit.,* p. 623.
[342] R. Zweig, "'Death—In—Love': Rossetti and the Victorian Journey Back to Dante", *op. cit.,* p. 180.
[343] S. Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry: Shelley to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 111.
[344] See O. Doughty, *op. cit.*
[345] V. Pesce, *op. cit.,* p. 204.

his art, as proven by paintings like *Pia de' Tolomei (1868)* which Jane Morris modelled for. However, he was influenced by the *Vita Nuova* much more.

As far as his pictorial production linked to the *Vita Nuova* is concerned, apart from *Beata Beatrix*, some other works appear in Roux e Viarengo edition. *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (also known as *Dante Drawing the Angel*) is one of those paintings. It is based on section XXXIV of Dante's book ('io mi sedea in parte, ne la quale, ricordandomi di lei, disegnava uno angelo sovra certe tavolette'[346]) and, in 1853 (the year in which it was made) it granted Rossetti Ruskin's praises. William Michael was the model for Dante Alighieri in this painting and, the drawing he is holding in his hands is, once again, a portrait of Siddal. *La donna della finestra* (1879) is also included in Roux edition. The painting represents a later part of the *Vita Nuova* in which Dante is grieving over the loss of Beatrice and suddenly sees 'a young and very beautiful lady, who was gazing upon me from a window with a gaze full of pity, so that the very sum of pity appeared gathered together in her'.[347] In this painting Jane Morris is strangely represented with red hair. Finally, *Dantis Amor* (1860), defined by Pesce as the most abstract synthesis of Dante's work ever created by Rossetti. It belongs to a triptych together with *The Salutation of Beatrice in Florence* and *The Salutation in the Garden of Eden* (both displayed in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa). While the model for Beatrice in both *Salutations* is Jane Morris (the triptych was conceived as a wedding present for the Morrises), Elizabeth sat for *Dantis Amor*. The aim of the project was to depict Beatrice's life, death and assumption to Heaven. There is also an inscription taken from the final section of *The Divine Comedy* : 'L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle' which implies a reference not only to Dante's love for Beatrice but also to the general idea of Love as driving force of the universe. *Dantis Amor*, on the other hand, is linked to the last sonnet of the *Vita Nuova* 'Quand'egli è giunto là, dove 'l desira, vede una Donna, che riceve onore e luce sì, che par lo suo splendore lo peregrino spirito la mira'.[348] The painting represents Love in the very center, Beatrice inside a moon and Christ inside a sun at the top of the image. Love, wearing pilgrim clothes, holds a bow and arrows and a sundial with the recurring date 9 June 1290 inscribed. *Dante's Dream on the*

[346] D. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, cit., p. 158. Translation: 'sat alone, I betook myself to draw the resemblance of an angel upon certain tablets' D. G. Rossetti, *The New Life,* cit*.,* p. 48.
[347] D. G. Rossetti, *The New Life*, cit., p. 49.
[348] D. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova,* cit.. p. 182. Translation: 'When it hath reached unto the end, and stays, It sees a lady round whom splendours move In homage; till, by the great light thereof Abashed, the pilgrim spirit stands at gaze' [D. G. Rossetti, *The New Life*, cit., p. 55].

Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice, painted in 1871 (9 years after Lizzie's passing) also contains clear reference to the Dantesque imagery but it should be considered as an 'expression of his [Dante Gabriel's] loss'[349] and his despair after the death of his beloved.

Beata Beatrix is probably the most famous work made by Rossetti and it shares some peculiar elements with another project of the artist: *Hand and Soul*, frequently considered as the archetypical "imaginary portrait"[350]. The term "imaginary portrait" was coined by Walter Pater and described as a short story which shares some characteristics with biographies and literary critics and is supported by other art forms (like painting and drawing).[351] As previously mentioned, this short story was published in the first issue of *The Germ* in 1849 and it can be considered as both a Rossettian and a Pre-Raphaelite manifesto since it contains all the ideas about art and aesthetics shared by the Brothers. Allegedly, this story was slightly revised in 1869-1870 in order to make sure that it was not going to be perceived as a merely religious text. Indubitably, religion plays a fundamental role in the text ('God' is mentioned 15 times in a little more than 30 pages). Right from the prologue, readers understand that the narrator has selected this protagonist, Chiaro dell'Erma because he 'feared God and loved the art'[352], thus underlining the centrality of religion from the very first lines. In the story Chiaro, who lost all inspiration, is surprised by his spirit in the shape of a woman. This woman (which embodies both Chiaro's spirit and Art itself) advises him to 'Set thine hand and thy soul to serve man with God'[353]. Despite the similarities, like the green dress worn by Beatrice which resembles the 'green and grey raiment'[354] mentioned in the tale and, generally, the presence of a woman who is the great source of inspiration for an artist, there are also some differences. Most importantly, the eyes, which, as previously mentioned, play a fundamental role in detecting the intentions of the artist. While the Soul is described in the short story with 'her eyes set earnestly open'[355], Lizzie is depicted as Beatrice with her eyes almost closed. As previously stated, eyes play a key role in determining the agency of the painted subject. In particular, glances are worth analyzing when examining

[349] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 23.
[350] E. Bizzotto, *La mano e l'anima: il ritratto immaginario fin de siècle.* (Milano: Cisalpino, 2001), p. XVI.
[351] *idem*, p. XV.
[352] D. G. Rossetti, *Hand and Soul* (London: T.N. Foulis, 1910), p. 7.
[353] *idem,* p. 30.
[354] *idem,* p. 24.
[355] *idem,* p. 34.

a painting in the context of gender studies since women are less frequently given the agency of the starring glance which would imply bravery and even effrontery.

Many references to religion also appear in 'The Blessed Damozel', a poem that was first published in *The Germ* in 1850. It was revised for publication in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* and then again before its appearance in *Poems*. The connection between the two texts is also marked by the fact that the spirit which appears in *Hand and Soul* is described as a 'blessed maiden'.[356] The embodiment of Chiaro's spirit is, in other words, a beautiful woman who blesses the artist by inspiring him. Similarly, Elizabeth was frequently perceived as a *donna angelo* who was destined to enter Rossetti's life and bless it.

Thirty years after its first publication, Rossetti told Hall Caine that he had written 'The Blessed Damozel' as a sequel to *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe. He claimed: 'I saw that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and so determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven.'[357] Rossetti's early study of Dante, especially the *Paradiso* of *The Divine Comedy*, influenced the general idea and many of the details of this poem.

Bronfen supports the idea that the theme of the relationship with a dead beloved was also presented by Rossetti in *The House of Life* (1881).[358] There is actually no final version of this collection of ballads and sonnets since Rossetti left it as a mere project titled *Towards a Work to be Called 'The House of Life.* However, this was published in several different versions (1870, 1873 and 1881). Rossetti's aim was 'to deal in poetry chiefly with personified emotions; and in carrying out my scheme of *The House of Life* (if ever I do so) shall try to put in action a complete 'dramatis personae' of the soul'.[359] Indubitably, translating Dante's *Vita Nuova* influenced Rossetti in pursuing a similar artistic project. *The House of Life* narrates the main events of Rossetti's' life from 1860 to 1870, similarly, *Vita Nuova* tells the main events of its author's life from 1274 (the date of the meeting with Beatrice Portinari), through her salutation in 1283, up until Beatrice's death in June 1290. Also, Dante Alighieri included in his masterpiece some sonnets that were not about Beatrice and likewise Rossetti's project contained many

[356] D. G. Rossetti, *Hand and Soul,* cit*.,* p. 15.
[357] A. D. McKillop, "Festus and the Blessed Damozel*" in Modern Language Notes*, Feb. 1919, Vol. 34, No. 2, p. 93.
[358] E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 171.
[359] www.Rossettiarchive.com [accessed 11.06.2020]

poems inspired by Jane Morris, his later lover. The sonnet 'A Superscription', which was included in this collection, could be considered as a summary of Rossetti's perception of art as combining different forms. Indeed, in this poem he refers to an object which is simultaneously looked at and read. Moreover, according to Doughty[360], the poem also includes a reference to Alighieri, since Rossetti mentions 'that wing'd Peace' which recalls Dante's 'pace d'amore'. [361] 'Her Gifts' was also included in the collection and it was allegedly written for and about Elizabeth Siddal. As reported by Zweig, in the poem, a celebration of love and life, 'the lover admonishes himself to 'Breathe low her [the beloved's] name' (l. 14), presumably, because in naming, in tying her to reality, she is diminished'.[362] As stated later, Rossetti frequently plays with reality in his works of art by blurring the lines between earth and heaven, 'between heavenly aspirations to be found through earthly pleasures and sensuous pleasures to be found in heaven.'[363] When commenting this collection, Boos selected guilt as the main topic since 'In his narratives and ballads sexuality is more frequently and overtly associated with moral guilt, although considered inevitable.' [364]

The struggle between instant gratification on earth and eternal joy in heaven is present in many of Rossetti's works, including this poem. Moreover, women and heaven are often linked in this collection of poems. For example, in 'Her Heaven' the object of Rossetti's desire is located in Heaven. Similarly, in 'The Blessed Damozel', the damozel (archaic form of damsel) is waiting for her earthly love and their reunion in Heaven. Rossetti also painted a version of 'The Blessed Damozel'. The model for the painting is often inaccurately identified as Elizabeth Siddal. Elizabeth is also frequently believed to have inspired her husband to write 'The Blessed Damozel' when it was actually first written prior to their meeting. On the contrary, as previously stated, the ideal and prototypical woman Rossetti had in mind when writing 'The Blessed Damozel' might have led him to be fascinated by Lizzie in the first place. As reported by Gilbert and Gubar, the protagonist of the painting is locked behind 'golden barriers' and her hair and her tears are 'weirdly real and sensual, perhaps to emphasize he impossibility of complete spirituality for any woman.'[365] As a matter of fact, the model for the painting is actually

[360] O. Doughty, *op. cit.* p. 300.
[361] D. G. Rossetti, *The House of Life* (New York: G.A.S. Wieners, 1902), p. 102.
[362] R. Zweig, *op. cit*., p. 183.
[363] *ibidem*.
[364] F. S. Boos, *The Poetry of Dante G. Rossetti* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1976), p. 88.
[365] S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit*., p. 27.

Alexa Wilding, who was frequently chosen by Rossetti for subjects with a strong sexual energy such as *Lady Lilith* (but only the second version dated 1872 since the first one was modelled by Fanny Cornforth in 1866) and *La Bella Mano* (1875). Alexa had several things in common with Lizzie. First of all, they both worked in fashion before knowing Rossetti (Alexa was a dressmaker) and they both knew how to read and write, despite their humble origins. They were also both known to be in poor health throughout their lives, moreover Alexa also changed her name under Rossetti's influence. She was born Alice Wilding but when she began sitting for him, she changed it to Alexa. As supported by Lee, the fact that (like in the case of Lizzie's life) William Michael Rossetti was considered a ridable insight to the life of this woman, led following scholars to call her Alexa, thus endlessly associating her with Dante Gabriel and depriving her of her identity.[366] In 1882 she was diagnosed with a splenic tumor which probably led Rossetti to consider her as weak for her whole life. Jane Morris's health was also rather frail and for this reason she spent some time at Bad Ems in Germany.[367] These common elements, together with the physical features shared by his models, led many scholars to state that 'the women in Rossetti's pictures all look alike.'[368]The idea of this woman who resembles an angel and who is the mediator between the artist and God had the powerful dilemma in itself of the battle between the spiritual love and the carnal love. As supported by Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (1477), 'onestissimo fu questo amore, né mai apparve, o per isguardo o per parola o per cenno, alcuno libidinoso appetito né nello amante né nella cosa amata'.[369] This statement highlights the almost-platonic nature of the relationship between Dante and Beatrice. Similarly, since they were considered (and sometimes they considered themselves) as reincarnations of the Florentine couple, Rossetti and Siddal's relationship is sometimes described as merely platonic while, as previously analyzed in details, the sexual component of their affair is shrouded in mystery. Something similar can be found in *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore* by Guido Guinizzelli in which the poet justifies himself to God by saying that the woman he was in love with, looked like an angel and therefore it was not his fault if he

[366] J. J. Lee, *Venus Imaginaria: Reflections on Alexa Wilding, Her Life, and Her Role as Muse in the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti - MA thesis* (College Park: University of Maryland, 2006), p. 43.
[367] J. Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 260.
[368] J. J. Lee, *op. cit..,* p. 1.
[369] G. Boccaccio, "Trattatello in laude di Dante", in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, vol. III*, ed. P.G. Ricci (Milano: Mondadori, 1974), pp. 444-445. 'His love was most virtuous, nor did there ever appear, by look or word or sign, any wanton appetite either in the lover or in her whom he loved' G. Rice Carpenter, *A Translation of Giovanni Boccaccio's life of Dante* (New York: The Grolier Club, 1900), p. 46.

had fallen for her, because she was from a divine world.[370] The struggle between carnal and spiritual love is a typical element of the Victorian Age characterized by a clash between morality and perversion. In that age the values of the Church appeared to be fundamental but they were rarely reflected on the reality of the society. From this viewpoint, Beatrice was the perfect muse since, because of her early death, she was physically never accessible and, by depicting Lizzie in that way, Rossetti linked hew with the ideal of an unattainable love object. Indeed, as stated by Prose, Rossetti sometimes seemed to prefer the idea of 'Dante's muse, dead for five hundred years, to the actuality of his own model, mistress, muse and wife'.[371] From this perspective, it might be stated that Rossetti never cared much for his wife interests and personality but rather created a role for her to play: the dying stunning muse. As reported by Pesce, Benedetti claimed that Elizabeth's face in *Beata Beatrix* established a bond between *eros* and transcendency, between orgasm and divine revelation. [372] This is also a recurring theme in courtly tradition since the divine and the erotic element were believed to be merged together in the female muse. From this point of view, the muse becomes an 'unattainable mistress whom the poet worships', a mediator between the Virgin and a real woman, as supported by Parker.[373] The painting might also be perceived as the perfect encounter between Love and Death. Indeed, the predominant colours have symbolic meanings: green is the colour of life while red is the colour of death. According to Johnson, through Rossetti's art viewers can understand his approach to love, deeply influenced by Dante and the Arthurian legends, generally poetic and embodied by a beautiful woman. [374] From this viewpoint, the spiritual sphere of love is considered by Rossetti as something to experience only through Beauty. Being a female beauty lover, Dante was at his best when painting his stunners. Ruskin was the first to recognize this talent when he admired Rossetti's portraits of Siddal for the first time. Indeed he stated: 'I think Ida [the nickname he used for Lizzie] should be very happy to see how much more beautifully, perfectly, and tenderly you draw when you are drawing her than when you draw anybody else. She cures you of all your worst faults when you only look at her.'[375] Indubitably, art was

[370] www.treccani.it. [accessed 12.06.2020]
[371] F. Prose, *op. cit*., p. 103.
[372] V. Pesce, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
[373] S. Parker, "The Muse Writes Back: Lyric Poetry and Female Poetic Identity". In: G. Dowd and N. Rulyova (eds) *Genre Trajectories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 92.
[374] R. Johnson, "Dante Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* and the *New Life*", *The Art Bulletin, Vol. 57, No. 4* (Dec. 1975), p. 548.
[375] *ibidem.*

perceived by Rossetti as a way of sublimating and mitigating, even if only momentarily, the human instincts and passions. [376] Furthermore, he considered earthly love as a merely possible way for fulfilment and he also believed that the love for a woman could be sublimated to satisfy spiritual yearnings. As reported by Zwieg, from this perspective, 'death is feared [by Rossetti], but also offers possibilities of fulfilment'.[377]

What remains unknown is whether *Beata Beatrix* should be considered as the result of a cathartic project or whether Rossetti just wanted to depict Beatrice (his long-lasting obsession) and simply used his wife as a model. There is also the possibility that Dante Gabriel desired to be Dante Alighieri so much that he tried to find a link between their lives. Indeed, by the time Rossetti and Siddal met, Dante Gabriel was already deeply fascinated with the Italian poet and he probably noticed that Elizabeth's features (coppery hair, pale skin and aethereal beauty) perfectly matched the ideal of female beauty of the Italian Renaissance. He probably selected her as his obsession as Dante did with Beatrice.

4.1 Aethereal Angel or Fallen Woman?

Just like the other members of the Brotherhood, Rossetti used to work with several models. As a matter of fact, the term 'monomania'[378] [rf. chapter 2] used by Ford Madox Brown to refer to Rossetti's obsession with Siddal could also apply to many other models of Dante Gabriel. As previously mentioned, the members of the Brotherhood tended to search for models mainly among family and friends since it was considered unacceptable for a man to approach a woman without a formal introduction (unless she was a prostitute, which made her unsuitable for the job). For this reason, when approaching Siddal, Deverell allegedly sent his mother to try to convince her to sit for her son. Furthermore, the personalities and inclinations of the models often influenced the final result of the painting. Therefore, each portrait of the Brotherhood contains the soul of both the artist and the model. For this reason they were so obsessed with finding the right stunner since it made a huge difference in the successful outcome of the painting.

As reported by Marsh, once Rossetti had confessed to Caine that 'to marry one woman and then find out, when it is too late, that you love another, is the deepest tragedy

[376] E. Bizzotto, *op. cit.* p. XIII.
[377] R. Zweig, *op. cit.,* p. 182.
[378] F.M. Brown, *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown*, ed. V. Surtees, (London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 148.

that can enter into a man's life'.[379] These lines were a reference to Jane Morris, for whom he had a deep admiration. Indubitably, Rossetti, suffering from lack of conjugal heat, threw himself into other women's arms. Defined by Mégroz as 'his mistress for more years than any other woman', [380] Jane Morris was one of those women. Since Jane's relationship with Dante Gabriel solidified after Lizzie's death, she is frequently considered as Dante's "new Beatrice" but, in a way, she could also be considered as one of the so-called screen women (donne dello schermo): Dante's "distractions" after the death of his one true love. If Rossetti's statement to Cain was true, it would be better to describe Elizabeth as a screen woman. However, for the purpose of this analysis of Siddal'life, I will keep an Elizabethcentric point of view. They were both depicted by him as *donne angelo*, aethereal beauties belonging more to heaven than to earth. They both had long necks and melancholic gazes and Dante Gabriel admired them profoundly. They also both modeled as Beatrice: Elizabeth in *Beata Beatrix* while Jane in *Beatrice* (1879), *The Salutation of Beatrice in Florence* (1860) and *The Salutation in the Garden of Eden* (1860). This last painting contains a clear reference to a sonnet of the Vita Nuova: 'Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare/la donna mia, quand'ella altrui saluta,/ch'ogne lingua deven tremando muta,/e li occhi no l'ardiscon di guardare.'[381] On the contrary, as a prostitute, Fanny represented the 'fallen woman' par excellence. Even though Elizabeth's relationship with religion is uncertain, some of her friends refer to her as a religious woman, thus amplifying the association with Mary and Beatrice. Bessie Parks, a friend of hers, once described Lizzie as 'a remarkably retiring English girl [who] had the look of one who read her Bible and said her prayers every night'.[382] However, as reported by Marsh, William Rossetti supported the idea that she was not a believer despite underlining the fact that his brother 'had no sort of liking for irreligion in women and even a prejudice against women who would not believe'.[383] Indubitably, Rossetti's portraits of Lizzie embody this idea perfectly since she looks aethereal and pious. Once Bessie also stated that: 'The expression of Beatrice was not hers.... I feel puzzled by the manner in which the artist took the head and shoulders of a remarkably retiring English girl, with whom I

[379] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 83.
[380] R.L. Mégroz, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter Poet of Heaven in Earth* (New York: Haskell House Published Ltd., 1971), pp. 66-67.
[381] D. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*,. cit., p. 137. 'My lady looks so gentle and so pure when yielding salutation by the way, that the tongue trembles and has nought to say, and the eyes, which fain would see, may not endure' [D. G. Rossetti, *The New Life,* cit., p. 40]
[382] J. Marsh and P. Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, cit., p. 105.
[383] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 51.

was perfectly familiar, and transfused them with an expression in which I could recognize nothing of the moral nature of Miss Siddal.'[384] Violet Hunt stated that 'Lizzy had […] nothing of Beatrice but her paleness.' She also underlined that when Elizabeth (presumably) sat for *Beata Beatrix* she was much older than Beatrice on the day of her death (which occurred when she was 25 years old).[385]

In a way, Elizabeth and Jane embodied sanctity while Fanny represented sexuality, the two perfectly complementary aspects of the ideal woman. Indubitably, the Victorian age was characterized by a strong absorption for religion and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood frequently searched for themes in the Biblical imaginary. As reported by Marsh, the great interest for religion combined with the undeniable impulses of youth, led the Brothers to often portray virtuous women like the Virgin Mary.[386] Interestingly enough, the saints of the Catholic Church did not belong to the artistic imagery of that era but they were taken by the Pre-Raphaelites from Renaissance Italian artists. For this reason, paintings like Rossetti's *The Wedding of St George and Princess Sabra* (1857) was considered rather unconventional at that time. The legend has it that Giorgio di Lidda (general of the Roman army) saved princess Sabra from the clutches of a dragon, and after that they both converted to Christianity. This medieval legend was a common source of inspiration for the Brotherhood and Rossetti asked Jane Morris to pose as Princess Sabra. Apparently, a few years later, the same theme was revisited by Dante Gabriel and, this time, the model was Elizabeth. Siddal apparently sat for this painting a few days before she died. However Rossetti chose two different moments of the legend. Morris sat for Sabra kissing Saint George while the other painting shows St George washing his hands after defeating the dragon. [387]

[384] L. B. Siddal, "The Sad, Short life of Elizabeth Siddal Pre-raphaelite Model and Artist", *The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society Autumn 2002* (Sebastopol: Tim McGee, 2002), pp. 6-7.
[385] V. Hunt, *op. cit*., p. 227.
[386] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 45.
[387] www.Rossettiarchive.com [accessed 01.06.2020]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The Wedding of St. George and the Princess Sabra, 1857

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, St. George and the Princess Sabra, 1862

As previously stated, Christina was also an occasional model for Rossetti's paintings and, due to her personal dispositions, she was only portrayed as the Virgin Mary (both in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancella Domini*). Since the Brotherhood preferred friends and acquaintances to professional models, one might support the idea that the personal traits of the muse inspired the creation of the work of art or, at least, different paintings were offered to different models based on their features. Indubitably, each model deeply influenced the final result of the work of art.

As supported by this chapter and by Marsh,[388] romantic love is probably the most frequently recurring theme in the Pre-Raphaelite artistic production. Marsh underlined that 'The personal popularity of such pictorial themes among the young PRB is not surprising, since all were youthfully aware of the attractions of the opposite sex, and also conscious of their own lack of income, which in middle-class circles meant deferred matrimony'.[389] Indeed, when discussing romantic love, Marsh refers to a love whose peak is wedding, like the iconic couples of literary tradition (Romeo and Juliet, Paolo and Francesca etc.). Not only did Lizzie appear as Beatrice in many paintings but, as previously affirmed, she also modelled as Delia, the wife of Tibullus in 1851. In this

[388] J. Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art*,. cit., p. 45
[389] *ibidem.*

painting she is depicted with her hair loose, similarly to the metaphorical 'golden veil' through which Chiaro (in Hand and Soul) 'beheld his dreams'. [390] These women were considered as ideal 'angels of the house' whose charm and innocence were devoted to household chores. In relation to this, Walter Howell Deverell's painting *A Pet* (1853) should be mentioned. Ideally, the perfect wife had to be submissive and a sort of slave for her husband. In his essay *Deverell, Rossetti, Siddal, and "The Bird in the Cage"*, Shefer supported the thesis that *A Pet* was inspired and modelled by Elizabeth who had become an encaged animal at No. 14, Chatham Place.

As reported by Gilbert and Gubar, the idea of the donna angelo has been created by male authors to describe ideal women. The authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* ask themselves how this idea was constructed and developed, especially in the Victorian Age. Indubitably, it all started with the Virgin Mary that was (and still is) considered, from a religious view point, as the perfect woman, a combination of all the virtues, a 'merciful dispenser of salvation'.[391] However, in the nineteenth century, the perfect woman was not a Virgin in Heaven but an angel of the house. According to Gilbert and Gubar this shift was actually originated by Dante since he 'claimed to know God and His Virgin handmaid by knowing the Virgin's attendant, Beatrice'.[392] Indeed, Beatrice is described by Dante as: 'la donna de la salute' [393], that is to say, the woman of the salvation. The name itself Beatrice means binger of joy and blessings. It seems as if dead women, on reaching Heaven, develop all the typical characteristic of Mary. From this perspective, a woman embodies both the domestic safe heaven from the outside world of her husband and a living image of the divine. Moreover, at that time women were 'warned that if they' did not 'behave like angels they' were inevitably 'monsters.'[394] Nevertheless, Gilbert and Gubar define Lizzie as 'a representative of otherness' who incarnates 'the damning otherness of the flesh rather than the inspiring otherness of the spirit'.[395] Moreover, as previously stated, there are several sexual connotations in the analysis of her death and her exhumation. Apparently, however, Rossetti perceived her as a gentle 'dove', more similar to an angel than to 'a kind of antithetical mirror image of an angel'.[396]

[390] D.G. Rossetti, *Hand and Soul*, cit., p. 24.
[391] S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit*., p. 20.
[392] *idem,* pp. 20-21.
[393] D. Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, cit., p. 42.
[394] S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit*., p. 51.
[395] *idem,* pp. 26-27.
[396] S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit*., pp. 26-27.

On the contrary, Fanny never embodied the *donna angelo* or the holy woman, but she was more frequently associated to a fallen girl. Like Elizabeth's, Fanny's life is also rather unknown. She claimed to have been born around 1835 in Sussex by the name of Sarah Cox but she was apparently born earlier. As claimed by Marsh, 'there was never much doubt about her profession' since it was an occupation that was not unusual at that time.[397] When discussing the meeting of Rossetti with his soon-to-be lover, Caine remembered the 'almost fatal flirtations on the borderland of Bohemia' between Rossetti and Fanny. Apparently, it all began with her 'cracking nuts with her white teeth and throwing the shells at him'.[398] The encounter was placed by Fanny in the summer 1858, right after Rossetti's return from Matlock, Derbyshire where Lizzie was recovering. This hypothesis is also supported by Allingham and the evidence of Rossetti's paintings.[399] Marsh also underlined that, whether as a cause or result of her acquaintance, the Fallen Woman theme re-emerged in the pre-Raphaelite painters' art and lives during 1858. After the previously mentioned *Found*, Rossetti also used her as a model for 'Mary Magdalene' (1877).[400] Rossetti's source of inspiration for *Found*, apart from Fanny herself and the other prostitutes he had observed in his walks around London, might have been 'Rosabell' by William Bell Scott. Rossetti's friends apparently did not approve his relationship with Fanny and Swinburne even called her 'the bitch'. Ruskin reportedly stated: 'I don't object to Rossetti having sixteen mistresses, but I won't have Fanny'.[401] According to Larg, Elizabeth and Fanny were complementary ('as a lavatory and a drawing room'[402]), they had nothing in common therefore, no reason to hate each other.

Rossetti's shift in subjects from religious and literary themes to three-quarter female portraits probably began in the 1860s after his meeting with Fanny. Her hair fascinated Rossetti, who was deeply influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite perception of loose hair as an emblem of female sexuality in art. 'Jenny' was also the result of Dante Gabriel's observation of the London prostitutes. In a photo arranged by Rossetti Fanny appears fierce and proud, as did the protagonist of the poem. Rossetti defined it 'the most serious thing' he had ever written but these verses received Ruskin's harsh criticism. The poem was published in 1870 after all the other poems were recovered from Lizzie's coffin.

[397] J. Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite sisterhood*, cit., p. 140.
[398] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 83.
[399] *idem*., p. 92.
[400] J. Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite sisterhood,* cit., p. 142.
[401] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 84.
[402] D. G. Larg, *Trial by Virgins: Fragment of a Biography* (London: Peter Davies, 1933), p. 278.

Apparently, this was the poem he 'most wanted' to reclaim after the burial. [403] The theme of the sexual love is clear in this composition and, in a way, it can be considered as the opposite of *Hand and Soul* and *Vita Nuova,* which use biblical terms and religious images. Jenny is described with 'loosened hair', the 'silk ungirdled and unlac'd and warm sweets open to the waist'. As already mentioned, hair represented (both in literature and in painting) a key element in the establishment of the characteristics of the ideal woman. For example, as reported by Gitter, hair played a fundamental role in *Lady Lilith* (1866–1868).[404] Indeed, in the sonnet that accompanied the painting, Rossetti stated that Lady Lilith's 'enchanted hair was the first gold'. This element does not traditionally belong to this character but it rather refers to a typical Victorian obsession. Although women's hair (especially when golden) has always been more a Western concern, Victorians became obsessed with it and even went as far as associating magical and symbolic powers to it. When the woman represented in the work of art was a *donna angelo*, her shining hair 'was her aureole or bower' while when she was a femme fatale, it 'became a glittering snare, web, or noose'[405]. Women of that time used their hair to make statements, to protect their lovers and sometimes to strangle them like the protagonist of Stoker's *The Secret of the Growing Gold (*1892). Interestingly enough, Stoker was Rossettis' neighbor. Similarly, in the sonnet inscribed in *Lady Lilith*'s frame Rossetti referenced: 'Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent and round his heart one strangling golden hair'.[406]

The case with Alexa Wilding is different. As previously mentioned, she is rarely taken into account by scholars when analyzing Rossetti's models probably because she had no romantic or sexual relationships with him. However, as reported by Lee, Dante Gabriel painted Alexa in roles that had earlier been given to other models (like Jane for example)[407] considering her almost as a passe-partout. On the contrary, as discussed above, each of his models generally played a specific role in his painting and that was highly influenced by the role she played in his life. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that in 1866 Alexa modelled for *Regina Cordium*, a different version of the work Rossetti had previously made of his wife right after their wedding. Due to the fact that

[403] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 14.06.2020]
[404] E.G. Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination", *PMLA* 99, no. 5 (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 936.
[405] *ibidem.*
[406] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 14.06.2020]
[407] J.J. Lee, *op. cit.,* p. 22.

she was merely a model for him, he could 'use her face as a reflection of his soul, and its many feminine aspects'.[408] Allegedly, she inspired Dante Gabriel to write 'Venus Victrix' which is included in *The House of Life* (1871). Despite the fact that there are no proofs of a relationship between Dante and Alexa, Fanny was allegedly very jealous of the other model, especially when Alexa was chosen by Rossetti as his housekeeper.

Indubitably, the images of Elizabeth as Beatrice (as well as her version of Ophelia) should not be confused with Siddal herself, no more than the prostitute in *Found* can be conflated with Fanny. In addition to this, it is worth mentioning that, regardless the fact that the muses played a fundamental role in inspiring the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood thus changing the outcome of the painting or the literary work, they are inexplicably only considered as characters. In addition to this, as proven by the case of Alexa Wilding, since the centrality of the role of each woman is commonly analyzed in the context of the biographical data of the artist, models who were sentimentally involved with Rossetti received more mediatic attention than those who were not. Ultimately, however, Rossetti was valued for his talent and his models are merely mentioned in art history textbooks (for example in footnotes) and mistaken one for the other.

As analyzed in the following chapter, probably because of the reduced amount of poems she officially wrote, all the sixteen poems produced by Elizabeth Siddal are only mentioned in books specifically about her, and only in comparison to the poems of her husband and sister-in-law. Additionally, her poems are normally analyzed through the lenses of her biography, trying to find in them references to her lover, her stillborn child and her suicidal thoughts. The following chapter, which represents a slight shift in topic, focuses on Elizabeth Siddal's work taking into account her influences, her life and the role of women in the Victorian society trying to maintain the commentaries to a level that is as objective as possible.

[408] J.J. Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 45

Chapter 5
Self-portrait

This last chapter focuses on Elizabeth Siddal's work (both poetry and painting). In the very first part of this section, I will describe the life of a female artist and why it was completely different from that of a male artist. Indubitably, it is important to keep in mind the gender differences when analyzing the work of a woman in the world of art in the Victorian age. I will then spend some time on Elizabeth's paintings and drawings and, in section 5.1 I will focus on her verses.

Elizabeth Siddal, Self-portrait, 1853-1854

The Pre-Raphaelite movement was apparently rather welcoming to women. So much so that Marsh has written a book titled *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood,* in which she narrates the lives of influential women who were associated with the Brotherhood. The movement was indeed rather welcoming - Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs were considered popular and appreciated both by the Brothers and the public; – yet, the female artists included were normally wives, sisters and daughters of members of the Brotherhood. [409] Marsh explains the reason why, in her view, the world of art was so complicated to access for women at that time: first they could not receive any artistic education (unless they were daughters of artists). From this point of view, Elizabeth was an exception since she

[409] J. Marsh and P. Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists,* cit., p. 20.

came from a rather humble background but she was offered several interesting opportunities throughout her life. Secondly, women had no chance of travelling around the world and entering in contact with other artists and artistic movements. As far as this element is concerned, Lizzie was also rather lucky since, being the wife of a painter she got in touch with many of his husband's colleagues and even had the opportunity of travelling to the continent. For instance she spent the winter between 1855 and 1856 in Paris under Ruskin's patronage. [410] In addition to this, it was considered immoral for women to sketch outside alone, not to mention, depicting real life male models. It appeared as promiscuous for a woman to discover the human body and for this reason many of them had no anatomical basis to work on artistically. As mentioned in previous chapters, in the Victorian age being a model was considered not that far from being a prostitute and models were frequently believed to be having sexual intercourses with artists. For this reason, young girls were discouraged to approach the art world. Marsh (in another book on the topic written with Pamela Nunn) also underlined the fact that women's outfits were not appropriate or comfortable enough to work in (especially *en plein air*). [411] Furthermore, women were normally relegated to the domestic sphere and, as pointed out by Anne Merritt (painter and writer herself) a wife was useful for a male artist because she could dedicate her life to the housework and taking care of her husband. On the other hand, a female artist had no one to take care of her [412]. Also, due to the fact that women were associated with the private sphere of married life, they were not allowed to exhibit their work in public. The public sphere and the working relationships were male jobs. The only way for a woman to succeed in art was to find herself another artist or a patron who was going to support her economically but without any kind of jealousy. For a woman, claiming an artistic life (which belonged to the public sphere) also meant losing sexual identity. Additionally, since reading, creating and thinking were considered, by definition, male activities, they appeared as not only inaccessible but also dangerous for women. [413]

Ruskin, the first real supporter of Elizabeth's work, had his ideas about women in art. In 1857, two years after his great gesture of buying all of Siddal's paintings, he wrote to an artists named Anna Blunden, who was exhibiting regularly at the Royal Academy

[410] J. Marsh and P. Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women,* cit., p. 23.
[411] *Idem*, pp. 13-20.
[412] *Idem*, p. 19.
[413] *idem*, pp. 10-13.

at that time: 'You will probably paint, ultimately, in a way calculated to be of great use and give great pleasure – although you will never be a great painter – but no woman has ever been a great painter yet – and I don't see why you should be vexed because you are not the first exception' .[414] This statement might be perceived as evidence of the fact that Ruskin's enthusiasm for Lizzie's work was not completely genuine but rather perhaps instilled by Rossetti.[415] In his work *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (1889) Lizzie's brother-in-law defined Ruskin's interests for her work as 'more than one munificent act'.[416]According to Marsh this was a circumlocution to say that Ruskin had provided economic aid that would have been considered improper at that time (since she was engaged to another man).[417] Something similar was claimed by Prose when she stated that Ruskin might have been interested in Elizabeth's art only because he was in love with her. This idea is supported by Megroz who speculated that Ruskin and another unknown artist referred to as 'G.' were flirting with Lizzie so much that Dante became jealous.[418] In addition to this, Prose also speculated that Ruskin might have flirted with both Gabriel and Elizabeth at the same time. [419] The disturbing side of the Victorian fascination with beautiful young bodies is inserted in Ruskin's life by Catherine Robson. In her book *Men in Wonderland* she wrote, that 'Ruskin's is a story of sexual irregularity'.[420] Indeed, she claimed that Ruskin 'was one of the two 'notorious girl-lovers' of the Victorian age' (the other being Lewis Carroll) [421] and, despite the fact that she could not supply 'evidence that he sexually abused little girls' and remarking that the 'dynamics of his encounters with real girls…remain essentially unknowable,' she concluded that 'Ruskin, the famous Victorian sage, was also Ruskin, the infamous Victorian pedophile'.[422] The fact that his sexuality is frequently described as twisted and his inclinations as strange, might be the reason why he is often accused of using his money to conquer preys. In addition to this, his wife Euphemia Gray (Effie) in a letter to her father once declared that after five years from the day of the wedding the marriage had not been consumed yet: 'He alleged various reasons, hatred to children, religious motives, a desire to preserve my beauty, and, finally

[414] E. Orlando, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
[415] *idem.,* p. 118.
[416] See W.M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (London: Cassell & Company, 1889).
[417] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 28.
[418] R, L. Mégroz, *op. cit.*, p. 76
[419] F. Prose, *op. cit.*, p. 111
[420] C. Robson, "The Stones of Childhood: Ruskin's "Lost Jewels"" in *Men in Wonderland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 97
[421] *idem*, p. 95.
[422] *idem*, p. 122.

this last year he told me his true reason... that he had imagined women were quite different to what he saw I was, and that the reason he did not make me his Wife was because he was disgusted with my person the first evening'.[423] While she was still married to Ruskin, Effie modelled for Millais' *The Order of Release* (1853) in which she embodied the faithful wife of a Scottish rebel. Once the Ruskins joined Millais on a trip to Scotland (since Ruskin wanted his portrait to be made according to the strict artistic principles). On this trip Effie and Millais fell in love and, on returning to London, Effie left her husband on the grounds of incurable impotency. She then married Millais in 1855 and had eight children from him. As reported by Gilbert and Gubar, Ruskin's opinion about women was consistent with the era he lived in. In 1865 he stated that 'the woman's power is not for rule, not for battle, and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet orderings of domesticity'[424]. These statements and his allegedly disturbing relation with young girls is often mentioned as evidence of the fact that his fascination for Lizzie's work was not genuine, thus implying that her work was not good enough to be supported by such an influential figure in the world of art of that age.

According to Doughty: 'Ruskin's offer was generous. Fearing Lizzie's proud and independent spirit, so different in this from Gabriel's, Ruskin dare not offer her a pension; instead he offered to buy all her pictures as she completed them; or, if she preferred, he would settle on her £150 a year in return for all her works'. This was an interesting deal of an artist at that time but Lizzie had to be persuaded by her husband before accepting it.[425] Furthermore, in many analyses of her work (which generally focus on why she never reached popularity) that this agreement meant that her drawings could never set foot on the art market thus leave her in the shadow of her husband's success. Ruskin' support was not merely economic and, in many ways, he began to take care of his "Ida", as he called her (referencing a character from one of Tennyson's poems). He expanded her cultural horizons by paying her a trip to Paris and he also paid many of her medical expenses. Anyway, as supported by Shefer, 'as a young artist in 1853, Siddal's hope of reaching the outside art world was extremely remote, and her works were not created with an eye to the art market. They were neither preparations for oil paintings nor even sketches for future watercolors'.[426] Apparently, her paintings, which Dante Gabriel defined as

[423] R. Hewison, *John Ruskin: The Argument of The Eye* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 292-293
[424] S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
[425] O. Doughty, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
[426] E. Shefer, "Elizabeth Siddal's 'The Lady of Shalott'", *Woman's Art Journal*, 9.1, 1988, p. 27.

"designs," were seen almost exclusively by him, Christina, William, and, of course, by Ruskin.[427] Her greatest artistic accomplishment was the 1857 Pre-Raphaelite exhibition in Russel Place in which some of her paintings and her self-portrait were displayed. William Holman Hunt described his first reaction to her paintings. He remembered Rossetti's enthusiasms for his muse's 'stunning drawings' and, on seeing them Hunt commented they looked like Deverell's 'happy designs'. Gabriel, offended by the comment which was supposed to be a compliment, replied 'They are a thousand times better than anything he ever did!'.[428] Shefer described the drawings as 'intimate, reserved for the sympathetic eyes of those who loved her or at least admired her effort'.[429] Another great accomplishment was the Tate Gallery exhibition titled *The Pre-Raphaelites* held from March to May 1984 in which among 250 works from many different artists, her 'two and a half works'[430] were the only paintings made by a woman. The 'half' painting was *Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail* signed by 'EES & DGR'. Indubitably, as reported by Marsh, 'a picture that could be said to have had Rossetti's hand in its execution was self-evidently worth more money than one by Siddal'.[431] As far as this element is concerned, the question of attribution is once again fundamental since, as reported by Trotot, 'the accreditation of the artist's talent is closely linked to her authorship being recognized'.[432] The other paintings at the exhibition were *Lady of Shalott* (1853) and *Lady Clare* (1854-1857), both inspired by Tennyson's work. The section of the catalogue dedicate to Elizabeth's paintings was written by Deborah Cherry, an art historian and curator who analyzed the work of Siddal (always calling her by her surname) from a feminist angle, dethatching the paintings both from Elizabeth's personal life and her dependence on her husband. She claimed that analyzing her 'drawings as pale echoes of Rossetti's […] produces and reproduces patriarchal ideology, constructing the woman artist and her work as negative, and sustaining the male artist and his art in a position of dominance and privilege'.[433] From this point of view Siddal is approached by Cherry in the catalogue not as an artist whose works needs to be analyzed but as an instrument to challenge the masculine interpretation of her art and female art in general.

[427] *idem*, p. 26.
[428] S. Kauze, *Rossetti the man* (Boston: Boston University, 1964), p. 100.
[429] E. Shefer, "Elizabeth Siddal's 'The Lady of Shalott'", cit., p. 27.
[430] J. Marsh*, The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 151.
[431] *idem,* p. 188.
[432] C. Trotot, "Women's portrait of the self Introduction, Arts et Savoirs", *Women's Self-Portraits in Early Modernity*, 2016, 6, p. 3.
[433] Tate Gallery*, The Pre-Raphaelites 1984: A Catalogue for the Tate Exhibition* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 217.

The only self-portrait she officially made is an oil on canvas dated 1853-54 in which her appearance is completely different from the images she is normally associated with. It is the only 'official' self-portrait because, according to Shefer, Pippa in her painting *Pippa Passes*, is also a self-portrait.[434]

In the portrait she 'exudes passion and purpose – qualities opposite from the languor and weakness usually attributed to her'[435] but William Michael Rossetti claimed that 'an absolute likeness' linked the image and Lizzie.[436] The most striking difference between this painting and the others she modelled for is the eye-contact she establishes with viewers. Indeed, she is usually remembered with a vague stare and half-closed eyes. On the contrary, 'in the small self-portrait Lizzie produced, she gives herself the agency this type of eye-contact connotes.'[437] As already mentioned, eyes play a fundamental role in portraits since they define the agency of the subject and Cherry described the pictures made by Siddal as 'innovative and path-breaking' as far as the use of the 'active imagery of looking, rather than being looked at'[438]. Marsh also underlined the fact that the majority of Elizabeth's paintings represent women as protagonists or main characters.[439] Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon is *Pippa Passes the Loose Women* (inspired by Browning) painted in 1854. As reported by Violet Hunt, the portrait was finished by August 1853 and, on seeing it, Rossetti exclaimed 'A perfect wonder'[440]. Moreover, according to the author to *The Wife of Rossetti*, who claimed to know Elizabeth personally, in the portrait Lizzie had exaggerated all of her flaws: 'the too prominent eyelids, the mouth the mouth pursed like that of a nursery governess'.[441] Rossetti allegedly 'almost laughed but he never laughed though it was a fine performance for one who had only just begun to handle oils'.[442]

As reported in an essay about self-portraits by Trotot, the term to indicate this kind of representations (self-portrait) did not appear before the twentieth century although the genre evidently existed before.[443] Trotot dedicated a great part of her essay to the role of self-portraits (both in the fine arts and in literature) as instruments for self-definition,

[434] A. Uphaus, *op. cit.,* p. 42.
[435] L. Bradley, *op. cit.,* p. 145.
[436] M. Berg, "A Neglected Voice: Elizabeth Siddal [Reviewed article]", *Dalhousie Review* (1980), p. 154
[437] A. Uphaus, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[438] J. Marsh*, The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. XV
[439]*, idem,* p. 191.
[440] V. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 61
[441] *ibidem*.
[442] *Ibidem.*
[443] C. Trotot, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

especially in the work of female artists. 'In self-portraits, women affirmed their existence within communities that were reluctant to include them and, in the process, they invented their own models.' [444] From this point of view, when creating a self-portrait the female artist is not merely copying the world she lives in, but she is creating a different one in which she is the Other. Through art (both literature and paintings) women artists gave an objective form to what was considered non-existing, that is to say their own vision of the world, and, only through the publishing of a book or the exhibition of a painting in an gallery they managed to receive the consideration they needed to define themselves as artists and as human beings in the society they lived in.

Despite the fact that she titled only one of her works *Self-portrait*, many believe that her painting *The Lady of Shalott at her Loom* (1853) is also a self-portrait. Unfortunately there is no evidence of this. [445] This image is inspired by the passage in Tennyson's poem in which the mirror breaks and the curse is set upon the Lady:

> She saw the helmet and the plume,
> She looked down to Camelot,
> Out flew the web and floated wide,
> The mirror cracked from side to side;
> 'The curse is come upon me', cried
> The Lady of Shalott. [446]

As already mentioned, Elizabeth really enjoyed reading Tennyson and was apparently rather fascinated with this story in particular. In the passage of the story Lizzie selected to portray, the acts of realizing and seeing are dangerous acts since they lead to a curse. However, just like the woman in the self-portrait who dares to look at the viewer in the eyes, the Lady accepts her destiny through a glance.

Like other Pre-Raphaelite artists, Lizzie used paintings to re-tell famous stories, the same way her story has been re-told by others when depicting her. The way Elizabeth

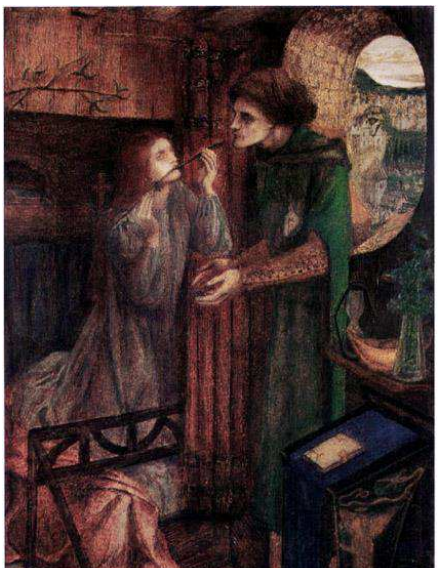
[444] *idem.*, p. 8.
[445] E. Shefer, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[446] A. Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott* (Toronto: Kids Can Press, 2005), p. 34.

specifically re-told those stories could be defined as unconventional. The stories she chose were frequently strange and disturbing. One of them is *Clerk Saunders* (1856) based on the ballad by Sir Patrick Spens. It is worth mentioning that in 1857 this painting was sold to an American collector, thus becoming the first painting officially sold by Elizabeth (except for those bought by Ruskin). It narrates the story of Clerk Saunders who persuades Margaret to go to bed with him before marriage. On the night of their intercourse, they are caught by Margaret's seven brothers who kill Saunders. The following night, Saunders' ghost appears at the girl's window and they discuss her pregnancy. Margaret expresses her concerns regarding the possibility that she might not be let into Heaven if she dies giving birth (since the lovers are not married).[447] The painting style is medievalist similar to the typical style of a manuscript's miniature. Like the other subjects Elizabeth chose to represent (including Macbeth), this includes a rather disturbing theme.

In addition to this, there is a crucial detail Elizabeth added to the story. At the bottom right of the image, there is a pray book, more specifically a so-called Book of Hours. A Book of Hours is a manuscript that was popular in the medieval period. It contained a prayer for each hour of the day and illustrations taken from the Virgin Mary's life. Elizabeth was familiar with those volumes because Ruskin collected them. The book represented by Elizabeth is shut and it is placed there for a reason. In the ballad, the time of the meeting between Margaret and the ghost is an hour before the day. That time in the Book of Hours is represented by the Annunciation. Indubitably, the composition Elizabeth selected slightly resembles the typical imaginary of the Annunciation (a character kneeling and the other revealing news). Like the Archangel Gabriel met Mary to talk about her pregnancy, so does Saunders with Margaret. Elizabeth dismantled the Annunciation iconography and applied it to a more laic theme. As already stated, Rossetti had selected the Annunciation as a theme both in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850) and *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849). The embroidery on the mantel converting the lectern in Lizzie's painting unequivocally resembles the embroidery Rossetti depicted in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. Interestingly enough, the colour of the mantel in Lizzie's painting is blue while in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, it is red. Coincidentally, in one of her poems Elizabeth refers to a shift from red to blue: 'Dead Love' [Appendix]: 'Oh never weep for love that's dead since love is seldom true but changes his fashion from blue to red, from brightest

[447] S.W. Scott, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1849), p. 184.

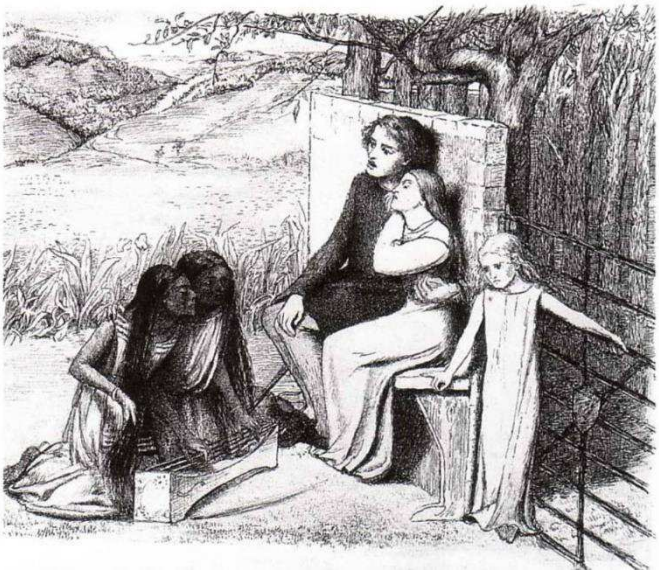
red to blue, and love was born to an early death and is so seldom true'. From this point of view, this change in the colour might be read as a reference to the instability that might doom love: a shift that disrupts certainties. Moreover this could be a reference to the fact that, as reported by Hunt, Ruskin preferred the colour blue while Rossetti loved red.[448] In addition to this, blue is always used in art to symbolize purity and chastity (for this reason it is frequently used to paint the garment of the Virgin Mary) while red is the colour of passion.



Elizabeth Siddal, Clerk Saunders, 1857

As far as her style is concerned, it is deeply influenced by the Brotherhood and the themes she proposes in her paintings belong to the same imaginary of her friends and of her husband. According to Cherry, 'by the mid-1850s Siddall had developed a distinctive artistic style characterized by compositional layering, enclousured spaces, attenuated figures and jewel-like colours in which the furniture, the dresses and the bulky folds of the drapery, as well as the execution in watercolour, consciously rework pre-modern visual languages.' [449] Cherry also supported the thesis that Rossetti's art was somewhat influenced by Elizabeth's medieval style. Marsh also agreed with this idea stating that Rossetti 'lacked sophistication in the same years (1850-55)'[450] and this is proven by works like *Arthur's Tomb* which Marsh defined as 'imitation of Siddal's naïve style'.[451]

[448] V. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
[449] D. Cherry, "Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2012), p. 183.
[450] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., pp. 188-189.
[451] M. Cunha, *op. cit.*, p. 3.



Elizabeth Siddal, Lovers Listening to Music, 1854

Siddal's art was (like in the case of the other members of the Brotherhood) frequently inspired by poetry. Not only were they influenced by the poems of English Romanticism (together with Dante, the Bible, Shakespeare, ancient mythology and Tennyson) but also, as previously proven by the analysis of some of Rossetti's works, their own poems. For example, Lizzie's painting *Lovers Listening to Music* can be seen as the perfect illustration for her poem 'The Passing of Love' (also known as *'*O God forgive me that I ranged')[452]. As far as the drawing is concerned, it allegedly represents Lizzie and Dante Gabriel sitting at the so-called Lovers Seat near Hastings, which they visited in the summer of 1854. The title was not chosen by Siddal, but is taken from Rossetti's description of it: 'the two Egyptian girls playing to lovers'.[453] Two identical versions of this drawings exist since the last version was made by Lizzie when she realized that the image she had promised William Allingham, had been accidentally included in the collection bought by Ruskin.[454] According to Marsh, the illustration can be seen as a 'representation of the artist and the beloved [..] the oriental girls making music perhaps represent 'the song of love' and Love is probably the identity of the small, childlike cupid attending the couple'.[455] Love is also the protagonist of Elizabeth's 'The Passing of Love' [Appendix] which includes lines like: 'Love kept my heart in a song of joy, my pulses quivered to the tune'.

[452] See J. Mars and P. Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, cit.
[453] www.Lizziesiddal.com [accessed 13.06.2020]
[454] J. Marsh*, The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 178.
[455] J. Marsh and P. Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement,.* cit., p. 68.

The theme of the tears washing away the pain can also be found in Luke 7:38 in which a woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears. According to Trowbridge, the poem recalls Christina Rossetti in many ways but most of all in the disillusion caused by the failure of earthly love. According to Hassett, Siddal's verses represent her 'disbelief in heterosexual love' and the rejection for the image of women as monogamous and passive, merely 'reliant upon masculine sexual activity'.[456] The comparison between earthly love and divine love are also present in Rossetti (as stated in the previous chapter).[457] This should not be perceived as evidence of the fact that Siddal's work was merely imitative. Indeed, as reported by Marsh 'the themes of the revenant and of the lovers reunited after death were recurrent motifs in both artists' work, and compositional similarity is indicative of a collaborative artistic relationship'.[458] Too often has Elizabeth's work been perceived as a mere imitation because she proposed the themes and the styles that were typical of that age (and more specifically of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood) while she was taking those themes and making them her own (as in the case of *Clerk Saunders*). The sources of inspiration she used were taken from many different sets of references, rather than being evidently absorbed passively from her husband and teacher. It is worth pointing out however, that she was also 'at the forefront of new ideas'.[459]

[456] Hassett, Constance, "Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry: A Problem and Some Suggestions", Victorian Poetry, 1997, 35.4, p. 457.
[457] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.,* p. 64.
[458] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 180.
[459] *idem,* p. 187.

5.1 The Muse Writes Back[460]

Although only sixteen poems and a few fragments are the only evidence of her poetic ambitions, it is enough to understand what kind of a poet she was. Unfortunately, unlike her pictorial creations, her verses, which were described by Violet Hunt as 'not very good – not nearly as good as her drawings'[461], never emerged from the 'ghostly mist'[462] that absorbed them. Also, due to the fact that none of her poems are dated and that they are very few, it is rather hard to analyze her work with the same approach used for other authors. It would be complicated to identify recurring themes or improvements over time. Moreover, due to the lack of precise information about her life, it has always been rather complicated for scholars to analyze her work from a biographical point of view. Mégroz supported a thesis that was widespread during Elizabeth's life when he claimed that 'none of her poems sublimates emotion enough not to be autobiographical in the ordinary sense'.[463] Indubitably, as reported by Taylor, Elizabeth's work should be perceived as a critique to the Victorian gender ideology. However, 'reading her painting and poetry through a biographical lens […] occludes this feminist critique'.[464] The frantic search for autobiographical elements in her work led to a misreading of her verses. Indeed, many of her contemporaries defined her works as 'generally meagre and underdeveloped'.[465] Despite the claims by Violet Hunt who stated that Lizzie 'had begun to write poetry when she was eleven and was always scribbling when she came home from the shop, sitting up in her bedroom in the cold'[466], it seems certain that she was not interested in publishing her verses during her lifetime and only few of her family members and friends ever mentioned her writings. One of her friends was Mary Howitt, who defined Lizzie's verses as having 'no originality' and claimed that Rossetti's fascination with his wife's work was exaggerated.[467] Hunt claimed that 'the poems were not quite good enough ; like her drawings, frustrate, without force, mere imitations of her Master,

[460] S. Parker, *op. cit.*
[461] V. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
[462] S. Chatfield, "Lizzie Siddal Emerges from the Ghostly Mist" in Lizziesiddal.com (2018)
[463] Mégroz, Rodolphe Louis, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
[464] Taylor, Beverly, "Beatrix/Creatrix: Elizabeth Siddal as Muse and Creator", *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 1995, 4, p. 29.
[465] C. Hassett, "Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry: A Problem and Some Suggestions", *Victorian Poetry*, 1997, 35.4, p. 130.
[466] V. Hunt, *op. cit.,* p. 30.
[467] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 38.

down to his great idea of Inter-Redemption.'.[468] Hunt also analyzed how the theme of redemption was represented by Rossetti in *Found* (1828-1882) and by Elizabeth in *Pippa Passes* (also known as *Pippa Passing the Loose Women,* 1854). The two works emphasize the fact that Rossetti knew the topic better that his wife who rarely left the house. Thanks to the analysis made by critics like Jan Marsh (1989 and 1991), Beverly Taylor (1995) and Constance H. Hassett (1997), it has been proven that Elizabeth was aware of the fact that she was creating works of art thus proving that painting and writing were not mere hobbies. Indeed, she read many books and she created her own set of references.[469] As far as the biographical component of her poems is concerned, since the poems were not conceived expressively for publication, they could be perceived as more personal and autobiographical than the paintings.

William Rossetti played an important role in her poetic career collecting and titling all her poems after editing them. Her words, fractured and scattered were then published by him in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, With a Memoir* (1895); *Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism: Papers 1854 to 1862* (1899); "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal", *Burlington Magazine* (1903) and *Some Reminiscences of William Michael Rossetti* (1909)[470]. After more than a century her poems were finally published in a single volume, together with her pictorial work in *Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal* (1978), edited by Roger C. Lewis y Mark Samuels Lasner. On consulting the original manuscripts of the poems and the copies made by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Lewis and Lasner realized that they differed notably from William Michael's versions. The original copies of the poems were characterized by several variations in the handwriting ('from a small, thin-lined cursive script to a broad, straggling and illegible hand which seems accurately identified by William Rossetti as 'done under the influence of laudanum…and probably not long before her death'').[471]

Generally speaking, the language she uses in her verses is modern (the only archaisms being 'Ope not thy lips'[472] and 'Chist ye save yon bonny sheperd')[473] apart from some contractions or other historic uses of the language made on purpose. Indubitably, as reported by Hughes, Elizabeth was a fervent reader and she was aware of

[468] V. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
[469] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 187.
[470] *idem,* p. 62.
[471] *idem,* p. 200.
[472] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[473] *idem,* p. 61.

the work of her contemporaries. [474] She probably did not obtain a lot of success with her writing because her verses were considered as extracts from her secret diary 'the scribbling of a depressed woman, the solitary expression of private sorrow.' [475] William Michael Rossetti, describing her process of composition stated: 'she used to take a great deal of pains, and I fancy was seldom or never satisfied with her productions. One can find dozen scribblings of the same stanza here and there modified and corrected. [476]

Her style was superior to other members of the Brotherhood and, had she started writing earlier in her life, she would definitely have been invited to contribute to *The Germ* since the only requirement was, as stated by William Rossetti, for an artist to 'think out his subject honestly and personally, not imitatively, and ought to express it with directness and precision; if he does this , we should respect his performance as truthful'.[477]

Interestingly enough, it was her husband's idea after her death to record her work as an artist and, in 1866, her paintings and sketches were collected and printed by him. However, when Lizzie's friend Georgiana Burne-Jones asked for a picture of her friend to keep, Rossetti said he had none and sent her a portrait he had made of his beloved instead. [478] According to Dunstan, Rossetti's attitude towards his wife became even more controversial after her death. Not only did he bury his poems with her before trying to rescue them on a cold October's night, but he also allegedly burnt her suicide note. [479] Also, as reported by Arcara, Christina Rossetti initially wanted to publish Elizabeth's verses after her death in her volume *The Prince's Progress (*1866) although she found them rather melancholic. Unfortunately, Dante Gabriel agreed at first but then published only his poems in 1870, after the exhumation of the manuscript[480]. If proven true, these stories could be read as evidence of how Rossetti tried to hold his wife down even after her death. The poems Christina wanted to publish were: 'True Love', 'A Year and a Day', 'Dead Love', 'Shepherd Turned Sailor', 'Gone' and 'At Last'.

Cherry and Pollock are frequently considered as fundamental resources to analyze the life and the work of Siddal. Indeed, they propose a reading of this enigmatic figure

[474] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit*.,* p. 53.
[475] S. Arcara, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
[476] W.M. Rossetti, *Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism* (London: Allen, 1899), p. 50.
[477] W.M. Rossetti, *The Germ: Thoughts Toward Nature- Poetry, Literature & Art (Literary Organ of the Pre· Raphaelite Brotherhood)*, (New York: AMS Press. 1850), p. 16.
[478] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 13.
[479] A. Dunstan, *op. cit.*, p. 89
[480] S. Arcara, *op. cit.*, p. 107,

'as a sign' of her husband genius. They claim that Siddall (the 'historical individual'[481]) is replaced in the Pre-Raphaelite world by Siddal who functions as a sign of Rossetti's genius and who is stereotypically embodied by the frail dove fatally ill and destined to die. [482] Nevertheless from the 1980s, a new version of Siddal emerged and, in this case, she became a symbol of abused womanhood. Indubitably, Rossetti played an important role in her education allowing her to access many more texts than she would have ever been able to access on her own. At the same time, her poems are also frequently considered as pale reflections of Rossetti's great verses and Taylor also claimed that she was generally perceived (especially by Rossettians scholars) as 'the moon to his sun, merely reflecting his light'.[483] A idea supported by Marsh is fundamental in order to understand this last concept: 'This view of woman as shadow or mirror, the creation of the artist's light, is a reminder of how in essential respects patriarchal thought still determined the perspective within which the story of Elizabeth Siddal was seen'[484]. However, one of the closest friends of the couple, Swinburn, once stated that 'Gabriel's influence and example' was 'not more perceptible than her own independence and freshness of inspiration'. [485] Moreover, as previously mentioned, when W.G. Wells asked on the *Daily Telegraph* for information about Elizabeth Siddal, he received a letter from a girl, signing herself A.S. and stating that she had attended the Sheffield School of Art with Elizabeth, which would prove Lizzie's fascination with art from a young age. The idea that she also proposed some of her paintings to Deverell because she wanted to access a School of Design where he worked is supported both by Wells and by Ibbitt on his article on the *Sheffield Telegraph* a few days after Elizabeth's death. [486]On the other hand, William Rossetti claimed she had no knowledge of art apart from what she learned from his brother Gabriel. [487]

Some of the recurring images in Elizabeth's poetry are: death, burials, leaves falling over cold settings, medieval references, trees and woods as symbols of sorrow and the summertime as the season of sadness. As reported by Berg, the verses are emblems of Victorian preoccupations: despair, alienation and 'the dramatic actuality of a

[481] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[482] *ibidem*.
[483] B. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[484] J. Marsh*, The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 118.
[485] A.C. Swinburn, *The Swinburne Letters* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1962), vol. VI, p. 94.
[486] J. Marsh*, The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 160.
[487] *idem,* p. 71.

relationship'.[488] On one hand critics frequently tried to undervalue her work, considering her verses as words of an ignorant and mentally instable woman. On the other hand, as reported by Marsh, her poems were frequently perceived (especially from scholars studying the Pre-Raphaelite movement) as evidence of the sorrow she felt for Rossetti's extra-marital affairs and her suicidal thoughts.[489] Violet Hunt supported a thesis that was not defended by any other scholar writing on the topic: that Elizabeth started to write poetry 'out of rivalry of Christina'.[490] Hunt also claimed that Rossetti spent a lot of time correcting Elizabeth's verses since he felt a strong sense of guilt for being the reason behind the great sorrow and sadness narrated in them. [491]

When analyzing female writing of the nineteenth-century, Gilbert and Guban's *The Madwoman in the Attic* is a fundamental resource. Indeed, this text reflects on authorship and the role of women in the artistic creation. According to the authors, male sexuality is the 'essence of literary power' and, from this point of view, the poet's pen becomes (more than metaphorically) a penis. This idea could be linked to the concept of 'penis envy' developed by Freud and revived by Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in which the problems of patriarchal societies are exaggerated in the description of a dystopian reality. This concept developed by Freud to explain the castration complex is based on the idea that women are envious of men for possessing a penis. Comparing the pen to the penis, Atwood talked about 'pen's envy'. The women in Atwood's book's society are not allowed to read and write since their masters want to numb their brains and silence their voices. The protagonist realizes the power given by writing in the following passage: 'the pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can fell its power, the power of the words it contains.[…] I envy the Commander his pen'. [492] As already mentioned in chapter 2, silence is a recurring theme in women's literary production. This idea is also supported by Bronfen who claimed that every woman 'speaks in silence, absence, anonymity' also because in the Victorian age they frequently published their works under male pseudonyms. Bronfen stated that the only form of speech women have always been allowed to use is, in a way, linked to death thus turning

[488] M. Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 151
[489] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 24.
[490] V. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
[491] *idem,* p. 196.
[492] M. Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), p. 213.

death into an 'act of self-fashioning'.[493] From this perspective, artists like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton become particularly relevant as symbols of female poetry. By imagining their own death, similarly to what Lizzie does in poems like *Early Death* [Appendix], they become both their own muse and the creator. In a way their death is also inspiring for other artists and for this reason they are also muses for others. Affirming their role as creators is the only way to be liberated from a reduction to mere sources of inspiration and to make their voices heard. Through his pen/penis, the male author creates art thus "fathering" his texts. In the world he creates with his art, women are just characters, often segregated and reduced to mere properties; They 'exist only to be acted on by men both as literary and as sensual objects'. From this perspective, 'literary women are really eunuchs'. [494] Coincidentally this is what Viola wants to become at the beginning of *Twelfth Night* because she realizes it is the only way for her to survive in Ilyria.[495] However, the idea that women are created by men is not new. Eve and Minerva are only two examples of how 'patriarchal mythology' has shaped the perception that women are generated by and for men. [496] The female characters forged by men are muted since they are not given the power of independent speech. It is not causal that the most famous portraits made by Rossetti of his wife represent her sitting down, half asleep while the images in which she is portrayed while painting and writing are rarely taken into consideration.

As reported by Gilbert and Gubar, each female writer should 'examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster", which male authors have generated for her. Before we women can write, declared Virginia Woolf, we must kill the "angel in the house"'.[497] As far as this element is concerned, the fact that Elizabeth entered the public common imaginary as a *donna angelo*, might have influenced the consideration people had of her as an author. She would have never been able to get rid of the image of the perfect angel of the house because when she was still alive her story was told by others only emphasizing that aspect of her life.

[493] E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 398.
[494] S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
[495] W. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2007), p. 57.
[496] S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit.,* p. 12.
[497] *idem,* p. 60.

The fact that she was not a prolific artist allows scholars to focus on each poem individually but the fact that none of the poems were dated or published following the order wanted by the author, only allows an analysis in alphabetical order. This kind of analysis was chosen by Trowbridge in her *My Ladys Soul* in which she proposes the first real study on Lizzie's complete poetical work. It would be slightly easier to date the poems if they were read as autobiographical. Indeed, as reported by Marsh, the major themes of her work (sorrow, love, hope etc.) could only be associated with a specific period of time in her life: her marriage to Rossetti (and more specifically the time in which he was unfaithful to her)[498].

'Autumnal leaves are falling' [Appendix] is the first poem. As already mentioned, according to Violet Hunt, this poem contained a reference to Lizzie's favorite drug: laudanum. Trowbridge supports the thesis that these verses actually belong to William Morris[499]. While this poem references autumn, many of Elizabeth's poem mention summer as a tragic time in which terrible things happen. The above-mentioned 'True Love' regards a death which takes place in the summer. This theme is also present in 'A Year and a Day' and 'Lord May I Come?' [both in Appendix].

As far as the first poem is concerned, 'A Year and a Day' was thus titled by William Michael Rossetti, who modified a lot of the verses. Suffice it to compare the poem copied by Trowbridge from a manuscript with Lizzie's handwriting titled 'It is not now a longing year' and the verses published by William Michael Rossetti in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Family-Letters with a Memoir*. Another version of this poem was also found in one of the many manuscripts Elizabeth allegedly used to work on this poem and it contains the following stanza:

Dim phantoms [sic] of an unknown ill

Float through my tired brain

The unformed visions of my life

~~Of my life~~

Pass by in ghastly train

Some linger with a loving book

Some scatter tears like rain. [500]

[498] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* cit., p. 212.
[499] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[500] *idem.*, p. 43.

If proven authentic, this stanza could be read as an evidence of Elizabeth's mental condition. Indeed, as reported by Trowbridge, 'dim phantoms' was a term frequently used in the Victorian age to indicate mental instability, for example it appears in a text by Elizabeth Gaskell.[501] Lerer supported the idea that, in many ways, this poem holds references to Ophelia, most of all the representation of the Shakespearean character proposed by John W. Waterhouse in which the girl lies 'among the tall grass that bends above my [the girl's] head [..] like grass above the dead'.[502]

The second poem referencing summer is 'Life and night are falling from me' (titled 'Lord may I come?' by William Michael Rossetti). The verses 'Life and youth and summer weather to my heart no joy can gather' are emblematic of Siddal's relationship with the warm season. Lasner reported a strange legend that regarded this poem [503]. Allegedly, Dante Gabriel Rossetti found this version (this poem was also produced in many different versions) near Lizzie's dead body the night of her overdose. Moreover, from the title proposed by Rossetti, readers can immediately identify the religious connotation of the poem. Trowbridge went as far as saying that this might be mistaken for one of Christina Rossetti's poems because it is rather simple in structure and it deals with a religious theme, which was typical of Christina's work, as already mentioned in chapter 2. [504] Regardless, hope and faith are also central themes in these verses ('Lord we put our faith in thee'). In the first stanzas Elizabeth used the first person narration which was a common nineteenth-century literary device but it could also be perceived from a different perspective. Indeed, it could also be a sign of the agency women artists had the opportunity of taking for themselves in their art. The 'you' the poems are generally dedicated to (commonly, the muse) can finally speak for herself through her words thus becoming an 'I'.

Probably the verse 'my lost one' refers to the child she lost because of the miscarriage in 1861. Motherhood is also a central theme in 'O mother open the window wide' (renamed by Rossetti 'At Last') [Appendix]. In this poem there is also a reference to willows which creates a link with Ophelia who, on descending into the water before drowning moves the branches of that tree (as reported by Queen Gertrude in Act IV)[505].

[501] See E. Gaskell, "Sketched among the poor N.1" in *Evergreen Review*, 1837.
[502] S. Lerer, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[503] E. Siddal, *Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal*, ed. Roger C. Lewis, Mark Samuels Lasner (Wolfville: Wombat Press, 1978), p. 22.
[504] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.,* p. 51.
[505] W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* cit., p. 114.

This poem might also be linked to her miscarriage although the verses refer to the death of a mother. According to Mégroz, this poem might be linked to Tennyson's 'The May Queen' (which he calls 'May Day') or Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'[506]. Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy* might also have been a source of inspiration for this poem, considering how deeply influenced by traditional ballads Siddal was. The structure resembles that of a typical ballad but the rhyming scheme is looser.[507] Defined by Arcara as a lay prayer[508], this poem includes many references to medieval magical rituals but it is also a mirror of the socio-cultural context of the time. Indeed at that time maternal death was still a frequent issue and Lizzie herself knew at least one woman who died giving birth: Joanna Boyce Wells (who died in 1861).[509]

Elizabeth's preoccupation for issues regarding women of her age is evident in many of her poems including 'I care not for my ladys soul' [Appendix], proposed by William Michael Rossetti as 'The Lust of the Eyes'. As reported by Trowbridge, these verses, deal with the admiration of a man for a woman (the perspective is that of the man) and for this reason it might be perceived as a mirror of the relationship between Siddal and Rossetti. The protagonist of the poem spends his time starring at his lover's 'starlike beauty' but he admits he does not care about 'her soul' or 'her goals'. This seems like a perfect match to Christina's poem 'In an Artist's Studio', which has already been analyzed. Both poems define the relationship between a beautiful stunner and a man who admires her only for her physical features (in Christina's poems the woman is not admired 'as she is, but as she fills his dream.'). Trowbridge defined the woman in Lizzie's verses as 'mute but not necessarily a victim'[510], however, the man in the poem smiles thinking about how his 'love will fleet when their [the woman's eyes'] starlike beauty dies' which might be read a reference to the decaying beauty of the aging woman or to the death of the beloved.

As previously reported when analyzing *Clerk Saunders*, frequently Siddal's art is influenced by medieval settings and ancient ballads. Evidence of this fact is the poem *True Love* [Appendix], which is allegedly the only poem she titled expressly. The poem first appeared in *Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism* (London: Allen, 1899) by William

[506] R.L. Mégroz, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
[507] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
[508] S. Arcara, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[509] *idem,* p. 44.
[510] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.,* p. 38.

Michael Rossetti.[511] The verses mention Earl Richard which seems to be a reference to Sir Walter Scott's ballad with the same name. The ballad is included in Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1849), a copy of which Elizabeth reportedly owned. In Scott's ballad, a beautiful lady is told by Earl Richard that she should no longer take care of their child because he has a new lover who is lovelier than she is. Regardless, the lady tries to seduce Earl Richard by getting him drunk with wine. He drinks so much he gets intoxicated and dies. Consequently, she decides to dress him up as if he was going hunting and drag his corpse to the first thus making his death look like an accident. When accused of the murder, the lady blames her maid Catherine but, once she is put in the fire to get burned, the fire does not catch hold of her body so they select the lady as the culprit and she is sentenced to death. Like Scott's, this poem is also constructed as a ballad with five four-lined stanzas with verses of different lengths thus keeping the reader constantly on the edge, as in the case of 'O mother open the window wide'. The theme of the loyalty of the lover to the dead beloved, that, as previously stated, was so close to Rossetti's heart, is central in this poem. However the lines 'soon must I leave thee, this sweet summer tide, that other is waiting', reference another groom implying that life must go on after a loss. Similarly, Rossetti found comfort after his wife's death into the arms of other women. The perspective is Christian since the rejoining in Heaven is taken for granted. As reported by Trowbridge, this poem could be perceived as a tribute to Walter Deverell after his premature death in 1854 (in which case these verses would become evidence of the love she felt for him) but, since, as above mentioned, Lizzie was always fascinated with medieval settings, the literary-historical interest seems a more suitable source of inspiration. The fact that none of her poems are dated prevents scholars from knowing if the reference to Deverell is even an option. According to Arcara, this poem is rather innovative since it does have a typical medieval setting but the point of view is that of a woman, and that is very unconventional.[512]

Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1849) is also a reference point for another poem by Siddal: 'Oh never weep for a love that is dead' which appeared in Rossetti's book as 'Dead Love'. The structure is similar to that of a ballad as well, with quatrains of different lengths. According to Trowbridge, this is one of the several poems by Elizabeth which contains references to religion, despite the fact that, as previously mentioned, she apparently was not a believer. For this reason, verses with a religious

[511] W.M. Rossetti, *Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism* (London: Allen, 1899), pp. 150-151.
[512] S. Arcara, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

theme in Siddal are frequently associated with Christina Rossetti.[513] According to Carol Rumens, motherhood is a central theme also in this poem since it can be read as a warning a mother gives her daughter remining her not to trust love which is 'seldom true'. Rumens also underlined the simplicity of Lizzie's vocabulary since many words are repeated in these verses (like 'love', 'dead' and 'true').[514] In the verses 'then, sweet, we should be in Heaven and this is only heart my dear where true love is not given' another recurring theme is presented: the struggle between earthly and heavenly love which, as reported in previous chapters was also a strong preoccupation in Rossetti's verses, most of all in the collection *The House of Life*. Moreover, as reported by Trowbridge, while in Christina Rossetti' poems the struggle between the two kinds of love ends with the renunciation to the earthly love in favour of the heavenly one, in Siddal the struggle leads to disappointment and indifference.[515]According to Lerer, 'Dead Love' could be perceived as a 'letter to Hamlet in Act 5'. [516]

Just like the theme of the struggle between earthly and heavenly love was a theme Elizabeth shared with her husband, so were, in a more subtle way, the Dantesque references. 'O grieve not with they bitter tears' [Appendix] and 'To touch the glove upon her tender hand' [Appendix] serve as evidence of this. The first poem ('O grieve not with they bitter tears') was titled by William Michael Rossetti 'Eartly Death*'.* This poem deals with the topic of juvenile death which was much more common in the Victorian Age than today and for this reason it appears in many books of the time. Moreover, as previously reported, there was a clear obsession with death and suicide at that time which led people to be more concerned with those themes. Spiritual love is proposed by Siddal in this poem as a superior alternative to earthly love. This theme, as already analyzed, was also recurrent in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings and poetry. According to Marsh, in these verses Siddal proposed the same themes that appear in the poem 'He and She and Angels three' and also in Dante Gabriel's 'The Blessed Damozel' (that was already discussed earlier).[517] As far as the references to Dante are concerned, according to Trowbridge, the 'throng of spirits floating past' in the poem (lines 9-10) might recall Canto V of *The Divine Comedy* in which adultery and pedophiles are spinning around pushed by the wind as they were driven by passions in life. Paolo and Francesca, who were depicted by

[513] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[514] C. Rumens, "Poem of the Week: Dead Love by Elizabeth Siddal", *Guardian*, 4 September 2015.
[515] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.,* p. 77.
[516] S. Lerer, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
[517] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 201.

Rossetti in 1855, are the protagonists of this Canto.[518] It is worth mentioning that in Rossetti's picture composed of three parts, Francesca is given the physical appearances of Lizzie.[519]

On the other hand, 'To touch the glove upon her tender hand' contains references to the *Vita Nuova*, in particular the way in which loss and love are descripted. As deeply analyzed in previous chapters, Dante Gabriel translated the *Vita Nuova* in the 1840s and was highly influenced by his Italian namesake in his lifestyle. According to Trowbridge, the word 'trembling' which appears in line 7 of Elizabeth's poem was frequently used by Dante Alighieri to indicate the fact that because of his trembles his emotions were revealed to others. In his *New Life*, Rossetti uses the words 'trembling', 'tremble' and 'trembles' 9 times for this reason it might be true that Lizzie was inspired by her husband's translation of Alighieri in her poetry. The last verses of the poem also include a reference to a 'tender dove that left the Ark alone' (line 11). It could be a clear symbol of the bird that flew from the Ark to search for dry land in the Genesis but also a reference to Dante's nickname for Elizabeth. As mentioned before, in many letters he substituted Siddal's name with the image of a dove. [520] From this point of view, the last lines could be seen as prophetical since they deal with a 'tender dove' that is 'gone gone for ever' just like Lizzie disappeared on 11 February 1862. This poem, re-titled by William Michael Rossetti as 'Gone', also contains elements belonging to the imagery of the courtly love (for example the fact that the only touch between the lovers occurs through a glove, a ring or a shadow). In line 6 Siddal mentions a 'darkened wood' which is a recurring image both in her pictorial and in her poetical works. 'O silent wood' (also known as 'O silent wood I enter thee') is the first connection that comes to mind when thinking about woods in Siddal's art. In the case of this last poem, according to Trowbridge, the forest in those verses might recall the forest of Broceliande which appears in Tennyson's 'Merlin and Vivian' in *Idylls of the King* (1859).[521] It is common knowledge that the forest frequently symbolizes the confrontation with nature and a place in which one connects with extreme emotions and feelings. It is also a place in which one gets lost (it is not a coincidence that wood is also an ancient symbol of chaos). Dante himself opened his most famous books with the lines 'In the midway of this our mortal

[518] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[519] J. Marsh and P. Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, cit., p. 58.
[520] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 47.
[521] A. Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company, 1900), p. 154.

life, I found me in a gloomy wood, astray gone from the path direct'.[522] Elizabeth's painting *The Haunted Wood* (1856) is a perfect depiction of these verses since they both share a 'spooky atmosphere'[523]. This poem could be read as a counterpart of Rossetti's 'The Portrait' (which was discussed earlier). In that poem, Dante Gabriel described 'a deep dim; and there she stands as in that wood that day'. From this point of view, Lizzie's verses could be seen as an admission of the fact that she was actually the person 'The Portrait' was based upon. Since Violet Hunt underlined the fact that Lizzie 'liked the wood near the house'[524] at Hastings and 'she wandered about, in the woods'[525], this poem could be read as strictly biographical. If the biographical reading was true, it would be impossible not to notice the sense of melancholy evoked by this poem and the theme of the lost love which, as seen before, is recurring in Elizabeth's art and life.

'The concept of being frozen and unable to move or speak' claimed Trowbridge 'is common in Siddal's poems'.[526] In lines 7 and 8 of 'Many a mile over land and sea' ('words came slowly one by one from frozen lips shut still and dumb') this concept appears, similarly to the previous poem. Something worth mentioning about this poem is the fact that it was written using Elizabeth's usual structure (four-lined stanzas with verses of different lengths) but in the original manuscript a small number seven and the writing 'see to this' appears after the final verse meaning that she wanted to add something more.[527] Because of its structure, it is frequently referred to as 'Fragment of a ballad', although it appeared in William Michael Rossetti's volume as 'Speechless'.[528] According to Hassett, the real theme of these verses is the 'living death', an equally sad alternative to organic death.[529] However, the blame is not placed on one of the lovers. The fact that the narrator of the poem claims: 'I remember not the words he said but only the trees moaning overhead' might be read in different ways. The protagonist might be affected by amnesia or she might be saying that what her lover said is not important or it is too painful for her to recall. The 'spooky atmosphere'[530] described in 'O silent wood' is also the setting for these verses and in addition to this, the sea is, like the forest, a place that is normally linked to chaos and extreme emotions. It is also frequently associated with

[522] D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* (New York: Collier, 1901), p. 1.
[523] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 179.
[524] V. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
[525] *idem,* p. 194.
[526] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[527] *idem*, p. 67.
[528] *idem,* p. 66.
[529] C. Hassett, *op. cit.*, p. 454.
[530] S. Trowbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

melancholy, changes and metamorphosis. Sea can also symbolize the coming of death (which was a recurring theme in Lizzie's works). The sea has this specific symbolic meaning in another poem: 'Now Christ ye save yon bonny shepherd' (proposed by Rossetti as 'Shepherd turned Sailor'). Apparently, Lizzie's fascination with the sea began with her trip to Hastings in 1852 (they stayed at 5 High Street)[531]. Again, the structure is similar to that of a typical ballad but it could also be perceived as a sort of prayer. As previously stated regarding 'Oh never weep for a love that is dead', religion plays a central role in many of the verses written by Siddal, despite the fact that she was characterized by an 'apparent lack of religion'[532] (as supported by Marsh). In 'Shepherd turned Sailor' she begins by addressing Christ while in 'The Passing of Love' she talks directly with God. In the latter poem, which was previously referenced in association with *Lovers Listening to Music*, God is addressed to solve some sentimental issues. The already discussed theme of silence as symbol of the impossibility of agency is present in the very first verses of this poem. Summer is again presented as a cold and cruel season in lines 7 and 8: 'the coldest blasts of winter blew upon me like sweet airs in June'. In many of Elizabeth's works nature is used as a tool to describe and emphasize feelings and emotions (for example the recurring images of the wood and the sea). Similarly, in 'Ope not thy lips thou foolish one' (titled by Rossetti 'Love and Hate') she references 'golden summer leaves' (line 11) which, according to Trowbridge, should be perceived as an image contrasting with the 'green leaves' that are frequently mentioned in 'It is not now a longing year' (in that poem leaves are referred to in almost every stanza).[533] In addition to this, the theme of the inconsistency of earthly love compared to heavenly love is once again central and the same thing can be said about 'Ruthless hands have torn her'. The line 'He and She and the angels three' which opens the last stanza in the manuscript was selected by Rossetti as a title for the poem in his edition. Unlike in the case of many other poems, Rossetti made little changes when publishing these verses. Indeed, he simply added heavy punctuation. It has the typical structure of Siddal's poems: four-lined stanzas. Furthermore the official manuscript written by Elizabeth has a number 4 written at the end implying the will of continuing with a forth stanza (like the number 7 at the end of 'Many a mile over land and sea*')*. The fact that these poems were not considered as completed by the author is fundamental when analyzing her poetical work. Indeed,

[531] www.rossettiarchive.com [accessed 11.06.2020]
[532] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 51.
[533] S. Trowbridge*, op. cit.*, p. 81.

with the exception of 'True Love', the poems she produced throughout her life should be considered as drafts and works in progress. The core theme of the verses is the idea that lovers that lose each other in their lifetime will eventually meet again in Heaven.

Finally, 'Thy strong arms are around me' also shares a similar structure to that of her other poems (four-line stanzas with verses of different lengths). Similarly to 'To touch the glove upon her tender hand', this poem also contains a reference to a bird ('a bird with broken wings must fly away from thee'). It is hard to tell whether this is a hint at Rossetti's passion for birds (which was already discussed in chapter 2) or just a symbol for women as birds in cages, weak and tamed.

In conclusion, reading and analyzing Elizabeth's work is fundamental to give a voice to the dead body of Millais' *Ophelia*, to the aesthetic angel *Beatrice* and the ill and weak dove of Rossetti but, more importantly, to a woman who has been silenced for too long and now is slowly being heard thanks to new publications on the topic. Indubitably, for several years her role as model and muse has obliterated her efforts to become an artist maybe due to her rather limited poetic and pictorial production. After Elizabeth Siddal 'lost her virginity'[534] in the 60s, as ironically proposed by Marsh, between the 70s and the 80s, more than a century after her passing, her artistic production has been revalued thus putting a spotlight on Lizzie's life and talent which had been shadowed by the men in her life (in particular the Rossettis).[535]Indubitably, as reported by Marsh, towards the end of the twentieth century an interest for the woman that had been silenced by the patriarchal version of history arose. This led biographers (including Marsh herself) to become more interested with the life and the work of Siddal since her production was starting to receive the credit it deserved. Nowadays, as reported by Russell Taylor, 'her main claim to fame is no longer that of being Rossetti's Beatrice and Millais' Ophelia'[536], she has re-gained a voice of her own. As far as muses becoming artists themselves are concerned, it is worth mentioning that, as proposed by Trotot, models (especially female models) normally transport the lessons they take from the artists they inspired and become their own models.[537] In this case reflexivity is crucial since, by talking about their own lives in their literary works or attempting self-portraits, they need to learn how to talk

[534] J. Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, cit., p. 131.
[535] *Idem*, p. 137.
[536] *idem*, p. 51.
[537] C. Trotot, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

about themselves and, most of all, learn how to start perceiving their voice (too frequently silenced by society) as worth listening. Since it is based on the replacement of the commonly observed object (as described in Christina Rossetti's 'In an Artist's Studio') with the observing subject, the self-portrait becomes an invitation to access a different reality.

The aim of this research was to provide readers with the elements to develop a critic analysis of the figure of Siddal and her work. If further studies could (and, in my opinion, should) be made on who she was, both from the biographical and the artistic viewpoint, I hope that this project described clearly who she was not. The perception people commonly have of her is based on a patriarchal take on the world of art in which 'the role ascribed to the feminine position is either as art's object, the model, or as its muse by virtue of a romantic affiliation with an artist'.[538] Indubitably, as reported by Pollock 'Siddal functions as both'.[539] Hopefully one day she will no longer be considered as a 'sign'[540] of her husband's genius but as a genius of her own.

[538] G. Pollock, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
[539] *ibidem.*
[540] id*em.*

APPENDIX

1. A Year and a Day

Slow days have passed that make a year,
Slow hours that make a day,
Since I could take my first dear love
And kiss him the old way;
Yet the green leaves touch me on the cheek,
Dear Christ, this month of May.

I lie among the tall green grass
That bends above my head
And covers up my wasted face
And folds me in its bed
Tenderly and lovingly
Like grass above the dead.

Dim phantoms of an unknown ill
Float through my tired brain;
The unformed visions of my life
Pass by in ghostly train;
Some pause to touch me on the cheek,
Some scatter tears like rain.

A shadow falls along the grass
And lingers at my feet;
A new face lies between my hands --
Dear Christ, if I could weep
Tears to shut out the summer leaves
When this new face I greet.

Still it is but the memory
Of something I have seen
In the dreamy summer weather

When the green leaves came between:
The shadow of my dear love's face --
So far and strange it seems.

The river ever running down
Between its grassy bed,
The voices of a thousand birds
That clang above my head,
Shall bring to me a sadder dream
When this sad dream is dead.

A silence falls upon my heart
And hushes all its pain.
I stretch my hands in the long grass
And fall to sleep again,
There to lie empty of all love
Like beaten corn of grain.

2. Autumnal leaves are falling

Autumnal leaves are falling
About her new made grave
Where the tall grass bends to listen
To the murmur of the wave.

3. I care not for my lady's soul (The Lust of the Eyes)

I care not for my Lady's soul
Though I worship before her smile;
I care not where be my Lady's goal
When her beauty shall lose its wile.

Low sit I down at my Lady's feet
Gazing through her wild eyes
Smiling to think how my love will fleet

When their starlike beauty dies.

I care not if my Lady pray
To our Father which is in Heaven
But for joy my heart's quick pulses play
For to me her love is given.

Then who shall close my Lady's eyes
And who shall fold her hands?
Will any hearken if she cries
Up to the unknown lands?

4. It is not now a longing year

It is not now a longing year
That parts us, not a day,
Yet the green leaves touch me on the cheek
Dear Christ this month of May,
Yet who can take their first dear love
And kiss him the old way?

A shadow falls along the grass
And lingers at my feet;
A new face lies between my hands --
Dear Christ, if I could weep
Tears to shut out the summer leaves
When this new face I greet.

Still it is but the memory
Of something I have seen
In the dreamy summer weather
When the green leaves came between:
The shadow of my dear love's face --
So far and strange it seems.

The river ever running down
Between its grassy bed,
The voices of a thousand birds
That clang above my head,
Shall bring to me a sadder dream
When this sad dream is dead.

5. Life and night are falling from me (Lord May I Come?)

Life and night are falling from me,
Death and day are opening on me,
Wherever my footsteps come and go,
Life is a stony way of woe.
Lord, have I long to go?

Hallow hearts are ever near me,
Soulless eyes have ceased to cheer me:
Lord may I come to thee?

Life and youth and summer weather
To my heart no joy can gather.
Lord, lift me from life's stony way!
Loved eyes long closed in death watch for me:
Holy death is waiting for me –
Lord, may I come to-day?

My outward life feels sad and still
Like lilies in a frozen rill;
I am gazing upwards to the sun,
Lord, Lord, remembering my lost one.
O Lord, remember me!

How is it in the unknown land?

Do the dead wander hand in hand?
God, give me trust in thee.

Do we clasp dead hands and quiver
With an endless joy for ever?
Do tall white angels gaze and wend
Along the banks where lilies bend?
Lord, we know not how this may be:
Good Lord we put our faith in thee –
O God, remember me.

6. Many a mile over land and sea (Speechless or Fragment of a ballad)

Many a mile over land and sea
Unsummoned my love returned to me;
I remember not the words he said
But only the trees moaning overhead.

And he came ready to take and bear
The cross I had carried for many a year,
But words came slowly one by one
From frozen lips shut still and dumb.

How sounded my words so still and slow
To the great strong heart that loved me so,
Who came to save me from pain and wrong
And to comfort me with his love so strong?

I felt the wind strike chill and cold
And vapours rise from the red-brown mould;
I felt the spell that held my breath
Bending me down to a living death.

7. Now Christ ye save yon bonny shepherd (Shepherd turned Sailor)

Now Christ ye save yon bonny shepherd
Sailing on the sea;
Ten thousand souls are sailing there
But they belong to Thee.
If he is lost then all is lost
And all is dead to me.

My love should have a grey head-stonee
And green moss at his feet
And clinging grass above his breast
Whereon his lambs could bleat,
And I should know the span of earth
Where some day I might sleep.

8. O God forgive me that I ranged (The Passing of Love)

O God, forgive me that I ranged
My live into a dream of love!
Will tears of anguish never wash
The passion from my blood?

Love kept my heart in a song of joy,
My pulses quivered to the tune;
The coldest blasts of winter blew
Upon me like sweet airs in June.

Love floated on the mists of morn
And rested on the sunset's rays;
He calmed the thunder of the storm
And lighted all my ways.

Love held me joyful through the day

And dreaming ever through the night;
No evil thing could come to me,
My spirit was so light.

O Heaven help my foolish heart
Which heeded not the passing time
That dragged my idol from its place
And shattered all its shrine.

9. O grieve not with thy bitter tears (Early Death)

Oh grieve not with thy bitter tears
The life that passes fast;
The gates of heaven will open wide
And take me in at last.

Then sit down meekly at my side
And watch my young life flee;
Then solemn peace of holy death
Come quickly unto thee.

But true love, seek me in the throng
Of spirits floating past,
And I will take thee by the hands
And know thee mine at last.

10. O mother open the window wide (At Last)

O mother, open the window wide
And let the daylight in;
The hills grow darker to my sight
And thoughts begin to swim.

And mother dear, take my young son,
(Since I was born of thee)

And care for all his little ways
And nurse him on thy knee.

And mother, wash my pale pale hands
And then bind up my feet;
My body may no longer rest
Out of its winding sheet.

And mother dear, take a sapling twig
And green grass newly mown,
And lay them on my empty bed
That my sorrow be not known.

And mother, find three berries red
And pluck them from the stalk,
And burn them at the first cockcrow
That my spirit may not walk.

And mother dear, break a willow wand,
And if the sap be even,
Then save it for sweet Robert's sake
And he'll know my soul's in heaven.

And mother, when the big tears fall,
(And fall, God knows, they may)
Tell him I died of my great love
And my dying heart was gay.

And mother dear, when the sun has set
And the pale kirk grass waves,
Then carry me through the dim twilight
And hide me among the graves.

11. O silent wood I enter thee (O Silent Wood)

O silent wood, I enter thee
With a heart so full of misery
For all the voices from the trees
And the ferns that cling about my knees.

In thy darkest shadow let me sit
When the grey owls about thee flit;
There will I ask of thee a boon,
That I may not faint or die or swoon.

Gazing through the gloom like one
Whose life and hopes are also done,
Frozen like a thing of stone
I sit in thy shadow – but not alone.

Can God bring back the day when we two stood
Beneath the clinging trees in that dark wood?

12. Oh never weep for love that is dead (Dead Love)

Oh never weep for love that's dead
Since love is seldom true
But changes his fashion from blue to red,
From brightest red to blue,
And love was born to an early death
And is so seldom true.

Then harbour no smile on your bonny face
To win the deepest sigh.
The fairest words on truest lips
Pass on and surely die,
And you will stand alone, my dear,
When wintry winds draw nigh.

Sweet, never weep for what cannot be,
For this God has not given.
If the merest dream of love were true
Then, sweet, we should be in heaven,
And this is only earth, my dear,
Where true love is not given.

13. Ope not thy lips thou foolish one (Love and Hate)

Ope not thy lips, thou foolish one,
Nor turn to me thy face;
The blasts of heaven shall strike thee down
Ere I will give thee grace.

Take thou thy shadow from my path,
Nor turn to me and pray;
The wild wild winds thy dirge may sing
Ere I will bid thee stay.

Turn thou away thy false dark eyes,
Nor gaze upon my face;
Great love I bore thee: now great hate
Sits grimly in its place.

All changes pass me like a dream,
I neither sing nor pray;
And thou art like the poisonous tree
That stole my life away.

14. Ruthless hands have torn her (He and She and Angels Three)

Ruthless hands have torn her
From one that loved her well;
Angels have upborn her,
Christ her grief to tell.

She shall stand to listen,
She shall stand and sing,
Till three winged angels
Her lover's soul shall bring.

He and she and the angels three
Before God's face shall stand;
There they shall pray among themselves
And sing at His right hand.

15. Thy strong arms are around me (Worn Out)

Thy strong arms are around me, love
My head is on thy breast;
Low words of comfort come from thee
Yet my soul has no rest.

For I am but a startled thing
Nor can I ever be
Aught save a bird whose broken wing
Must fly away from thee.

I cannot give to thee the love
I gave so long ago,
The love that turned and struck me down
Amid the blinding snow.

I can but give a failing heart
And weary eyes of pain,
A faded mouth that cannot smile
And may not laugh again.

Yet keep thine arms around me, love,
Until I fall to sleep;
Then leave me, saying no goodbye
Lest I might wake, and weep.

16. To touch the glove upon her tender hand (Gone)

To touch the glove upon her tender hand,
To watch the jewel sparkle in her ring,
Lifted my heart into a sudden song
As when the wild birds sing.

To touch her shadow on the sunny grass,
To break her pathway through the darkened wood,
Filled all my life with trembling and tears
And silence where I stood.

I watch the shadows gather round my heart,
I live to know that she is gone –
Gone gone for ever, like the tender dove
That left the Ark alone.

17. True Love

Farewell, Earl Richard,
Tender and brave;
Kneeling I kiss
The dust from thy grave.

Pray for me, Richard,
Lying alone
With hands pleading earnestly,
All in white stone.

Soon must I leave thee
This sweet summer tide;
That other is waiting
To claim his pale bride.

Soon I'll return to thee
Hopeful and brave,
When the dead leaves
Blow over thy grave.

Then shall they find me
Close at thy head
Watching or fainting,
Sleeping or dead.

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Riassunto in italiano

L'obiettivo di questa ricerca è esaminare la figura di Elizabeth Siddal e comprendere come la percezione che se ne ha sia influenzata da ciò che altri hanno detto di lei. Infatti, nonostante abbia prodotto svariati quadri e alcune poesie (sedici in totale), essi vengono utilizzati solo per supportare l'idea che si ha di lei come di una bellissima musa, fragile, dipendente dal laudano e perennemente triste. Tanto triste da decidere di togliersi la vita nel 1863. Senza dubbio le leggende inventate da altri (tra cui suo cognato William Michael Rossetti, suo marito Dante Gabriel ed il magnate d'arte Charles Howell) hanno avuto molto più successo del suo lavoro di poetessa e pittrice nel definire la sua identità. La mia tesi ha quindi l'obiettivo di capire quali delle tante storie raccontate su questa creatura misteriosa siano vere e quante siano invece state create per perpetuarne il mito.

La tesi si compone di cinque capitoli. Nel primo cerco di descrivere Lizzie nel modo più oggettivo possibile, basandomi su dati biografici e fornendo le basi per un'analisi dettagliata di come lei venga percepita dagli altri. Nel secondo capitolo analizzo la figura di Elizabeth in quanto musa dei Rossetti. Infatti, Elizabeth non ha ispirato solo Dante Gabriel con la sua bellezza ma anche la sorella di lui, Christina. Inoltre William Michael Rossetti è stato uno dei primi biografi a raccontare la vita di sua cognata. Ho trovato utile fornire dati biografici della famiglia per comprendere come i Rossetti fossero stati educati dal padre, un insegnante di italiano in Inghilterra. Inoltre ho analizzato diverse opere dei fratelli per capire se e come esse abbiano definito l'identità di Lizzie. Per quanto riguarda il terzo capitolo mi sono prefissata l'obiettivo di capire come Elizabeth abbia plasmato la figura di Ofelia (l'eroina di Shakespeare) nell'immaginario comune. Senza dubbio pensando al personaggio dell'*Amleto* è facile che giunga alla mente l'immagine di Elizabeth ritratta da John Everett Millais tra il 1851 e il 1852 morente nell'acqua. L'associazione tra Lizzie e questo personaggio avviene anche per altri motivi però. Non solo sia Ofelia che la Siddal erano descritte come pazze ma entrambe hanno vissuto un amore travagliato che, sotto certi punti di vista, le ha portate alla morte. La relazione tra Elizabeth e Rossetti infatti, viene spesso descritta come tossica poiché lui non le era fedele e il carattere di lei, a quanto pare, portava la coppia a continui litigi. Inoltre, l'aborto spontaneo che Siddal subì nel 1861, peggiorò la situazione e condusse Elizabeth verso l'instabilità mentale. Anche la dipendenza dal laudano (che la portò ad una morte per overdose) è discussa ampiamente nel terzo capitolo. La quarta

parte di questo progetto si focalizza sulle ragioni per cui Lizzie, essendo stata ritratta dal marito in *Beata Beatrix*, viene sempre associata a Beatrice Portinari, la musa di Alighieri. Indubbiamente anche questo fatto ha sagomato la percezione che si ha di lei, trasformandola nell'immaginario comune in una *donna angelo* casta e pura, il perfetto angelo della casa. In questo capitolo quindi ho descritto il ruolo di Dante Alighieri nella vita di Rossetti (il cui padre era ossessionato dal poeta fiorentino tanto da chiamare suo figlio con quel nome), e ho analizzato come i lavori dell'autore stilnovista abbiano influenzato la produzione Rossettiana. A questo proposito, in questo capitolo è presente un'analisi accurata di opere di Rossetti come *Beata Beatrix* (1870), The *House of Life* (1881) e 'The Blessed Damozel' (1875–1878) che sono fortemente ispirate da Alighieri.

Nell'analizzare l'ultimo capitolo, che si focalizza sul lavoro della Siddal come artista, è fondamentale tenere a mente quanto sia problematica la percezione di donna come angelo del focolare nella Victorian Age. Infatti, il fatto che le donne fossero relegate alla sfera domestica ha fatto si che fosse più difficile per loro approcciarsi al mondo dell'arte, considerato per secoli prettamente maschile. Dopo una breve introduzione sul ruolo della donna nell'arte, in questo capitolo mi sono focalizzata su Elizabeth nello specifico e, prima di analizzare ognuno dei suoi versi, ho cercato di comprendere come la società patriarcale dell'epoca abbia influenzato la percezione che i suoi contemporanei hanno avuto della sua arte. Infatti le sue poesie, benché percepite come pagine del suo diario segreto vengono letti come brutte copie dei versi del marito, quando invece in molti casi fu lei ad ispirare lui. In questo capitolo spiego anche perché una lettura meramente autobiografica è riduttiva nell'analizzare queste poesie.

Relativamente poco è stato scritto su di lei fino ad oggi. Jan Marsh, con i suoi svariati libri sui Preraffaelliti ha portato alla luce alcuni dettagli della vita della loro musa che erano caduti nell'oblio ma pochissimi testi sono interamente dedicati a lei. Indubbiamente resta ancora molto da raccontare e da scoprire, tanto dal punto di vista biografico come pure dal punto di vista artistico ma, non riuscendo a carpire completamente chi fosse Elizabeth Siddal, non mi resta che sperare che questa tesi riesca a raccontare chi non era e dare voce ad una donna che per troppo tempo è stata silenziata.