The Musical Imagery in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s paintings for his patron, Frederick Leyland

A thesis submitted for the completion of

Master of Arts in Music

by Penelope Esplin

Department of Music

University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Submitted July 12, 2013
Abstract

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) was an accomplished English painter, poet, designer and translator. He was a leading figure of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood (formed in 1848) which was a movement of a small group of British painters who reformed painting in Britain and influenced painters throughout the world. Rossetti went on to forge a successful career as a painter and by the 1860s he created a distinctive style independent of the original stylistic aims of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood.

My thesis focusses on Rossetti’s depiction of musical instruments in a small group of paintings intended for Frederick Leyland. Leyland sought depictions of a single female figure, usually three-quarter length, and depicted with a musical instrument. Leyland and Rossetti made a specific plan for the arrangement of Rossetti’s paintings on Leyland’s walls. This thesis will investigate the symbolic content of this series of paintings and attempt to uncover the common theme. Understanding the purpose of his inclusion of musical instruments in his paintings is complicated because Rossetti’s paintings are dense with ambiguous symbolism. This symbolism resulted in the possibility of various readings dependent upon the viewer’s individual interpretation. To understand any ambiguous symbolism in his paintings, it is necessary to look at all the non-musical parts of the paintings as well, such as the flowers, the dress, the birds and the angels, which are a commonality. This should add to the reader’s understanding of the paintings in general and the complex meaning behind the musical symbolism. Rossetti’s depictions of musical instruments are fascinating as he was often more concerned with the physical shape and the iconographical implications of an instrument than the technicalities of the instrument itself. As such, these musical instruments are often obscurely exotic, especially for a Victorian audience, or even entirely invented without reference to an instrument that exists. Moreover, these musical instruments are often depicted in ways that make them completely unplayable; either the hand positions of the player would negate any sound, or the strings of the musical instrument are obstructed by another object (for example hair, flowers, material from a dress) which would result in no sound.
Preface

Many previous researchers have analysed Rossetti’s paintings in depth. There has also been some research on the musical themes in Rossetti’s paintings, but little research has been completed on the musical content specifically related to paintings for Leyland. This research aims to investigate the complicated relationship between patron and artist and the joint aesthetic which resulted in five musically themed paintings arguably unique in Rossetti’s oeuvre. It will also investigate the sources used for each painting and the possible reasons behind the choice of musical content in Rossetti’s paintings for Leyland.

First of all, I would like to thank my first supervisor Alan Davison, for unfailing guidance, interest and encouragement and for suggesting such a fascinating topic in the first place. I’d also like to thank my second supervisor, Henry Johnson, for taking me on despite his busy schedule. And finally I’d like to thank my third supervisor, Rob Burns, for his patience, encouragement and clarity in writing.

I’d also like to thank my friends, family, bandmates and friends for their continued support and patience with my (physical and mental) absence. I’d also like to thank the Bill Robertson Library and the University Book Shop for allowing me the job flexibility to finally put this thesis to rest.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Preface ............................................................................................................................................. iii

List of Illustrations ........................................................................................................................... v

Chapter 1. Rossetti and his interest in Music ................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2. Leyland’s interest in music and Rossetti’s first commission, *Lady Lilith* .......... 19

Chapter 3. *Veronica Veronese* (1872)....................................................................................... 53

Chapter 4. *La Ghirlandata* (1873) ............................................................................................. 80

Chapter 5. *Roman Widow* (1874) ............................................................................................ 103

Chapter 6. *A Sea Spell* (1877) ................................................................................................. 120

Chapter 7. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 133

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................. 138

Websites Accessed .......................................................................................................................... 146

Appendix. Copyright Permission .................................................................................................. 149
List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *Lady Lilith*, 1864-73. Oil on canvas, 95 x 81 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA/ Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial/ The Bridgeman Art Library..............................................................19

Figure 2: Henry Bedford Lemere (Photographer). “Frederick Leyland’s House, 49 Princes Gate, London. The Drawing Room (1892)” in Nicholas Cooper, *The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design* (London: Architectural Press, 1976), 91..............................................................20

Figure 3: Titian (c.1488/90-1576), *Woman with a Mirror*, c.1515. Oil on canvas, 99 x 75 cm. Réunion des musées nationaux Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre), Paris..............30

Figure 4: Titian (c.1488/90-1576), *Venus with a Mirror*, 1555. 124 x 105 cm. National Gallery of Art, Andrew Mellon collection, Washington.................................33

Figure 5: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Venus Surrounded by Mirrors Reflecting Her Different Views*, c.1863-66. Pen and ink on handmade paper, 9.7 x 18 cm. Robin Alston........33

Figure 6: *Lady Lilith* (Original 1867 with face of Fanny Cornforth). Watercolour on paper. 51.3 x 44. This is a watercolour replica of the original oil painting which Rossetti subsequently revised. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1908..............................................................37

Figure 7: Sketch for picture arrangement in a letter from D. G. Rossetti to George Rae, 22nd March 1864. Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.................................45

Figure 8: Henry Bedford Lemere (Photographer). “Frederic Leyland’s House. 49 Princes Gate, London. The Study (1892),” in Nicholas Cooper, *The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design* (London: The Architectural Press, 1976), 90..............................................................47

Figure 9: The side panel of the frame intended for James Whistler’s painting *The White Symphony: The Three Girls* (incomplete) featuring the opening notes of Franz Schubert’s *Moments Musicaux*, D 780 (Op.94), no.3 in F minor. .........................49

Figure 10: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frithly[sic] Lucre*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 186.7 x 139.7 cm. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco...........50

Figure 11: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of F. R. Leyland*, 1870-3. Oil on canvas, 218.5 x 119.4 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington..............................................................50
Figure 12: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *F.R.L. frill-of Liverpool* (ca.1879). Pen and Ink on paper, 17.6 x 11.0. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford ........................................51

Figure 13: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Caricature of F. R. Leyland* (ca.1879). Pen and Ink on paper, 17.6 x 11.0. Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; Bernie Philip Bequest.................................................................51

Figure 14: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *Veronica Veronese*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 33 x 22 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA/ Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial/ The Bridgeman Art Library..................................................51

Figure 15: “Venvsta” from Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (1645), 646........................................54

Figure 16: “Diletto” from Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (1645), 152........................................58

Figure 17: Albrecht Dürer’s (1471-1528), *Melancholia*, 1514. Engraving on copper plate, 24.1 x 19.2 cm. British Museum / Gift of the National Art Collections Fund ........59

Figure 18: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *Monna Vanna*, 1866 (repainted 1873). Oil on canvas, 88 x 86 cm. Tate Collection, Tate Gallery, London.................................61

Figure 19: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, hand drawn “tenor mark” in letter to George Boyce, 1872..........................................................62

Figure 20: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of manuscript in *Veronica Veronese*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 109 x 88 cm. Bancroft Collection, Wilmington Society of Fine Arts, Delaware.........................................................62

Figure 21: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of instrument in *Veronica Veronese*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 109 x 88 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA/ Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial/ The Bridgeman Art Library.........................63

Figure 22: A standard old violin from the front and the side........................................64

Figure 23: John Baptist Jackson (engraver) (c.1701-c.1780), engraving of Paolo Veronese (1528-88), *Marriage at Cana*, 1745. Chiaroscuro woodcut print, 58 x 86 cm (sheet). Princeton University Library, Princeton .................................65

Figure 24: John Baptist Jackson (engraver) (c.1701-c.1780), detail of engraving of Paolo Veronese (1528-88), *Marriage at Cana*, 1745. Chiaroscuro woodcut print, 58 x 86 cm (sheet). Princeton University Library, Princeton..........................66

Figure 25: Paolo Veronese (1528-88), detail of *Les Noces de Cana (Marriage at Cana)*, 1563. Oil on canvas, 677 x 994 cm. Réunion des musées nationaux Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre), Paris .......................................................66

Figure 26: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *Fazio’s Mistress*, 1863 (repainted 1873). Oil on mahogany, 43 x36 cm. Tate Collection, Tate Gallery, London .........................67
Figure 27: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of hand and instrument in *Veronica Veronese*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 109 x 88 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA/ Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial/ The Bridgeman Art Library……..68

Figure 28: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), example of leather strap on instrument and Veronica’s hair in *Veronica Veronese*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 109 x 88 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA/ Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial/ The Bridgeman Art Library Nationality……………………………………………70

Figure 29: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *La Ghirlandata*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library………………………………………………………………………………80

Figure 30: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), detail of *Venus Verticordia*, 1864-8. Oil on canvas, 98cm x 70cm. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth………………………………………84

Figure 31: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of *La Ghirlandata*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library………………………………………………………………………………………………………………85

Figure 32: Jacopo Robusti Tintoretto (1518-94), *Women Playing Music, Perhaps an Allegory of Music*, 1582-4. Oil on canvas, 142 x 214 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden .................................86

Figure 33: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of harp in *La Ghirlandata*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library ..........................87

Figure 34: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of fingers of model in *La Ghirlandata*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library ..........................88

Figure 35: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of birds at top and bottom of harp in *La Ghirlandata*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library ..........................90

Figure 36: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *Ligeia Siren*, 1873. Coloured Chalk, 78.74 x 47 cm. Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York / Private Collection .................................................................92

Figure 37: Image from Wilhelm Heyer et al, *Musikhistorisches Museum von Wilhelm Heyer in Cöln*, vol.2 (Leipzig: Kommissions-verlag von Breitkopf & Härtel, 1912), 26….93

Figure 38: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *May Morris*, 1872. Chalk, dimensions

Figure 39: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), detail of La Ghirlandata, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library.................................................................96

Figure 40: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), Roman Widow (Déis Manibus), 1874. Oil on canvas, 105 x 92.9 cm. Collection Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico. The Luis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc .................................................................103

Figure 41: Image from Thomas Hope, Costume of the Ancients (1841). .......................107

Figure 42: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), The Return of Tibullus to Delia, c.1853. Watercolour, 22 x 29 cm. Terence W. G. Rowe .........................................................109

Figure 43: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of harp player in The Return of Tibullus to Delia, c.1853. Watercolour, 22 x 29 cm. Location unknown .........................109

Figure 44: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), A Harp Player, c.1857. Watercolour heightened with body colour, 33 x 25 cm. Private Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library .................................................................110

Figure 45: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), A Sea Spell, 1877. Oil on canvas, 109 x 90 cm. Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University ..................................................120

Figure 46: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), Ligeia Siren, 1873. Coloured Chalks, 78 x 47 cm. Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library.................................................................123

Figure 47: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), A Sea Spell (sketch), 1876. Pen and ink on writing paper, 17 x 11 cm. Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery .................128

Figure 48: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of fingers of model in A Sea Spell, 1877. Oil on canvas, 109 x 90 cm. Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University ..............128
Chapter One
Rossetti and his interest in Music

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) was an accomplished English painter, poet, designer and translator. Although he is famous as a leading figure of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, he went on to forge a successful career as a painter and by the 1860s he created a distinctive style independent of the stylistic aims of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood.¹ My thesis focuses on Rossetti’s depiction of musical instruments in a series of paintings intended for Frederick Leyland and will discuss how they are linked in theme and form. Understanding the purpose of his inclusion of musical instruments in his paintings is complicated because Rossetti’s paintings are dense with ambiguous symbolism resulting in the possibility of various readings dependent upon the viewer’s individual interpretation.² To understand the ambiguous symbolism in his paintings, it is necessary to look at all the non-musical parts of the paintings as well, such as the flowers, the dress, the birds and the angels. This adds to the understanding of the paintings in general and the complex meaning behind in musical symbolism. Rossetti’s depictions of musical instruments are fascinating as he was often more concerned with the physical shape and the iconographical implications of an instrument than the technicalities of the instrument itself. As such, these musical instruments are often obscurely exotic, especially for a Victorian audience, or even entirely invented without reference to an instrument that exists.³ Moreover, these musical instruments are often depicted in ways that make them completely unplayable; either the hand positions of the player would negate any sound, or the strings of the musical instrument are obstructed by

¹ The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood rejected the academically taught style which focused on Raphael (1483-1520) and Michelangelo (1475-1564), instead preferring the highly detailed style of Quattrocento Flemish and Italian art. His new style moved away from densely symbolic medievalism of the Pre-Raphaelites and towards the style of the Venetian masters; Titian (c.1485-1576), Giorgione (c.1477-1510) and Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). He had always revered these painters, including them in the ‘List of Immortals’ that he drew up with Holman Hunt in 1848 (See Dianne Sachko MacLeod, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Titian,” Apollo 121 (January 1985): 36).
² For example, Lady Lilith can be interpreted as a depiction of the dangerous female type emerging as a result of the New Woman movement in Victorian England, or a depiction of the Hebrew myth of Lilith, the first wife of Adam.
³ Some of the obscure instruments include the oud, Indian sarinda or sārangī, aulos, ancient zithers, lyres and lutes. Invented instruments can be seen in the following paintings: The Blue Closet (1857) features two keyboards, with a vertically attached zither on one side and hanging bells on the other, King René’s Honeymoon (1864) and St. Cecilia (1856-7) both feature a keyboard with organ pipes rising vertically above the keys, The Tune of Seven Towers (1857) includes a chair with attached lap zither and built in bell overhead.
another object (for example hair, flowers, material from a dress) which would result in no
sound.4

Despite regularly portraying musical instruments in his paintings, Rossetti supposedly had no
interest in music according to many scholars and friends of the painter.5 It could be argued
that his lack of interest in music is the reason for his inaccurate portrayal of musical
instruments.6 Yet Rossetti had a habit of collecting ‘bric-a-brac,’ a collection of various
ornamental items, to paint into his pictures, including an array of musical instruments.7 This
raises the issue of whether Rossetti had physical examples to paint with and why he would
fail to paint accurate portrayals of these musical instruments. It is hard to believe Rossetti did
not care enough to portray the musical instruments correctly when other aspects of his
paintings (such as flowers) were well researched, accurately depicted and purposely included
as symbolic devices.8

I argue that Rossetti’s inaccurate portrayal of musical instruments was deliberate and
illustrates an effort to disconnect the viewer from the real world into the fantasy world
Rossetti created. This is especially evident in the ‘Veronica type’ paintings Rossetti made for
one of his wealthier patrons, Frederick Leyland (1832-92), which form the centrepiece of my
thesis. I decided to focus on Leyland’s ‘Veronica’ paintings because they illustrate the
influence a patron can have on an artist’s output. These paintings demonstrate a joint
aesthetic unique in Rossetti’s oeuvre. As this study will show, musical instruments were an
important feature of the Leyland paintings.

4 Instruments in unplayable performance contexts include A Sea Spell (1877) which depicts a koto played
vertically (see Henry Johnson, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Japan,” Music in Art 30, 1-2 (2005), and three
paintings depicting a woman impossibly playing two harps simultaneously with each hand include The Harp
Player (c. 1857), Roman Widow (1874) and The Return of Tibullus to Delia (c.1853). As Woods has recently
argued, the hand positions that negate sound include The Merciless Lady (1865), The Bower Meadow (1872), La
Ghirlandata (1873), Veronica Veronese (1872), A Sea Spell (1877). Hair obstructs Morning Music (1864) and
La Ghirlandata (1873). Material obstructs Love’s Greeting (c.1861), The Merciless Lady (1865), The Bower
Meadow (1872), Forced Music (1877) and A Sea Spell (1877). Flowers obstruct La Ghirlandata (1873), Roman
Widow (1874), and A Sea Spell (1877).
5 This point will be discussed later in the chapter, see pages 4 and 5.
6 Kirsten Powell in particular has made this argument, see Kirsten H. Powell, “Object, Symbol, and Metaphor:
2013, May 18].
8 See Sarah Phelps Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery and the Meaning of his Paintings.” (Ph.D.
The ‘Veronica’ paintings are *Lady Lilith* (1868), *Veronica Veronese* (1872), *La Ghirlandata* (1873), *Roman Widow* (1874), and *A Sea Spell* (1877).

Before I discuss the Leyland paintings in detail, it is important to first look at the nature of Rossetti’s interest in music, what acquaintances said of Rossetti’s interest in music and the recent scholarship that has subsequently emerged. Therefore, chapter one will discuss Rossetti’s interest in music, covering what acquaintances said of his interest in music and the perceptions of music in wider Victorian culture. I will look at what modern day scholars have said about him, his use of music as metaphor and his representation of various musical instruments. As Leyland is the predominant feature of my thesis, chapter two will discuss Leyland’s first commission, *Lady Lilith* (1868), and his (debated) interest in music. Although *Lady Lilith* does not feature a musical instrument, it was the model for Leyland’s musical paintings. In chapter three, I will analyse *Veronica Veronese* (1872) which was Leyland’s first painting featuring a musical instrument. Chapter four will focus on *La Ghirlandata* (1873), a painting Rossetti intended for Leyland, but was ultimately rejected by Leyland due to his strict specifications and a breakdown in communication. This altercation over *La Ghirlandata* almost ended the friendship (and business) between artist and patron. In chapter five, I will discuss *Roman Widow* (1874), alternatively titled *Dîs Manibus*, which was the third painting Leyland owned featuring a musical instrument. Finally, in chapter six I will discuss *A Sea Spell* (1877), the final painting Leyland was to own that featured a musical instrument.

I will demonstrate how *Lady Lilith* (1868), *Veronica Veronese* (1873), *La Ghirlandata* (1873), *Roman Widow* (or *Dîs Manibus*) (1874), and *A Sea Spell* (1877), which were all intended for Leyland’s walls, are all interconnected in theme and form. Rossetti recognised Leyland’s preference for musical instruments in paintings and catered to his patron’s desire (I will discuss Leyland’s musical leanings later in the chapter). Rossetti was introduced to Leyland in October 1865 by another patron, John Miller (1796-1876). It cannot be mere coincidence that 1865 is the date Rossetti begins the inclusion of musical instruments in his paintings and continues to do so for twelve years. McGann states, “The earliest of these, *The Blue Bower*, dates from 1865, while the latest, *Forced Music*, was done [sic] in 1877.”

---


10 Although smaller studies exist from before this date including *The Harp Player* (c.1857).

These dates coincide with Leyland’s redecoration of his house. Leyland ceased requesting paintings in 1877, after he shifted residence to the considerably smaller Princes Gate in 1876. Rossetti also ceased creating paintings with musical themes after 1877. These facts indicate that Rossetti was creating musical themed paintings during this period with Leyland in mind, regardless of whether these paintings were eventually bought by Leyland. Critics debate Leyland’s desire for musical themed paintings. For example, Gail Lynn Goldberg infers that the desire for paintings with musical instruments did not stem from Leyland, but instead it was Rossetti who “clung to the idea of other musical pictures like the [sic] Veronica Veronese which had so pleased Leyland.” Victorian art dealer C. A. Howell questioned Leyland’s desire for any particular style of painting having recognised the importance of interior decoration in Leyland’s purchases. In Howell’s eyes, Leyland was not a true collector, for he “only buys a thing when he wants it for a certain place.” This thesis will attempt to discover if the musical instruments depicted in the Veronica series are accurately depicted. It will also investigate whether the Veronica paintings include the same symbolic devices. And finally, whether there is any specific reason for the inclusion of musical instrument in the Veronica paintings for Leyland.

Comments on Rossetti’s interest in music are varied and sometimes contradictory. Many even stated that he had no interest in music at all. Fellow Pre-Raphaelite painter and friend, William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), stated that Rossetti found music “positively offensive.” Rossetti’s friend and apprentice, Henry Treffry Dunn (1838-99), commented that Rossetti “did not care a whit” about music. Rossetti’s biographer, Alfred Hipkins (1826-1903), wrote that Rossetti’s unmusical ear was “liable to correction.” William Allingham noted in 1864 that he and Rossetti attended a performance of Gounod’s opera Mireille, but “Gabriel, who detests music, soon went away; I remained.”

---

12 Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti*, 198. Although Leyland requests no more of Rossetti’s paintings in June 1880 by stating “I have put so much money in pictures already that I do not care to put any more,” (Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, Leyland to DGR, 10 June 1880, 86) by October Leyland requests Rossetti’s *La Pia* to “fill up the wall space I have left” (Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, Leyland to DGR, 11 October 1880, 87).
14 Merrill, 154 cites Cline, *Owl and the Rossettis*, Howell to DGR, 1 March 1874, no.344.
Yet there are reports that Rossetti did enjoy music on many levels. Rossetti’s brother, William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919), maintained that Gabriel “could enjoy an opera, or a simple tuneable song,” although he acknowledges that the Rossetti’s “were not a musical family; they had…no craving to be constantly hearing music.” According to Rosalie Grylls, when Rossetti was at Sass’s Art Academy (before 1846), “when he did not want to draw or to write he would throw his head back and sing “Alice Gray” at the top of his voice.” In 1847, Rossetti himself admitted in a letter to his mother that he “abhor[s] concerts.” Yet in 1865 he asked his close friend Charles Augustus Howell (1840-90) to get him an opera box for Don Giovanni “the best box available of course, as before.” There are also reports that Rossetti took part in musical evenings with his friends, the Morrises, and his wife Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862). His assistant Henry Treffry Dunn reported that he collected many:

- musical instruments of some kind or another; all were old and mostly stringed-mandolines [sic], lutes, dulcimers, and barbarous-looking things of Chinese fashioning, which I imagine it would have been a great trial to the nerves to hear played upon—and yet in all the after years that I lived in the house I never heard a note of music. It had no home there.

---

19 W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir*, 412. Dunn’s account of Rossetti attending an opera at Leyland’s behest (and then later making fun of it) disputes this claim. See Dunn, *Recollections of D.G. Rossetti*, 29. Rossetti often made fun of music, but as Yuen points out, Rossetti’s jokes about music are often characterized by humourous sarcasm (Yuen, “Bound by Sound”, fn. 46, 96): “I hope the melody of existence does not still pass to the strains of the hurdy-gurdy.” (Fredeman, *Correspondence 3*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, Sunday night [c. 18 December 1864], (64,179), 227), “The Demon Olaf [William Bell Scott’s dog] first greeted me with a selection from some opera of his own – probably ‘Scotus le Diable’ (This translates to “The devil William Bell Scott.” “Scotus” was William Bell Scott’s nickname).” (William E. Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Formative Years, 1835-1862*, vol.1. 1835-54 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti, [c. 4 September 1847], (47), 43).


24 William Morris (1834-96) and his wife, Jane (nee Burden) (1839-1914). Helsinger, “Listening,” 414. According to Dunn music making was expected in the presence of ladies “As there were ladies present, a little music was indulged in, but as a rule Howell’s parties were chiefly composed of people who were not very musically inclined.” See Gale Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti or No Peacocks Allowed* (London: Macdonald, 1964), 94.

The fact that Rossetti’s vast collection of musical instruments were never played might lead to a conclusion that Rossetti was uninterested in making or listening to music. However, Dunn also writes (in mentioning a party at Howell’s house) that Rossetti’s musical instruments were purely aesthetic and were not intended to be used, “as in Rossetti’s house, the place abounded in musical instruments, but never a one that could be played upon; all were of antiquated construction, only to be looked at, and talked about in hushed whisper of admiration for their workmanship and adornment.” Yet, considering the abundance of musical subjects that feature in his poetry and paintings, music clearly interested him on a conceptual level. As Macleod states “musical accessories appear too frequently in his work, over too long a period of time, to be dismissed on commercial grounds.”

I am not the first to draw attention to Rossetti’s unique use of music in his paintings. However, to get a clear idea of Rossetti’s interest in music, we must put it in the context of the wider Victorian culture and the common perception of music. Some scholars argue that Rossetti’s interest in music was a reflection of a general trend of the Victorian era and more specifically the aesthetic movement. The aesthetic movement as a whole elevated music above all the other arts after Walter Pater’s (1839-94) concept that “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.” Delia da Sousa Correa points out
that music occupied a place of far greater significance in Victorian culture than we now tend to recognise, impacting on every part of society.\textsuperscript{31} Karen Yuen notes that in the nineteenth century, Britain experienced a surge of musical activity that affected the daily life of every individual. The growth of a middle class willing to patronise music resulted in greater attendance of concerts, the creation of numerous musical societies and the growth of instrument making and music publication. Moreover, the interest in reading and writing about music grew; there were around two hundred music journals in existence during this period and thousands of music reports printed in the general press.\textsuperscript{32} Musical scenes also featured in novels, poetry and paintings of this period.

Music even impinged on parts of society that were not musical. One common feature of the Victorian era was the use of musical terms to describe things distinctly unmusical. Rossetti’s friend and fellow poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) applied musical terms to describe Albert Moore’s (1841-93) painting \textit{Azaleas} (1868) stating “the melody of colour, the symphony of form is complete.”\textsuperscript{33} Suzanne Fagence Cooper states that Victorian critics also wrote articles encouraging this theme in Victorian art, such as ‘The Musical Work of Art’ and used phrases such as the “chord of colour.”\textsuperscript{34} Musical terminology was also used in descriptions about Rossetti. In 1883, Theodore Watts commented that even: “the name Rossetti was a word of music.”\textsuperscript{35} Hipkins wrote in 1883 that: “apart from what is recognised as the music of poetry, its cadence and inflection, Rossetti was endowed with no decided musical ear.”\textsuperscript{36} Hall Caine (1853-1931) applied musical terminology to Rossetti’s speaking voice describing it as: “a deep, full baritone, with easy modulations and undertones of infinite softness and sweetness…having every gradation of tone at command for the recitation or reading of poetry.”\textsuperscript{37} F. G. Stephens often referred to

\textsuperscript{37} Hall Caine, \textit{Recollections of Rossetti} (London: Cassell, 1928), 69.
Rossetti’s paintings in musical terms, illustrated when he discussed *The Blue Bower* (1865) as having the blue “key-note” of the cornflowers, the black “sharp note” of the dulcimer establishing the “chromatic harmony” of the painting.  

Karen Yuen argues that music also inspired other aspects of the arts. In art, James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) used musical terminology to name his paintings, such as *At the Piano* (1858-9), *Symphony in White No.1: The White Girl* (1862). In poetry, Robert Browning (1812-89) would structure his poems like toccatas and fugues, or insert bars of music into his letters and poems to ‘say’ what could not be said with words. Swinburne produced Wagnerian-inspired poetry (e.g. ‘Laus Veneris’ (1864) and ‘Tristram of Lyonesse’ (1882)). Rossetti also used this technique in his art, inserting musical notation and a few lines of poetry on the upper right of his painting *My Lady Greensleeves* (1859) and in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1855) again on the upper right of the painting. As Macleod points out, even though music was integral to Rossetti’s system of aesthetics, this was a concern that “aligns him with the major theoretical trends of the time.”

As such, this next section will discuss some theories that have emerged in recent scholarship concerning Rossetti’s interest in music.

---

39 Interestingly, Rossetti’s biggest patron, Frederick Leyland, was credited as giving Whistler the idea to use such musical terms in naming his paintings: “I say I can’t thank you too much for the name “Nocturne” as a title for my moonlights!” See Nigel Thorp, ed., *Whistler on Art: Selected Letters and Writings of James McNeill Whistler* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2004), Whistler to Leyland, [November 1872], 46.
43 Macleod, “Rossetti’s Two Ligelias,” 89.
The first theory I would like to discuss is the perception that Rossetti’s supposed dislike of music was a result of its emasculating consequences tied up in perceived gender roles. It is considered by some scholars that in order to protect his masculinity and prevent being outcast by society, Rossetti deliberately downplayed his enjoyment of music.\textsuperscript{44} Herbert Sussman, however argues that Rossetti established “the mode of reconciling manliness and art practice that has become one of the most powerful models for resolving male gender anxiety about the artistic life.”\textsuperscript{45}

Karen Yuen suggests Rossetti’s friendship with notable men and patrons, such as Frederick R. Leyland and Glasgow MP William Graham (1816-85) marks a shift in his beliefs, resulting in deliberate efforts by Rossetti to belittle and distance himself from music. Yuen accepts that Rossetti’s circle was an exception to Victorian norms in that it was partial to music. Many of the men in Rossetti’s circle collected musical instruments, such as Leyland, George Price Boyce (1826-97) and Charles Augustus Howell. Another of Rossetti’s circle, Franz Hueffer (1845-89), was considered to be the composer of Rossetti’s libretto \textit{The Doom of the Sirens} (1869). However, Yuen argues that these men aligned themselves with the masculine aspects of art and society, or were members of other respectable professions (shielding them from the emasculating aspects of music).\textsuperscript{46} She asserts that Rossetti’s stylistic shift in painting technique in the 1860s is his attempt to reassert his masculinity and disassociate himself from the emasculating threat music posed. She cites \textit{Morning Music} (1864) as a prime example of this shift.

Yuen gives many examples of other Victorians who snubbed music for the reason that it was considered more suitable for women.\textsuperscript{47} She argues that because Rossetti never exhibited in public and relied upon only a few patrons, patron perception of his masculinity would impact the sale of his paintings. Yuen states that this resulted in a ‘schizophrenic’ attitude towards music; torn between developing “its artistic potential or…illustrating its danger.”\textsuperscript{48} She points to Rossetti’s main patron, Leyland, as a source of such anxiety as he preferred paintings with women playing music. She notes Rossetti’s affirmation of Leyland’s musical taste in a letter from Rossetti to Leyland about the painting \textit{Desdemona’s Death-Song}, that it would “form a

\textsuperscript{44} Perceived homosexuality could result in being outcast by society. Simeon Solomon (1840-1905) was a social pariah after his arrest for attempted sodomy in 1873. Yuen discusses this theory in two articles previously mentioned: Yuen “Bound by Sound,” 79-96 and “Instruments of Ambivalence,” 145-60.

\textsuperscript{45} Herbert Sussman, \textit{Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Arts} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 166.

\textsuperscript{46} Yuen, “Bound by Sound,” 89-90.

\textsuperscript{47} Yuen, “Instruments of Ambivalence,” 153.

\textsuperscript{48} Yuen, “Instruments of Ambivalence,” 154.
splendid centre for other musical pictures in your drawing rooms." Yet, as Yuen points out, months later Rossetti wished “Leyland be d—d!”⁴⁹ In Yuen’s opinion, Rossetti’s outburst points to the frustration of artistic ambitions linked with the belief that “music could potentially feminise a man and that he must defend his manliness.”⁵⁰ She fails to realise that this remark was not anxiety over his masculinity, it was Rossetti’s frustration with Leyland not buying *La Ghirlandata* outright. Leyland insisted on viewing before buying upon hearing Rossetti had included two extra figures.⁵¹ In a fit of anger, Rossetti “sold over Leyland’s head.”⁵² However, Yuen also believes that Rossetti was anxious about failing to meet the requirements of music as both ‘feminising’ and ‘aesthetic ideal’ in his attempt to satisfy both.⁵³ Yet Phyllis Weliver rightly points out that Rossetti’s interest in music as aesthetic ideal pre-dates Pater’s “all art constantly aspires to the condition of music.”⁵⁴ Rossetti was not very concerned with conventional standards in any form, including the portrayal of masculinity within art. I assert instead that Rossetti’s art was unconventional. As Susan Casteras points out, the female types in his later works were considered unprecedented and despite outrage from critics he continued to paint in this style.⁵⁵ Part of his theory of art was to ‘allegorise on one’s own hook.’⁵⁶ Even his behaviour was considered eccentric, collecting

---


⁵¹ This was normal practice for Leyland, who insisted on seeing most of his paintings. Rossetti even acknowledged this habit in stating he could sell something to Graham without sight, as Leyland will have to see it. In reference to *La Ghirlandata* (1873), he wrote “Leyland was to have had it, but he wanted to see it first & put me out of temper, so I offered it to Graham.” See Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Monday [7 July 1873], (73.193), 189.

⁵² Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Friday 11 July [1873], (73.200), 196.


odd animals such as wombats, kangaroos, a Brahman bull, and attending séances. According to Allingham, even his walk was unconventional, having:

a peculiar long gait, often trailing the point of his umbrella on the ground, but still obstinately pushing on and making way, he humming the while with closed teeth, in the intervals of talk, not a tune or anything like one but what sounds like a *sotto voce* note of defiance to the Universe. Then suddenly he will fling himself down somewhere and refuse to stir an inch further.

His relationships with women were often unconventional and likely the cause of much gossip, not to mention exhuming his wife’s grave to retrieve his book of poetry. It is clear that such behaviour hardly reflected a man concerned with public perception. Royal Cortissoz (1869-1948) said of Rossetti and Whistler in 1903 that they preferred “a kind of curtained existence, in which they could ignore the claims of the schools and the world in general.”

This disregard for convention was also demonstrated in Rossetti’s art and was recognised by Evelyn Waugh who states:

Rossetti was unrestrained as no other artist of importance had been before, by any adequate aesthetic system either devised by himself or imposed upon him by convention. He was guided entirely by his own momentary preferences for a face or piece of patterned stuff, and by those of his clients, but there was in him, errant and erring, a streak of purest genius.

An acquaintance of Rossetti’s, Philip James Bailey (1816-1902), said the painter appeared to be “in deliberate revolt against society, delighting in any opportunity to startle well-ordered persons out of their propriety.”

The second theory I would like to discuss is the perception that Rossetti used music as a metaphor of the senses. Rossetti absorbed Renaissance attitudes towards symbolic objects

---


58 Allingham, *Diary*, Thursday September 19 1867, 162.

59 There is some evidence Fanny Cornforth (1835-1906) was a prostitute and his affair with her is often suggested as the cause of Elizabeth Siddal’s suicide. Rossetti also had a close friendship and affair with William Morris’ wife Jane. Although he did struggle with the decision of whether to exhume his wife’s grave.


and transformed the straightforward use of $x = y$ into an extended metaphor, so that one image could elicit a whole series of associations.\textsuperscript{63}

One aspect of this use of metaphor was Rossetti’s allegorical use of sensory transfer or synaesthesia (a metaphor of the senses). This is a matter I will discuss later in greater depth, as it was very much in evidence in many of Rossetti’s poetry and paintings, but it is important to understand that this was not something unique to Rossetti. As Wood points out, the interrelationship of colour and music was an accepted component of nineteenth-century aesthetic thought, fuelled by the writings of Théophile Gautier (1811-72) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-67).\textsuperscript{64} Théophile Gautier commented in 1843, “I hear the noise of colours; the green, red, blue, yellow sounds.”\textsuperscript{65} As Wood observes, Baudelaire went so far as to comment, “what would be truly surprising would be to find that sound could not suggest colour, that colours could not evoke the idea of a melody.”\textsuperscript{66} Contemporary critics have noted Rossetti’s familiarity with these ideas came mainly through his friendship with Swinburne, who was fascinated with sensory transfer and read excerpts from Gautier and Baudelaire in the company of Rossetti.\textsuperscript{67}

Many poets who influenced Rossetti used synaesthetic transfer including Lord Byron (1788-1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), John Keats (1795-1821), H. W. Longfellow (1807-82), William Morris and Edgar Allen Poe (1809-49).\textsuperscript{68} Poe was especially respected by Rossetti. Macleod notes Rossetti’s enthusiasm for the writings of Poe and attributes Poe as one inspiration for his poetry and paintings. According to Hall Caine, Rossetti admitted

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Defined as ‘Translating one sense impression into terms of another’. Ullmann proves that poets from this time typically transfer the sphere of touch to the sphere of sound. See Stephen de Ullmann, “Romanticism and Synaesthesia: A Comparative Study of Sense transfer in Keats and Byron,” \textit{PMLA} 60, 3 (Sept 1945): 813-820. Allingham also confirms Rossetti’s interest in the literature of “Blake, Keats, Shelley, Browning, Mrs Browning, Tennyson, Poe being first favourites, and now Swinburne.” (Allingham, \textit{Diary}, Thursday September 19 1867, 163).
\end{itemize}
modelling his painting *The Blessed Damozel* on Poe’s poem ‘The Raven.’

Poe’s poem ‘Ligeia’ is also the likely inspiration for Rossetti’s painting *Ligeia Siren.* Macleod notes that Poe’s ‘Ligeia’ is not about a siren, but about a mysterious woman with superhuman powers who responds to her husband’s love for her by coming back from the dead. Like Rossetti’s two Ligeias (the painting *Ligeia Siren* and his poem ‘The Doom of the Siren’), she depends upon the evocative power of music for her appeal. Poe uses synaesthetic transfer by comparing her eyes to “certain sounds from stringed instruments.”

Both Poe and Rossetti manipulate the mesmerising effects of music.

This kind of intermingling of senses in Rossetti’s paintings is also acknowledged by Yuen. She notes that Rossetti’s Venetian styled paintings of the 1860s show a noticeable change in his depictions of women and music. Music became less abstract and more sensual, mingling with colour, smell and touch. Yuen recognised Rossetti’s concern for music’s feminising potential as a particularly new addition to his artwork during this time.

As Drew points out the influence of poetry and music pervade both mediums of Rossetti’s art. “The idea that music and colour are two manifestations of a single vibration derives from Rosicrucian thought as explained in the writings of Hargrave Jennings.” Similarly, for Rossetti music and colour are alternative means of expressing the same underlying concept. Rossetti’s habit of writing poems for pictures, both his own and those of other painters, “indicates his view that the two arts compose a mutually linked creative duality which share the same roots in his artistic vision.”

For Rossetti, music also has the ability to communicate on higher realms.

---


72 Macleod, “Rossetti’s Two Ligeias,” 96.

73 Rossetti’s style distinctly changed in 1858 painting more in the style of the Venetian masters, particularly Giorgione and Titian.


As early as 1851, Rossetti wrote that music, unlike verbal language, could speak to the soul. This is exampled in his poem ‘During Music’ (1851), where despite the poet’s inability to recognise musical notation, music can ease pain and create joy:

The written music cramped and stiff;  
Tis dark to me, as hieroglyph,  
music soothes pain, provides joy and speaks to his soul  
o cool unto the sense of pain…Ó warm unto the sense of joy.77

Macleod also argues that music, for Rossetti, had the power to create a mood, to cast a spell, and to transport the spectator into a heavenly realm. Macleod believed that music provided a means to elevate the viewer from the mundane to the spiritual and was clearly associated with a supernatural ideal in the mind of Rossetti.78 For Macleod, Rossetti’s work reflects an interest in the inner struggles of Christianity and paganism.79 She comments that Rossetti’s recurring themes in his painting and poetry include the survival of love and reunion after death. Macleod notes that Rossetti recognised the source of his siren’s supernatural powers through her musicality.80 She labels the paintings Rossetti did for Leyland as a “formula he knew would sell” and dismisses the musical instruments as “purely decorative objects.”81 She calls all his musical subjects an attempt of a poet to imbue one art form with the ideality of another.82 She concludes that the function of music in Rossetti’s paintings and poetry presages one of the major concerns of the aesthetic movement in England and its counterparts abroad.83

Like Macleod, Yuen also considers Rossetti’s use of music as connected to higher realms. She posits Rossetti’s version of ‘music as aesthetic ideal’ invested music with the ability to connect the self with the universe. This was a theory known as Pythagorean mysticism, which Rossetti was exposed to through his father who introduced him to the works of the writer Dante Alighieri (1265-1321).84 Although the concept of ‘music as aesthetic ideal’ was not yet popular in Victorian England in the 1850s, Rossetti’s early education included studying the writings of Dante Alighieri and consequently Pythagorean mysticism.85 Rossetti spent much

78 Macleod, “Rossetti’s Two Ligeias,” 99.  
79 Macleod, 94-5.  
80 Macleod, 97.  
81 Macleod, 98.  
82 Macleod, 101.  
83 Macleod, 102.  
84 Yuen, “Instruments of Ambivalence,” 146.  
85 Rossetti himself states his Dantean education and his father’s influence in his book, “The first associations I have are connected with my father's devoted studies, which, from his own point of view, have done so much
of his lifetime translating Dante Alighieri’s work into English and painted many depictions of Dante’s love ideal Beatrice. Yuen uses The Blue Bower as an example of Rossetti translating music visually into sonorous (koto, zither) and hidden dimensions (colour combinations). Similarly, Helsinger believes that Rossetti was particularly interested in the sense or sensation aroused by sound. Although she focuses mainly on Rossetti’s poetry, she calls attention to Rossetti’s concept of the mind stimulated by music (either felt, heard or imagined). Much of his poetry supports this claim as the five senses are aroused separately, yet simultaneously, usually in a state of synaesthetic transfer. She briefly looks at three ‘sonnets for pictures’ created by Rossetti after being inspired by paintings in the Louvre. These were written in 1849, very early on in Rossetti’s career, which means they may not reflect his changing attitudes towards music. Helsinger argues that the subject of listening to music became a poetic and pictorial focus for the artists surrounding Rossetti after the break-up of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as both William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98) were interested in music. She claims Georgiana Burne-Jones (1840-1920, the wife of Edward) guided the domestic musical life of Rossetti’s circle; not only did she provide sing-alongs at their gatherings in 1857-8, but there was also collective music-making at Morris’s Red House in the summer of 1860. Helsinger also draws attention to Rossetti’s lyrics grouped under the title “Songs.” These song poems are not about the human voice, but waves of measured sound, heard and felt as a rhythmic pulse. One criticism of Helsinger’s work is her failure to address how song affected Rossetti’s work after 1860, which leaves one wondering how song affected the last twenty years of his life and his dramatic change in style from the 1860s onwards.


86 See The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice (1848), Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, Denies Him Her Salutation (1855), Beata Beatrix (1864), Jane Morris as Beatrice (c.1872), The Salutation of Beatrice (1880-1).
89 Helsinger, “Listening,” 414.
Weliver also writes of Rossetti’s connection with music and the soul. She observes that music for Rossetti is more than just a theme. For Rossetti, music makes up the structural and figurative elements of his poetry. It “mimics the speaker’s aspired unity of soul and body, of himself and his lover, and finally of his own personality.”

It is not surprising that Rossetti may have associated music with a higher purpose, as he had an interest in death and the afterlife which seems to have fascinated him for much of his life. As Fredeman points out, when Rossetti was translating Dante’s Vita Nuova and the early Italian poets in the 1840s, he was “obsessed with the subjects of beautiful women and unrequited love, often through death.” It could be that this obsession also increased after his wife’s suicide in 1862, and especially after his own suicide attempt in 1872. Many of his paintings after 1862 have overtones of death or the afterlife (Blessed Damozel, 1873, Desdemona’s Death Song 1878-81, A Sea Spell, 1877). However, Rossetti was not alone in this fascination; George Eliot (1819-80) uses music as an association with death and human loss in much of her work. Sounds of scythes, birdsong and the human voice feature in her novel Adam Bebe (1859).

Powell also writes of Rossetti’s use of music as connected to other realms, particularly as “exotic objects capable of evoking a time and place unrelated to the present; as traditional symbols of death, sexual desire, and love and as metaphors for synaesthetic interrelations between the visual or literary arts and music.” Powell notes his fascination with musical

---

92 For séances see Pedrick, Life with Rossetti, 98 and Kirsty Stonell, Stunner: The Fall and Rise of Fanny Cornforth ([S.l.]: Lulu Pub, c2006), 50-53 and Fredeman, Correspondence 1, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Michael Rossetti, [9 May 1851], (51.10n.1), 173. For superstition see Fredeman, Correspondence 2, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Michael Rossetti, Paris Tuesday [19 June 1860], (60.15n1), 300. Allingham confirms Rossetti’s interest in spiritualism: “we talk of Home and other ‘Spiritualists,’ about whom DGR [sic] has at least a curiosity” (Allingham, Diary, Sunday September 15 1867, 160-1) and “there are traces of superstition noticeable in him” (Allingham, Diary, Wednesday September 18 1867, 162). Fredeman notes “Of the appeal of the ‘marvellous and supernatural’ to DGR [sic], there is a great deal of evidence…throughout his life he was interested and sometimes distressed by what he saw as demonstrations of contacts from the world beyond.” (William E. Fredeman, ed., “Appendix 7: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Spiritualism,” The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Last Decade: 1873-1882, Kelmscott to Birchington, vol.7. 1875-77 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 401). DGR stands for Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
94 Kirsty Stonell, Stunner: The Fall and Rise of Fanny Cornforth ([S.l.]: Lulu Pub, c2006), 50-53
95 Sousa Correa, George Eliot, 2. Music and death features in much of George Eliot’s work, although unlike Rossetti, playing music was an important aspect of her life (see Sousa Correa, 2-4).
instruments that were medieval and early Renaissance prototypes. She believes his interest in music is not auditory. Instead she argues Rossetti valued music as a conceptual construct due to the imaginative associations they evoked. The ability of music to transport listeners to a different time or place was admired by Rossetti, as demonstrated in his poem “Dante at Verona.” Powell notes Rossetti’s ability to construct fanciful musical instruments but believes this “evokes a golden age of innocence and purity that contrasts dramatically with the immorality perceived in the present.” One interesting point she raises is Rossetti’s representation of music and death in the form of what she calls the ‘psychopomp musician.’ This musician, representing music, death and immortality, would accompany the soul to the Elysian Fields: the transition from death into the afterlife. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* also dealt with this subject in connection with the music of the spheres. Powell comments on Rossetti’s association of sirens with musical instruments, although noting the traditionally noble associations connected with stringed instruments, such as love and worship. She notes the theme of the female musician as an enchantress or enticer, which recurs throughout Rossetti’s work, even though the musician often seems innocent. However, despite her recognition of Rossetti’s use of sirens and musical instruments, Powell also argues Rossetti’s incorrect depictions of performance practice prove he did not understand how the instruments were constructed or played. She believes that these incorrect depictions unfortunately undermine the credibility and artistic value of the paintings.

Johnson also observes Rossetti’s lack of concern for performance practice and inaccurate depictions of musical instruments. Although Johnson mainly focuses on Rossetti’s depictions of the Japanese *koto* in *The Blue Bower* (1865) and *A Sea Spell* (1877), he provides a thorough analysis of Rossetti’s use of musical instruments in both paintings. Johnson also notes Rossetti’s use of music as conceptual constructs or exotic still life objects and questions the rationale behind apparent inaccuracies in Rossetti’s depictions. Johnson points out the contradiction between the abundance of musical instruments found in Rossetti’s work and his much documented dislike of music. Johnson suggests the possibility that Rossetti painted from a *koto* in his possession and the possible symbolic purposes behind Rossetti’s use of musical instruments in these paintings.

97 Powell, 17.
98 Powell, 18.
99 Powell, 19.
100 Powell, 20.
101 Powell, 16.
102 Johnson, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Japan,” 149.
In summary, Rossetti clearly had a complicated relationship with music. Many friends and scholars considered him to have no interest in music whatsoever, yet he collected many musical instruments and attended musical events. Yet music was a significant part of Victorian culture, particularly the aesthetic movement. Music had an effect on parts of society that were not musical. Musical terminology was even applied to Rossetti himself. Music was also a source of inspiration to other aspects of the arts.

I have discussed two theories concerning Rossetti’s complicated interest in music. The first theory is that Rossetti downplayed his enjoyment of music to protect his masculinity, as was common in the Victorian era. The second theory is that Rossetti used music as a metaphor for the senses, using sensory transfer or synaesthesia, or using music to connect to higher realms, or to connect to the soul.

In the next chapter, I will discuss Rossetti’s first painting for Leyland, *Lady Lilith* (1868). Following this art work, Leyland commissioned other paintings by Rossetti that were in a similar vein.
Chapter Two

Leyland’s interest in music and his first commission, Lady Lilith

Lady Lilith (1868) was the first of a series of paintings that Frederick Leyland bought. As such, it is important to first look at Lilith as a signal of works to come. From this art work, Leyland commissioned other paintings by Rossetti that were in a similar vein. This chapter therefore investigates the iconography of Lady Lilith, the sources Rossetti used, the significant features such as flower symbolism, hair, symbols of insincerity, and the theme of reflection or mirroring. It is useful to assess the critical reception of the painting, including how the repainting was regarded. This chapter will investigate Rossetti’s Venetian style, of which Lady Lilith is a prime example. In order to comprehend Leyland’s paintings, it is necessary to grasp Leyland’s preferences and requirements, including the importance of the layout of the paintings in his house. Leyland’s artistic and musical tastes are also significant aspects of his life. This chapter will also explore the ways music was connected to Leyland in various ways by his friend, turned enemy, James Whistler. Lastly, in order to understand Leyland the patron, this chapter discusses the disagreements Leyland had with Rossetti.

Figure 1: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), Lady Lilith, 1864-73. Oil on canvas, 95 x 81 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA/ Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial/ The Bridgeman Art Library Nationality

104 Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2011, November 25.
As Fennell asserts, “Leyland was the kind of buyer who made demands on Rossetti’s art, who helped determine the shape and direction of that art.” Leyland specifically sought depictions of enlarged single figure females usually three-quarter length, with full, red, fleshy lips, sleepy eyes, abundant hair, contorted hands and a long neck. A photograph taken of Leyland’s Drawing Room in 1892 captures Leyland’s plan for a room filled with Rossetti’s paintings (see below).

![Image of Leyland's Drawing Room](image-url)

**Figure 2:** Henry Bedford Lemere (Photographer), “Frederick Leyland’s House, 49 Princes Gate, London. The Drawing Room (1892)” in Nicholas Cooper, *The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design* (London: Architectural Press, 1976), 91

Adorned on the walls from left to right are *Monna Rosa* (1867), *Mnemosyne* (1876-81) *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-9), *Proserpine* (1874), *Veronica Veronese* (1872) and *Lady Lilith* (1868). This grand design for the Leyland household may have been the influence of

---


Leyland’s friend Whistler who stated that “the painter must also make of the wall upon which his work hung, the room containing it, the whole house, a Harmony, a Symphony, an Arrangement, as perfect as the picture or print which became a part of it.”

It is clear Leyland had a specific plan for the arrangement of Rossetti’s paintings on his walls. Music was clearly important to Leyland and even in the arrangement of paintings, music played a role. This importance is evident in a statement Leyland made to Rossetti’s business agent, Charles Howell, explaining the reason he turned down Rossetti’s painting La Ghirlandata. Leyland said:

You see Howell three heads would never do for me, the pictures must run round like music notes, a head in each, that one must follow them round the room, only it is the devil to say so to Rossetti, as of course he knows best what to paint, but then, one knows what one wants.

Rossetti was aware of Leyland’s specific requirements and admitted to catering to his demands, as he said in a statement to Howell:

Leyland is a queer hard chap about pictures, obstinate as a mule…if Leyland got the slightest inkling that I discussed matters with you in this way, I would never learn anything more from him respecting his art transactions, and to know what he thinks is quite as valuable as his tin for one can always please him the better by working to his pulse.

It is evident from the pictures Leyland bought, that Rossetti’s intention was to cater to his patron who demanded three quarter-length females; as William Michael Rossetti stated “if Gabriel depicted the subject [of females and flowers] to the point of monotony, it was only because his patrons wanted nothing else.”

Although Lady Lilith does not have a musical theme, the painting cannot be separated from many of Leyland’s paintings with musical subjects. Not only are they visually similar in composition and form, but many were identified as companion pieces by both artist and patron. As stated in the previous chapter, I will demonstrate how Lady Lilith (1868), Veronica Veronese (1873), La Ghirlandata (1873), Roman Widow (or Dîs Manibus) (1874),

---

108 Cline, *Owl and the Rossettis*, Charles Augustus Howell to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 7 July 1873, no. 261.  
109 Cline, *Owl and the Rossettis*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 13 November 1872, no.161. ’Tin’ was Rossetti’s word for ‘money.’

and *A Sea Spell* (1877), which were all intended for Leyland’s walls, are all interconnected in theme and form. 

*Lady Lilith* is one of the first of Rossetti’s Venetian style paintings of his later years. This style departs so drastically from his previous work and from traditional standards of beauty and form, that these works were only appreciated by a select few of Rossetti’s patrons. Scholars have only recently reassessed Rossetti’s late period to perceive it as having worthy qualities. According to Fennel, every scholar up until the end of the 20th century, “agreed that the paintings of Rossetti’s last years show a marked decline in artistic power.” The painting depicts Lilith, who according to Jewish legend was Adam’s first wife and Eve’s predecessor. Lilith assumed the shape of a serpent to creep into Eden, in order to present temptation in the form of forbidden fruit and bring about the Fall of Man. She is therefore the original femme fatale. McGann points out that: “the myth of Lilith developed as a

111 For the influences of Ruskin and Titian on Rossetti’s new style see Allan Staley, “Pre-Raphaelites in the 1860s: I. Rossetti,” *The British Art Journal* 4, 3 (Summer, 2003), 8-10.

112 Jerome McGann’s reassesses Rossetti’s failure in traditional perspective to be seen as post-modernist experiments in abstract art. McGann argues that Rossetti’s treatment of linear spaces has been wrongly viewed as technical failings, as opposed to a deliberate rejection of correct perspective. “Fifty years later Rossetti’s views on this matter helped to launch some of the most important lines of Modernist art” See Jerome McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the game that must be lost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 110-118, page 111 for quote. As I discuss later in the chapter, J. Hillis Miller also reinterprets Rossetti’s painting *Lady Lilith* as having a level of sophistication by morphing realism, body enlargement and deliberate inaccurate perspective to create a disturbingly claustrophobic enclosure; a space that is not comforting but uncomfortably exposed to the dangers of Lilith (J. Hillis Miller, “The Mirror’s Secret: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Double Work of Art,” *Victorian Poetry* 29, 4 (Winter 1991): 335).

113 Fennell, *The Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, xxiii. See also J. Comyns Carr, *Papers on Art* (London: Macmillan, 1885), 229-30. <http://www.archive.org/details/papersonart00gabrgoo> [Accessed 2013, May 18], who argues “the change that came over his art was not healthful but hurtful…individual forms and faces…he began to force and exaggerate the reality he was no longer able to control…with the failing health of later years.” Fredeman states that “the weaknesses of his paintings…are obviously to even the untrained eye. The simple fact is that as a painter Rossetti never fully mastered his craft, particularly in oils.” William E. Fredeman, “Introduction: “What is wrong with Rossetti?” : A Centenary Reassessment,” *Victorian Poetry* 20 ¾ (Autumn-Winter, 1982), xxii. *West Virginia University Press* [database, UWO]. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40002977 [Accessed 2013, May 23]. His change of style was seen as a lead up to his suicide attempt in 1872. His decision to paint over many paintings after his attempted suicide, including *Lady Lilith* in 1872 has often been used as evidence of his mental health and declining skill (e.g. Manillier states that Lilith was altered “after one of his illnesses, when he became seized with a sort of mania for altering his work…with anything but satisfactory results.” See H. C. Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, An Illustrated Memorial of His Life* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), 134 via Jerome McGann, “Transcript: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life,” *Rossetti Archive*. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/nd497.t8.m33.rad.html#p134arecto> [Accessed 2012, June 1]. Surtees also describes the repainting of Lilith as having “disastrous consequences”, see Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (1828-1882): *A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 116.


response to the divergent creation stories in the first chapter of Genesis. God made Lilith and Adam from the dust and partnered them, but, when Lilith refused subservience and fled, God made Adam a new helpmate.”

Some critics have also read the painting as a commentary on the New Woman Movement in Victorian England, as Spencer-Longhurst observes:

The women’s emancipation movement began to affect the conventions of male-female relations with the first petition for women’s suffrage in 1866. The subsidiary role of women began to be challenged, together with mid-Victorian stereotypes including…the ‘fallen woman’…Rossetti’s response to these changes is complex, but they must have played a part in the genesis of his mystic-erotic female portraits.

Rossetti has depicted her sitting in her toilette combing her abundant golden hair while impassively gazing at her reflection in a hand held mirror. Rossetti attached a sonnet to the frame of the painting to further explain the subject:

Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
(The witch he loved before the gift of Eve)
That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
And subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?
Lo! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent,
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.

It is important to look at Rossetti’s sources of inspirations in order to understand his paintings. Rossetti used a variety of complex sources for several of his paintings and Lady Lilith was no exception. There are many possible areas of inspiration for the painting Lady Lilith. He came across the myth of Lilith at various times in his life, mainly through literary research. Rossetti’s decision to depict Lilith combing her hair shows a depth of understanding for traditional iconography. As Bentley observes, the figure of a woman combing her hair has

---

118 The original draft for this poem used the word ‘net’ instead of ‘web.’
at least three allegorical traditions: the Christian tradition, representing the sin of vanity; the Dantean tradition, whereby Rachel gazing at her reflection in Dante’s *Purgatorio* (section 27) represents the contemplative life; and the Classical tradition, whereby the beautiful woman looking at herself in a mirror represents incarnate Beauty contemplating itself.\textsuperscript{120}

The literary inspirations for *Lady Lilith* include Johann Wolfgang van Goethe’s (1749-1832) ‘Faust.’ Rossetti knew Goethe’s plays from childhood according to his brother.\textsuperscript{121} Rossetti’s assistant, Henry Treffry Dunn, questioned Rossetti on the female in *Lady Lilith*, to be told of: “the Talmudic legend concerning her, and then I understood the allusion to her in *Faust*, where Goethe introduces Lilith into the witch scene on the Hartzbrocken, and makes Faust ask the same question in almost the same words that I had used.”\textsuperscript{122}

Further evidence that Rossetti clearly knew of Goethe’s legend of Lilith, is illustrated by the fact that he wrote a quote from Goethe on the back of one of the replicas: “*Lady Lilith,* Beware of her fair hair for she excels All women in the magic of her locks And when she twines them round a young man’s neck She will not ever let him go again. Goethe.”\textsuperscript{124}

Rossetti may have seen illustrations of Lilith by Theodor von Holst (1810-44), as he was one of the few artists to have depicted the Walpurgisnacht scene from *Faust* where Faust first sees Lilith.\textsuperscript{125} Rossetti admired von Holst, collected his engravings and, in 1855, frequented a restaurant decorated with von Holst’s paintings.\textsuperscript{126} Another literary inspiration for *Lady Lilith* is Keats's “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” a femme fatale epic poem about a witch-lady who

---


\textsuperscript{122} Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti*, 52.

\textsuperscript{123} Goethe’s *Faust*, quoted in Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti*, 52.


\textsuperscript{126} Allen, “‘One Strangling Golden Hair,” 286 cites W. M. Rossetti *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters* (London 1900), 176. Footnote from Ford Madox Brown’s (1821-93) Diary, dated April 12, 1855.
seduces a knight, condemning him to an early death. Rossetti also included the myth of Lilith in his poem “Eden Bower” (1869) which revolves around the destructive qualities of beauty and love.\(^{127}\)

Flower symbolism is an important aspect to understand Rossetti’s paintings. Flower symbolism is rife in *Lady Lilith*. The sonnet for *Lady Lilith* states “The rose and poppy are her flowers.” As Sarah Phelps Smith observes, Rossetti uses these flowers to assert the idea that love of female beauty leads to destruction.\(^{128}\) The rose is a traditional symbol of love, yet the idea of love does not fit with Lilith because she is a temptress who destroys love rather than fostering it. White roses however can be seen as intentionally used, if the painting is interpreted as incorporating the popular legend that all the roses in paradise were initially white until Eve kissed one because of its great beauty, which caused all of the roses blushed red with the compliment. Since Lilith was Adam’s first wife before Eve, the roses in her Eden therefore would be white.\(^{129}\)

A poppy rests in a jar on the bottom right of the painting. The poppy is a symbol of death and sleep, such a flower is a fitting attribute for Lilith who causes death after snaring her victims.\(^{130}\) Merrill points out that the poppy also has personal significance for Rossetti as it is a derivative of the laudanum that killed his wife, Elizabeth Siddal.\(^{131}\) It is interesting to note that although the poppy is a symbol of death, it is also an attribute of Venus who is the Roman goddess associated with love, beauty and fertility.\(^{132}\) This positions Lilith in opposition to the positive attributes Venus encompasses but may also suggest Lilith has the potential to display the qualities associated with Venus in an attempt to capture the hearts of her victims.

Other flower symbols include the wreath on Lilith’s lap, which Smith identifies as woven with daisies.\(^{133}\) The daisies however are not mentioned in the sonnet. Signifying “innocence,”

---


\(^{129}\) Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 97 cites “The legend is frequently repeated in books on the language of flowers, e.g. *Garland of Flora*, 143, or *Language of Flowers* (Saunders & Otley, 1835), 109, which also cites a poem by Carey (?). According to Surtees the flowers were hand picked by a group of Rossetti’s friends from John Ruskin’s garden (Surtees, *Paintings and Drawings*, 117).

\(^{130}\) Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 96.

\(^{131}\) Merrill, *The Peacock Room*, 80. It is unclear whether Elizabeth Siddal accidentally overdosed on the drug or committed suicide. It is also the drug Rossetti occasionally used in his suicide attempt in June 1872.

\(^{132}\) Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art*, 165.

\(^{133}\) Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 96.
the daisies are at first a puzzling attribute for Lilith. Since they are not, however, referred to as one of Lilith’s flowers, it is evident that they are not a true attribute but an intentioned disguise Lilith assumes in order to entrap the hearts of men. She wears the wreath to make her beauty seem harmless or to make each man feel that he is her first lover. But as the painting suggests, when alone at her dressing table she removes the disguise to comb her hair. This is not the only floral symbol of insincerity however. Purple foxgloves sit on her dressing table to the left of the painting. Foxglove signifies “insincerity;” it is a beautiful but deadly poisonous flower. The foxglove is particularly appropriate for Lilith who is herself beautiful but deadly. The omission of the foxglove from the published sonnet may have been to improve the meter, or perhaps because its meaning was not as well known as those of the poppy and the rose.

Hair is a significant symbol in Victorian era paintings, including Rossetti’s. Lady Lilith is one such example. According to his contemporaries, Rossetti was obsessed with hair. One contemporary, Elizabeth Gaskell, calls Rossetti ‘hair mad’:

I had a good deal of talk with him, always excepting the times when ladies with beautiful hair came in when he was like the cat turned into a lady who jumped out of bed and ran after a mouse. It did not signify what we were talking about or how agreeable I was, if a particular kind of reddish brown, crepe-wavy hair came in, he was away in a moment struggling for an introduction to the owner of said head of hair. He is not mad as a March hare, but hair-mad.

Although hair has long had symbolic connotations in Christian art, long flowing hair denotes a penitent woman, as with Mary Magdalene. It also denotes virginity or, at least, the unmarried state, yet the Renaissance courtesan usually has her hair tied up, as does the ‘earthly’ Venus. Fascination with women’s hair became increasingly prevalent in painting,
literature and popular culture of the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Elisabeth Gitter observes, women’s hair had complex meanings for the Victorians; it could function as an aureole or bower, but easily become a glittering snare, web, or noose. Allen asserts that this newfound fear of the destructive potential of women emerged as a result of the Women’s Emancipation Movement and the controversy over family planning in the 1860’s. Weaving or hair combing was often associated with music, “whether the deadly song of the nixie, swan maiden, or mermaid or the mournful songs of Desdemona and the Lady of Shalott.”

Hair is often used as a symbolic device in Rossetti’s paintings. As Allen points out, hair is used in Rossetti’s paintings as a symbol of the erotic and destructive power possessed by the femme fatale. Spencer-Longhurst also observes that in many Rossetti paintings, “hair is given great significance as a metaphor for female sexuality…auburn or ‘red’ hair was generally held to denote a passionate, wilful or evil temperament…undressed hair on adults was taken to indicate sexual readiness or looseness of morals.”

Dorment states that

---


140 Gitter, “Power of Women’s Hair,” 936.


142 Gitter, “Power of Women’s Hair,” 938. Rossetti made a drawing of *The Lady of Shalott* in 1856-7, and also sketched *Desdemona’s death song* (1870-81), which he intended to paint for Leyland, but never completed. According to McGann, “He felt that the scene illustrated would suit the musical theme that dominated in Leyland's drawing room, and even environed its placement above his patron's piano.” (McGann, “Desdemona’s Death Song,” *Rossetti Archive*. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s254.raw.html> [Accessed 2012, June 1].

143 Allen, “One Strangling Golden Hair,” 286. Rossetti never used the phrase “femme fatale” as it was not coined until 1895.

“Rossetti’s obsession with women’s hair is palpably demonstrated by his *Lady Lilith*…the vulgar but compelling image…is bursting with erotic undertones focused on her hair.”

Hair is also traditionally associated with musical instruments. Gitter points out that a woman’s hair could be used as strings on an instrument, to lure men to their death or reveal their destruction in life. One such example is the Scottish-Irish ballad ‘The Cruel Sister’, which was another planned but unexecuted painting by Rossetti (c.1867), in which one sister kills another for the love of a man. A passing harper finds the body and fashions a harp out of her remains using her yellow hair for strings. Once played, the harp reveals and condemns her murderer.

In Robert Browning’s “The Flight of the Duchess,” the gypsy queen makes magical music that infuses the duchess and her reanimated hair, with new life:

> ...that filling her, passed redundant  
> Into her very hair, back swerving  
> Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,  
> As her head thrown back showed the white  
> throat curving;  
> And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,  
> Moving to the mystic measure,  
> Bounding as the bosom bounded. (Browning, lines 545-51)

Rossetti’s hair obsession even appears in his own poetry. Gitter observes that Rossetti was the most prolific poet of his era to use hair tents (where a female lies on top of a man, letting her hair drape over him creating a tent made of hair). An example of this can be found in his poem, “The Stream’s Secret”:

> Beneath her sheltering hair,  
> In the warm silence near her breast,  
> Our kisses and our sobs shall sink to rest;  
> As in some trance made aware  
> That day and night have wrought to fullness there  
> And Love has built our nest. (“The Stream’s Secret,” lines 79-84)

---

145 Richard Dorment, “Venice, the Night and the Haunted Woman,” *Arts Magazine*, 45, 5 (March 1971), 42. Dorment mistakenly identifies the female as Fanny Cornforth instead of Alexa Wilding. It is unclear if he is commenting on an earlier image of the painting featuring Cornforth.


147 Gitter, “Power of Women’s Hair,” 941.

As J. Hillis Miller observes, Lilith’s tresses function within *Lady Lilith* to create flow within the painting. Her hair matches the branches of the rose bush, both which spread from left to right.\(^{149}\)

As Rossetti clearly knew of the symbolic associations between hair and musical instruments, it is not unrealistic to propose that he deliberately used the visual connotation of Lilith ‘playing’ her hair like an instrument to create visual pendants with other Leyland musical paintings, where the females depicted are playing musical instruments in similar poses (e.g. *Veronica Veronese* and *A Sea Spell*).

*Lady Lilith* contains many symbols of insincerity. Lilith’s dress is the first sign of insincerity. The dress Lilith wears is white, which is traditionally a symbol of innocence and purity, a colour not associated with a femme fatale. However, the dress has slipped off her shoulder to expose her porcelain flesh, a sign of the dangers of the flesh. Rossetti’s choice of the colour white for the dress is deliberate as he took great care in the choice of dress for his paintings. For example, when Rossetti stayed at Kelmscott Manor, he would request Dunn send specific costumes via train, noting colour, fabric and distinctive features of the material:

> There is a silk remnant…described in your inventory as “A remnant silk (blood red)” – [sic] my impression is that it is rather crimson brown shot with tawny. I dare say it is the same however. Would you include this in the parcel, together with “Chinese brown silk robe with gold circles on it” and “A silver blue scarf with purple fringe.”\(^{150}\)

Furthermore, Rossetti reveals to Howell that a dress can make a picture: “do you ever come across costume draperies? These are invaluable to me, as a picture can be made on the strength of a good thing of the kind. Or properties such as the harp you got me, without which I should never have painted this Ghirlandata.”\(^{151}\) As this quote demonstrates, the choice of clothing was just as important as the musical instruments. Therefore, Rossetti’s choice of a white dress would have been a carefully considered choice used to mislead the viewer into believing Lilith’s innocence, much like Lilith’s victims.

Another symbol of insincerity can be seen in the white fur lining of the chair in which Lilith sits, as it was also used in another of Rossetti’s femme fatale paintings, *The Blue Bower*


\(^{150}\) Fredeman, *Correspondence* 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Sunday [13 July 1873?], (73.205), 200.

\(^{151}\) Cline, *Owl and the Rossettis*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 28 August 1873, no.289.
(1865), in which fur is draped around the neck of the femme fatale subject of the painting. Rossetti may have deliberately used this white fur accessory as a symbol of a femme fatale.

As we continue to the left side of the painting, further symbols of insincerity become apparent. Apart from the foxglove already mentioned, extinguished candles also feature in *Lady Lilith* on the left reflected in the mirror. Candles in general can be seen as a seemingly pure symbol as they denote Christ as ‘the light of the world.’ However, extinguished candles symbolise the death of Christ, or in this case presumably the death of Lilith’s victims. A bottle of perfume sits on the night stand, which Lilith could use to entice men into her snare. The perfume is mentioned in the sonnet, recognised as a tool Lilith uses to seduce men: “Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent, And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?”

The inspiration for adding perfume as an attribute of Lilith may have come from Titian’s *Woman with a Mirror* (c.1515), which Rossetti probably saw on his trip to Paris in 1849 and again, as Virginia Allen points out, in 1864, which she argues inspired the painting of *Lady Lilith.* These symbols of insincerity communicate to the viewer of the painting that Lilith is morally corrupt.

![Figure 3: Titian (c.1488/90-1576), *Woman with a Mirror*, c.1515. Oil on canvas, 99 x 75 cm. Réunion des musées nationaux Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre), Paris](image)

---

152 Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art*, 60.
154 Copyright permission obtained from Réunion des musées nationaux Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre), Paris, 2013, March 22.
Titian’s *Woman with a Mirror* may have inspired Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* in other ways; both women are portrayed handling their waist-length tresses, both are portrayed with the shoulder of their dresses falling off the shoulder and both paintings feature two mirrors. In both paintings the female subject can see her reflection in the hand held mirror, yet what she sees remains hidden from the viewer. Both paintings have the second mirror directed at the viewer. However, while Titian’s painting provides a further angle of the woman for the viewer, Rossetti’s provides a view of Lilith’s past.

Another inspiration Rossetti may have taken from Titian’s *Woman with a Mirror* is the use of the mirror to explore a complex scene. The mirror in the top left hand corner of *Lady Lilith* reflects a verdant garden. It is unlikely this was intended to be an actual reflection of the enclosed space Lilith occupies. It could be taken as a representation of the Eden Lilith left behind, the mirror acting as a barrier to the paradise with which she was once familiar. According to Merrill, the reflected garden represents the lost paradise of Rossetti’s wedded bliss with Elizabeth Siddal. This seems unlikely, however, because not only did Siddal not feature in the painting, but their marriage could hardly be described as blissful.

Rossetti had a fascination with mirrors. The auction catalogue of Rossetti’s residence at the time of his death lists (at a conservative estimate) thirty-one glasses and mirrors. According to D.M.R Bentley, Rossetti’s “dining room at his death contained at least eight convex mirrors, including “a set of five…put together…by himself” in an “ebony and gilt frame” of his own design”.

---

158 Merrill, *The Peacock Room*, 80.
159 Her constant failing health and the stillbirth of their first child could not have made for a happy home. Shortly after marriage Rossetti writes of “and anxious and disturbed life mine is while she remains in this state” (Fredeman, *Correspondence* 2, DGR to William Michael Rossetti, Saturday [9 June 1860], (60.13), 297). Her death has been thought of as suicide by many scholars and Fredeman points out that apart from Elizabeth Siddal being an ailing and unhealthy woman, she also abused alcohol and took drugs (see Fredeman, “Appendix 6: The Death of Elizabeth Eleanor (nee Siddal) Rossetti,” *Correspondence* 3, 400).
points out “mirrors are instruments of a universal magic that converts things into spectacle, spectacle into things, myself into another, and another into myself.”\textsuperscript{162} David G. Reide acutely notes that Rossetti “consistently saw surfaces as the most profound symbols of emotional and psychological depths.\textsuperscript{163} Rodger Drew writes, “the Rossettian motif of the mirror expresses both the relationship between man and Nature, and between man and his inner nature. The symbolic glass of his soul reflects the nature within himself as the counterpart of that without.”\textsuperscript{164} Therefore, it is no surprise that mirroring or reflection is a theme which bonds the Leyland paintings as pendants. As Lemere’s photograph of Leyland’s salon shows (see figure 2), \textit{Lady Lilith} and \textit{Veronica Veronese} were hung side by side, appearing as almost mirror images. Leyland clearly recognised the aesthetic mirroring effect of the two paintings and exaggerated this feature by displaying \textit{Lady Lilith} and \textit{Veronica Veronese} side by side but divided merely by a mirror, further emphasising the mirroring quality of the paintings.\textsuperscript{165} The mirror featured in \textit{Lady Lilith} is not what we expect. Jerome McGann points out that the garden or natural scene reflected in the mirror in \textit{Lady Lilith} is an impossible imagination by any realistic measure:

It is as if the mirror in Lilith’s enclosed and fantastic realm (or room) magically preserved a memory of the Edenic garden which she fled. The mirror functions, formally speaking, as a window. But the mirrors allusion to that typical piece of pictorial symbology is negative and critical, for it does not face (spatially) outward and (temporally) forward, but inward and backward. Furthermore, the mirror’s placement suggests that if we are to imagine it reflecting anything actual, it would have to be the world inhibited by the spectator of the painting.\textsuperscript{166}

Rossetti took inspiration from Titian’s use of mirrors. McGann points out that Titian’s \textit{Venus with a Mirror} (1555) was the inspiration for Rossetti’s sketch \textit{Venus Surrounded by Mirrors Reflecting Her Different Views} (c.1863-66).\textsuperscript{167} Although this sketch was never executed into

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
a painting, it may have also provided inspiration for the illusionary reflected views depicted in *Lady Lilith*.

![Figure 4](image1.png)

**Figure 4:** Titian (c.1488/90-1576), *Venus with a Mirror*, 1555. Oil on canvas, 124 x 105 cm. National Gallery of Art, Andrew Mellon collection, Washington

The mirror depicted in *Lady Lilith* acts as a looking glass and may be an allusion to the myth of ‘The Lady of Shalott,’ a popular theme in Victorian art and literature. In the myth, the Lady of Shalott uses a mirror, which operates as a looking glass, to spy on the neighbouring

---

168 Copyright permission obtained from National Gallery of Art, New York, 2011, December 24.
169 Robin Alston is listed as the copyright holder for this image, but he passed away in July 2011. Although the estate is currently being contested, copyright permission obtained from London University May 2013, but image removed from online version at the request of London University.
town. She is reclusive and spends her days weaving. Her downfall occurs when she spies Lancelot in her mirror and falls in love with him. In Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* the mirror operates as a looking glass much like in ‘The Lady of Shalott.’ The garden seen in the mirror could not possibly be a reflection considering the enclosed space in which Lilith sits. It can either be interpreted as The Garden of Eden (Lilith’s first home), providing the Victorian audience with added symbolism so they are reminded of Lilith’s origin, or it can be interpreted that Lilith is using the mirror as a looking glass to ensnare further victims, perhaps eluding to the idea that, like The Lady of Shalott, she may fall in love with a passing stranger. Either interpretation adds to the narrative, while providing emotional (or potential emotional) depth to Rossetti’s Lilith.

It may also be relevant that William Holman Hunt’s *Awakening Conscience* (1853-4) also makes use of a garden scene reflected in a mirror. Rossetti would have known of this painting and possibly used it as inspiration, as the two men were members of The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The girl in Hunt’s famous painting is depicted in her epiphany of redemption as she stares out the window. In Rossetti’s painting, Lilith has her eyes turned away from the garden, perhaps symbolic of her inability to be saved. Miller states that the confusion of interior and exterior, window and mirror, is characteristic of the art Walter Pater referred to as “aesthetic.” In such artistic works, nature has been made into an image of art, and those images are made over once more, the result being something that does not quite resemble nature but something deliberately artificial. Miller argues that the realism of the flowers combined with the grotesquely enlarged features of Lilith and Rossetti’s arguably deliberate lack of accurate perspective create a disturbingly claustrophobic enclosure; a space that is not comforting but uncomfortably exposed to the dangers of Lilith.

The red tassel tied around the end of the mirror in *Lady Lilith* creates links to other erotically themed paintings by Rossetti featuring his mistress, Fanny Cornforth. A red tassel is also tied around the female subject’s neck in Rossetti’s *Woman Combing Her Hair* (1864), which features Fanny combing her long red hair with one hand and holding a mirror up to her hair with the other. A red tassel is also tied around the end of the Japanese koto in Rossetti’s *The

---

171 See Miller, “The Mirror’s Secret,” 335.
172 Fanny Cornforth was disliked by many of Rossetti’s friends and family. Although Rossetti painted her often in the early days of his career, she was replaced by other models such as Alexa Wilding and Jane Morris.
Blue Bower (1865) in which Fanny is again the model. In this way, the red tassel creates links between the instrument, mirror and the women featured in the paintings.\(^{173}\)

The initial reception of *Lady Lilith* provides insight into the Victorian perception of the painting. The consensus amongst the reviews focus on the body or fleshliness of Lilith, which is fitting as Rossetti described her as the symbol of “Body’s Beauty.”\(^{174}\) Rossetti’s friend Algernon Charles Swinburne wrote of *Lady Lilith* in 1868:

For this serene and sublime sorceress there is no life but of the body; with spirit (if spirit there be) she can dispense…of evil desire or evil impulse she has nothing; and nothing of good. She is indifferent, equable, magnetic; she charms and draws down the souls of men by pure force of absorption, in no wise wilful or malignant [sic]; outside herself she cannot live, she cannot even see: and because of this she attracts and subdues all men at once in body and in spirit.\(^{175}\)

H. C. Marillier (1865-1951) described *Lady Lilith* as “the incarnation of the world and the flesh, with all sorts of latent suggestions of the third element…She herself was a serpent first, and knows the gift of fascination. Bowered in roses…no painter has ever idealized like this the elemental power of carnal loveliness.”\(^{176}\) In this description Marillier emphasises the

\(^{173}\) The theme of the red tassel could be taken from Goethe’s *Faust* in which Faust marvels at Lilith’s scarlet string tied around her neck (taken from an 1820 outline of *Faust* by Retzsch which William Rossetti states of Gabriel: “the outlines of Retzsch from the great drama having been highly familiar to him at a very early age (say six).” McGann, “William Michael Rossetti: Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer, 1889,” *Rossetti Archive*. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/nd497.r8r8.rad.html> [Accessed 2012, May 1].


other-worldliness of Rossetti’s creation. He describes the enclosed space as a bower, which to
Victorian viewer’s implied a lover’s bower. Spencer-Longhurst states that ‘bower’: “was a
word used by Coleridge, Keats, Tennyson and other Romantic poets to denote a setting for
love – [sic] either a lady’s private apartment in a medieval castle, or a sheltered place in a
garden made from boughs.” The bower seems a fitting setting for Lilith, the mistress of
delusion and seduction, who appears ready for love but merely sets traps.
Spencer-Longhurst also states that Shakespeare established the connection of bowers with
music in Henry IV, Part I:

…sweet as ditties highly penn’d
Sung by a fair queen in a summer’s bower,
With ravishing division, to her lute.

William Michael Rossetti, tried to remove Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s association with the
occult, of which he held a clear fascination. William Michael Rossetti states “the accessories
are those of an ordinary modern tiring-chamber. There is thus in the picture not anything to
connect it with Lilith the first serpent-bride of Adam, nor to indicate a deep occult meaning
of any kind.” This is a bizarre statement, considering the overwhelming evidence
indicating Rossetti’s fascination with all things occult and Rossetti’s sonnet attached to the
picture frame which begins, “Of Adam’s first wife, Lilith, it is told.” William Michael
Rossetti was clearly trying to protect the reputation of his brother by constructing a more
sanitised view for the world.

Lady Lilith (1868) was famously repainted years after it was sold in 1872. Rossetti made
the sole change of painting over the face depicting Fanny Cornforth to paint Alexa Wilding in
her place.

177 For more information on bowers in the Victorian period see Elisabeth Gitter, “The Power of Women’s Hair
180 W.M. Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer (London: Cassell & Co, 1899), 64
181 For Dunn’s account (Rossetti’s assistant) of Rossetti’s fascination with the occult, see Gale Pedrick, Life with
Rossetti or No Peacocks Allowed (London: Macdonald, 1964), 98-102. See also Ernest Fontana, “Rossetti’s “St
Agnes of Intercession” as Metempsychic Narrative Fragment,” The Journal of Narrative Technique 26, 1
(Winter 1996):75-84. Department of English Language and Literature, Eastern Michigan University [database
182 Lady Lilith is dated as 1868, but may not have been completed and delivered until 1869. It was then
repainted in 1872.
Accounts vary as to whether Leyland or Rossetti instigated the repainting of Lilith’s face. Walker states that it was Leyland’s request as Fanny Cornforth was too “sensual and commonplace,” citing Alexa Wilding’s icy features as more fitting with Lilith. Allen also states that Rossetti repainted the face “in response to its owner’s request, and formed one far more coldly and explicitly erotic.” McGann commented that the sensuous and powerful nature of the original *Lady Lilith* troubled Leyland. McGann claims that Rossetti agreed to replace the boldly erotic look from the painting at Leyland’s behest, achieving this goal by using Alexa Wilding’s features. Walker argues that while the resulting version of *Lady Lilith* featuring Alexa Wilding is still threatening, it is less so than Fanny Cornforth. He states that “Cornforth Lilith is a voluptuous image, whereas the Wilding is ophidian.” It seems odd that Rossetti would replace the model entirely as opposed to just altering the facial features of

---


185 McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the game that must be lost*, 14.
Cornforth. According to Dunn, Rossetti was accustomed to planning a painting before choosing a model for the final version. Dunn said of Rossetti’s paintings, “often a work would be delayed in the execution because the desired face could not be immediately found.”

It seems likely that Rossetti made the decision to repaint the face at Leyland’s behest, rather than as a result of his own unhappiness with Cornforth’s features. Perhaps the decision was motivated by the fact that by 1873 Leyland had suggested Rossetti paint a series of paintings featuring Alexa Wilding. It seems fitting to have a room filled with the same model (Alexa Wilding), as opposed to having merely one painting featuring Fanny Cornforth. Regardless of the reason behind the alteration, Leyland was happy with the changes, writing to Rossetti to explain how he regretted he could not “tell you personally how much I thought you had improved the Lilith picture.”

As McGann notes, the reception was quite different after the repainting. Rossetti’s repainting of Lady Lilith has been almost universally deplored. F. G. Stephens (1828-1907), wrote “I am at one with Mr. W. Rossetti in preferring the former face.” Rossetti’s assistant, Dunn, states that the face was repainted “for what reason I could never divine. To my thinking he by no means improved on the original.” As stated earlier, Marillier remarked of the changes to Lilith’s face “Leyland, who, unwisely as the event turned out, let Rossetti have it back in 1873, after one of his illnesses, when he became seized with a sort of mania for altering his work…with anything but satisfactory results, although he himself was not displeased with the work which had been done upon it.” Rossetti actually requested the work back from Leyland in January of 1872, before his suicide attempt in June. Although it is unclear how mentally stable he was at this time, as Robert Buchanan’s article The Fleshly School of Poetry, which heavily criticised Rossetti’s poetry, was published mere months before in October 1871. Even as late as 1971, scholar Elizabeth Surtees describes the repainting of

---

186 Pedrick, Life with Rossetti, 67.
187 Fennell, The Rossetti-Leyland Letters, Leyland to DGR, 17th October 1873, 48. Fanny Cornforth was presumably concerned with this repainting as DGR writes her in 1873 that he is glazing Fazio’s Mistress, “but I am not working at all on the head [his italics], which is exactly like funny old elephant [his pet name for her], as like as any I ever did.” Fredeman, Correspondence 6, DGR to Fanny Cornforth, Wednesday [24 September 1873], 73.289, 281.
190 Pedrick, Life with Rossetti, 52
192 Fennell, The Rossetti-Leyland Letters, Friday 29 Dec 1871, 28.
Lady Lilith as having “disastrous consequences” leaving a “vapid and lifeless figure which now appears on the canvas.” Although Rossetti’s alteration of Lilith’s face in Lady Lilith has drawn much speculation from critics, it was in fact a common practice by Rossetti to alter his paintings after completion rather than an indication of unique unease with a final result.

By 1868, Rossetti had developed a Venetian style of painting which is a significant feature of Lady Lilith. While our modern perception does not discern anything disturbing about this stylistic feature in Lady Lilith, critics of Rossetti’s time were appalled by what was considered a grotesque distortion of the female body. William Holman Hunt was outraged by Rossetti’s work Bocca Baciata (1869) which is in the same style as Lady Lilith. Hunt wrote of Rossetti’s new style as:

remarkable for gross sensuality of a revolting kind, peculiar to foreign prints, that would scarcely pass our English Custom House from France…Rossetti is advocating as a principle mere gratification of the eye and if any passion at all – the animal passion to be the aim of Art – for my part I disavow any sort of sympathy with such notion if Art could not do better service than dress up the worst vices in the garb only deserved by innocence and virtue. I would give it up today…

From a modern perspective there is nothing revolutionary about Rossetti’s style of painting. He was actually breaking from a long tradition of English narrative painting and by painting for mere aesthetic purposes Rossetti was also straying from the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of imbedding painting with spiritual or moral significance. It has subsequently been revealed that Hunt’s outrage towards Rossetti may have been partly a result of Rossetti’s intimacy with Annie Miller (1835-1925), Hunt’s intended wife-to-be, in the weeks previous. As Rossetti also had Fanny Cornforth as his mistress, Staley argues Hunt must have thought of Rossetti as a sexual predator and perceived his new style as a celebration of this promiscuity. Luckily this criticism did not curtail Rossetti’s efforts in producing Venetian style paintings, nor did it affect Leyland’s purchases of Rossetti’s work.

194 Rossetti also substituted Alexa Wilding into another painting, Venus Verticordia (1864), in 1867. Rossetti also substituted the head in Bocca Baciata (1868) almost ten years after completion in 1877. The figure in Lucretia Borgia (1860-1) was replaced some time before 1874. Fazio’s Mistress (1863) retouched parts of the painting in 1873. See rossettiarchive.org for production history on these paintings.
There is speculation about how Rossetti was influenced to develop this new Venetian style of painting. Ruskin has been suggested as one influence, although there are differing views on how influential Ruskin was in encouraging Rossetti’s new style. Staley states that Ruskin was quite influential, having become an advocate of Titian and Paolo Veronese in 1858. It is plausible that Rossetti initially experimented with this style to retain Ruskin as a patron.\footnote{Ruskin bought Rossetti’s \textit{Rachel and Leah} (1855) and \textit{La Belle Dame Sans Merci} (1855).} Staley portrays Ruskin as distancing himself from Rossetti as he grew increasingly critical of Rossetti’s stylistic experimentations: “you are not on the way to Correggio,” and ‘you are, it seems, under the (for the present) \textit{fatal} [sic] mistake of thinking that you will ever learn to paint well by painting badly, i.e. coarsely.’\footnote{William Michael Rossetti, \textit{Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Family-Letters with a Memoir} (Volume One), (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1895), 261.} By 1865 Ruskin and Rossetti were no longer friends, Ruskin stating the reason being in part to a ‘change in your own methods of work with which I have no sympathy and which renders it impossible to give you the kind of praise which would give you pleasure.’\footnote{Staley, “Pre-Raphaelites in the 1860s: I. Rossetti,” 8-10 cites Ruskin, \textit{Works}, XXXVI, 488–495: six letter written by Ruskin to Rossetti, which are undated but ascribed by William Michael Rossetti as 1865. The painting that specifically elicited Ruskin’s comments about the coarseness was \textit{Venus Verticordia} (See Surtees, \textit{The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti}, 98–100).} Bristow however portrays Rossetti as using Ruskin for a steady income and raising his profile. Rossetti’s growing independence and refusal to jump to Ruskin’s demands, caused Ruskin to complain of the decaying friendship: ‘I wish Lizzie and you liked me enough to – say – put on a dressing-gown and run in for a minute rather than not see me.’\footnote{John Ruskin, \textit{Works}, XXXVI, eds., E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1909), [Letter from Ruskin to Rossetti, 1860?], 342-3. Lizzie was Elizabeth Siddal’s nickname.} By 1860 Rossetti favoured Mannerist painters Paolo Veronese (1528–1588), Tintoretto (1518–1594) and Titian’s later works.\footnote{Other High Renaissance Venetian Painters include Giorgione (1477/8-1510) and Andrea Mantegna (c.1431-1506) (among others).}

Rossetti’s feminine type, which was inspired by High Renaissance Venetian painters and epitomised by \textit{Lady Lilith}, was publicly criticised throughout his career.\footnote{Casteras, “Pre-Raphaelites Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty,” 31-2. \textit{University of California Press} [database online, UWO]. AN: 3817653. Accessed 2009, December 1.} Although Rossetti’s female figures were abhorred by the critics, they were incorporated into faddish trends, even becoming the ideal feminine type.\footnote{Mary Haweis’ noted in 1878 that the new}
fashion for “Red hair—once…a…social assassination…is the rage. A pallid face with a protruding lip is highly esteemed.” This is suggestive of Alexa Wilding’s features which appear in many of Leyland’s paintings including Lady Lilith.

Myers in 1882 defended Rossetti’s sexualised women noting they “sometimes dwelt on with an Italian empathy of sensuousness which our English reserve condemns.”

Although there was a lot of praise for Rossetti’s work after his death in 1882, there was also a lot of criticism. David Hannay, in the National Review in 1883, described The Blessed Damozel (1875-8) as condemning heaven to be full of “haggard, worn-out, and ghastly figures hugging one another.” Harry Quilter in 1883 labelled Rossetti’s female types as having “distortions and even ugliness such as can be scarcely condoned…they are the record of a man whose sense of beauty was always being disturbed by his sense of feeling.”

Emily Barrington described his “transgressions. In the drawing of the mouth, often, in the drawing of the arms and hands sometimes, and in the painting of the flesh…it is felt that there is a positive element of ugliness such as is almost incomprehensible.”

In order to understand the Leyland paintings, it is important to understand his preferences and requirements, Leyland himself and the relationship he had with Rossetti.

Leyland commissioned his first painting, Lady Lilith, in 1866 after he failed to obtain Sibylla Palmifera (Leyland forever regretted missing out on this painting and would compare it to all other paintings. Rossetti in turn would use this regret to convince Leyland to buy other works).

When marketing Lady Lilith to Leyland, Rossetti promised it would be “better than any picture of its class,” implying it would be a better picture than Sibylla Palmifera.

Leyland had a preference for morally ambiguous paintings. Moral ambiguity was a common theme represented in paintings at this time, as is evident in Lady Lilith, and many other

---

206 Casteras, “Pre-Raphaelites Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty,” 195.
208 Leyland even commissioned a replica of Sibylla Palmifera in 1869, which Rossetti accepted 200 pounds for on account and never completed.
209 Rossetti promised increasing craftsmanship with almost every painting he sold to Leyland. Therefore, all such promises do not accurately reflect an increasing level of standard. George Rae was the successful purchaser of Sibylla Palmifera.
paintings by Rossetti and other artists.\(^{210}\) This theme clearly held an interest for Leyland as in the same year he also purchased Simeon Solomon’s *Heliogabalus, High Priest of the Sun* (1866), a painting based on the tyrannical Roman Emperor Heliogabalus who is historically renowned for smothering his dinner guests with rose petals.\(^{211}\) In 1871 Rossetti and Leyland made a verbal arrangement for a series of paintings. This is not only evidenced in the letters between the two, but also by a diary entry by Rossetti’s brother, William: “Leyland - who, it seems, has suggested to Gabriel to paint a good number of similar half-figures for him to buy.”\(^{212}\)

The strongest evidence of Leyland’s commissions come in the form of a letter from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland in October 1873:

> The last time we spoke of commissions at Queen’s Gate (about the end of 1871) your views were to have 7 more pictures of mine, -viz [sic]: a large one & 2 smaller ones for the place over the piano in the back drawing room (which we measured at the time-2 of the smaller size to face these, & 2 similar ones to face my 2 in the front drawing room. You had so decidedly said that you wished the drawing rooms to contain eventually my work only, that I had not doubted the continuance of this plan (with whatever modification of details).\(^{213}\)

Fredeman states that Rossetti’s reliance on only a few patrons “inevitably dictated to some extent his subjects and range of his imagination.”\(^{214}\) Such limitations can be seen in the paintings Rossetti made for Leyland. Such moulding to Leyland’s taste is not surprising considering (by conservative estimates) Leyland paid Rossetti between £8,000 and £10,000 over the last sixteen years of Rossetti’s life.\(^{215}\)

Leyland’s requirements were specific and any that did not meet his expectation were rejected. There were many components that made up the Leyland type including size, model, and

\(^{210}\) The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were renowned for creating morally ambiguous paintings. For further reading see Elizabeth Prettejohn, *After the Pre-Raphaelites: art and aestheticism in Victorian England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999).


\(^{213}\) This letter was written after the falling out over *La Ghirlandata*. The aggressive tone is evident in letters from both parties. Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, 48. Leyland replied “I quite recollect the conversation at Queen’s Gate but nothing was arranged and I never dreamt you were counting on this.” (Fennell 58). The fact remains that Rossetti created these paintings with Leyland in mind before this letter.


\(^{215}\) Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, xi-xii.
colouring. Leyland might request a painting (such as *The Bower Meadow*) to be “two or three inches larger each way,” and then reject it because he “found it too small to go with Lilith.”\textsuperscript{216} The size of the painting often seems to be Leyland’s biggest concern: “The second picture you have to paint is one the size of Veronica [sic] or Roman Widow [sic] and I should prefer a picture of this size rather than that of the Proserpine [sic] which I find a difficult size to hang advantageously.”\textsuperscript{217} Leyland also rejects *La Ricordanza* “owing to its size: - [sic] when you see my drawing room you will find I am limited by the scheme of decoration to half lengths like Veronica [sic].”\textsuperscript{218} Rossetti however admitted to Dunn “the fact is I feel quite confused about the size of pictures till I see them actually painted…”\textsuperscript{219} Evidently Rossetti’s decision to make Leyland’s figures seated came from a concern about sizing. He writes to Leyland in 1874: “I came to the conclusion that it might suit you well as to size if I make it a sitting instead of a standing figure. Will show you the drawing when you come.”\textsuperscript{220} Another important factor was the model. Leyland bought almost exclusively paintings featuring Alexa Wilding and Jane Morris.\textsuperscript{221} Rossetti was aware of his desire to have paintings featuring Alexa Wilding and wrote, “Miss Wilding is coming here immediately, & I propose beginning a picture or two from her instantly for your drawing rooms, of the same order as the Veronica [sic].”\textsuperscript{222} Colour was another important factor in paintings requested by Leyland. From the paintings, we can tell that Leyland prefers mainly green and gold, with touches of red. Rossetti describes *Veronica Veronese* as “a study of varied greens.”\textsuperscript{223} Describing *Dîs Manibus*, Rossetti emphasises “her silver marriage-girdle…her dress is white…the white marble background & urn, the white drapery & white roses will combine I trust to a lovely effect.”\textsuperscript{224} Interestingly Rossetti changes almost all of these colours, the dress is gold, the roses red, and the marble is green. This seems to be a deliberate change as Rossetti specifically requested

---

\textsuperscript{216} Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, xxv. “Lilith” stands for *Lady Lilith*.
\textsuperscript{217} Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, 42. “Veronica’ stands for Rossetti’s painting *Veronica Veronese*. *Roman Widow* and *Proserpine* are also paintings by Rossetti.
\textsuperscript{218} Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, 78. “Veronica” stands for Rossetti’s painting *Veronica Veronese*.
\textsuperscript{219} Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti*, 146.
\textsuperscript{221} Jane Morris was the wife of William Morris, one of Rossetti’s best friends and fellow Pre-Raphaelite. She was also Rossetti’s muse, lover (in the late 1860s to mid-1870s) and arguably the love of his life. As Jan Marsh states, “The love triangle between herself, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris is, moreover, one of the best-known stories from within the turbulent emotional world of the Pre-Raphaelites.” See Jan Marsh and Frank C. Sharp, *The Collected Letters of Jane Morris* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 1 and 10.
\textsuperscript{222} Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, 36. “Veronica” stands for Rossetti’s painting *Veronica Veronese*.
\textsuperscript{223} Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, 45.
\textsuperscript{224} Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, 29.
green marble from Dunn, “for background of this Roman Widow [sic] I shall be wanting some lightish green marble…Verde Antique which is dark wouldn’t do. It would have to be a green tint about the depth of the grey you sent.” Changes to the roses and dress color could have come later as Rossetti retouched Roman Widow, along with Veronica Veronese, Proserpine, and Lady Lilith in 1876. This retouching could have been to preserve the works, or because Leyland moved house in 1876 to Prince’s Gate so Rossetti took the opportunity to alter the works to more of a cohesive inseparable whole, or to fit with the layout in the new location. Rossetti instructed Dunn on which paintings to take to Leyland’s new house. “The pictures to go are the Fiddle [sic], the Proserpine [sic] and the Roman Widow [sic] and the Lilith [sic]. The new unfinished picture is to remain.”

The layout of the paintings were of concern to both Rossetti and Leyland. Both patron and artist had an idea of where the paintings would best fit in Leyland’s house. Rossetti often marketed a painting to Leyland based on the idea that it was to be a companion to another work Leyland already owned. Rossetti said of Proserpine, “I hope Lilith [sic] hangs opposite now. If so, it with the Dis Manibus [sic] will make up a quartet I shall not be ashamed of.” Rossetti however was also inclined to push other patrons into his ideal decoration schemes. Rossetti wrote a letter to George Rae (1817-1901) in 1864 stating, “the best thing you could now do with all the drawings of mine you have would be (if practicable) to hang them arranged all together with the frames touching each other. They would thus have their greatest effect.”

Rossetti even provided George Rae with a sketch of the ideal layout for his paintings (see below).

---

226 Fennell, *Rossetti-Leyland Letters*, 76.
227 Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti*, 198. Rossetti calls Veronica Veronese “The Fiddle” as it features the violin. The others mentioned are Proserpine, Roman Widow and he calls Lady Lilith merely “Lilith.”
Although it is not known if Rae took Rossetti’s advice on how to present his paintings, there have been some publications, both contemporary and recent, about Leyland’s arrangement of Rossetti’s paintings in Speke Hall. Rossetti often recommended his patrons to hang specific paintings so the light shines from the left of the spectator. Rossetti wrote of *Proserpine*, “It is essential that it should be placed in the light in which it was painted – i.e. with the light from the left (left of spectator).” Yet, as Treuherz points out, “puzzlingly, in the paintings themselves, the source of light is not consistently from one side.”

Leyland’s taste is another important aspect to consider in order to understand the paintings Rossetti made for him; both his artistic taste and his interest in music.

Leyland came from a modest background. He worked his way up from an apprentice in the firm of Messrs. Bibby and Sons, Liverpool shipowners, eventually rising to management in the company by the age of thirty and within a few years bought out the surviving partners. Being part of the nouveaux riches and having immense wealth, he lined his walls with art. He bought paintings by the old masters, such as Sandro Botticelli (c.1445-1510), Carlo Crivelli (c.1435-c.1495), Giorgione, Fra Filippo Lippi (c.1406-69), Hans Memling (c.1430-94),
Rembrandt (1606-69), Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Tintoretto (1518-94), and Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). He also bought paintings by contemporary English artists who were considered avant-garde, such as Whistler, Alphonse Legros (1837-1911), Frederic Leighton (1830-96), and Albert Moore. But he especially invested money in artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement such as John Everett Millais (1821-96), Ford Madox Brown (1821-93), William Windus (1822-1907), James Smetham (1821-89), Frederick Sandys (1829-1904), and Edward Burne-Jones.

Leyland had a ‘great taste for music,’ and was a very proficient pianist. A relative had given him a grand piano when he was young and “he would have liked a professional music career.” Merrill speculates that Frederick Leyland may have taken greatest pleasure from his piano. Val Prinsep (1838-1904) was given to understand that Leyland had purchased a grand piano with his first savings, but H. E. Stripe relates that he was given the instrument by a relative (although Merrill argues this is unlikely because of “the legendary deprivation of Leyland’s youth,” his extremely poor background may be a slight exaggeration). At his London house in Prince’s Gate, Leyland was to keep one piano in his study (see image below of Leyland’s study with the grand piano on the left) and another, along with a harpsichord, in the drawing room, which held the majority of Rossetti’s musical paintings.

---

235 Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, viii.
236 Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, viii.
238 Tibbles, “Speke Hall and Frederick Leyland,” 34.
239 Merrill, The Peacock Room, 116, cites MMM Stripe MS, 70; Prinsep, “Private Art Collections,” 129.
Leyland is said to have practiced the piano every morning before breakfast and to have eventually become highly proficient. Stripe heard him play the “Hallelujah Chorus” from memory and observed that “his long fingers enabled him to reach notes beyond an octave and give a good effect to a tenor.” Even so, Leyland failed to acquire the skill to play his favourite pieces; in later life, he persuaded more accomplished musicians (possibly including his friend the Italian pianist and composer Luigi Albanesi) to sit beside him and perform the works of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) according to his own interpretation. Mastering the piano may have been the only personal goal that Leyland failed to achieve through sheer strength of will, and there is some poignancy in his unflagging dedication to the task, which Whistler could never comprehend. He told the Pennells that Leyland was always “portentously solemn and serious” about his music, describing how he would come...

---

240 Copyright permission obtained from English Heritage, Swindon, 2013, March 24, but image removed from online version at the request of the copyright holder.
241 Merrill, *The Peacock Room*, 116, cites MMM Stripe MS, 70.
home from his office and head straight for his piano without stopping to speak to anyone. One day, when Leyland had been practising scales for what seemed like hours to Whistler, a workman who happened to be there remarked (to Whistler’s delight) that the master of the house “must be a light-hearted gentleman.”

Music and art seemed to go hand in hand for Leyland. Many of the paintings Rossetti planned for Leyland were intended to be positioned on the walls surrounding his grand piano. Leyland pressed Rossetti for images of women playing musical instruments or singing. At least seven of the major oils which were intended for Leyland portrayed a woman singing or playing a stringed instrument. These include *A Christmas Carol* (1867), *Veronica Veronese* (1872), *The Bower Meadow* (1872), *La Ghirlandata* (1873), *The Roman Widow* (1874), *A Sea Spell* (1877), *Desdemona’s Death Song* (1878-1882).

One of the closest people to Leyland, Whistler, connected him to music in many ways; through the terms he used, the paintings he produced for him, the frames for paintings and also scathing caricatures after their falling out. Whistler wrote to Leyland using a musical metaphor to explain the progress of *The Peacock Room*: “I assure you”, employing a metaphor calculated to appeal to his patron, “you can have no more idea of the ensemble in its perfection gathered from what you last saw on the walls than you could have of a complete Opera judging from a third finger exercise!”

Leyland commissioned Whistler to produce many paintings to line the walls of his house. One such painting was *The Three Girls*, of which it was Whistler’s intention to “produce a harmony in colour corresponding to Beethoven’s harmonies in sound.” Although this painting was never completed, the most distinctive feature of the frame is the tiny musical passage inscribed on one side—a treble clef, a key signature, and the opening notes of Franz Schubert’s (1797-1828) *Moments Musicaux*, D 780 (Op.94) no.3 in F minor (see image below).

---

244 Desdemona’s Death Song.
246 Merrill, *The Peacock Room*, 225 cites JMW to FRL, [ca. 2 Sept. 1876], PWC 6B.
248 Merrill, *The Peacock Room*, 143.
Figure 9: The side panel of the frame intended for James Whistler’s painting *The White Symphony: The Three Girls* (incomplete) featuring the opening notes of Franz Schubert’s *Moments Musicaux*, D 780 (Op.94), no.3 in F minor.  

It has been suggested that the passage was chosen to allude to the three girls in the painting, and that someone, possibly Leyland, had whiled away the hours in Whistler’s studio by playing the piece on the piano. According to Merrill, that suggestion has no foundation, but it is known that Whistler was occasionally entertained in the studio by a pianist named Horace Jee (c.1816-?), whom he had met through the Leylands. Horace Jee was a man of no fixed abode who would rely on his friends for accommodation. Jee was also described as a genius of a musician, which explains Leyland’s otherwise unaccountable attachment to that “prince of parasites.” As Whistler explained to the Pennells, “He was supposed not to know his notes, and for that to be all the more wonderful.” Jee may have been partially responsible for the Schubert on the frame of *The White Symphony: The Three Girls* (incomplete), which was later to surround Whistler’s caricature of Frederick Leyland, *The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frilthy Lucre* (1879).

The reason the musical frame for *The White Symphony: The Three Girls* instead framed *The Gold Scab* lies behind Whistler’s inability to finish the former painting, and his hatred for Leyland after the Peacock Room dispute. Leyland waited nine years for Whistler’s *The White Symphony: The Three Girls* and upon the liquidation of his assets, Whistler knew Leyland

---

249 Although this work is held at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, it is now available in the public domain via Wikimedia Commons, 2013, March 24.
253 Merrill, *The Peacock Room*, 143. The word “Frilthy” (instead of “filthy”) incorporates Leyland’s initials, FRL, while simultaneously poking fun at his unfashionable habit of wearing frilled shirts. Whistler’s treatment of Leyland in *The Gold Scab : Eruption of Frilthy Lucre*, will be discussed on the next page.
would seek it out when it came time to search his studio in his capacity as creditor.\footnote{Merrill, \textit{The Peacock Room}, 284, 288.}

Whistler decided not to give Leyland the satisfaction of having the painting \textit{The White Symphony: The Three Girls} after their falling out. Instead Whistler used its frame featuring hawthorn petals and the opening theme of Schubert’s \textit{Moment Musicaux}, D 780 (Op.94), no.3 in F minor, on his demonic caricature of Leyland. Instead of Leyland finding a painting of \textit{The White Symphony: The Three Girls} proposed to have been, as Merrill states, “the most beautiful painting of them all, and the product of perfect harmony between the patron’s desire and the painter’s ambition”, Leyland would instead find a repellent image of himself.\footnote{Merrill, \textit{The Peacock Room}, 288.}

In \textit{The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frilthy [sic] Lucre}, Leyland is depicted as an anthropomorphic peacock, with coins scaling his body and his characteristic white frill appearing under his beard, a fashion accessory for which he was renowned. Whistler incorporated the frill into all his depictions of Leyland, as it had long gone out of fashion yet it was a frequent accessory in Leyland’s attire (See fig: Whistler’s \textit{Arrangement in Black: Portrait of F. R. Leyland} (1870-3), fig: Whistler’s \textit{F.R.L frill-of Liverpool} (ca.1879), fig. \textit{Caricature of F. R. Leyland} (ca.1879))

\begin{figure}[h]
  
  \includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure10}
  \includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure11}
  
  Figure 10: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, \textit{The Gold Scab : Eruption in Frilthy Lucre}, 1879. Oil on canvas, 186.7 x 139.7 cm. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
  
  Figure 11: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, \textit{Arrangement in Black : Portrait of F. R. Leyland}, 1870-3. Oil on canvas, 218.5 x 119.4 cm. Freer Gallery of Art\footnote{Although this work is held at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, it is now available in the public domain via Wikimedia Commons, 2013, March 24.}
\end{figure}
The Gold Scab features Leyland playing a piano whilst seated on top of a miniature of Whistler’s house (a reference to Leyland’s appointment as one of three men to liquidate Whistler’s assets). Bags of money can be seen under the piano. The score on the piano features, on the left side, a single note with Leyland’s characteristic frill on the stem, on the other side of the score is Whistler’s play on Leyland’s initials (FRL), FRiLthy Lucre (implying Leyland’s filthy financial gain in a distasteful or dishonorable way).

Leyland not only had disagreements with Whistler, he also had disagreements with Rossetti. The struggle between patron and artist is evident in the letters between Leyland and Rossetti, this culminated in a falling out in 1873 over La Ghirlandata (1873). This incident will be discussed in chapter four, yet it is worth mentioning here to understand Leyland and Rossetti’s dynamic. The falling out seems to have occurred after Leyland requested to view La Ghirlandata before buying it. Rossetti was inadvertently offended after catering to Leyland’s demands and being met with the prospect of a rejection. Rossetti quickly sold it instead to William Graham to teach Leyland not to toy with him. Rossetti’s reaction is quite pronounced considering Leyland had similarly declined to commit himself to the very first

---

258 Copyright permission obtained from Ashmolean Museum, 2013, March 27.
259 Copyright permission obtained from Hunterian Art Gallery, 2013, April 9, but image removed from online version at the request of the copyright holder.
260 Bryson posits that the ‘White House’ he sits upon is in fact Leyland’s (See John Bryson (ed.), Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), Wednesday [10 March 1880], fn.7, 148).
painting he had bought, *Lady Lilith*, until he had seen it first.\(^{261}\) Leyland was justifiably upset. Rossetti wrote to friends alluding to his frustrations with his picky patron; to Madox Brown he wrote “Leyland be d—d”, to Treffry Dunn he wrote of his pleasure at Graham buying *La Ghirlandata* as “he is the only buyer I have who is worth a damn.”\(^{262}\) Rossetti writes to Dunn that despite Graham being eager to have a companion to *La Ghirlandata*, “at present I shall have to be very attentive to Leyland’s work who is not to be trifled with any longer.”\(^{263}\) Interestingly, even though in Rossetti’s words, Leyland “hates poetry more than anything,” many of Leyland’s paintings have sonnets attached to the paintings.\(^{264}\) This indicates Rossetti’s inclination to challenge the strict requirements of his patron. Clearly Leyland could not merely make demands from Rossetti and expect him to deliver.

In summation, this chapter has covered the meaning of *Lady Lilith*, and the wide range of sources Rossetti used as inspiration. Rossetti added meaning to the painting by incorporating an array of significant features such as flower symbolism, hair, and symbols of insincerity. The theme of reflection or mirroring is a recurrent theme throughout Rossetti’s paintings for Leyland and bonds the paintings as a series. The critical reception of the painting was initially approving, although the repainting was almost universally deplored. This chapter has also discussed Rossetti’s Venetian style, of which *Lady Lilith* is a prime example. It has ascertained that Leyland was specific with his preferences and requirements. Size, model and colour were important factors. Even the layout of the paintings was of concern to both Rossetti and Leyland. Leyland had broad artistic tastes and collected art work from the old masters and contemporary artists. Music was a significant part of Leyland’s life, yet he never managed to master the piano despite persistent practice. Both Rossetti and Whistler recognised Leyland’s musical leanings and incorporated it into their art. As discussed in this chapter, the disagreements between Leyland and Rossetti are indicative of their independent struggle for creative control; one over his artistic freedom and the other over his investment.

Chapter three will look at the next musical painting Leyland bought, *Veronica Veronese* (1872).

\(^{261}\) Merrill, *The Peacock Room*, 78.
\(^{262}\) Fredeman, *Correspondence* 6, DGR to Ford Madox Brown, Wednesday [28 May 1873], (73.146), 157.
\(^{263}\) Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti*, 123.
\(^{264}\) Bryson, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris*, Letter from Rossetti to Jane Morris, [17(?) Nov 1880], 163.
Chapter Three

Veronica Veronese (1872)

Veronica Veronese (1872) is the first musically related painting Leyland owned, which remained in his collection until his death.\footnote{Leyland also bought another paintings with a musical topic, A Christmas Carol, in 1867, but sold it the following year (See Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, 10).} It is logical to look at this painting at this stage, as Rossetti marketed it to Leyland as a “companion to Lilith,” making adjustments to *Lady Lilith* at the same time as painting *Veronica Veronese* so it would “be worthy of hanging with the fiddle picture” (i.e. *Veronica Veronese*).\footnote{Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, 25 January 1872, 29. Fredeman, Correspondence 5, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland, Thursday 25 January 1872, (72.10), 228. Fredemen, Correspondence 5, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland, 2 Dec 1872, (72.128), 334. He also tells Ford Madox Brown that Lilith was “quite worthy to hang with the fiddle picture,” confirming that his statement was more than a marketing ploy to Leyland (see Fredeman, Correspondence 5, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, 11 Dec [1872], (72.141), 349.} Although *Lady Lilith* does not predetermine *Veronica Veronese*, and both should be examined separately, the correspondence between patron and artist clearly links the two, as I will discuss.
This chapter will explore the meaning of *Veronica Veronese*, including a brief description of the painting, the sources Rossetti used, the important features such as the dress and the bird. It will investigate the musical elements such as the manuscript, violin, performance practice and the sequence of sound. This chapter will also explore the flower symbolism and discuss the influence of Rossetti’s poem “Hand and Soul” on the painting. It will also consider contemporary descriptions and examine the importance of *Veronica Veronese* in

---

267 Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2011, November 25.

268 By ‘Sequence of sound,’ I mean the sequence we would expect from the sound producing elements of the painting, e.g. does the bird produce sound before the violin or vice versa? What were Rossetti’s intensions? As I will discuss later, this is not my original idea, but is from Lorraine Wood, “The Language of Music: Paradigms of Performance in Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Vernon Lee, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf” (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 2009).
Rossetti’s oeuvre. Lastly, this chapter will discuss Veronica Veronese as a companion piece to both Lady Lilith and A Sea Spell, both in terms of marketing and aesthetics.

Veronica Veronese portrays a lady robed in a green velvet dress seated before a desk in a dreamy state of contemplation. In the upper left corner of the painting a yellow canary sits perched outside its cage. Hanging vertically on the wall before her is an oddly shaped violin. The subject rests the fingers of her left hand on the strings and body of the violin. In her twisted right hand she holds a violin bow vertically beside (but not touching) the strings of the violin. On the desk in front of her is an open book with a line of handwritten musical notation and beyond that, an upright quill in a pot of ink. On top of the manuscript or lying on the desk are three primroses and a daffodil. At her knees, on a ledge, is a circular arrangement of seven daffodils in a vase of water. Around her neck and shoulders is what William Sharp describes as a “white neckerchief.” She wears a silver necklace, and a silver bracelet which Jerome McGann identifies as Indian silver. Her red hair, parted in the middle, is loosely tied into a bun. This is the only painting of Leyland’s ‘Veronica’ type paintings where her hair is tied up. A red girdle is tied around her waist which is connected to a yellow tassel. Hanging from the girdle, at her side, is a black and white striped fan with white fur at the base.

Inscribed onto the frame at the bottom of the painting was a passage from The Letters of Girolamo Ridolfi in French:

> Se penchant vivement, la Veronica jeta les premières notes sur la feuille vierge. Ensuite elle prit l'archet du violon pour réaliser son rêve; mais avant de décrocher l'instrument suspendu, elle resta quelques instants immobile en écoutant l'oiseau inspirateur, pendant que sa main gauche errait sur les cordes cherchant le motif suprême encore eloigné. C'était le mariage des voix de la nature et de l'âme—l’aube d’une création mystique.

Ainsworth translates the frame:

---

²⁷¹ Another of Rossetti’s paintings, The Bower Meadow (1872), also features Alexa Wilding with her hair tied up in a bun. The Bower Meadow was intended for Leyland, but he rejected the painting on account of it being too small to accompany Lady Lilith (See Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, 27 January 1872, 30).
Suddenly leaning forward, the Lady Veronica rapidly wrote the first notes on the virgin page. Then she took the bow of the violin to make her dream reality; but before commencing to play the instrument hanging from her hand, she remained quiet a few minutes listening to the inspiring bird, while her left hand strayed over the strings searching for the supreme melody, still illusive. It was the marriage of the voices of nature and the soul—the dawn of a mystic creation.  

H. C. Marillier points out that *The Letters of Girolamo Ridolfi* were in fact nonexistent, and states that Swinburne and Rossetti were “great hands” at composition of this kind, either one being responsible for the fictitious verse. The secret was public knowledge by 1892, as Theodore Child refers to the “fictitious letters of Girolama Ridolfo [sic]” in an article. Rossetti never explained the reason for this pseudonym, although it was most likely a Rossettian joke. The joint inspiration of nature, soul, instrument and voice was what he was trying to capture in this depiction. As the inscription on the frame states “It was the marriage of the voices of nature and the soul—the dawn of a mystic creation.”

Rossetti painted *Veronica Veronese* very quickly, first mentioning it to Leyland on 25 January 1872 and completing it in March of the same year.

The correspondence between Leyland and Rossetti confirms the significance of the musical element in the painting and confirms that *Veronica Veronese* was designed as a companion piece to *Lady Lilith* to be hung in Leyland’s mansion.

When beginning the painting, Rossetti described it to Leyland as “an entirely new picture from the Palmifera model,” having discovered his desire for Alexa’s face and regret at having missed out on *Sibylla Palmifera.*

---


275 H. C. Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), footnote 1, 171 via Jerome McGann, “Transcript: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life” *Rossetti Archive*. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/nd497.t8.m33.rad.html> [Accessed 2012, December 20]. There exists a medallion in the National Trust Collections in Kent labeled ‘Girolamo Ridolfi (1465-1526)’. It features the profile of a man. See <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1118521.7> [Accessed 2012, June 4]. The medallion was designed by Niccolo (di Forzore) Spinelli (1430-1514), a sculptor who may have been portrayed in a painting by Hans Memling (c.1430-1494) entitled *Portrait of a man with a Roman Medal* (c.1480). It may be that Rossetti or Swinburne saw this medal and decided to appropriate the name for the purpose of the fictitious passage. Memling was an inspiration for Rossetti. He wrote a sonnet inspired by Memling’s “Virgin and Child” (1487) which he saw on a trip to Bruges in 1849. Rossetti also wrote a letter commenting on the “miraculous works of Memling” (See Fredeman, *Correspondence 1*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to James Collinson, (49.20), 128).


The Lilith was sent here yesterday & I’ll work on it as soon as I can. I believe I proposed to paint you a companion to Lilith for 700 gs (guineas) but when you see this you will agree I should have no difficulty in getting 800 for it anywhere. I think at present of calling it [i.e., Veronica Veronese] the Day Dream. The girl is in a sort of passionate reverie & is drawing her hand listlessly along the strings of a violin which hangs against the wall, while she holds the bow with the other hand, as if arrested by thought at the moment when she was about to play. In colour I shall make the picture chiefly a study of varied greens. I have not yet quite settled the background but am going ahead at it.279

Rossetti knew it would please Leyland if he added a musical element to the painting. He even went to the extent of pointing out the musical significance of the title. Rossetti wrote to Leyland “I mean to call the violin picture ‘Veronica Veronese’ which sounds like the name of a musical genius.”280 This correspondence also suggests that the original focus of the painting was the girl and the violin. The bird is not initially mentioned, evidently being part of the background to be refined at a later date. Although we do not know exactly when musical instruments became an essential requirement for Leyland’s paintings, Rossetti must have established it was a desired feature early in their friendship. As mentioned in chapter two, Rossetti’s inclusion of musical instruments in his paintings coincides with Leyland’s patronage, 1865-77. Clearly, musical instruments were an essential element in Leyland’s paintings and Rossetti would offer this feature in order to win Leyland’s approval for paintings (see chapter two for Leyland’s interest in music and desire for musical themed paintings).

By December 1872, Rossetti had finished the repainting of Lady Lilith (replacing Fanny Cornforth’s face with that of Alexa Wilding’s) and told Leyland, “Today I send away Lilith [sic], to which I have done a great deal. I will say that it is now a complete success, & quite worthy to hang with the fiddle picture [Veronica Veronese].”281 This statement links the two paintings, and shows that either Rossetti or Leyland (or both) had determined that they should hang together.

In terms of sources Rossetti used for painting Veronica Veronese, there are several plausible possibilities presented by scholars. Jan Marsh describes Veronica Veronese as a “pictorial allegory of Art, showing a woman composing music Messiaen-like while listening to a

280 Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, [Early March 1872], 33.
281 Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, 2 December 1872, 35.
songbird’s notes.” As Marsh points out, ‘Veronica’ means ‘true image,’ while ‘Veronese’ refers to the painter, Paolo Veronese (1528-88), whose “opulent colour-sense is dominated by green and pale blue, lemon yellow and silvery white…text, and picture combine to present a work allusive of all the arts: poetry, painting, music, song.”

Both Marsh and Nolta state that Veronica Veronese could be partly derived from an old Italian source – the symbolic Iconologia of Cesare Ripa (Rossetti had an edition of this in his library). Nolta writes that “Veronica Veronese is, nevertheless, compatible with conventional allegorical representations of Music with her instrument, sheet music, and singing bird.” Accordingly, Veronica could be an illustration from Iconologia through the use of green which is the symbolic colour of hope and the colour of art. This interpretation favours a meaning in the painting which, according to Marsh, depicts “Art conquering Time to keep all fresh.” Two images from Iconologia (see below) have some similarity to Veronica Veronese, especially the representations of nature and music, merging the two to create Veronica Veronese. Rossetti may have been inspired to take the image of the woman, dress, bird and flower from the image on the left and join it with the violin, manuscript and bird on the right.

Figure 15: On left, “Venvsta” from Cesare Ripa’s Iconologia (1645), 646

---

283 Marsh, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 430.
286 Cesare Ripa, Giovanni Zaratino Castellini and Christoforo Tomasini (printer), Iconologia di Cesare Ripa perugino cavalier di Ss. Maurizio et Lazaro. : Divisa in tre libri nei quali si esprimono varie imagini di virtù, vitij, affetti, passioni humane, arti, discipline, humori, elementi, corpi celesti, provincie d’Italia, fiuni, & altre materie infinite vili ad ogni stato di persone. 1645 <http://books.google.co.nz/books?id=ocsQcQQLh5MC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Ripa,+Cesare++Iconologia+1645&source=bl&ots=k_ijS25pfk&sig=-
Figure 16: On right, “Diletto” from Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (1645), 152

John Hollander cites quite a different inspiration for Veronica Veronese, stating that “Lady Veronica is Rossetti’s version of Albrecht Dürer’s (1471-1528) *Melencolia I*, suspended between art and nature” (see figure 17). This interpretation is plausible as Rossetti’s correspondence confirms Albrecht Dürer was an inspiration to him.

Figure 17: Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), *Melencolia I*, 1514. Engraving, 24.1 x 19.2 cm. British Museum / Gift of the National Art Collections Fund

---


289 In November 1854, Rossetti wrote that he was painting the calf in Found ”like Albert Dürer hair by hair.” McGann, “Rossetti Archive Chronology,” *Rossetti Archive*. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www.rosettiarchive.org/racs/chronology.rac.html> [Accessed 2012, June 2].

290 Copyright permission obtained from The British Museum, 2012, June 21.
McGann points out that Veronica Veronese is an example of Rossetti’s use of symbolist ideas: “Rossetti’s symbolist ideas made emblems of music, such as the violin represented here, signs for an ideal of Pythagorean harmony. That harmony constituted the transcendental and abstract ground of all artistic practice.” I will discuss this point later in this chapter.

The accessories in Veronica Veronese add to the meaning of the painting. This includes the choice of dress, the bird, the various musical elements (the manuscript, the violin, the performance practice, and the painting’s sound sequence) and the flowers. The costumes Rossetti uses in his paintings are important in that they had symbolic significance. The model for Veronica Veronese is robed in a green velvet dress. The colour green was a symbol of hope and life for Rossetti. Evidently, the dress belonged to Jane Morris, illustrated in a letter Rossetti wrote her: “Miss Stillman has just sent all the way from Florence to borrow your old olive green velvet dress which I painted in that old fiddle picture.” Rossetti evidently had quite an array of dresses from Jane Morris, as in the same letter he states “The extreme usefulness of the dresses of yours which I have induces me to ask if you have any more ‘Old Clo’ of an artistic cut and material. If so you might make a bundle for this Hebrew.” Rossetti evidently still had the green dress as late as 1875, amongst others, as in a letter telling Dunn to post a green dress, he informs him: “The green dress I name in my last is not the dark one I painted in the fiddle picture, but one of the same material as the curtains of the large window in the studio.” Evidently the silk material covering Veronica’s neck was also used for other paintings, as he told Dunn “I think it would be well to include in one of the cases a couple of pieces (in good condition) of the silk gauze material I use so much. The whole lot is in that little cabinet made by Stennett.” The reusing of material in other paintings further enhanced the connections between the paintings.

---

295 Pedrick, Life with Rossetti, Friday, Aldwick Lodge, Bognor (presumably December), 186.
296 Pedrick, Life with Rossetti, Kelmscott Sunday 1875 (presumably December), 187.
The fan which hangs closed at Veronica’s waist is also used in Rossetti’s *Monna Vanna* (depicted splayed out and held upright to the left of the model’s face, see figure 18). Sarah Phelps Smith argues the fan stands for a bird’s wing and like the singing bird it represents the artist’s spirit.297

![Figure 18: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *Monna Vanna*, 1866 (repainted 1873). Oil on canvas, 88 x 86 cm. Tate Gallery, London](image)

The bird is also a significant element in *Veronica Veronese*. William Sharp writes that the cage of the bird is “surmounted with a small fragment of red worsted (painted, of course, for colour contrast).”299 Rossetti may have got the idea to add a bird to the painting from having enjoyed the company of a caged bird which resided in his home as he was painting *Veronica Veronese*. He later wrote to G. P. Boyce apologising for the destruction of the musical notation he sent as “a parrot which was here got hold of it through the bars of his cage.”300 It is clear Rossetti chose to paint a canary, as he considered renaming the painting *La Contesta del Canarino*, which roughly translates to ‘the answer of the canary.’301 Smith identifies the bird as a symbol of the soul; it is the artist’s own soul which speaks to her and is reflected in

---

298 Copyright permission obtained from Tate Gallery, London, 2011, December 10, but image removed from online version at the request of the copyright holder.
299 Sharp, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 228 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
300 Fredeman, *Correspondence 5*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to George Price Boyce, (72.24), 238.
the work of art. As Jerome McGann states, “the “marriage” noted here is emblematically represented in the figure of the uncaged bird, which stands simultaneously as a figure of nature and of the soul.” Lorraine Wood observes that as the bird is perched outside of the cage, free to fly away “it is as if the music, represented and ultimately realised by the canary, cannot be contained within the spatial limits of the chamber (or painting) – an idea also explored by Rossetti in *The Blue Bower.*”

*Veronica Veronese* has many musical elements worthy of discussion, firstly the manuscript. We know from the correspondence that Rossetti sought to include a piece of old music in the painting, as illustrated when he wrote to Boyce in March 1872, including his own hand drawing of “old violin music” (see figure 19):

> have you got any old written music, and could you lend me such a sheet? – if for the violin, so much the better – also if containing any red initial or such like…is there not a tenor mark or something like this in old violin music?

![Figure 19: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, hand drawn “tenor mark” in letter to George Boyce, 1872](image)

Rossetti’s drawing does not match what is written on the manuscript. Instead Rossetti presumably opted for the music that Boyce sent (see figure 20). This letter, however, confirms that Rossetti was not only trying to please his patron by adding music into the painting, but he was also specifically searching for sheet music for the violin and specifically old notation. This separates the painting from a depiction of Victorian England and adds to the obscurity of the scene for the Victorian viewer.

---

302 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121.
305 Fredeman, *Correspondence 5*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to George Boyce, [2 March 1872], (72.18), 234-5.
306 Image from Fredeman, *Correspondence 5*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to George Boyce, [2 March 1872], (72.18), 235.
Figure 20: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of manuscript in Veronica Veronese, 1872. Oil on canvas, 109 x 88 cm. Bancroft Collection, Wilmington Society of Fine Arts, Delaware

The second musical element in Veronica Veronese worthy of discussion is the violin. From the request Rossetti made to Boyce for some “violin music,” it is clear Rossetti thought he was depicting a violin in the painting. However, the instrument Rossetti has used, although similar to a violin, has an additional rounded protrusion on the sides of the instrument not seen on typical violins (compares figures 21 and 22). The traditional hard edges on the sides of the instrument, Rossetti has depicted entirely rounded on both the upper and lower parts.

Figure 21: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of instrument in Veronica Veronese, 1872. Oil on canvas, 109 x 88 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA/ Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial/ The Bridgeman Art Library Nationality

308 Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2011, November 25.
Jerome McGann states that Rossetti had a violin in his possession, although there is no mention of a violin in either the correspondence or the inventory at the time of his death (although other musical instruments are mentioned). Rossetti’s brother, William, describes the instrument in *Veronica Veronese* as a “viol d’amore” in his diary. If Rossetti did paint this from an actual violin, he has deliberately added an additional rounded protrusion on the base of the instrument. Along with the fact that he requested old music from Boyce, this seems to signify an attempt to disconnect the scene from a contemporary setting.

The potential inspiration for the instrument depicted comes in a letter from Rossetti to William Bell Scott in 1871:

> Two things sent me by Norton from Italy, and which I have stuck on my bedroom wall here…They are from Veronese and Tintoret[sic]… The Veronese is by an engraver named Jackson - the Tintoret I suppose to be Italian. I presume the line part in such work is wood-engraving is it not?\(^{312}\)

---

309 Image is in the public domain via Wikimedia Commons, 2013, December 24.
310 McGann, “Veronica Veronese – Image,” *Rossetti Archive*. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s228.rap.html> [Accessed 2012, June 4]. For a record of the musical instruments in Rossetti’s possession at the time of his death, see *The Valuable Contents of the Residence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 2\(^{nd}\) ed. (London: T. G. Wharton, Martin and Co., 1883), 12 and 22, lots 196, 442, and 448. This is located in the Rare Books & Special Collections Library, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. I have been unable to read this as the extant copy is too fragile to scan, although Yuen cites it in her article “Instruments of Ambivalence,” fn. 22, 158.
312 Fredeman, *Correspondence 5*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Bell Scott, September 15, 1871 (71.149), 154. Rossetti has abbreviated Tintoretto to Tintoret.
The Veronese engraving mentioned is possibly one which features an instrument very similar to the violin-type instrument Rossetti depicted in *Veronica Veronese*. Although it is not certain which engraving Rossetti had in his possession, John Baptist Jackson (1701-80?) engraved very few of Veronese’s works, *The Marriage of Cana* (1745) being one of them. *The Marriage of Cana* not only features a viol, which bears striking resemblance to the unique curves of the violin in *Veronica Veronese* (see full image and detail below), but includes a ‘line part’ of which Rossetti speaks. Interestingly this parting creates a division between the two music players, much like the division between *Veronica Veronese* and *Lady Lilith* on Leyland’s walls.\(^{313}\)

![Figure 23: John Baptist Jackson (engraver) (c.1701-c.1780), engraving of Paolo Veronese (1528-88), *Marriage at Cana*, 1745. Chiaroscuro woodcut print, 58 x 86 cm (sheet). Princeton University Library, Princeton\(^{314}\)](http://pudl.princeton.edu/sheetreader.php?obj=4t64gn30v#page/1/mode/2up)

\(^{313}\) Other works by Veronese that Jackson engraved include *Holy Family and four saints*, *The mystic marriage of St. Catherine* and *The presentation in the Temple*, all of which appear in a book of his engravings entitled ‘Titiani Vecellii, Pauli Caliarii, Jacobi Robusti, et Jacobi de Ponte, opera selectiora a Joanne Baptista Jackson Anglo, ligno cœlata, et coloribus adumbrata’.

Rossetti was clearly inspired by Veronese’s *The Marriage of Cana*, and actually saw it on his honeymoon in 1860 and wrote to his brother calling it “the greatest picture in the world beyond a doubt.”

Furthermore, in Veronese’s *Marriage at Cana* (1745), the drapery to the right of the player also has striking resemblance to the background fabric above the head of *Veronica Veronese*, confirming possible homage to Veronese.

---

315 Fredeman, *Correspondence* 2, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Michael Rossetti, Saturday [9 June 1860], (60.13), 298.
McGann identifies the background drapery in *Veronica Veronese* as a Renaissance brocade, further highlighting Veronese as inspiration. Smith points out that Rossetti painted similar tapestries in both *Veronica Veronese* and *Fazio’s Mistress* (above the model’s head in both instances), indicating that Rossetti may have found inspiration in Veronese’s *Les Noces de Cana (Marriage at Cana)* over a period of many years.
Figure 26: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), Fazio’s Mistress, 1863 (repainted 1873). Oil on mahogany, 43 x36 cm. Tate Gallery, London

Smith identifies the flower on the tapestry in Veronica Veronese as an iris, which in terms of flower symbolism “crows this beauty with the power of the creative artist.” Smith points out that by using Veronese in the very title of his painting Veronica Veronese, Rossetti probably intended to show a debt to an artist whose colouring he much admired.

Another musical element in Veronica Veronese which is worthy of discussion is the performance aspect, specifically why Rossetti has portrayed the model attempting to play the instrument while it is still hanging on the wall at face height. No serious musician would play the violin in such an improbable manner (it is completely at odds with normal performance practice on this instrument). Although Child describes Veronica as having “her left hand wandered over the strings seeking the motif,” a closer inspection of the image reveals that she only has her thumb resting on the instrument, her other fingers are touching the body of the instrument (see figure 27). This creates a further distancing between the image Rossetti portrayed and the sense of reality which determined how the instrument could be played in practice. Rossetti has therefore portrayed her not attempting to play, but in a state of contemplation. What she is contemplating is left to the viewer’s imagination.

Figure 27: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of hand and instrument in Veronica Veronese, 1872. Oil on canvas, 109 x 88 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, USA/ Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial/ The Bridgeman Art Library Nationality

319 Copyright permission obtained from Tate Gallery, London, 2011, December 10, but image removed from online version at the request of the copyright holder.
320 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121.
323 Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2011, November 25.
If the instrument Rossetti was depicting was a ‘viol d’amore’ as his brother claimed, it could be that he is portraying Veronica touching the drone strings that are part of this instrument. However, the drone strings are not clearly visible, nor does it seem likely for a bird to sing drone notes, as his brother states the woman “who listening to a bird, is going to try some like notes on a ‘viol d’amore’.” However this seems unlikely, as Rossetti refers to the instrument as a violin several times in the correspondence with Leyland. This further illustrates his lack of concern about the technicalities of the instrument itself, as he was more concerned with its iconographical implications. Rossetti would portray a contemporary instrument, such as a violin, with additional accessories in order to suit his iconographical needs. In this case, he might be ensuring the scene is removed from reality for the viewer, in the hope that the viewer seeks a deeper meaning. Perhaps Rossetti realised he could aesthetically link the mirror theme of Lady Lilith with Veronica Veronese by portraying the instrument as a kind of mirror, hung on the wall at face height. There is also the possibility that Rossetti deliberately portrayed the violin hanging from the wall vertically as to aesthetically imitate and mirror the female figure, thereby further linking the idea that the model is playing on her own soul. This possibility is made more plausible by the fact that Rossetti has added an additional leather strap to the handle of the instrument at the top of the painting. The strap, however, does not connect to any other part of the instrument, leaving the leather to hang by the side, thereby serving no functional purpose. However, the strap serves to visually imitate and mirror Veronica’s hair, bunched at the top, with a strand dangling down the back.

326 Fredeman, Correspondence 5, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland, Thursday 25 January 1872, (72.10), 228, “strings of the violin.” Fredeman, Correspondence 5, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland, Monday 27 February 1872, (72.16), 233, “the picture of the Lady with Violin.” Fredeman, Correspondence 5, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland, [c.10 March 1872], (72.20), 236, “I mean to call the violin picture “Veronica Veronese” which sounds like the name of a musical genius.” Plus the fact that Rossetti sought from Boyce old written music specifying “if for the violin, so much the better.”
327 Although this may initially seem like a far-fetched interpretation, Rossetti often wrote poetry questioning the reincarnation of the soul. I will analyse the poem “Hand and Soul” later in the chapter. See also “Soul and Music,” and “St Agnes of Intercession.” For further reading, see Rodger Drew, The Stream’s Secret: The Symbolism of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2007), and Ernest Fontana, “Rossetti’s “St Agnes of Intercession” as Metempsychic Narrative Fragment,” The Journal of Narrative Technique 26, 1 (Winter 1996):75-84. Department of English Language and Literature, Eastern Michigan University [database online, UWO]. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225440 [Accessed 2013, May 25].
Another musical aspect worth discussing is the sequence of sound in the painting. Wood argues that *Veronica Veronese* “demonstrates the coalescence of time and space and the move from symbol to sound inherent to performance.” She quotes three differing accounts of sequence of events within the painting. The first account is taken from Marillier, the second from the inscription on the frame of the painting and the third from the correspondence between Rossetti and Leyland.

Firstly, Marillier states that the lady “after listening to the notes of the bird, tries to commit them to paper, and finally to reproduce them on her violin.” Secondly, Wood notes that the inscription on the frame has the lady writing the notes, then reproducing them on the violin, followed by listening to the bird. Thirdly, Wood observes that Rossetti himself does not refer to such a sequence of events. In the initial correspondence with Frederick Leyland, Rossetti makes no mention of the musical page or the canary. Instead, the girl is “drawing her hand listlessly along the strings of a violin…arrested by thought at the moment when she was about to play.”

Wood points out that the addition of the notation and bird in the scene is significant because it sets up three musical analogues within the painting. Rossetti has deliberately made the sequential relationship between canary, violin and score unclear. Wood poses several

---

328 Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2011, November 25.
sequential possibilities. Is Veronica composing or simply notating the song of the bird—and is this the “elusive” music she seeks? Has the canary’s song provided the material, or has the bird interrupted her in the midst of composition? Perhaps the written score is the sung melody of the bird, since the concept of a “marriage” of nature and soul suggests a synthesis. On the other hand, in this synthesis of nature and soul, does the bird represent nature and the violin the soul as I have previously suggested? Wood notes that Rossetti has significantly positioned the woman’s head both vertically and horizontally between the two musical instruments: the violin, representing potentiality, and the bird, signifying actualisation. Wood suggests that the suspended violin may represent Veronica’s song being suspended between concept and manifestation; as her confinement between the writing desk, violin, curtain, and birdcage “may symbolise the inability of her song to reach actualisation in the audible, since her performance is more suggested than realised.” Thus, Sarah Phelps Smith describes this painting as symbolising “the creative process, or Art itself.”

The flowers for Rossetti’s paintings are always carefully chosen for symbolic significance. Although Rossetti told Leyland “in colour I shall make the picture a study of greens,” he chose to include yellow flowers in the painting. This could merely be for the purpose of contrasting colours, or perhaps to draw the viewer’s attention to the symbols of nature, as the canary is also yellow. Sharp writes that hanging from the bird cage is some “pale green worsel seed.” Smith however identifies camomile on the bird cage which signifies “energy in adversity,” stating that this must apply to the bird “who sings even though imprisoned,” even though the bird is positioned outside of the cage. In turn, David Nolta argues that the camomile is in fact celandine, which in herbal lore was a remedy for diseases of the eyes. As Rossetti had

---

336 Fredeman, Correspondence 5, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland, Thursday 25 January 1872, (72.10), 228-9.
337 Sharp, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 228 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
problems with his eyesight throughout his life, it is likely that at some point he himself used celandine.\footnote{Rossetti’s Library included the 1636 edition of The Herbal or General History of Plants by John Gerard (1545-1612). He acquired this after September 1872, as told Thomas Gordon Hake (1809-95) “It is too late to get the flowers I want to draw from in the fields or garden, so I have sent to London for Gerarde’s Herbal.” Fredeman, Correspondence 5, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Thomas Gordon Hake, 24 September 1872, (72.77), 280.}

Sharp identifies yellow daffodils and primroses on the desk and in a glass tumbler “seven or eight more daffodils.”\footnote{Sharp, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 228.} Smith asserts however, that to identify the flowers as daffodils or jonquils reveals nothing of significance because their meanings would be interpreted as “regard” or “I desire a return of affection,” sentiments which do not relate to the subject.\footnote{Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 119 cites John. H. Ingram, Flora Symbolica; or The Language and Sentiment of Flowers; Including Floral Poetry, Original and Selected (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1868), 357 and 358.} It could be that Rossetti was merely painting flowers then in bloom in the surrounding area of his stay at Kelmscott, as in a letter to his mother he writes, “Many flowers are coming out,—abundant daffodils in the garden, marybuds (another name for marsh marigolds) all over the fields near the river…”\footnote{Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti, 16 April, 1874, (74.74), 435. Rossetti stayed at Kelmscott Manor for a long time, in order to recover from his mental breakdown in June 1872.} Rossetti also painted the marigolds surrounding him during his stay at Kelmscott, as evidenced by another painting produced in 1874 entitled \textit{Marigolds or The Bower Maiden}, which he also intended for Leyland (but which was rejected on account of the high price).\footnote{Surtees, The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 134.}

Smith asserts that Rossetti must have been thinking rather of the generic name, “narcissus,” selecting a pure yellow rather than a yellow-and-white variety for the sake of his colour scheme. The “narcissus” means in the language of flowers “egotism,” after the youth Narcissus in Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool and was turned into a flower.\footnote{Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 120 cites Ingram, Flora Symbolica (1868), 359 and Ovid, 83-7.} Although this meaning does not obviously apply to the painting, the myth is relevant to Rossetti’s reference to the idea of reflection, of the mirror of beauty or nature in art, which is the primary subject of the painting. The subtle reference to the Narcissus myth is in the reflection of the single yellow narcissus on the polished surface of the desk.
This explanation for Rossetti’s use of daffodils may seem at first far-fetched, until the title of the painting is considered. The name Veronica was chosen by Rossetti rather than by the fictitious Ridoldi and he was surely aware of its significance. The name means “true image,” and was given to the saint who gave her veil to Christ on his way to Calvary. After she wiped his face, his image was imprinted on the veil. Thus both the title of the painting and the most prominent flower refer to the artistic process: the translation of the image of beauty.

The yellow primroses are also a difficult emblem to interpret. The meanings for primroses vary and are based on different associations. They are commonly interpreted to represent “early youth” as they are an early spring flower. Alternatively they represent “lovers’ doubts and fears” because of their pale colour. They are also said to mean “have confidence in me.” The key to interpreting the primrose association in Rossetti’s paintings is again the name, which means “first rose”. Primroses were traditionally associated with spring, thus Rossetti may have intended them to connote the “springing” of this song so that the flower represents a source of artistic inspiration.

However, while the overt meaning of artistic inspiration for the painting seems clear, it should be noted that Rossetti’s use of flowers has become problematic if their meaning is to be sourced only from the language of flowers. Smith asserts that the essential content of most of Rossetti’s paintings of women and flowers is the representation of a beautiful woman as something beyond herself, such as Beauty, Art, or Pity. The flowers and other objects depicted in the background serve as symbolic attributes of these characteristics.

Veronica Veronese links with Rossetti’s poem Hand and Soul (1849), which has been described by McGann as the most important document addressing Rossetti’s idea of art and

---

346 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121.
347 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121 cites Ingram, Flora Symbolica (1868), 360.
348 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121 cites Miss Carruthers Flower Lore; The Teachings of Flowers; Historical Poetical and Symbolical (Belfast: London: MaCaw, Stevenson and Orr, 1879), 201 (Morris Lib and British Lib).
349 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121 cites Sarah. J. Hale, Flora’s Interpreter or the American Book of Flowers and Sentiments (Boston: March, Capon, Lyons, Webb, 1840), 256.
350 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121.
351 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121.
In the poem, the protagonist, Chiaro, is met by “a lady in green and grey raiment”, the same colours as the dress in *Veronica Veronese*. She introduces herself to Chiaro as “an image...of thine own soul within thee.” For McGann, Chiaro and the narrator in *Hand and Soul* are clearly surrogates for Rossetti - one a contemporary surrogate (the narrator), the other his thirteenth-century precursor (Chiaro). The argument in *Hand and Soul* is that art must come from a vision of the soul and that the soul is a beautiful woman. Ainsworth argues the picture represents “the artistic soul in the act of creation.” McGann asserts “it is a visionary portrait [sic] of that soul as it had been incarnated in the practise of Paolo Veronese.” If Rossetti is painting women, or specifically Alexa Wilding, as representations of the soul, how does music function in the context of these images? It could be considered a vehicle for the purification of the soul. Some stringed instruments, such as harps, have been traditionally associated with purity in traditional iconography and especially in association with women. Rossetti has deliberately portrayed incorrect performance practice and represented the instruments with additional incorrect parts in order to remove them from reality. On closer inspection, the instrument in *Veronica Veronese* is positioned in such a way as to imitate the figure of a woman, more specifically Veronica herself. Rossetti has even added additional unnecessary parts, such as a detached length of leather at the top of the instrument, which serves no functional purpose, except iconographically to imitate Veronica’s hair. If the instrument is taken as representing Veronica herself, then Veronica’s fingers resting on the soundboard of the instrument can be

354 The word “raiment” means clothing.
360 Perhaps the reason behind the harp being associated with purity is because in the Bible, heaven is sometimes symbolically depicted with angels playing harps, as in Revelation 14:2: “And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.” The violin was traditionally thought of as a masculine instrument, although it was becoming more acceptable for women in England by 1851; see George Dubourg, *The Violin: Some Account of that Leading Instrument, and its Most Eminent Professors, from its Earliest Date to the Present Time; With Hints to Amateurs, Anecdotes, Etc* (London: Robert Cuck and Co, 1852), 397-401 <http://books.google.co.nz/books?id=7y0DAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false> [Accessed 2013, June 23].
taken to represent the act of listening to her soul in a rare moment of internal metamorphosis. Leyland was aware of the internal metamorphosis represented in the painting, as he communicated as much to a reporter writing an article on his house in 1890. The reporter, Theodore Child, quotes Leyland saying that in *Veronica Veronese* “the mystic intentions are not immediately obvious, nor does any explanation seem necessary.” The instrument in the painting is even held at head height (as are all the instruments in the Leyland series) representing a mirror, as Veronica is in a state of self-reflection (a play on words which was common in Rossetti’s work).

Images of reflection occur throughout Rossetti’s work, both in his painting and in his poetry. The significance of these as a recurrent theme is evident in his poem “Hand and Soul,” where his painting is a reflection of his own personified soul. In his poem, “The Portrait,” Rossetti compared the generic work of art to a mirror:

```
This is her picture as she was
It seems a thing to wonder on,
As though mine image in the glass
Should tarry when myself am gone.
```

The successful mirroring, not just of nature itself, but of the soul of the subject, was one of Rossetti’s artistic aims. The song of the bird, the symbol of the soul in *Veronica Veronese*, must be reflected in the music she writes.

As I discussed in chapter two, mirror images are an important feature in Rossetti’s work. David Reide observes that doppelgangers, echoes, and mirror images pervade Rossetti’s work from the mid-1850s onwards. Reide points out that Rossetti’s later works revolves around “strange personal forebodings” symbolised by mirror images: “The myth of Narcissus and Echo is consistently evoked, with the neoplatonic notion that both the reflection in the water and the echo are images of the soul…reinforces the image of the portrait as a mirror (present in both 1847 and 1870).” This mirroring theme is repeated throughout Rossetti’s paintings for Leyland, as I will discuss in chapter six.

---

364 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121.
Contemporary descriptions are important in ascertaining Victorian perceptions of the painting and Rossetti’s work in general. As *Veronica Veronese* was not publicly exhibited (like so many of Rossetti’s paintings), the first contemporary descriptions come long after the painting was completed, in 1882 following Rossetti’s death. William Sharp (1855-1905) describes *Veronica Veronese*:

…the loveliness of which is apparent at once and yet grows more and more with acquaintance, a picture that seems haunted with distant echoes of soft low music, such as we discern again, though hardly so exquisitely, in *La Ghirlandata* and *The Sea Spell*, the harmony of colour throughout being never disturbed and the listening expectant attitude and rapt visionary outlooks of the dark blue eyes of La Veronica [sic] being more than fully interpretive of the passage which it illustrates.366

According to his brother in 1884, Rossetti wished to express a concept of art as an emotional reaction to some element of nature.367 *Veronica Veronese* is clearly a prime example of this: the girl reacts emotionally to the song of the bird, which inspires her to write music.

In 1899, Marillier describes *Veronica Veronese* as “one of the fine series of pictures painted for Mr. F. R. Leyland, at a cost of 800 guineas, the price for which he mostly commissioned them.”368

An article by Theodore Child in 1890 asserts that in *Veronica Veronese*, “A beautiful blond maiden clad in olive-green velvet is depicted wearing a white neckerchief [sic] and a reddish-purple girdle. She is seated on a dull red chair, and leaning over a table on which sit some primroses and a daffodil. As she listens to a canary-bird singing, her fingers stray over the chords of a violin, and before her the paper lies ready to receive the record of the notes.” As Child states, to the Victorian eye:

The absolute originality of the composition, which separates the causes in opposite corners of the picture, and unites the effects in the intensely expressive face, at once strikes one. Such an arrangement as this has not been conceived before. No artist has painted hands in such a position. This is something strange, intimate, and at the same time dreamily beautiful, comparable with nothing that ancient or modern art has

produced—something so refined, so harmonious in effect, and so complete, and direct in expression that the charm is as instantaneous as it is lasting.\textsuperscript{369}

Child goes on to state:

But even in this instance the artist has thought fit to accompany the picture by a few lines of explanation from the fictitious letters of Girolama Ridolfo, describing how Veronica wrote the first notes of a composition on a clean sheet of paper; then she grasped her bow in order to realise her dream; but before taking down the instrument she remained an instant motionless, listening to the inspiring bird, while her left hand wandered over the strings seeking the \textit{motif}. It was the marriage of the voices of nature and of the soul, “the dawn of a mystic creation.”\textsuperscript{370}

In this excerpt, Child identifies the painting’s primary focus of music, nature and the soul. “The dawn of mystic creation” implies the use of the occult in the act of creation. This is not surprising considering Rossetti’s aforementioned interest in the occult. According to McGann, Rossetti was fascinated by the relation between the soul’s beauty and the body’s beauty.\textsuperscript{371} Pictorial art was perfectly suited to undertake a study in the great divide between the two. As such, Rossetti’s paintings after the 1860s appear to be primarily of morally ambiguous women. This culminates in a series of paintings for Leyland where (on close inspection) the paintings are representations of the soul in a state of metamorphosis, as I will discuss throughout the thesis.

\textit{Veronica Veronese} is an important painting in Rossetti’s oeuvre as it was used as a model for Rossetti’s other paintings, particularly for Leyland. It is often used as a comparison to other paintings in the correspondence between the patron and artist, who both refer to the term ‘Veronica type.’ Veronica quickly becomes the standard of comparison in letters between the artist and patron. In March 1873, Rossetti told Leyland “Miss Wilding is coming here immediately, & I propose beginning a picture or two from her instantly, for your drawing rooms, of the same order as the Veronica… I have several very jolly & suggestive instruments, & nothing could be more pleasant to do or to see together than several musical pictures.”\textsuperscript{372} This letter inextricably links the Veronica type with Miss Wilding and musical instruments. In the same letter, Rossetti offers Leyland \textit{Desdemona’s Death Song} (depicting a scene from Shakespeare’s play \textit{Othello}), stating “this would form a splendid centre for other

\textsuperscript{369} Child, “A Pre-Raphaelite Mansion,” 93.
\textsuperscript{370} Child, “A Pre-Raphaelite Mansion,” 93.
\textsuperscript{372} Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence 6}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 18 March 1873, (73.82), 95.
musical pictures in your drawing rooms.” Leyland turned the offer down a mere two days later, saying “some pictures of the Veronica class…would come in better with my scheme of decoration.” Several months later, in a letter to Leyland in October 1873, Rossetti again used Veronica as the ideal, asking if he would prefer “some pictures of the Veronica class.” In the midst of their argument over La Ghirlandata, Rossetti reminded Leyland of his earlier letter stating he “thought of doing rather some pictures of the Veronica class.” Rossetti went on to explain that “In pursuance of this last plan, I offered you in May of this year La Ghirlandata and the Roman subject (The Roman Widow).”

Marsh specifically draws attention to Veronica Veronese as the painting to compare to the other works intended for Leyland. These consisted of one large painting and six smaller ones which were intended to hang around the drawing and music rooms. “The large one was to be The Ship of Love, and the six others were to complement Veronica Veronese.” Veronica Veronese is also used as a yardstick in letters from Rossetti to potential buyers. Referring to an initial sketch for Desdemona’s Death Song, which was intended to be a life scale painting for Leyland, Rossetti told Howell that he has depicted “the scene in Othello where she sings the willow song…I have made a study for Desdemona from Miss Wilding…I shall paint it boldly and full of colour—[sic] every thing straight from nature—[sic] like Leyland’s fiddle picture.” He also requests Leyland to send “the dimensions of the Veronica [sic], that I may see how far these can be made similar in size, but I believe both must be rather larger.” The paintings he is comparing for size are La Ghirlandata and The Roman Widow.

Veronica Veronese and Lady Lilith were hung as a pair to the left and right of Leyland’s fireplace. Visually, they not only incorporate the same model in each painting, Wilding, but they mirror each other’s poses almost exactly. Both are seated sideways, heads tilted, with dreamy expressions. Both women have similar angled arms, bracelets and a wreath of

373 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 18 March 1873, (73.82), 95.
374 Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, Leyland to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 20th March 1873, 37.
375 Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland, 17th Oct 1873, 47.
376 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 17th Oct 1873, (73.309), 300.
378 Cline, Owl and the Rossettis, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 3 January 1873, no. 185. “Leyland’s fiddle picture” refers to Veronica Veronese.
379 Fennell, Rossetti-Leyland Letters, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Leyland, 23 May 1873, 41.
flowers near their laps. Psomiades describes how the paintings were made to fit the space in Leyland’s salon to enhance the architectural details surrounding them:

Yet, being hung together, the only two paintings on the wall, they announce a relation to each other. They suggest an equivalency between unheard music in the process of composition and feminine narcissistic reverie; they underline the extent to which Lilith’s body is the body of art. Violin and bow are visually paired to comb and mirror, their strings visually paired to the strands of Lilith’s hair. Hair and music, narcissistic reverie and creative reverie, empty mirror and inhabited cage, all are paralleled to say as much about art as it does about sex.\(^{381}\)

Interestingly, Rossetti later described another painting, *A Sea Spell*, as “a companion to the Veronica [sic]” in a letter to Leyland of August 18, 1875.\(^{382}\) Rossetti described *A Sea Spell* to Leyland as another treatment of a “musical genius.”\(^{383}\)

The various sources Rossetti used for this painting are considerable. The features in *Veronica Veronese* contribute to our understanding; the dress, the bird, musical elements (the manuscript, violin, performance practice and sequence of sound), and flower symbolism.

This chapter has revealed that Rossetti has depicted the musical instrument in this painting completely at odds with traditional performance practice. Through the use of Rossetti’s poem “Hand and soul,” he is painting Alexa Wilding as a representation of the soul. The musical instrument is depicted in such a way as to represent a mirror which implies that the female figure is playing on her soul, with the musical instrument as a vehicle for its purification.

Contemporary descriptions heralded *Veronica Veronese* is one of the finest examples of Rossetti’s Venetian-styled paintings. Although it is a companion piece to *Lady Lilith*, it was used as a standard of comparison between patron and artist for subsequent Leyland paintings.

Chapter four will therefore discuss the next such painting, *La Ghirlandata* (1873). Although Leyland did not eventuate as the owner of *La Ghirlandata*, the argument that resulted over this art work marks a turning point in the relationship between artist and patron, as I will discuss. Their professional and personal relationship following this point was arguably never the same.


Chapter Four

La Ghirlandata (1873)

Figure 29: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *La Ghirlandata*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library

This chapter will provide a brief description of *La Ghirlandata* and discuss the sources Rossetti used as inspiration for the painting. It will also discuss common themes seen in previous chapters; important features such as the dress, the bird, the musical instrument, the flowers and the angel. It will also chronicle and assess the argument between Leyland and Rossetti over this painting and will consider contemporary descriptions and its modern reception.

Rossetti started painting *La Ghirlandata* in the first half of 1873. As with most of the paintings intended for Leyland, it depicts Alexa Wilding playing a stringed musical instrument, surrounded by various symbolic accessories. Wilding modelled for *La*  

---

Figure 29: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *La Ghirlandata*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library

This chapter will provide a brief description of *La Ghirlandata* and discuss the sources Rossetti used as inspiration for the painting. It will also discuss common themes seen in previous chapters; important features such as the dress, the bird, the musical instrument, the flowers and the angel. It will also chronicle and assess the argument between Leyland and Rossetti over this painting and will consider contemporary descriptions and its modern reception.

Rossetti started painting *La Ghirlandata* in the first half of 1873. As with most of the paintings intended for Leyland, it depicts Alexa Wilding playing a stringed musical instrument, surrounded by various symbolic accessories. Wilding modelled for *La*  

---

Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2011, December 1.
Ghirlandata for a week in early April. As with other paintings, he has depicted her in a “fanciful bower”, surrounded by foliage and flowers. She is shown floating above the green leaves of a “thorn tree & myrtle copse.” On either side of her, two angels listen to her playing, “as if heaven itself waited on her song.” Rossetti intended it to be “a study of greens chiefly, interspersed with blues of various shades.”

In correspondence, Rossetti repeatedly calls La Ghirlandata his best work. I have chosen correspondence with family members, which ensures his remarks are not meshed with commercial purposes. To his mother he wrote, “It has turned out about my best, I think, but of course has taken me much longer than I looked for.” He told his brother: “I have finished my picture for Graham & think it is the best I have done, so should have liked to show it you. However I dare say there will be some other chance.”

Rossetti appears to have drawn on many sources of inspiration for La Ghirlandata. The inspiration for the painting may have come from the fifteenth century Florentine painter, Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Rossetti knew of Ghirlandaio as early as 1847, evident in one of his notebooks from this period. The work of Ghirlandaio is also described as an

---

385 Rossetti writes, Alexa “has now been here three days” in a letter dated 6 April, and in another letter dated 9 April, Rossetti writes “Miss W[ilding] & Dunn are leaving here tomorrow night or Friday. I have made a successful study for a Leyland picture from her.” See Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, 6 April 1873, (73.98), 114 and Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, Wednesday night [9 April 1873], (73.101), 119. Henry Treffry Dunn was Rossetti’s assistant, who often made preliminary studies or copies for Rossetti, acted as secretary and gathered materials to be used in sessions. They grew to be good friends and Rossetti came to rely on him heavily. However, they argued increasingly towards the end of Rossetti’s life. Rossetti then refused to pay him and Dunn left the position in 1880 (Vivien Allen, *Hall Caine: Portrait of a Victorian Romancer* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1997), 87 <http://www.amazon.com/Hall-Caine-Portrait-Victorian-Romancer/dp/1850758093> [Accessed 2013, November 18].

386 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Wednesday [20 August 1873], (73.248), 238.

387 Fredeman, *Correspondence 7*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederic George Stephens, Tuesday [c. 10 August 1875], (75.93), 70.

388 Fredeman, *Correspondence 7*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederic George Stephens, Tuesday [c. 10 August 1875], (75.93), 70.

389 He also tells Charles Augustus Howell: “I should like you to see it, for it’s really a stunner.” Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 23 Sept [1873], (73.284), 277 (Not my italics). However Howell was acting as Rossetti’s liaison with patrons, so his comment may be commercially driven.

390 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti, 13 Sept 1873, (73.275), 269.

391 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Michael Rossetti, Tuesday [23 September 1873], (73.287), 279. William Graham (1817–1885) was a Liberal MP and a collector of Rossetti’s work.

example of art which “cannot be surpassed by any other school” in an article featured in *The Germ* (a short lived journal created by the Pre-Raphaelites and Rossetti, pronouncing their notions of true art). As John Ruskin heralded Ghirlandaio as the master of painting in Quattrocentro Florence, it is not surprising that Rossetti may have used his work as a source of inspiration.

McGann identifies Keat’s poem “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” as another source of inspiration for *La Ghirlandata*. Rossetti drew three representations of the poem in his career, a sketch in 1848, a watercolour in 1855, and another sketch circa 1855. He also wrote a poem in 1880 entitled “John Keats.” “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” includes many features which appear in *La Ghirlandata* indicating likely homage. This includes a garland, a bracelet, and the long hair of the model. The singing bird in the painting may signify that the knight is not yet lulled to sleep, when no birds sing.

Rossetti was specific with his requirements for every aspect of his paintings, including the dress in *La Ghirlandata*.

He wrote to Charles Augustus Howell from Kelmscott “Please send pattern of green velvet. I may probably be taking the lot & giving you some drawing for it, if it really seems worth £43. I think some of it w[oul]d do better than anything else for the curtain (instead of screen). So please send me pattern at once.” In a later letter, he told Howell “about the velvet, I am

---


399 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 22 January 1873, (73.29), 41. Rossetti stayed at Kelmscott Manor for a long time, in order to recover from his mental breakdown and suicide attempt in June 1872.
sorry to have missed it if good, but the small sample sent looks dimmer and rustier than the last lot I had from Marks, and compared with the piece I now enclose, is as mud to meadow.\footnote{Cline, {\it Owl and the Rossettis}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Howell, 25 January 1873, no.195.} Rossetti clearly had a specific colour in mind for the dress in the painting, reflecting his aesthetic preoccupations.

The bird is also an important symbol in \textit{La Ghirlandata}, as with many of Rossetti’s paintings featuring birds, as previously mentioned. It is often difficult to accurately identify the type of bird in Rossetti’s paintings, as he often changes its colour to suit symbolic purposes.\footnote{In \textit{La Fiammetta}, the bird is red, the same colour as the model’s dress. In \textit{Beata Beatrix}, the bird is red, the same colour as Love’s dress, depicted in the background of the painting.} In \textit{La Ghirlandata} it is a harbinger of woe, as in \textit{Venus Verticordia} and \textit{Beata Beatrix}, and at the same time, a symbol of the spirit, as in \textit{Veronica Veronese}. The bird can often symbolise the parting soul, as in \textit{La Fiammetta}.\footnote{Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “A Warning.” \textit{Athenaeum} 2647 (July-December 1878, part II), 89, via McGann, “Transcript: The Athenaeum, 1878, part II, July-December,” \textit{Rossetti Archive}. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www.rosettiarchive.org/docs/ap4.a85.1878b.rad.html#ap4.a85> [Accessed 2012, August 2].} The figure miraculously rises above the trees and is surrounded by angels, presumably ready to guide her into the afterlife.

Evidently Rossetti considered the options of a bird, butterfly or dragonfly for the painting. He wrote Dunn requesting:

\begin{quote}
a dragon-fly or two to paint in my picture, you know they are quite blue, & I want one with his wings spread upwards as they do when they fly or sometimes when they stand (included sketch of dragonfly). You might get me if possible two or three set up in different positions. I am wanting them as soon as possible. Also you might get me a few blue or blue-grey butterflies. These also should be set up in action flying or resting…I used to have a lot in a flat box…Also you might send me at the same time that little blue bird there is at Chelsea.\footnote{Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence 6}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, (73.248), 238.} \end{quote}

The correspondence confirms that Rossetti was after a specific shade of blue. Upon receiving the specimens, Rossetti told Dunn: “the dragon-fly is not blue – [sic] so no use to me.”\footnote{Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence 6}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, (73.251), 241.}

According to Rossetti, Kelmscott usually teemed with blue dragonflies in hot weather. The colour was so important to Rossetti that he told Dunn he would attempt to catch one
himself. According to Smith, a bird or butterfly was used by Rossetti to indicate the captive soul of man. Treuherz also asserts that butterflies are representative of the soul.

Rossetti may have chosen the bird for personal reasons. Many accounts assert that Rossetti associated birds with otherworldly phenomena. William Michael Rossetti recounts a time when his brother believed a singing “thrush had been trained to ejaculate something insulting to him.” On another occasion, William Bell Scott recalls that while on a walk with Rossetti, they observed a chaffinch on their path which calmly allowed Rossetti to hold it. Rossetti’s reported response was the belief that the chaffinch “is my wife, the spirit of my wife, the soul of her has taken this shape; something is going to happen to me.” D. M. R. Bentley points out that Rossetti was known to call his wife by bird names.

Bentley identifies that Rossetti has represented the same blue bird in both La Ghirlandata and Venus Verticordia, in almost the same pose (see figures 30 and 31). He asserts that both birds symbolise that “the inspirational power of love outlasts both time and death.”

---

406 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, (73.251), 241-2.
Figure 30: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), detail of Venus Verticordia, 1864-8. Oil on canvas, 98cm x 70cm. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth413

Figure 31: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of La Ghirlandata, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library414

Venus Verticordia is also linked to La Ghirlandata in other ways as the model was painted out in 1867 in favour of Alexa Wilding.415 Both are emerging from foliage like angels. The flowers encircling the musical instrument in La Ghirlandata are very similar to the flowers surrounding the model in Venus Verticordia. Interestingly, Venus Verticordia sparked the falling out with Ruskin who cited Rossetti’s “fatal mistake of thinking that you will ever learn to paint well by painting badly— i.e., coarsely.”416

In terms of physical examples from which Rossetti painted, Fredeman notes that Rossetti requested from Dunn: “a pair of pelican wings & another pair of some other bird which are at Chelsea & which I need for painting.”417 Having remembered the name of the second bird, Rossetti writes again a fortnight later, with the request for: “a wing of a pee-wit [sic] (lapwing) (or a pair of wings I think) which are somewhere.”418 The Pelican wings are

413 Copyright permission obtained from Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth, 2012, November 11, , but image removed from online version at the request of the copyright holder.
415 The name of the model is not known, she is only referred to as a cook Rossetti found on the street, who was “a very large woman, almost a giantess.” McGann, “Venus Verticordia –Image,” Rossetti Archive. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www/rossettiarchive.org/docs/s173.rap.html> [Accessed 2012, August 2] and Surtees (ed), The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti I, 99.
417 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Tuesday [1 July 1873], (73.183), 182.
418 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, 16 July [1873], (73.213), 207.
probably for the bird atop the instrument, and the peewit seems visibly similar to the blue wings painted on the column of the musical instrument.

The musical instrument is one of the central features in *La Ghirlandata*. Rossetti may have been inspired to add it after seeing Tintoretto’s “Women playing music.”

Figure 32: Jacopo Robusti Tintoretto (1518-94), *Women Playing Music, Perhaps an Allegory of Music*, 1582-4. Oil on canvas, 142 x 214 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

In the centre of this painting, Tintoretto has depicted a dulcimer (see figure 32). Rossetti appears to have painted an instrument very similar in appearance in *La Ghirlandata*, with the additional feature of ornamental birds at the top and bottom of the instrument (see figure 33 below).

---

419 Tintoretto was clearly an inspiration to Rossetti, although I have not been able to confirm that this is the Tintoretto painting Hunt and Rossetti saw in the Louvre in 1849. The closest description I can find is from Hunt stating, “large composition by Tintoretto gave us some idea of his dignity, but the arrangement of figures sitting in a half-circle and seen from below was so common to painters of his century” William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (E. P. Dutton and Company, 1914), 132. It is more likely that Rossetti encountered it as a copy or an engraving. Rossetti also had a “Tintoret” [sic] print sent to him in 1871 which he mounted on his bedroom wall. See McGann, “Transcript: Letter to William Bell Scott, September 15, 1871,” *Rossetti Archive*. Distributed by IATH and NINES <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti.Itr.0544.rad.html> [Accessed 2012, November 16]. Rossetti often referred to Tintoretto, or “Tintoret” throughout his writings, usually in comparison to other artists. Leyland had also bought two Tintoretto paintings, which Rossetti would have known about, as they often discussed purchases and painting values. See J. B. Stoughton Holborn, *Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1912), 103. <http://archive.org/stream/cu31924016803581/cu31924016803581_djvu.txt> [Accessed 2012, November 16]

420 This image is now deemed to be available in the public domain and free of copyright legislation. The image is from Wikimedia commons <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacopo_Tintoretto_-_Women_Playing_Music_-_WGA22668.jpg#filelinks> Copyright permission obtained from Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden 2013, March 22.
It is clear, however, that Rossetti had an actual harp to paint from as the correspondence confirms. In a letter to Howell, Rossetti also revealed how important the harp was to *La Ghirlandata*: “do you ever come across costume draperies? These are invaluable to me, as a picture can be made on the strength of a good thing of the kind. Or properties such as the harp you got me, without which I should never have painted this Ghirlandata.”

Marsh refers to the instrument as “from the stock of studio props, which looks something like a zither, held upright.” Rossetti told Howell “I have got those two instruments you bought for me down here, Dunn has strung them & set them to rights, & I am going soon to paint two pictures from Miss Wilding with them, about the size of the fiddle one, as Leyland wants others of that kind for his drawing rooms, & a series of musical pictures would look splendid together.”

---

422 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 28 Aug 1873, (73.260), 251.
424 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 7 March 1873, (73.70), 83.
The instrument looks very unlike any plausible harp, especially if it is strung in a similar fashion on the side we cannot see. Harps have strings perpendicular to the soundboard, whereas zithers in most cases have strings parallel to the soundboard. Therefore, in this case we can interpret the instrument in the painting as a zither-type instrument, as opposed to a harp. Rossetti also had a dulcimer in his possession at the time of his death, an instrument that does have a sound board and strings running parallel to the soundboard. Although Rossetti’s inventory at the time of his death states that there was an Irish harp in his collection, the strings of an Irish harp run perpendicular to the instrument which does not fit with the instrument in the painting. From the correspondence we know that there was a dulcimer at Kelmscott at the time he was finishing La Ghirlandata. This is confirmed in a letter to his mother, explaining how they had been teasing Dizzy the dog by taking:

a dulcimer which lies flat on the ground - & put a bit of sugar on the strings. Then, as Dizzy approached to take it, the strings were immediately struck with the plectrum, and the contest of terror & appetite in Dizzy’s bosom was delicious.

Although Rossetti refers to the instrument in the painting as a harp in three separate letters, the instrument depicted most closely resembles a zither-type instrument.

In terms of performance practice, the instrument would be unplayable as depicted. The player’s hair is obstructing the strings, as is the material on her dress. Moreover, the model is clearly holding one of the strings between her index finger and thumb, which would not produce a sound (see figure 34).

Figure 34: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of fingers of model in La Ghirlandata, 1873. Oil on canvas, 115 x 87 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library

426 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti, 13 Sept 1873, (73.275), 271.
427 To Watts-Dunton he described the painting as “a lady playing on a harp,” to Treffry Dunn “figure playing on the queer old harp which I drew from Miss W[ilding] when you were here with her.” And to William Bell Scott “a woman playing on a sort of solid harp I have-an instrument stringed on both sides.” See Fredeman, Correspondence 6, 73.190, 73.248, 73.252, 73.257. Rossetti also had a harp from Howell in April 1875, as he writes “All right. I keep the harp…” (it is unclear when this came into his possession) Cline, Owl and the Rossettis, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Howell, Monday [12 April 1875], no. 414 or Fredeman, Correspondence 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, Monday [12 April 1875], (75.32), 29.
This is interesting as Rossetti had previously depicted correct performance practice in such paintings such as *A Blue Closet* (1856-7), *A Tune of Seven Towers* (1857), *The Blue Bower* (1865), and *A Christmas Carol* (1867). Moreover, he also depicted the model incorrectly holding the string of the instrument in another painting, *The Sea Spell* (1877). Both paintings were intended for Leyland. I believe this decision was not an accident, but was part of a joint aesthetic for Leyland’s series of paintings, as I will discuss in chapter six. Rossetti has also chosen to depict the model seated with the zither to one side of her body, as opposed to the traditional performance practice of having a leg on either side. This would hinder the performer’s ability to navigate the range of the instrument with ease. Moreover, using this method, the performer cannot see where the fingers should be placed. This leads to the conclusion that Rossetti never intended to portray the model playing the instrument, but instead has depicted a woman using the instrument as a tool to symbol the purification of the soul.

In terms of symbolic meaning, we will look at the symbolic meaning of the harp as Rossetti repeatedly referred to the instrument in the painting as a harp in the correspondence (as mentioned earlier). The harp was associated with the curative powers of music: King David is described in the Bible as playing a harp in order to soothe the evil spirit that possessed King Saul: “And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.”

Could it be that, as we saw in *Veronica Veronese*, Rossetti has again represented a female figure in a state of internal metamorphosis using a musical instrument as a symbol for the purification of her soul? Smith states that the carved swans on the top of the instrument is not only a symbol of music, but also of death. Spencer-Longhurst states that the blue wings painted on the side of the instrument are symbolic of the flight of time. These two observations indicate that the musical instrument may have a deeper symbolic purpose than first appears. The birds at the top and bottom of the instrument were specifically requested from Dunn by Rossetti (see figure 35).

---

429 See Samuel 16:23.
The tradition of adorning musical instruments with carved swans appears in various cultures throughout history and originates in ancient Greece. Reasons for these additions vary from a natural association of birdsong with music, inclusion in religious and funerary rituals to symbolise rebirth or victory over death, and even as symbols of creation, eroticism and divinity.

Rossetti required Dunn to make a carving of a bird “to paint as a top for that harp-instrument in the picture I am doing from Miss W[ilding].” The specifications were fairly exact, Rossetti stating “the height of it from tops of head to points of lower wings should be about 6 [sic] inches & the width between the points of the expanded wings about the same…the birds to be crested ones perhaps – [sic] not so much like ducks – [sic] but still good solid headed birds.”

The instrument Rossetti was using as a model had strings extending to the top and attached to knobs, as stated to Dunn:

---

435 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Friday [1 August 1873], (73.237), 227.
436 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Friday [1 August 1873], (73.237), 227.
I suppose the round tops of the folded wings must project sideways as knobs a little [sic] more than I have made them, as I perceive in the instrument, a few of the strings seem to be fastened round the corresponding knobs in the awkward ornament at the top. However, these knobs project but little more than the wing-tops in my sketch.\footnote{Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence} 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Friday [1 August 1873], (73.237), 227. Not my italics. This is presumably based on a drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Fredeman notes that the drawing is untraced and also points out that the carving was only used in the later stages of the painting process, see (73.237), note 2, 228. For evidence carving was used in later stages see Fredeman, 73.245.1 and 73.248.}

This description conflicts with the instrument Rossetti has chosen to represent in the painting, indicating he has used artistic license in his representation, melding various sources into one representation.

However these birds are clearly an important addition as he stated to Dunn, “I should be glad of this as soon as you could let me have it, as part of the composition of the pictures depends on drawing it in.”\footnote{Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence} 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Friday [1 August 1873], (73.237), 227.} In a later letter to Dunn, Rossetti told him to:

send me the wood-carving \textit{as it is} [sic]…I meant the roughest cutting out of the softest wood & thought you could do it in a day. As it is, I have been obliged to fill the space in the picture, as I could not do the surrounding parts till this was in. I have concocted something from the bird on the Indian instrument you brought here, but could avail myself of the spread wings in yours if you would send it to me.\footnote{Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence} 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Monday [18 August 1873], (73.245.1), 236. Not my italics.}

The Indian instrument he speaks of is the Indian sarinda as seen in \textit{Ligeia Siren}, painted at the same time (see figure 36).
As Fredeman states of this instrument, it is “played with a bow, but DGR [sic] as usual was more interested in the physical shape & [sic] the iconographical implications of an instrument than its technicalities, let alone its sound.”

Rossetti told William Bell Scott that the figure in La Ghirlandata is playing on “a sort of solid harp I have – an instrument stringed on both sides and very paintable in form.” In the inventory at the time of Rossetti’s death, there is listed an ‘Irish harp.’ It is possible that this instrument was a Spitzharfe (otherwise known as an Arpanetta in Western society). The Spitzharfe is organologically a box zither, but was historically called an Irländische Harfe (Irish harp) in Germany. The Spitzharfe closely resembles the instrument in La

---

441 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, (73.64), fn.4, 78. ‘Dante Gabriel Rossetti’ stands for Dante Gabriel Rossetti. ‘DGR’ is Fredeman’s abbreviation for Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
442 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Bell Scott, [c. 26 August 1873], (73.257), 249.
Ghirlandata: an upright double psaltery, with each main side of the trapezoidal box acting as a soundboard and ornate soundholes (see image below). 444


Obviously, Rossetti would have taken artistic license in the representation of the instrument in the painting, as they are clearly not identical.

As in other Rossetti paintings, flowers contribute to our understanding of La Ghirlandata. Smith comments that the title of the painting can be roughly translated as the “garlanded one”. William Michael Rossetti wrote of La Ghirlandata:

I never heard Gabriel explain the underlying significance of this picture: I suppose he
purposed to indicate, more or less, youth, beauty, and the faculty for art worthy of a
celestial audience, all shadowed by mortal doom.\textsuperscript{445}

As Rossetti never explained the underlying significance of this painting, it is difficult to know
if William Michael Rossetti’s interpretation is correct, but it seems perfectly plausible.
The flowers however give us some indication of the hidden meaning behind \textit{La Ghirlandata}.
Smith identifies that the subject of \textit{La Ghirlandata} sits in a grove of myrtle and thornapple.
Myrtle stands for “love,” thornapple for “deceitful charms.”\textsuperscript{446}

Smith notes that the garland on the instrument is made of roses and honeysuckle. These are
flowers of love and, more specifically, love of a sensual nature. A garland itself gives praise
to the wearer and could stand for “bonds of love.”\textsuperscript{447} Although these flowers represent love of
different kinds, the blue flowers in the foreground contradict this, as William Michael
Rossetti explained:

\begin{quote}
...It must have been intended to have a fateful or deadly purport, as indicated by the
prominence given to the blue flowers of the poisonous monkshood. Monkshood this
plant was, in Rossetti’s intention: but I am informed that he made a mistake (being
assuredly far the reverse of a botanist), and figured the innocuous larkspur instead--
and was not minded to make an alteration when friendly admonitions had apprised
him of his error.\textsuperscript{448}
\end{quote}

Smith also identifies the red flower in the lower right as a red variety of the passion-flower,
showing the nature of music. She believes that the two figures at the top are not “youthful
angels” as William believed them to be, but rather attendants on La Ghirlandata. They appear
later in \textit{Astarte Syriaca} and \textit{La Bella Mano} and are described as “loves.”\textsuperscript{449} They have flame-
coloured wings like Dante’s love, and help to give the main figure a goddess-like stature,
aided by the myrtle and the swans on the instrument, both attributes of Venus who was the
god associated with love, beauty and fertility.\textsuperscript{450} Swans are also birds sacred to Apollo, the
god of art.\textsuperscript{451} The use of flowers illustrates the way in which Rossetti intended to depict
images which represented both beauty and an underlying tone of doom and deceit.

\textsuperscript{445} Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 121 cites W.M. Rossetti, \textit{Dante Gabriel Rossetti as
designer and writer}, 87.
\textsuperscript{446} Smith, 122 cites Ingram, \textit{Flora Symbolica} (1868), 361.
\textsuperscript{447} Smith, 122 cites Ernst and Joanna Lehner, \textit{Forklore and Symbolism of flowers, plants and trees} (New York:
Tudor publishing co., 1969), 117.
\textsuperscript{448} Smith, 122 cites W.M. Rossetti, “Notes on Rossetti and his works” \textit{Art Journal} (July 1884), 206.
\textsuperscript{450} Smith, 122 cites James Hall, \textit{Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art} (New York: Icon Editions, Harper
and Row, 1974), 318.
\textsuperscript{451} Smith, 122 cites Hall, \textit{Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art}, 26.
Marsh observes that “The garland of the title was made of roses and honeysuckle, his favourite flowers, but the auburn-haired figure floats as if garlanded in leaves, attended by angels. The hues are bright, even gaudy, but at the foot are blue flowers meant for the poisonous monkshood, adding an ominous note.”

Smith notes that, by the time La Ghirlandata was painted, Rossetti had altered the face of Lady Lilith to Alexa Wilding, expunging the features of Fanny Cornforth. Smith writes that Wilding represents a beauty whose main purpose it is to inspire or create. She notes that Wilding’s face has a similar expression to Sibylla Palmifera and Regina Cordium with her mouth closed and her gaze directly at the viewer. Smith comments that the “loves” attending her make her seem praiseworthy, despite the garland of “sensuous” flowers on the instrument. The suggestion in this painting is that she is a goddess of art, love and death.

The angel is a symbol often used in Rossetti’s paintings. The angel can be a symbol of the parting soul, as in La Fiammetta. This seems fitting, as the central figure is floating above the treeline seemingly escorted by the angels, indicating the soul’s passing over into the true death. As mentioned earlier, further evidence of this can be seen in the carved swans on the top of the instrument which are symbols of death.

The angels in the picture are modelled from May Morris, daughter of Jane Morris, who lived at Kelmscott with Rossetti at this time. Rossetti wrote to William Bell Scott, “Little May is growing a divine model, and appears twice, as angels in the plural, in my Ghirlandata.” Rossetti had painted May Morris’s portrait one year earlier in 1872 (see figure 38). Rossetti appears to have adjusted May Morris’s features to closer resemble Alexa Wilding’s. This includes adjusting the angel’s eye colour from brown to bright blue (like Alexa’s) and changing her heavy hooded eyelids to wide open eyelids. Rossetti has also adjusted her hair colour from brown to red like Alexa’s (see example figures below).

---

452 Marsh, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 470.
457 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Bell Scott, 31 August 1873, (73.265), 258.
La Ghirlandata is also an important painting in that it marks a turning point in the personal and professional relationship between Rossetti and Leyland. By May 1873, Rossetti was showing frustration at being constrained by Leyland’s requirements. Not only the pressure to produce good work within time contraints, but also the necessary expectation of travelling to

---

458 Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2013, March 29.
meet Leyland to present his work. Kelmscott was several hours travel from London. In a letter to Ford Madox Brown, he writes of Leyland:

From what you say I judge he comes to town at the close of every [sic] week…To be coming to London now w[oul]d be an extreme inconvenience to me…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 & fancies of individuals is concerned. Absolutely everything I need is here after great labour & expense in getting it here…The natural impulse is to say simply – Leyland be d—d! [sic] - & so no doubt the whore feels but too often inclined to say & cannot. 460

It is clear Rossetti was increasingly reluctant to travel to meet Leyland and preferred him to simply buy the paintings outright, which although Leyland had sometimes done so in the past, it is obviously an unrealistic expectation. 461

Although Rossetti asserts that Leyland turned down the painting, the correspondence shows that he merely balked at the three heads and requested to view it in person before buying. 462 Rossetti also acknowledged to Fanny Cornforth that it was less of a mix up than he himself being arrogant and not remotely apologetic about it: “Leyland was to have had it, but he wanted to see it first & put me out of temper, so I offered it to Graham.” 463

On July 4th, Howell not only urged Rossetti to accept Graham’s offer of 800 guineas for La Ghirlandata, but he added: “Graham is one’s right hand, and if all be well I can work him up to no end of use…Damn Leyland, he is no good.” 464

Although Rossetti accepted Graham’s offer in early July 1873, he only told Leyland the painting has gone to another patron in October, explaining that he:

needed the advance which I proposed; & as I could not continue to press the matter after your objection, I accepted an offer from another quarter of the whole price of the picture down in advance; and having accepted this I was of course bound to complete this picture before other things. It is now finished & delivered. It is a much finer

460 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, Wednesday [28 May 1873], (73.146), 157.
461 Although Leyland had never refused a painting before seeing it, he often requested to view works in process and Rossetti often writes as if Leyland has requested a viewing e.g. Fredeman, Correspondence 6, 11 April 1874 (74.72), 433. Perhaps Leyland became more rigid with this requirement to view works in process, as three years later Whistler attempted to restrict Leyland’s viewing of the Peacock Room before it was complete. Arguably Whistler could have avoided his lawsuit with Leyland over the Peacock Room had he observed Leyland’s argument with Rossetti over La Ghirlandata three years earlier. It seems as if Leyland became frustrated with being treated as a bottomless source of money for his artist friends.
462 For request to see La Ghirlandata in progress see Fennell, 52 and for Leyland’s response to having it sold it without his knowledge, “I understood that was one of the two pictures you were to do for me,” see Fennell, 56.
463 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Fanny Cornforth, Monday [7 July 1873], (73.193), 189.
464 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Howell, 4 July 1873, (73.190), fn. 1, 188 cites Cline, Owl and the Rossettis, Howell to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 3 July 1873, no. 257.
thing, my dear Leyland, than the Palmifera which you always regretted to have missed; & it should have been yours if my plans had held good.\textsuperscript{465}

As Fredeman explains, Rossetti presumably felt inclined to gloat, most likely feeling insulted about Leyland’s comments to Howell in July that “three heads would never do.”\textsuperscript{466} Even though Leyland was reserved about the three heads, he merely wanted to see the picture before accepting it. Understandably he wrote back on Oct 8 with indignation: “I understood that was one of the two pictures you were to do for me.”\textsuperscript{467}

Howell had written to Rossetti in July explaining Leyland’s reasons for wanting to view \textit{La Ghirlandata}. In the letter, Howell transcribed his conversation with Leyland:

> You see Howell three heads would never do for me, the pictures must run round like music notes, a head in each, that one must follow them round the room, only it is the devil to say so to Rossetti, as of course he knows best what to painting, but then, one knows what one wants.\textsuperscript{468}

In the same letter, on 7\textsuperscript{th} July, Howell advises Rossetti he could resolve the situation by quickly painting Leyland another painting at a reduced price:

> The advantage of having two such men as Leyland and Graham quite free, is enormous, Leyland as you see by this £400 business is worked up, and has come to a stand still like a half bred horse, he is [sic] mean, and the only way to get him back, is to loosen the traces, and ease this debt which to him seems enormous, If indeed now that you have Miss Wilding you could keep her, and rapidly paint a picture for Leyland and receive for it as little as possible in case it would be the right things. If you can, let me know what you have to paint for him, and how you stand with him as to each advance.\textsuperscript{469}

On 11 July, a letter from Rossetti to Dunn indicates Leyland is ‘horribly fidgetty’[sic] at having missed out on the painting:

\textsuperscript{465} Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence 6}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 4 Oct 1873, (73.293), 285.
\textsuperscript{467} Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence 6}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 4 Oct 1873, (73.293), note 2, 286 and Fennell, 56.
\textsuperscript{468} Cline, \textit{Owl and the Rossettis}, Howell to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 7 July 1873, no. 261.
\textsuperscript{469} Cline, \textit{Owl and the Rossettis}, Howell to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 7 July 1873, no. 261.
The picture I am doing of her [Alexa Wilding] has been sold over Leyland’s head to Graham for 800 g[uinea]s…I am also making a study from her for a picture for Leyland - Roman Widow. By Howell’s account he now seems horribly fidgety [sic] at having missed the other. I think he is likely to have the Proserpine which is here…470

By 13th October, Howell warns Rossetti that Leyland is sulking over the loss of La Ghirlandata and must be treated carefully:

This is a downright royal black Leyland sulk, and it will take a long time to get him out of it…Hold you own in this matter but do it so gently and in such a friendly way that he may never suspect that you need [sic] him if he once gets the notion that you require him and will not remain at his mercy the game is up, as far as he is concerned….Leyland most distinctly [sic] refused the Ghirlandata [sic]. I remember every word he said on the subject by my bedside—viz “Damn this stay at Kelmscott [sic] one cannot see his work, and I am not going to buy pictures without first seeing them, he has already got a large advance at hand, and now he wants to paint this picture with three heads! I would not take it at any price for what I distinctly want are pictures with one head each, three heads would throw out all my plans at once.”471

Although Rossetti’s early correspondence gives an air of confidence about Leyland’s continued patronage, the later correspondence indicates that Rossetti was concerned about how to handle the matter. He wrote to both Howell and Ford Madox Brown to get advice on Leyland’s conduct and likely responses, enclosing Leyland’s letters to ensure they had all the information. Howell did not receive all the Leyland correspondence however, whereas Madox Brown did. Rossetti also wrote to his brother, “Thank you for your trouble with Leyland’s letters”, clearly having asked him for advice too.472

The correspondence indicates that Rossetti grew more concerned as the months progressed. On 23 October, Rossetti writes to Ford Madox Brown of his doubts about Leyland’s continued patronage:

Certainly Graham holds good, but Leyland seems very shaky, and I am still engaged in an awkward correspondence with him. He consents to take the Proserpine & Roman Widow, at 800 g[uinea]s each, but is so rummy (odd) in his general conduct that I don’t quite know how it will end.473

470 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, Friday 11 July [1873], (73.200), 196.
471 Cline, Owl and the Rossettis, Howell to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 13 October 1873, no. 311.
472 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, 28 Oct [1873], (73.318), 310 and Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 21 Oct 1873, (73.312), 304-5. Dante Gabriel Rossetti to WMR, Thursday [13 November 1873], (73.337), 325.
473 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, Thursday, 23 October, 1873, (73.316), 307.
In November, Rossetti wrote to Howell of his concern over the state of affairs, “Leyland has been affectionate to me, & that is what I never forget, & I could not bear him really to think me neglectful.”

Although the relationship was now strained, Leyland continued to receive paintings from Rossetti and the two men continued friendly correspondence until Rossetti’s death in 1882.

Contemporary descriptions are important in ascertaining Victorian perceptions of the painting and Rossetti’s work in general. Although critical descriptions are seemingly sparse, this is not surprising, as the painting was not displayed for the public and went direct to the successful buyer.

In an 1875 letter to Frederic Stephens, in preparation for an article on Rossetti’s paintings, the artist provided a thorough description of La Ghirlandata:

The green-clad “Lady of the Garland” sits among the golden greens of thorn tree & myrtle copse; her hands drawing the music from the harp [sic] beside her, & her face absorbed in the sound. On either side, over her shoulders an angel looks through the glowing upper leaves, as if Heaven itself waited on her song. Round the summit of the harp [sic] is slung a garland of roses & honeysuckles, sweetest of earthy blooms, & the sky above, where the day of earth is dying, seems to speak of a sweetness still beyond. The evening breeze has just risen, & [sic] begins to lift the light drapery about her shoulders as she plays. In colour, the picture is a study of greens chiefly, interspersed with blues of various shades – the deep blueaconite which fills the base of the picture, the bright bird looking through the leaves, the wing-pattern painted on the instrument, & the blue fading from the sky. These hues are balanced by the golden browns of the hair, & the dusky-hued harp [sic] – an instrument solid & strung on both sides.

Stephens appears to have taken the description and repeated it almost verbatim. In 1882, William Sharp described the painting as:

one of those great pictures by Rossetti which could hardly ever become really popular, for its appeal is not that of a representation of the actual but of the ideal ; it

474 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, 2 Nov 1873, (73.326), 316.

475 Fredeman, Correspondence 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederic George Stephens, Tuesday [c. 10 August 1875], (75.93), 70. Rossetti’s description of this painting is thorough despite the fact it was two years after the painting was completed. This is because Rossetti had it in his possession after Graham lent the painting back to Rossetti for an undisclosed reason. Fredeman speculates that the painting was returned to Rossetti in order for a red and brown chalk version to be eventually completed by his assistant, Henry Treffry Dunn (Fredeman, Correspondence 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederic George Stephens, Sunday [c. 8 August 1875], (75.92), 66, n.1).

476 Apart from a few slight changes in word choice, and the omission of indefinite articles, Stephens quotes Rossetti’s letter verbatim. See Stephens, “Pictures by Mr Rossetti,” The Athenaeum, no. 2494 (14th August, 1875), 219-21.
deals not with easily understood domestic sentiment, but with what has to a few special spiritual significance.\textsuperscript{477}

This comment hints at the painting’s esoteric qualities.

In 1894, Stephens wrote approvingly of \textit{La Ghirlandata’s} "dreamy amorousness, the spell of which she is weaving with the notes of the harp [sic] whose strings her fingers slowly and daintily caress. The rapture of her deep blue eyes attests the secret of the throbbing music which loses itself amid the foliage of her bower."\textsuperscript{478}

In 1899, Marillier describes \textit{La Ghirlandata} as beautiful but indicated that he preferred his earlier work:

a lady playing upon a garlanded harp [sic], in the midst of a forest clearing, where angel faces peer down upon her rapt in wonder of her music, and mystical blue birds cleave the air...The whole is a subtle blending of subdued colour, where blue and green strive for the mastery. Beautiful as it is in these respects, \textit{La Ghirlandata}, it must be admitted, lacks the invention and the interest of Rossetti's more vigorous early work. It is an inspiration, a touch of poetry, no more.\textsuperscript{479}

Later scholars have linked this painting with others in examining the role of music in Rossetti’s work in general. Yuen observes that “we can say with certainty that Rossetti was interested in two ideas about music: ‘music as aesthetic ideal’ and ‘music as a feminine and feminising art.”\textsuperscript{480} These ideas repeatedly appear in his work, often in dialogue, not just in \textit{La Ghirlandata} (1873), but in \textit{The Blue Bower} (1865), \textit{Morning Music} (1864). Macleod asserts that in Rossetti’s work, music “has the power to create a mood, to cast a spell, and to transport the spectator into a heavenly realm...Because of its celestial associations, music provided the means to elevate the viewer from the mundane to the spiritual.”\textsuperscript{481} This is clearly the case with \textit{La Ghirlandata} as the female representing beauty is literally elevated towards

\textsuperscript{477} William Sharp, \textit{Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study} (London: Macmillan, 1882), 172. It is difficult to know if Sharp’s statement is representative of Rossetti’s interest in the occult, or in Sharp’s personal interpretation of occult meaning in his paintings. Sharp was avidly interested in the occult and had only known Rossetti for seven months before he died. See Elizabeth Sharp, \textit{William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by his Wife Elizabeth A. Sharp} (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 36.


\textsuperscript{480} Yuen, “Instruments of Ambivalence,” 153.

\textsuperscript{481} Macleod, “Rossetti’s Two Ligeias,” 99.
heaven as she plays the instrument. Her audience of two angels are drawn to this ‘heavenly’ music.

In summation, this chapter has provided a brief description of *La Ghirlandata* and discussed the wide range of sources of Rossetti. This chapter has again assessed the recurring significant features such as the dress, the bird, the flowers, and introduced the new feature of the angel. The musical instrument featured in this painting is depicted in a position which would produce poor or little sound, a paradox in Rossetti but making less enigmatic qualities more appealing. Rossetti used a wide range of sources as a model for the instrument, even designing a carving to aid him. The discussion has chronicled and assessed the argument between Leyland and Rossetti over this painting. Although Rossetti was initially cavalier about Leyland’s continued patronage after growing tired of his demands, Rossetti later realised his reliance on the relationship and grew concerned he would be thought neglectful. Contemporary descriptions and modern reception to the painting are mostly positive, and some hint at the spiritual significance of the painting.

Chapter five will discuss the next art work with a musical topic that Leyland bought, *Roman Widow* (1874). It will provide a brief description of *Roman Widow* and discuss the sources Rossetti used as inspiration for the painting. The chapter will explore the common themes seen previously and critical reception of the painting will be examined.
Chapter Five

Roman Widow (Dis Manibus) (1874)

Figure 40: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), Roman Widow (Dis Manibus), 1874. Oil on canvas, 105 x 92.9 cm. Collection Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico. The Luis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc.482

Rossetti’s painting Roman Widow (alternatively titled Dis Manibus) was completed in 1874 and was intended for Leyland, to whom Rossetti had already sent details (see below).483 This

482 Copyright permission obtained from Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico, 2011, December 14.
painting depicts a melancholic Roman widow performing an ‘elegy’ to the divine manes while playing on two ‘harps.’ The manes were the souls of the dead who were deified in Ancient Rome and considered protectors of the home. They were invoked by the Romans to address major issues in their lives. It can be assumed from the painting that the widow is performing for the soul of her deceased husband, as she sits beside her husband’s urn (at the right of the painting). The memorial urn is marble, decorated with many reliefs of animals; a bird taking flight, owls and rams. The inscription on the urn identifies the wife as Papiria Gemina and the husband as Lucius Aelius Aquinus. Around the urn hangs the silver marriage girdle of Papiria Gemina symbolising her enduring affection for her husband. Hanging beneath the tomb is a garland of pink rose-blossoms.

Rossetti first began the *Roman Widow* in 1873. He first broached the idea with Leyland in May, then promised him a drawing from Alexa Wilding on the subject in July. In October, Rossetti sent Leyland a thorough description of his plans for the painting, taking great care to explain the careful detailing:

Of the second picture [Roman Widow] I trust to make a work fully equal to the first [La Ghirlandata]. This I have cartooned from nature and am now beginning to paint it. It is called *Dis Manibus* – the dedicatory inscription to the Manes, the initials of which (DM) we find heading the epitaphs in Roman cinerary urns. In the picture, the lady sits in the “Columbarium” beside her husband’s urn which stands in a niche in the wall, wreathed about with roses & having her silver marriage-girdle handing among them. Her dress is white – the mourning of nobles in Rome – and as she sits she plays on two harps [sic] (one in her arm & one lying beside her) her elegy addresses “Dis Manibus.” The white marble background & urn, the white drapery & white roses will combine I trust to a lovely effect, & the expression will I believe be as beautiful & elevated as any I have attempted. Do you like me to consider this picture as yours at 800 gs?

“Collection Introduction: Dis Manibus,” Rossetti Archive. Distributed by IATH and NINES

Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 4 Oct 1873, (73.293), 285. “Manes” is defined as “the venerated or appeased spirit of a dead person.”


For the first mention to Leyland see Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Leyland, 23 May 1873, (73.140), 152-3. For the promise of a drawing see Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Leyland, 9 July 1873, (73.196), 191-3.

Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 4 Oct 1873, (73.293), 285.
Evidently, Rossetti was making a study for *Roman Widow* as early as July 1873, and intended it for Leyland, despite denying him *La Ghirlandata*. This is evidenced in a letter to Dunn, 11 July 1873:

> The picture I am doing of her [Alexa Wilding] has been sold over Leyland’s head to Graham for 800 guineas... I am also making a study from her for a picture for Leyland-Roman Widow. By Howell’s account he seems horribly fidgety at having missed the other. I think he is likely to have the Proserpine which is here...  

The painting was underway by 28 October, as evidenced in a letter Rossetti wrote to Thomas Gordon Hake:

> I am hoping soon to get forward with a commenced picture which I call *Dis Manibus*, and which represents a Roman widow seated in the ‘columbarium’ beside the cinerary urn of her husband, and playing on two small harps [sic], in Roman fashion, her elegy to the Divine Manes.\(^{490}\)

Columbaria were large underground vaults where peoples’ cremated remains were placed within small wall niches, as seen in Rossetti’s painting. Individual niches were frequently marked by memorial plaques, which Rossetti has taken care to include.\(^{491}\) The wreath of roses featured hanging from the tomb in *Roman Widow* was a Roman custom. The feasts of the Rosaria, when the celebrants adorned tombs with roses, were devoted to the manes.\(^{492}\) The Romans believed that a proper burial was essential for passage to the afterlife. Rossetti clearly had an understanding of such ceremonies in ancient Rome and made sure Leyland was aware of this deliberate inclusion.

When Stephens was preparing his article on Rossetti’s new works for *The Athenaeum*, the artist supplied this commentary:

> **Dis Manibus. [Roman Widow]** The title here suggests the subject—that of a Roman widow seated in the funeral vault beside her husband's cinerary urn, the inscription on which is headed with the invariable words as given above; and playing on two harps [sic] (as seen in some classical examples) an elegy ‘to the Divine Manes.’ She is robed in white—the mourning of noble ladies in Rome. The antique form of the harps [sic] is rendered in tortoiseshell chiefly with fittings of ebony or dark horn embossed in silver. The harp [sic] on which her right hand plays is wound with wild roses; and

---

\(^{489}\) Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti*, 155.  
\(^{490}\) Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Thomas Gordon Hake, 28 Oct [1873], (73.319), 312. ‘Marito carissimo’ translates to ‘beloved husband.’ I will investigate Rossetti’s use of two instruments and the performance practice depicted in this painting, later in the chapter.  
beneath the urn, across the wall of green marble, is a large festoon of garden roses, repeating as it were the festoon to be almost universally found on such urns and which this one displays round its inscription. About the urn is wound the widow's wedding-girdle of silver, dedicated to the dead as to the living husband. The moment chosen must be supposed to belong to those special occasions on which the Romans solemnized mortuary rites, and which recurring at intervals during the year.

In the article, Stephens quoted Rossetti almost verbatim, except for his own addition emphasising the musical element, “The second hand is on the bench on her left; her lean, pale fingers seem to stray “preluding” a mournful strain upon the strings of the instruments, and her very eyes seem to listen; her lips we might expect would part and emit a faint funereal hymn.”

Rossetti drew on many sources of inspiration for *Roman Widow*. Smith indicates that he may have also been inspired for this painting while reading *The History of the Romans under the Empire* by Charles Merivale in 1872, or from a similar composition of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Agrippina with the Ashes of Germanicus* (1866). It seems likely that Rossetti was inspired by an urn in his possession which he described to Hake when depicting it in *Roman Widow*:

> You will probably remember that the initials D.M (Dis Manibus) commence invariably the epitaphs inscribed on these urns, one of which I possess and shall paint in the picture. It is really inscribed by one Papiria Gemina “marito carissimo.”

Rossetti may have also taken inspiration from a depiction of a Roman urn in a book in his library, *Costume of the Ancients* by Thomas Hope (1841), specifically the animals under the inscription.

---

493 Fredeman, *Correspondence 7*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederic George Stephens, Tuesday [c. 10 August 1875], (75.93), 69-70.
496 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Thomas Gordon Hake, 28 Oct [1873], (73.319), 312.
He also told Hake that he had “perched your photograph of the Fates before my eyes while I painted it & tried to get a faint reflex of that kind of beauty.”

The dress is another important element in *Roman Widow*. For the headdress he used samples of muslin. Rossetti wrote to Dunn with his requirements on 13 May 1874:

> Is there any Indian muslin – quite thin at Cheyne Walk? I want some for the headdress of the Widow, which progresses very successfully – as good at least as any I have done. Head hair neck & one hand are finished. Tomorrow I do the 2nd [sic] hand…

The musical elements in *Roman Widow* are of primary focus. The subject of the painting is portrayed in the act of singing, as Rossetti indicates in a letter to Howell, “the hymn the lady is singing is of course also addressed Dis Manibus [sic], so the title fits as well.”

Although Rossetti refers to the instruments in the painting as ‘harps’, Alberto Ausoni identifies the two instruments as “a lyra and a table cittern (cetra da tavolo).” This is an

---

499 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Thomas Gordon Hake, 9 June 1874, (74.117), 474.
501 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Howell, 11 July 1873, (73.201), 197.
accurate identification of the instruments represented in the painting. According to Ausoni, the two instruments allude to “concord and affection maritale, that is, the enduring agreement between spouses to consider one another husband and wife.”  

Rossetti had a specific colour scheme for the instruments in mind. He wrote to his mother asking for tortoiseshell to help finish the surface of the instruments:

I am engaged still in painting the Roman Widow subject which goes on well...Do you happen to have anywhere any tortoiseshell article of that very bright tiny, strong dark spots on a light yellow ground, which one sometimes sees, reminding one a little of a panther’s skin? I mean to make the surface of the two harps [sic] on which the Roman widow plays of tortoiseshell thus tinted.  

In a later letter to his mother, he states the tint was close to what he had in mind, “Many thanks for the loan of the cardcase. It is just about the tint I meant & no doubt will be very useful. I will take greatest care of it.”

In terms of the performance practice, playing two such instruments simultaneously is extremely difficult. However, this was not a careless error by Rossetti, as two other Rossetti paintings depict a woman playing two such instruments simultaneously, both almost twenty years earlier. These are *The Return of Tibullus to Delia* (c.1853) and *A Harp Player* (c.1857) (see figures 42, 43 and 44). However, both of these examples portray the vertical instrument being held in a stable position through the use of a strap around the shoulder which is tied to the base of the instrument (see figures 43 and 44). The vertical instrument in *Roman Widow* has no such strap to hold it in place. It could be that the model is not actually represented playing the instrument, the viewer just assumes this must be the case. As we have seen in the other paintings for Leyland, Rossetti has portrayed the model with musical instruments that cannot reasonably be played. This leads the viewer to the question why Rossetti would depict the instrument in such an unplayable position.

---

504 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti, 16 April, 1874, (74.74), 435.  
505 Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti, 23 April, 1874, (74.81), 440.
Figure 42: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), *The Return of Tibullus to Delia*, c.1853. Watercolour, 22 x 29 cm. Location unknown.

Although this work is credited as copyright belonging to Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery (See http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s62.rap.html), the work does not belong to their collections.

Figure 43: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), detail of player in *The Return of Tibullus to Delia*, c.1853. Watercolour, 22 x 29 cm. Location unknown.

Although this work is credited as copyright belonging to Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery (See http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s62.rap.html), the work does not belong to their collections.
Rossetti indicates that he had seen classical depictions of people playing the instruments simultaneously, as evidenced by a commentary Rossetti gave to Stephens for his 1875 article in *The Athenaeum*. Rossetti wrote that the woman is “playing on two harps [sic] (as seen in some classical examples).” Rossetti may have seen such examples in the book, Sir William Hamilton’s *A Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases*, which was part of his library collection. However, Rossetti’s correspondence proves that he ordered this book in 1866, long after the completion of *The Harp Player* (c.1857) and *The Return of Tibullus to Delia* (c.1853), leaving the inspiration for these two earlier examples a mystery. It may be that these women are not supposed to be depicted in the act of playing the instruments, as these instruments are perhaps not supposed to be played simultaneously by one person. As all three women are in a state of contemplative mourning, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the women are only playing one instrument while reaching for the other which symbolises their

---

508 Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2013, March 15.
509 Fredeman, *Correspondence 7*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederic George Stephens, Tuesday [c. 10 August 1875], (75.93), 69-70.
510 Although it is not clear which edition Rossetti had, the closest match is the 1791-5 version.
511 For evidence that Rossetti ordered this book in 1866, see Fredeman, *Correspondence 3*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Startridge Ellis, 9 Sept 1866, (66.149), 466-7.
deceased partner, who is no longer around to sound the instrument strings. This interpretation is further reinforced by Ausoni’s note that the two instruments allude to “concord and affection maritalis, that is, the enduring agreement between spouses to consider one another husband and wife.”

The instrument in Roman Widow is again held at face height, as seen in the two previous paintings for Leyland, thereby continuing the mirror theme.

The flowers chosen for “Roman Widow” were again carefully selected, as is generally the case with any of his paintings. Rossetti was, by 1874, also making an effort to aesthetically link Leyland’s paintings using flowers, as he states in a letter to Dunn:

> The picture is now, as I said, likely to be delayed for roses. What I want for the large festoon under the urn (which are needed first & now) are those warm white roses with the slightest flush towards the centre, such as I painted in Lilith & the Ghirlandata. I suppose there would be no possibility of you or Alice [Alexa Wilding] bringing me these from Cov: Garden [sic] or elsewhere.512

Smith presents a thorough analysis of the flowers shown in Roman Widow. The garland of roses under the tomb represents the abundant love that had been between man and wife. The wild roses adorning the instrument stand for “pleasures and pain,” the pleasures of memory juxtaposed with the pain of separation caused by death.513 The instrument also has a decorative motif made up of mulberry leaves which mean “I shall not survive you.”514 Though she has survived her husband corporeally, she joins their spirits through her song.

Death and mourning are the main subjects of Roman Widow. After Rossetti’s suicide attempt in 1872, many of his paintings and poetry contain reverberations of death. Roman Widow is one such painting, yet it suggests the hope of love after death. His thoughts on the subject of death may have been enhanced by the suicide of his wife, Elizabeth Siddal, and obviously by

512 Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Henry Treffry Dunn, [c. 13 May 1874], (74:93), 452-3. He also writes his mother, Frances and Ford Madox Brown complaining of the “standstill for roses.” (See Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti, (74.94), 453-4 and Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, (74.97), 457). ‘Cov:Garden’ refers to Covent Garden in London.

513 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 123 cites the wild rose is also called a “dog rose,” Ingram, Flora Symbolica (1868), 360. Rossetti also used these wild roses in Blessed Damozel, another painting about lovers separated by death.

514 Smith, 123 cites a letter to Dunn in June, 1874 which has an isolated sentence, “Thanks about mulberry leaves,” Pedrick, Life with Rossetti, 176. Rossetti must have written to Dunn to inquire about their meaning, or perhaps Dunn suggested them as appropriate to the painting. For the meaning, see Language of Flowers (Saunders and Otley, 1835), 274.
his own suicide attempts.\textsuperscript{515} However, it is clear that Rossetti’s fascination with the subject of death was a feature of many of his paintings and poetry as far back as the 1840s.\textsuperscript{516}

Part of Rossetti’s fascination with death involved the theme of metempsychosis. Metempsychosis is another term for reincarnation or transmigration of the soul. Basically, the theory is that although in death the body dies, the soul is immortal and reborn. It was originally an Orphic doctrine, which was then made popular by Pythagoras.\textsuperscript{517} Orpheus is said to have created the theory of metempsychosis. The Orphic cult involved a complicated set of beliefs in which the soul was a mixture of the divine and the earthly. Developing the divine and suppressing the earthly required purification, which took more than one lifetime, in order to rejoin the divine. The fate of the soul was dependant on the previous life.\textsuperscript{518} The purer a life one lives, the nobler the reincarnation. In keeping with the Orphic tradition, Pythagoras taught the doctrine of transmigration of the soul or reincarnation and even claimed to remember his past lives.\textsuperscript{519} Pythagoras believed that there was the possibility to escape the cycle of reincarnation. In his teachings there was a divine level of immortality from which each soul was a ‘torn off fragment’, a mere ‘spark of the divine fire’, held captive in a long train of dying bodies. The goal was to rejoin this divine level of immortality via purification.\textsuperscript{520} As Kitty Ferguson states of the Pythagoreans: “All philosophy

\textsuperscript{515} Rossetti’s suicide attempts were clearly triggered by Robert Buchanan’s hostile reviews (see Robert Buchanan [pseudonym, Thomas Maitland], “The Fleshy School of Poetry, Mr. D. G. Rossetti,” The Contemporary Review 18 (October 1871): 334-50. Contemporary Review Company Ltd [database online, UWO]. AN: http://pao.chadwyck.co.uk/PDF/1368852333240.pdf. Accessed 2009, October 29), yet the fact that his suicide attempt involved swallowing a bottle of laudanum, in the same way his wife committed suicide, cannot be coincidental. Rossetti also believed his wife was contacting him in the afterlife, either through séances or on one occasion as a chaffinch. Both instances are recorded by William Bell Scott, “[DGR] [sic] began to call up the spirit of his wife by table-turning,” and his belief that the chaffinch “is my wife, the spirit of my wife, the soul of her has taken this shape; something is going to happen to me.” (W Minto (ed), Autobiographical notes of the life of William Bell Scott, and notices of his artistic and poetic circle of friends, 1830 to 1882, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892), 66 and 113). <http://archive.org/stream/autobiographical02scotuoft/autobiographical02scotuoft_djvu.txt> [Accessed 2012, December 21].

\textsuperscript{516} Paintings on the subject of death include Proserpine (1872), The Death of Lady Macbeth (1875), A Vision of Fiametta (1877), Dis Manibus (1874), and Desdemona’s Death Song (c.1878-81). Poetry on the subject of death include: “The Card-Dealer” (1848-9, revised 1869), “Parted Presence” (1875), “A Death-Parting” (1876), “Adieu” (1876), “Alas, So Long” (1881), “Insomnia” (1881), and “Spheral Change” (1881).

\textsuperscript{517} Orphism believed human souls to be immortal, but were doomed to live successive bodily lives through metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls. By living an ascetic way of life, and performing secret rites, one could be released from the reincarnation cycle and also commune with gods.


and inquiry – all use of the powers of reason and observation to gain and understanding of nature, human nature, the world, and the cosmos, including what would later be called ‘science’ – was linked with, indeed was, the effort to purify the soul and escape the wheel of reincarnation.«

Orpheus is traditionally represented with a string instrument as his accessory. Pythagoras and his followers conceived of the universe as a vast Lyre, in which each planet vibrating at a specific pitch in relationships similar to the stopping of the monochord string harmonised with other heavenly bodies creating a music of the spheres. The vibrations of strings would be carried through the ear to the brain and the soul. McGann asserts that although Rossetti “had very little practical knowledge of music, the idea of music was extremely important to him, and it appears repeatedly in both his textual and pictorial works in central ways, as a figure for a Pythagorean ideal of harmony.” This can be seen in Rossetti’s poem “The Monochord” (1870) and his repeated use of various stringed instruments throughout the Leyland series.

Metempsychosis was also a theme in Plato’s *Republic* (Rossetti read and scribbled notes about the text) as well as stories by Edgar Allen Poe, who was an inspiration to Rossetti. Scholars Jerome McGann and Rodger Drew accept that Rossetti was greatly influenced by neoplatonic thought (which includes metempsychosis). There is also a study on neoplatonic symbolism in Rossetti’s works by Rodger Drew.

According to Plato’s *Republic*, at the point of death the soul is taken to a place of judgement, where they choose their future lives (animal or human). Once they have decided, they drink from the Lethe to forget their previous lives and then they are reborn. In Plato’s view, the number of souls are fixed, so it is more a case of the transmigration of souls. To get out of the cycle of reincarnation one must be a good person and philosopher, which can be achieved through contemplation. Rossetti’s knowledge of metempsychosis is evidenced in a quote by

---

This theme of reincarnation is recurrent in Rossetti’s writings and is seen in “St Agnes of Intercession” (incomplete, 1850-1882), “Sudden Light” (1854), “Hand and Soul” (1849), “Willowwood” (1868), “The Portrait” (1847-70), “The Birth Bond” (1854-70), and “The One Hope” (1870).

The first example, “St Agnes of Intercession,” was a story Rossetti returned to throughout his life, up until a few months before his death. A nineteenth century painter falls in love with a young woman and within a year they are engaged. The artist paints a portrait of her and includes it in an exhibition. A critic comments on the model’s resemblance to a fifteenth-century painting of St Agnes by Bucchiolo Angiolieri. The painter is so intrigued by this, that he goes to Italy to see the painting. Once he finds the portrait, he is astounded to find it an exact match to the features of his fiancé. He then finds a painting of Bucchiolo Angiolieri, and is shocked to find the artist’s face exactly matches his own. The artist realises that he and his fiancé are new incarnations of two people who loved one another in fifteenth-century Italy.

The second example, “Sudden Light,” was written shortly after Rossetti met Elizabeth Siddal. This poem recalls love from another lifetime, but with the same person. It is essentially the story of reincarnated love or déjà vu as suggestive of metempsychosis.

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell;
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.
You have been mine before—
How long ago I may not know:
But just when at that swallow’s soar
Your neck turned so,
Some veil did fall, — I knew it all of yore.


The fourth example, “Birth Bond” is a poem about lovers being soulmates in another time and space, particularly evident in this extract:

\begin{quote}
Even so, when first I saw you, seemed it, love,
That among souls allied to mine was yet
One nearer kindred than life hinted of.
O born with me somewhere that men forget,
And though in years of sight and sound unmet,
Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough!
\end{quote}

In the fifth example, the focus of the sonnet, “The One Hope,” is “the longing for accomplishment of individual desire after death.”\footnote{Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Alice Boyd, 70.63 (22 March 1870), 406.}

\begin{quote}
When vain desire at last and vain regret
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain
And teach the unforgettable to forget?
Shall Peace be still a sunk stream long unmet,—
Or may the soul at once in a green plain
Stoop through the spray of some sweet life-fountain
And cull the dew-drenched flowering amulet?
Ah! when the wan soul in that golden air
Between the scriptured petals softly blown
Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown,—
Ah! let none other alien spell soe'er
But only the one Hope's one name be there,—
Not less nor more, but even that word alone.
\end{quote}

Metempsychosis is also evident in the sixth example, Rossetti’s painting, \textit{How They Met Themselves} (1861), which illustrates two couples meeting their doppelgangers in the woods. Rossetti referred to it as the “bogie drawing,” as one couple is depicted enveloped by an aureole implying they are not of this world.\footnote{Virginia Surtees (ed), \textit{The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Catalogue Raisonné} I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 74.} Rossetti’s representations of reincarnation usually feature the narrator meeting his soulmate who he believes he has loved in various past lives.
Bentley comments on the theme of death in both *La Ghirlandata* and *Roman Widow*, “Not only do these paintings with their musical images and tones exude a delicate mood of sorrow and yearning, sadness and hope, but they also seem to exist on the borderline of the known and the unknown, the real and the imaginary, the quick and the dead.”

He observes that many of the subjects in Rossetti’s paintings from the late 1860s onwards seem to be “searching for a person and a certainty that have been loved and lost…inhabiting a grey, purgatorial realm in which heaven and hell were assumed yet invisible coordinates.”

Bentley points out that another other-worldly painting, *Proserpine* (1874), was also intended for Leyland.

Rossetti indicates that the death subject featured in *Roman Widow* may have fallen out of favour with Leyland, “I believe now the subject is too “painful” for the nerves of the British purchaser. However I shall paint it all the same.”

Rossetti had problems with this painting for several reasons. Firstly, his relations with Leyland were fragile and remained unsteady after the sale *La Ghirlandata* to William Graham. Rossetti was aware of the instability and that he needed Leyland as a patron for financial reasons. As such, he needed to keep his patron content. Leyland desired Rossetti’s paintings to fill his home, yet he would not stand having another promised painting sold to another patron. If Rossetti did not supply him with the painting he wanted then Leyland would look elsewhere.

Rossetti was worried about Alexa Wilding at this time. She was often sick and would become unavailable depending on her financial situation (even though Rossetti paid her a salary), which became increasingly frustrating for him. He realised that Wilding was an important...

---


534 Quotation marks around “Painful” are Rossetti’s. Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to George Gordon Hake, Sunday [13 July 1873], (73.203), 198. In reference to Leyland, *La Pia de’ Tolomei* (S.207) (1868-80) was also described as “a “painful” subject and might not easily find another purchaser.” See Fredeman, Correspondence 6, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Howell, 9 July 1873, (73.196), 191.

535 For evidence she was paid a salary see William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Family-Letters with a Memoir*, v.1 (London: Ellis, 1895), 242 via Jerome McGann, “Transcript: Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His..."
component of any Leyland painting and considering the recent fallout with Leyland, Rossetti needed to keep her available for any future paintings. Rossetti told Dunn:

About [lexa] W[ilding] you do not say what she said as to her immediate troubles and how soon she will need tin [money]. Please keep an eye on her, for I don’t want her to skedaddle. If she is much wanting tin I must manage to send her some, but may probably be asking her down here for a new head almost at once.\(^{536}\)

Rossetti also struggled with boredom and laziness during the painting of *Roman Widow*. It is difficult to know whether this is because the subject was less appealing to him over time, or if the sour relations with Leyland over *La Ghirlandata* affected him.

It is clear from the correspondence that Rossetti continued to tell Leyland that work was progressing regardless of his difficulties, writing in January 1874 “The *Roman Widow* progresses & will be as good a thing as ever I did, but takes time and trouble.”\(^{537}\)

Although Leyland sought to view the painting in early April, Rossetti put off a possible viewing, claiming that he would not be free of a cold until the following Sunday:

I should be very glad to see you then; but as it is, a more opportune moment might probably turn up in better weather & when the *Roman Widow* picture might be [finished] as I should like to show it, which is not the case at present. The dress being *drapery* & not *costume*, it takes (like the Proserpine) a great deal of study & alteration. It will however be fully equal to any picture of mine & I trust even to make in it, when complete, my usual one step forward.\(^{538}\)

However, Rossetti then wrote to Madox Brown complaining of his troubles with the painting and confessed that it had not progressed enough to show Leyland:

I am getting on with Leyland’s picture (*Roman Widow*), but feel bored & languid about it. However I believe it is coming all right. Leyland wrote proposing to come here “for a few hours” last Sunday, but I put him off, the picture being not at the best juncture to show. I don’t know if he’ll be huffed.\(^{539}\)

Rossetti continued to reassure Leyland of his progress in a letter from Kelmscott “I shall be delighted to see you here before long at some propitious moment & show you the picture (*Roman Widow*).”\(^{540}\)
Rossetti then wrote to his art dealer, Murray Marks, in late April apologising for his inability to start on any other paintings: “I have been so taken up with a picture for Leyland (Roman Widow) that I am unable to think of anything else as yet.”

It was not until May 1874, after much delay, that the painting was close to completion. Rossetti wrote to Madox Brown, “I am getting to a finish with Leyland’s Roman Widow (I hope well) but have been so inert about it or it should have been done some time ago. I shall have to get Leyland down to see it one day when I have the frame.”

Critical reception is also significant for Roman Widow. Similarly to Lady Lilith, its reception was mixed. Although critics were not overly complimentary of Roman Widow, William Michael Rossetti thought it ‘lovable.’ He wrote in 1895:

> The Roman Widow seems to me quite unsurpassed, amid my brother's work, for pathetic sweetness and beautiful simplicity. If he painted one supremely loveable picture, it is, I think, The Roman Widow.

Gale Pedrick remarks, however, that “opinion was divided as to the merit of this picture.” Marillier was unenthusiastic: “Roman Widow it must be admitted, lacks the invention and the interest of Rossetti's more vigorous early work. It is an inspiration, a touch of poetry, no more.”

Smith remarks that unlike La Ghirlandata, the Roman Widow is not a symbolic, goddess-like figure. She is an mortal who is inspired to make music by the spirit of her dead husband. Her husband’s immortal spirit (the Divine Manes) lives on in her music. Her marriage girdle is laid on the urn to emphasise the fact that though the physical side of her marriage is over, the spiritual side of her love lives on in her elegy.

_{Roman Widow} was clearly envisioned by Rossetti as part of a set with the other musical paintings for Leyland. This is evidenced by encouragement to hang the paintings together. He

---

541 Fredeman, _Correspondence 6_, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Murray Marks, 26 April, 1874, (74.87), 445.

542 Fredeman, _Correspondence 6_, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, 8 May [1874], (74.90), 448.


546 Smith, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Flower Imagery,” 123.
wrote to Howell about the ideal hanging of *Proserpine* at Leyland’s new house in Queen’s Gate: “the best thing would be to hang it and *Lilith* on the side where *Lilith* now is, and *Veronica* and the *Roman Widow* (when done) on the other.”

McGann also notes the important links between the *Roman Widow* and Rossetti’s other paintings produced at this time. He draws connections between Leyland’s paintings without identifying Leyland as the common denominator:

The painting is particularly important because of a set of strange and suggestive relationships that it has with other works by DGR [sic] that date from 1872-1877, especially *Veronica Veronese*, *La Ghirlandata*, and *A Sea Spell*. These four pictures share a number of features, motivic and compositional, even as their titles and nominal conceptions are very different. Considered together, they exhibit as it were four facets or aspects of a single iconic figure of highly ambiguous import.

Without identifying Leyland as the common denominator, McGann has identified the aesthetic and thematic relationship between the paintings *Roman Widow*, *Veronica Veronese*, *La Ghirlandata* and *A Sea Spell*.

In summation, this chapter provided a brief description of *Roman Widow* and discuss Rossetti’s sources of inspiration. The chapter explored the common themes seen in previous chapters; the important features such as the dress, the instruments, and the flowers. The subject of death is a new theme in the Leyland paintings, but a significant element linking the paintings is the theory of metempsychosis. Rossetti struggled with this painting, from the fragile relations with Leyland, to his fear that Alexa Wilding would find work elsewhere and his boredom with the painting. The critical reception of the painting was mixed, but one scholar, McGann, identifies it as an important painting in his oeuvre, specifically linking it thematically and aesthetically to Leyland’s other musical paintings.

Chapter six will discuss Rossetti’s next musical painting for Leyland, *A Sea Spell* (1877). This is the last musical painting Rossetti made for Leyland.

---

547 Cline, *Owl and the Rossettis*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Howell [26 February 1874], letter 341. In previous correspondence, Rossetti told Howell to “persuade L[eyland]. to hang the Proserpine with light from left (of spectator) as it needs that light absolutely—much more than his two others.” (underlining not mine), See Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, Tuesday [24 February 1874], (74.38), 406.

A Sea Spell (1877) is an oil painting depicting a siren type woman seated playing what Rossetti referred to as a dulcimer, improbably hung from an apple tree. A gull hovers in the background, the music having attracted it. Flowers surround both the instrument and form a crown around the siren’s head. William Michael Rossetti described the picture as: “the idea is

---

549 Copyright permission obtained from Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, 2013, March 16.
that of a Siren, or Sea-Fairy, whose lute summons a sea-bird to listen, and whose song will soon prove fatal to some fascinated mariner.\textsuperscript{550}

Rossetti intended it to be a companion piece to \textit{Veronica Veronese}, which Frederick Leyland owned. William writes of the pairing:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The Sea Spell} was to serve as a pendant to the \textit{Veronica Veronese}...and it presents an inverse to the motive of that picture. Veronica finds in the note of a canary an incentive to a musical invention; whereas the Siren of \textit{The Sea Spell} charms a bird into the magic of her lay.\textsuperscript{551}
\end{quote}

Rossetti promoted \textit{A Sea Spell} as a companion piece to \textit{Veronica Veronese}. This is evidenced in the first letter to Leyland discussing the painting:

\begin{quote}
I am beginning a picture as companion to the \textit{Veronica},—indeed the head and shoulders, as well as the arms and hands, are nearly finished. It is as brilliant in painting as anything I have done or can do. I may quote to it the lines of Coleridge, “A Damsel with a dulcimer, In a vision once I saw: It was an Abyssinian maid, And on her dulcimer she played, Singing of Mount Abora.”\textsuperscript{552} It represents the lady (Miss W[ilding]) seated by a tree on which her instrument is hung, and playing on it in an attitude of passionate absorption, while her hair spreads wide over the bough above her, and a dove seated in the tree stretches its neck low along a branch with its wings raised, and harkens to the magic lay. Thus here the bird listens to the player, as in the other picture the player does to the bird.\textsuperscript{553}
\end{quote}

The painting was also accompanied by a sonnet, which was attached to the frame:

\begin{quote}
Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,
    While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell
    Between its chords; and as the wild notes swell,
The sea-bird for those branches leaves the sea.
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she?
    What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,
In answering echoes from what planisphere,\textsuperscript{554}
    Along the wind, along the estuary?

She sinks into her spell; and when full soon
    Her lips move and she soars into her song,
What creatures of the midmost main shall throng
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{551} William Michael Rossetti, \textit{Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters} (London : Ellis & Elvey, 1895), v.1, 364.

\textsuperscript{552} Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence 7}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 18 Aug 1875, (75.102), 76. Cites Coleridge’s poem “Kubla Khan,” II. 37-41.

\textsuperscript{553} Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence 7}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 18 Aug 1875, (75.102), 76.

In furrowed surf-clouds to the summoning rune:
Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,
An up her rock, bare-breasted, comes to die?\footnote{555}

In this painting Rossetti returns to his recurrent theme of the perils of love and beauty. It is also a clear example of one of Rossetti’s femme fatale paintings, in the same vein as \textit{Lady Lilith} (discussed in chapter two). She is dressed provocatively in transparent chiffon material which is sufficiently layered to reveal nothing, yet the suggestion is that the material may fall off if she stands. This is perhaps an indication that she intends to use her body as tool of seduction on an approaching mariner. Although the spell is intended for passing sailors, the heroine appears to be under her own spell, with glazed dilated pupils and remote expression staring into the distance in a state of contemplation.

Inspiration for \textit{A Sea Spell} may have come from another siren themed painting Rossetti completed several years earlier entitled \textit{Ligeia Siren} (1873). The model in \textit{Ligeia Siren} was again depicted with a musical instrument, identified by Dianne Sachko Macleod as a sarinda.\footnote{556} Gale Pedrick notes the connection with \textit{A Sea Spell}, stating that although the figure in \textit{Ligeia Siren} was depicted nude: “public taste was passing through a phase when the undraped figure was considered offensive and in deference to this and with tongue and cheek, Gabriel clothed the figure and decorum was satisfied.”\footnote{557} Rossetti himself stated of \textit{Ligeia Siren}: “the unpopular central detail will eventually be masked by a fillet of flying drapery coming from a veil twisted in the hair so as to render it saleable.”\footnote{558} Rossetti stated in a letter to Howell that he thought of offering Leyland \textit{Ligeia Siren}: “as it is quite like a fresco in colour and would hang well with his pictures.”\footnote{559}

\footnote{555} F. G. Stephens, “Mr Rossetti’s Pictures,” \textit{The Athenaeum}, no.2714 (1 November, 1871), 567.
\footnote{558} Fredeman, \textit{Correspondence 6}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, [2 March 1873], (73.64), 78.
\footnote{559} Cline, \textit{Owl and the Rossettis}, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Howell, 3 March 1873, no. 206.
Rossetti continues to use birds in his paintings. The gull is enticed by the tune of the woman. It was originally painted as a dove, which is not only a symbol of innocence but was Rossetti’s pet name for Elizabeth Siddal (his wife). As mentioned previously, Rossetti was known to call his wife by bird names. It is not clear why it was changed to a gull. The gull could perhaps symbolise Jane Burden (whom he loved) or Alexa Wilding (the model for the painting), or it could merely be referring to its literal meaning of ‘to gull, easily tricked.’ The change was deliberate, however, as Rossetti complained to Leyland that there was “endless delay in getting a sea-gull set up by a naturalist in the position in which I need to paint him.” There is no evidence that Rossetti painted a preliminary sketch of the sea-bird.

560 Copyright permission obtained from Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd, London/New York, 2011, December 1.

561 In Rossetti’s first mention of the painting to Leyland, he refers to “a dove seated in the tree.” See Fredeman, Correspondence 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 18 Aug 1875, (75.102), 76. For Rossetti’s pet name for his wife, see Robert Upstone, The Pre-Raphaelite Dream: Paintings and drawings from the Tate Collection (Hong Kong: Tate publishing, 2003), 91.


563 Fredeman, Correspondence 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 20 Sept 1875, (75.129), 94.
although he informed a friend that he “worked in the sea bird with immense effect.” The inspiration for the inclusion of a sea bird may have come from his stay at Bognor, on the Sussex coast, from October 1875 to July 1876. He writes to Alice Boyd, “it is within one minute’s walk of the sea-beach which is a fine one, only without downs, and the air is very pure and bracing…”

Once again, the flowers depicted in *A Sea Spell* are significant in the analysis of Rossetti’s painting. Rossetti wrote in a letter to Leyland that the painting contains “a wreath of autumn anemones round the head - (and) a growth of antirrhinum at the base of the pictures.” However, William Sharp cites the flowers in the lower left as a type of snapdragon, writing in 1883: “At her side the red and pale crimson flowers of the Venus Fly Trap, a plant of the familiar snapdragon species and here having a symbolism made apparent in the name itself.” Sarah Phelps Smith agrees on this point with Sharp. She also notes the crown of roses, and the roses in the lower right appear at first to be wild roses, which would not be inappropriate, signifying “pleasure and pain.” However, Smith points out that they are semi-double, rather than single in petal structure like the wild rose. This small difference identifies it as an American variety, the Caroline rose, whose meaning was included in many English versions of the language of flowers as “love is dangerous.” It emphasises the meaning conveyed by the snapdragon, though as a rose it still has a suggestion of love. Smith states that: “the apple tree of temptation forms the background with ripe apples (referring to Adam and Eve),” which fits with the symbols of temptation associated with sirens.

The dress is another important feature of *A Sea Spell*. The study for *A Sea Spell* depicts the model in a heavier dress than the lighter dress of the oil version. Gail Lynn Goldberg asserts that the dress of the study is very similar to the velvet dress worn in *Veronica Veronese*, pointing out that in the final oil version model is merely draped.

---

565 Fredeman, *Correspondence* 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Alice Boyd, 3 November 1875, (75.177), 128.
566 Fredeman, *Correspondence* 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 20 Sept 1875, (75.129), 94.
570 Gail Lynn Goldberg, “Composition and Correspondence : Rossetti’s “Sea Spell” Pair.” *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 85, 2 (1982), 195.
this distinction is important to Rossetti, as he described the dress in another of Leyland’s paintings, *Roman Widow* as: “drapery & not costume.”\(^571\) Also, when Rossetti initially conceived of *A Sea Spell*, he envisioned the female figure with a large dulcimer and some drapery.\(^572\) As Goldberg notes, it is difficult to make out the details of the dress in the study for *A Sea Spell*, in order to compare it to the dress featured in *Veronica Veronese* which has smocking from elbow to wrist and a ropelike belt. However, both dresses have the same full skirt, gigot sleeves, and modest neckline.\(^573\) Most likely, the dresses are identical. Although Goldberg concludes that these two paintings therefore must have been completed at the same time, McGann dates the sketch from 1876.\(^574\)

The musical instrument depicted in *A Sea Spell* has been identified under various names by various people. Dante Gabriel Rossetti refers to the instrument as a ‘dulcimer,’ a trapezoidal zither with metal strings, which does not match the instrument in the painting.\(^575\) William refers to it as a ‘lute’, “the idea is that of a Siren, or Sea-Fairy, whose lute summons a seabird to listen, and whose song will soon prove fatal to some fascinated mariner.”\(^576\) A lute however is more closely related in appearance to a guitar than a zither. Marillier described it as “a harp of strange unearthly form.”\(^577\)

The instrument in the painting has subsequently been identified as a Japanese *koto*, although it is a miniature version of the traditional instrument.\(^578\) Rossetti also depicted a *koto* in *The Blue Bower* (1865), but as depicted here it is quite different. The *koto* depicted in *The Blue Bower* is quite different to the version seen in *A Sea Spell*. The *koto* in *A Sea Spell* features an additional brass-ringed leather band on the side of the *koto*. Goldberg observes that the

\(^571\) Goldberg, “Composition and Correspondence,” 195 cites Francis L. Fennell, *The Rossetti-Leyland Letters: The Correspondence of an Artist and His Patron* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), April 3 1874, 61. See also Fredeman, *Correspondence 6*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Leyland, 3 April 1874, (74.64), 426.

\(^572\) Fredeman, *Correspondence 7*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, Saturday night [31 July 1875], (75.89), 64.

\(^573\) Goldberg, “Composition and Correspondence,” 196.


\(^575\) “A Damsel with a dulcimer,” (a line from Coleridge). Fredeman, *Correspondence 7*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Leyland, 18 August 1875, (75.102), 75.


brass-ringed leather band functions to hang the instrument from the fruit-laden tree. The vertical positioning of the koto in *A Sea Spell* is puzzling, as the instrument is usually played on a flat surface horizontally, as opposed to being hung vertically. Goldberg argues that the bold verticals of the instrument and its strings act as a barrier along the left side of the canvas. This could be a compositional device, leading the eye to circle around the positioning of the lower arm, to the body of the siren, following her upper arm and back down the instrument. Another reason for such a depiction was to connect it visually to the Aeolian harp, which as Goldberg points out, had generalised romantic overtones for the Victorian public. The reason I believe the instrument may have deliberately incorrectly been depicted vertically in *A Sea Spell* was to connect it visually to the other Leyland paintings, which all have vertically placed instruments and similarly positioned figures.

The musical instrument was an integral part in the creation of *A Sea Spell* as Rossetti explains to Howell:

> You lately named to me a large Dulcimer, but I didn’t see my way to make it useful (for the picture *Sea Spell*). I DO now, if of the same story on a large scale as a Japanese one which I have here, which I think you said was the case. I should be very anxious in that case to get it at once, as I see my way to a Leyland picture with that and some of the draperies. Can you see about it for me without delay.

Spencer-Longhurst observes that “undoubtedly part of his interest in the koto was his love of archaic and unfamiliar objects. He made a habit of collecting old and mostly unplayable instruments, which he prized for their quaintness rather than for any musical quality they might possess.” Rossetti later commented of his painting in the 1860s: “I had a mania for buying bric-a-brac and used to stick it in my pictures.”

The performance practice of the figure playing the instrument in *A Sea Spell* is also technically incorrect. Rossetti painted the hands of the siren in an almost impossible playing position. The fingers of the right hand are depicted curving under the strings and two fingers

---

579 Goldberg, “Composition and Correspondence,” 199.
580 Goldberg, “Composition and Correspondence,” 202.
581 Goldberg, “Composition and Correspondence,” 200.
582 Fredeman, *Correspondence 7*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, Saturday night [31 July 1875], (75.89), 64 (not my underlining or italics). Fredeman notes that this is the instrument used in *The Sea Spell*, see note 1.
584 Fredeman, *Correspondence 4*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to George Rae, Saturday 21 August/ 1869, (69.132), 241.
are holding one string, which would not emit any sound – the hand itself is resting against the strings the left hand would be playing, meaning that even if the fingers of the left hand were plucking the strings (which they are not), they would still not produce any sound. This is an interesting portrayal as Rossetti had in the past depicted correct performance practice in such paintings such as *A Blue Closet* (1856-7), *A Tune of Seven Towers* (1857), *The Blue Bower* (1865), and *A Christmas Carol* (1867).

It is unclear why Rossetti would change from painting accurate to inaccurate performance practice. It could be that Rossetti was trying to emphasise the exoticism of the image, although no critics of the time recognised it as such. Perhaps it is merely Rossetti’s lack of knowledge about music (Rossetti was considered by some of his friends and colleagues to have had absolutely ‘no passion for music’ and found music ‘positively offensive’).\(^{585}\) This does not explain such a change after years of correctly portraying performance practice, unless there was a purpose behind it.

It is clear from the descriptions mentioned by Marillier, William Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti that the specificity of the instrument was not of utmost importance. Yet it was clearly an important part of the intended composition, as Rossetti included a rough version in the initial sketch (he could have included any object, yet the musical instrument seems to have been a deliberate choice). The initial sketch is very simply drawn with no bird of any sort in the background, nor any flowers, or apple tree, simply the model and her instrument (with strings, but without movable bridges).

---

The shared feature between all three instruments mentioned by contemporaries in relation to *A Sea Spell* (lute, dulcimer and harp) is that they are all stringed. Throughout Rossetti’s painting career, he often portrayed women weaving (i.e. *Penelope* (1869), *The Return of Tibullus to Delia* (c.1853)). The inaccurate performance practice with the siren holding one of the strings between both the forefinger and thumb has connotations of weaving and the sonnet confirms this with the line describing the fingers that “weave the sweet-strung spell.”

---

586 Copyright permission obtained from Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham, 2011, December 7.
587 Copyright permission obtained from Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, 2013, March 16.
The inaccurate performance position of the koto hanging vertically in the tree can be explained if the instrument is considered as a mirror. Rossetti often portrayed women with mirrors (Woman Combing Her Hair (1864), Lady Lilith (1868), Desdemona’s Death Song (1878-81)), and the legend of the siren was associated with narcissism in Victorian times.\(^{588}\) This vertical mirroring can be seen in other instrument pictures which were intended for Leyland, notably Veronica Veronese, Roman Widow, La Ghirlandata, and The Bower Meadow.\(^{589}\) All these paintings portray women playing stringed instruments vertically while the instruments are directed at face height to act as a sort of mirror, often completely at odds with normal performance practice. It is possible that he was merely creating a mirror image of the violin in Veronica Veronese, which also depicted the instrument hanging vertically (and considering it was intended as a companion piece to A Sea Spell, this is possible). As already discussed, the performance practice in A Sea Spell is far from correct; the instrument is portrayed hung from a tree, the movable bridges are placed on both ends of the instrument, while the position of the fingers would not have produced sound. Interestingly, Rossetti’s first attempt at portraying the koto in The Blue Bower is closer to the correct performance practice than in A Sea Spell. Firstly, the instrument is correctly portrayed lying flat on a horizontal surface, as opposed to being hung vertically from a tree. Secondly, the movable bridges are placed more visually similar to a traditional koto, although even here as Henry Johnson points out, the positioning of the movable bridges “does not follow the usual pentatonic tunings of Japanese traditional koto music.” He questions whether they were arranged to a tuning of semitones as found in Western music.\(^{590}\)

Chuji Ikegami proposes that Rossetti may have seen “the specimens of Japanese musical instruments sent from Edo by Sir Rutherford Alcock to the International Exhibition of 1862.”\(^{591}\) Perhaps Rossetti was painting from memory in both cases, explaining why the depictions vary from the 1865 to the 1877 version (as a natural result of forgetting detail over time). Accuracy in this instance was not of utmost importance for Rossetti. The figure’s contemplative pose and art for art’s sake was ultimately more important.


\(^{589}\) La Ghirlandata and Bower Meadow were turned down by Leyland (See chapter four for more on La Ghirlandata and for Bower Meadow, Leyland wrote “As to ‘Bower Meadow’ I did not intend to convey to you that I would take it nor in fact did I say so. On the contrary I found it too small to go with Lilith which was one of the principal things I had in view.” (Fennell, The Rossetti-Leyland Letters, 27 January 1872, 30).


Many modern critics have commented on the illusion of movement in the painting. Fagence Copper asserts that Rossetti attempted to make his paintings a sensory experience. The idea of sensory experience in *A Sea Spell* is plausible—touch (texture of dress, sea, wind), sight (colour), sound (*koto*, sea), smell (flowers, sea).[^592] The wind creates the illusion of movement in this painting; the ruffling flow of her dress seems to be held aloft from her body in places especially where the fabric remains covering some of her vertically placed right arm, the curling, uplifting movement of her hair towards the top right of the painting, the gull seemingly held mid-flight with wings outstretched. Yet as Goldberg points out, there is a degree of stasis in the painting, of hypnotising enchantment where the woman to a certain extent plays the role of the victim herself, held under her own spell, doomed to forever play the role of the siren.[^593]

Rossetti was criticised at the time for the exaggerated poses of the women in his paintings—including the model in *A Sea Spell*. The elongated neck and awkward angles of the hands and arms concerned some critics.[^594] J. B. Bullen identifies Botticelli as an influence on Rossetti in such exaggerated body positionings.[^595] As discussed above, Rossetti saw Botticelli’s paintings as early as 1849 and even purchased a portrait of Smeralda Bandinelli by Botticelli in 1867.[^596] Leyland was a collector of Botticelli from as early as 1874.[^597] However, when the sonnet is taken into consideration, another reason for such an odd angle of the neck can be explained:

```plaintext
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she?
What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,
```


[^593]: This idea can also be seen in Rossetti’s poetic sketch for a play ‘Doom of the Sirens’ (1869) which, like Keats, reflects his sympathy for the femme fatale. See Jerome McGann, ‘Doom of the Sirens,’ Rossetti Archive. Distributed by IATH and NINES [http://www.rosettiarchive.org/docs/47p-1869.raw.html] [Accessed 2012, December 10].

[^594]: Other exaggerated poses in Rossetti’s paintings include *Pia de’ Tolomei* (c.1868), *Astarte Syriaca* (1877), *Mnemosyne* (c.1876–81). An anonymous critic for *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* wrote of Rossetti’s style in 1883, “Of his latest form, oft repeated—the lips pouting, the elongated throat abnormally swelling, the hair weighted as a mane, and crowning the facial façade as a massive overhanging pediment—few could be enamoured but the painter himself,” in David Wayne Thomas, *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004), 135.


In answering echoes from what planisphere,  
Along the wind, along the estuary?

The head is bent so her ears can listen to the sounds of the ‘netherworld’; it is not clear if this region is heaven or hell. The strings of the koto are pointing in the same direction as the siren’s listening ear, and could be considered to be channelling the sounds from the netherworld and other planispheres. This painting is another example of metempsychosis. The siren is depicted in a state of philosophical contemplation, using the musical instrument as a tool for purification of the soul through meditation.

As with the previous painting, Rossetti struggled with finishing this painting as shown in a letter to Madox Brown: “I have somehow got to get through a new Leyland picture of the usual kind though in a very seedy state of health.” Rossetti also admits to Leyland that: “some sluggishness seems to weigh on the proposed Sea-Spell sonnet, which I must manage to dissipate.” As with most of Rossetti’s paintings, five years after completing the painting, Rossetti took it back not long before he died and: “altered the knees in Sea-Spell which is a great improvement: also lessened the portion of back showing beyond the shoulder, which seemed perhaps incompatible with the amount of bosom seen.”

In summation, this chapter has provided a brief description of A Sea Spell and discussed the sources Rossetti used as inspiration for the painting. This chapter has assessed the common themes seen in previous chapters which add to our understanding; the bird, the flowers and the dress. Once again, the musical instrument and the performance practice have been analysed. Although Rossetti had depicted the musical instrument and the performance practice correctly in previous paintings, both are inaccurate in this painting. When considering the exaggerated body positioning and the sonnet attached to the painting, it becomes clear that the siren is in a state of philosophical contemplation, and the musical instrument is aiding her in the purification of the soul. This painting is another example of metempsychosis, as seen in previous Leyland paintings.

598 Fredeman, Correspondence 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, Thursday [23 September 1875], (75.133), 97.
599 Fredeman, Correspondence 7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Frederick Richards Leyland, 28 March [1877], (77.36), 369.
600 Fennell, The Rossetti-Leyland Letters, 92. Rossetti often recalled and changed paintings years after completion, as discussed in previous chapters.
The next chapter will provide an overview of what has been discovered in the thesis and consider some possible avenues of investigation still to be researched.
Chapter Seven
Conclusion

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) was an accomplished English painter, poet, designer and translator. He was a leading figure of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood (formed in 1848) which was a movement of a small group of painters in England who reformed painting in Britain and influenced painters throughout the world.\(^{601}\) Rossetti went on to forge a successful career as a painter and by the 1860s he created a distinctive style independent of the stylistic aims of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood.\(^{602}\) Although Rossetti only exhibited his work a handful of times, his work clearly has an influence on many artists. There are echoes of his work in later painters as diverse as Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), Maurice Denis (1870-1943), Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921), Ferdinand Hodler (1853-1918), Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939).\(^{603}\)

My thesis focused on Rossetti’s depiction of musical instruments in a small group of paintings intended for Frederick Leyland. Rossetti included musical instruments in his paintings specifically for his patron, after an agreement in which Leyland would purchase seven paintings from the artist. Rossetti only incorporated musical instruments into his paintings for a short time; from the same year he met Leyland (1865), until the patron moved house and refused to commission any other paintings (1877). Leyland was a demanding patron whose specifications shaped and restricted Rossetti’s art. He was specific about size, model, model length and he preferred solitary female figures. It was mutually understood that musical instruments would also feature in any painting for the patron. Leyland would refuse a painting over arguably insignificant details if his requirements were not met. As I have demonstrated, understanding the meaning behind Rossetti’s musical-themed paintings is complicated because these paintings are dense with ambiguous symbolism. This results in the possibility of various readings dependent on the viewer’s individual

\(^{601}\) The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood rejected the academically taught style which focused on Raphael (1483-1520) and Michelangelo (1475-1564), instead preferring the highly detailed style of quattrocentro Flemish and Italian art.

\(^{602}\) His new style moved away from densely symbolic medievalism of the Pre-Raphaelites and towards the style of the Venetian masters; Titian (c.1485-1576), Giorgione (c.1477-1510) and Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). He had always revered these painters, including them in the ‘List of Immortals’ that he drew up with Holman Hunt in 1848 (See Dianne Sachko MacLeod, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Titian,” *Apollo* 121 (January 1985): 36).

\(^{603}\) Spencer-Longhurst, *The Blue Bower*, 33
To understand the ambiguous symbolism in his paintings, it is necessary to look at all the non-musical parts of the paintings, such as the flowers, the dress, the birds and the angels. This adds to the understanding of the paintings in general and the complex meaning behind the musical symbolism. It also clarifies that these paintings are linked in theme and form through their recurrent symbolic devices. Rossetti’s depictions of musical instruments are fascinating as he was often more concerned with the physical shape and the iconographical implications of an instrument than the technicalities of the instrument itself. As such, these musical instruments are often obscurely exotic, especially for a Victorian audience, or even entirely invented without reference to an instrument in existence. Moreover, the musical instruments are often depicted in ways that make them unplayable; either the hand positions of the player would negate any sound, or the strings of the musical instrument are obstructed by another object (for example hair, flowers, material from a dress), which would result in no sound. Rossetti clearly had a complicated relationship with music. Although music was a significant part of Victorian culture, many friends and scholars considered Rossetti to have no interest in music whatsoever, yet he collected many musical instruments and attended musical events.

Despite this, music was a significant feature in many of Rossetti’s paintings. Music may not have been an important part of his life on a personal level, as evidence from his friends suggests, but it was an important part of his life on an artistic level. He regularly used musical instruments to transport the viewer to a fantasy world of his creation. This is especially evident in the ‘Veronica type’ paintings Rossetti made for Leyland. He repeatedly painted these instruments and their performance practice inaccurately, regardless of whether he had

For example, Lady Lilith can be interpreted as a depiction of the dangerous female type emerging as a result of the New Woman movement in Victorian England, or a depiction of the Hebrew myth of Lilith, the first wife of Adam. Some of the obscure instruments include the oud, Indian sarinda or sārangī, aulos, ancient zithers, lyres and lutes. Invented instruments can be seen in the following paintings: The Blue Closet (1857) features two keyboards, with a vertically attached zither on one side and hanging bells on the other. King René’s Honeymoon (1864) and St.Cecelia (1856-7) both feature a keyboard with organ pipes rising vertically above the keys, The Tune of Seven Towers (1857) includes a chair with attached lap zither and built in bell overhead. Instruments in unplayable performance contexts include A Sea Spell (1877) which depicts a koto played vertically (see Henry Johnson, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Japan,” Music in Art 30, 1-2 (2005), and three paintings depicting a woman impossibly playing two instruments simultaneously with each hand include The Harp Player (c. 1857), Roman Widow (1874) and The Return of Tibullus to Delia (c.1853). As Woods has recently argued, the hand positions that negate sound include The Merciless Lady (1865), The Bower Meadow (1872), La Ghirlandata (1873), Veronica Veronese (1872), A Sea Spell (1877). Hair obstructs Morning Music (1864) and La Ghirlandata (1873). Material obstructs Love’s Greeting (c.1861), The Merciless Lady (1865), The Bower Meadow (1872), Forced Music (1877) and A Sea Spell (1877). Flowers obstruct La Ghirlandata (1873), Roman Widow (1874), and A Sea Spell (1877).
painted the same musical instruments accurately in previous paintings. However, their joint aesthetic created a series of paintings unique in Rossetti’s oeuvre and stylistically catered to suit Leyland’s personal taste and decor.

As discussed, in the Veronica paintings for Leyland, Rossetti uses musical instruments as a connection to higher realms and moreover, as a symbol for purification. Patrons of the Victorian era would purchase artwork on an individual basis. Yet Rossetti had a guarantee from Leyland that a selection of his paintings would be housed together and be seen as a series. As such, Rossetti planned a series of paintings portraying a tale of metempsychosis, in much the same way Sandro Botticelli (c.1445-1510) created a series of paintings entitled *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (1482/3) depicting scenes from Boccaccio’s Decameron (which Leyland bought and displayed in his Italian Room). Clearly, narrative painting portrayed in a series held an interest for both patron and artist.

As discussed, Rossetti was fascinated with the theme of death and more specifically, metempsychosis. It is plausible that Leyland was also fascinated with this theme of metempsychosis, as both Rossetti and Leyland believed in the occult and attended seances. Rossetti may have taken the opportunity to depict a subject that may not have been popular with any other patron other than Leyland.

It could be argued that the five music themed paintings intended for Leyland; *Lady Lilith* (1868), *Veronica Veronese* (1872), *La Ghirlandata* (1874), *Roman Widow* (1874), and *A Sea Spell* (1877), are depictions of the same woman throughout different moments in history. All of the images depict Alexa Wilding in various states of morality and in states of philosophical contemplation or meditation (which according to Plato’s Republic, is the path a philosopher must take to exit the cycle of reincarnation). The first in the series is *Lady Lilith* (1868) who was the first female before Eve. She is represented as the incarnation of evil, a trapper of men. In this depiction, she has no instrument and is obsessed with her own image. *A Sea Spell* (1877) has ambiguous dating, but sirens are traditionally of Greek origin (1600B.C.-146B.C.). A Siren is an evil trapper of men, yet she is on the path to enlightenment (a bird is drawn to her, a crown of flowers are on her head and she is in a meditative state). She has a musical instrument (a symbol of purification), the *koto*, but is still using the music and her body to lure men to their deaths. Despite the traditional performance practice of the *koto*, in this depiction the instrument in held in a vertical position parallel to the player and the strings are held between her fingers.
A Roman Widow (1874) depicts a woman in the Roman era (700bc-600) mourning her deceased husband. The musical instruments in this depiction, a lyra and a table cittern (cetra da tavolo), symbolises the player’s continued devotion to the husband, while playing one instrument she reaches for the other instrument which symbolises the husband himself. She is also in a state of meditative contemplation. This is comparatively a higher state of morality than the previous painting. The lyra is held in a vertical position parallel to the female figure and the fingers are resting on the strings of the instruments.

Veronica Veronese (1872) is depicted in Titian’s Venetian period (1500s). She is depicted demurely communicating with nature (the bird). Despite traditional performance practice, the violin-type instrument is depicted hung from the wall vertical to the player. She is also in a meditative state while holding the strings of the instrument between her fingers.

Finally La Ghirlandata (1874) also has ambiguous dating but the dress could be argued to be from the Victorian era (1850s). It shows a woman floating through trees surrounded by angels, holding the strings of a zither-type instrument. She is looking directly at the viewer having no need to meditate as she is being carried by the angels to heaven. The flowers at the bottom of the picture and the swans adorning the instrument indicate (true) death is on the way.

The stringed instruments represented are never shown being played, but held between fingers or rested on the strings or the body of the instrument, alluding to the possibility that these instruments are not for playing, but are allusions to Pythagoras' harmony of the spheres. McGann asserts that although Dante Gabriel Rossetti “had very little practical knowledge of music, the idea of music was extremely important to him, and it appears repeatedly in both his textual and pictorial works in central ways, as a figure for a Pythagorean ideal of harmony.”*607 It also may explain why each musical instrument itself is bizarrely distorted and portrayed with the strings aligned vertically (to the heavens) regardless of traditional performance practice and whether Rossetti had represented correct performance for the instruments previously. This is because Rossetti was deliberately trying to allude to the higher purpose in the portrayals.

For Rossetti, music serves a "higher" moral force in the images, regardless of whether the instruments are in the hands of an angel or a siren. Perhaps he was fascinated with the idea of music as a source of redemption. As McGann states, “Rossetti (like Hunt) was searching for an artistic method that would instantiate idealised states of being – an art of the soul and

---

soul’s transcendental engagements.”608 In this series of paintings, he has tried to depict Alexa Wilding in transcendental states of being through various moments in time, like his 1870 idea for a painting he never executed “Venus surrounded by mirrors, reflecting her in different views.”

Although there has been much research of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, there is still much to be investigated and explored. This study has just scratched the surface of Rossetti’s use of metempsychosis in his work. Given the nature of his dense symbolism, and the fact that there have only been a handful of articles on the musical instruments in his paintings, I look forward to the information that remains to be uncovered by future researchers.

---

608 Jerome McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the game that must be lost* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000), 88.
Bibliography


-----------.


-----------.


-----------.


-----------.


-----------.


-----------.


Websites Accessed


------------------


---------------------------------

Appendix