The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel
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Triumphant yet saddened, defiant yet withdrawn, the gaze of the woman who rescues her husband from prison in John Everett Millais's *Order of Release*, 1746 polarized critics when it first appeared in the Tate Gallery in 1853. Whereas some of them applauded the poignant expression of the emotional conflict registered in the rescuer's face, others decried the transgression of conventional gender boundaries in this Pre-Raphaelite representation of a narrative scene in one of Walter Scott's novels. The critic of *Fraser's Magazine*, for instance, affirmed, "the picture is entitled to unqualified praise for the subtilty [sic] with which it seizes upon the conflict of feelings engaged in the moment of profound emotion it embodies. We still see in her eye the fear that has harassed her—she is not quite sure of his liberty—we read the whole story of her struggles, and sorrows, and heroic endurance, in that hectic flush mounting upon the pallid cheek." \(1\) John Eagles's objections, on the other hand, echo those of contemporary critics who voiced anxieties over the Pre-Raphaelites' destabilizations of gender constructs: "Instead of the eye dimmed even with a tear," he protested, "it looks defiance, as if she had contested at some previous time the matter with the jailer, and looks a triumph, as much as to say, 'I've won, and so pay me.' " Instead of displaying feminine tenderness, "she is the hardest looking creature you can imagine: Her under lip . . . is thrust out to a very disagreeable expression." In conclusion, he regretted the reversal of conventional gender roles the painting represents: "[I]t is wrong so to exhibit the released man. The painter should have considered that he should be shown worthy a reprieve—that he was, after all, a fine manly fellow."

Millais's reconfiguration of a narrative scene into a painting is representative of the Pre-Raphaelites' ability to express in pictorial form gender issues that continue to preoccupy us. Simultaneously *The Order of Release*, like numerous other Pre-Raphaelite paintings, depicts the coalescence of the verbal and the visual and the extension of temporal and spatial boundaries. The convergence of the verbal and the visual was not limited to Pre-Raphaelite painting or poetry but also transpired in yet
another important genre—the Victorian novel. The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel explores the coalescence of the visual and the verbal, that is, the reconfigurations of notable Pre-Raphaelite paintings within the Victorian novel and examines some of the most significant gender issues this convergence involves.

During the last four decades, we have witnessed a great deal of work in the area of gender. This work has taken place on political, legal, social, and cultural fronts. Among the many questions raised during this period is the question of definition. Many authors, scholars, activists, and reformers have argued that gender should not be defined once and for all. Rather, it should be rethought and renegotiated. The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel joins this argument but substantiates it historically and aesthetically. It shows that a great deal of what we have witnessed in recent decades has significant antecedents in the art of the Victorian period, specifically in the paintings of several prominent Pre-Raphaelites and the fiction of renowned Victorian novelists.

Very early versions of parts of the chapters that follow (in a completely different form) can be found in The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies (chapters 2 and 4), The Victorians Institute Journal (chapter 4), The Companion to the Victorian Novel, ed. William Baker and Kenneth Womack, and The Victorian Newsletter (chapter 3). I am grateful to the editors concerned for giving me the permission to rewrite the material.

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