International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

Dickens and the Early Pre-Raphaelites: Finding Oneself among the Dead

Robin L. Fetherston, Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, Qatar

Abstract: Though Charles Dickens was a generation older than the Pre-Raphaelite founders and initially found much to fault in their art, his work corresponds with theirs in ways that move beyond what scholars have previously discussed. His novels, besides providing inspiration for the young artists and sharing in their practice of rendering subjects through realistic detail, intersect with their treatment of the maturation process of adolescents as self identity evolves. This essay offers the view that the death or near death of adolescents occurring in these novels and works of art corresponds to the perceived transitional nature of nineteenth-century society and the constant threat of death of the young in Britain. Main characters from Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Great Expectations*, and *Bleak House* are examined alongside of John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*, William Holman Hunt's *The Lady of Shallot*, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *How They Met Themselves*. At the heart of each struggle for identity that forms part of the narratives supporting Dickens's characters and the re-interpreted narratives behind the Pre-Raphaelites' painted or drawn figures lies a secret, essential to self-knowledge, but that when exposed acts as a contagion undermining the very maturation process the new knowledge is supposed to help, at times bringing it to a halt. It is this commonality in their artistic treatment of the coming-of-age-process that signifies the cultural context of Victorian transition and early death in which these works were birthed.

Keywords: Dickens, Pre-Raphaelites, Adolescence, Death.

Introduction

In his now famous "Old Lamps for New Ones," Charles Dickens (1850), with tongue-in-cheek contempt, leaves no doubt he considers members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (P.R.B.) to be sophomoric, misguided philistines. However, his work converses with theirs more closely than he would have cared to accept, despite his eventually becoming friends with two of the three founding members, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt. Scholars have noted that Dickens's novels often serve as part of the inspiration behind Pre-Raphaelite ideas and techniques (e.g., Tobin, 2002; Landow, 2004). His penchant for detail and the theatricality of his character descriptions, which impose personality onto the exterior, correspond to both the Pre-Raphaelite principle of rendering nature truthfully and their technique of equalizing the foreground and background in importance. Thomas J. Tobin (2002) points out that members of the P.R.B., who were about fifteen years younger than Dickens, grew up reading his novels, and this was especially true of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (p. 4). William Holman Hunt (1905), in his memoir, depicts Dickens's novels as directly influential on his own work: Hunt paints the panels in his office with illustrations of *Barnaby Rudge* (1841); in his studio he guides his disciple Robert Martineau in a work featuring Kit and Nell in a scene from *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41/2000); and Mr. Peggoty's rescue of his wayward daughter Emily in *David Copperfield*

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

(1849-50) offers the initial idea of a mind's conversion in Hunt's *Awakening Conscience* (1853). By the late 1850s, as Tobin (2002) demonstrates, critics such as those writing for the *Living Age* paired the Pre-Raphaelites' "pictorial verisimilitude," with "the detailed descriptions to be found in Dickens's novels" (p.7), though in the pejorative.

What modern critics have neglected to analyze in Dickens and the Pre-Raphaelites is the intertextuality of their works on important cultural matters, other than to mention that both the novelist and the artists address social problems in the early stages of their careers. For instance, adolescence, in its search for identity—the focus of this essay—is often treated in their works and offers much for scholars to investigate. Though the word "adolescence" would not become popularized until the late nineteenth century, Victorians inherited the concept of adolescence from the eighteenth-century, which had seen an expansion of urban leisure for the upper classes, thereby keeping youth for longer periods at home rather than in labor. In turn, the parents of that age found themselves making a heavier investment emotionally in their children than in previous centuries.

Later, during the nineteenth century, as Chris R. Vanden Bossche (1999) notes, the ages "13 to 24 came to be regarded as a distinct epoch in individual development" (p. 82). The Victorians celebrated a woman's "coming out" at eighteen and a man's having reached the age of majority at twenty-one when he would take hold of his property; however, these were ritualized symbols of a gradual process towards adulthood, which was considered, according to Vanden Bossche, a "psychological state defined by how successfully one negotiated each of …life's stages" such as "leaving school, choice of vocation, marriage, and setting up a household" (p. 83). Thus, both the older novelist, Dickens, and the young avant-garde artists of the P.R.B. were products of an age that expected their young to become increasingly independent from their origins as they developed a high level of self-culture, the ideal quality linked to a cultivated and mature individual. Navigating through this coming-of-age process, however, was complicated for Victorians by first, the common threat of premature death and second, the "mixed state" (pp. 210-11), as John Stuart Mill (1831/1936) characterized it, of the underpinnings of philosophy, religion, politics, and culture.

In Dickens and the three founding Pre-Raphaelites, Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti, the death or near death of adolescents occurring in the midst of the maturation process can be seen as emblematic of the consistent transitioning of Victorian society and the ever-present dying of the young. This essay begins by focusing mainly on the latter as a real-world influence on their creations. This is not to say that Dickens and the artists were working outside the long and variegated history of the treatment of death in word and art. Nor can Dickens's inheritance of eighteenth-century philosophy of the moral sentiments and his novelistic intention to arouse the innate sentiments of his readers be negated. Instead, this essay serves partly as a corrective in light of the tendency of today's readers to interpret Victorian works through the colored glass of our own contemporary interests and concerns, thereby missing the cultural context (sometimes the content of individual biography, but more often the wider circumstances of society) in which nineteenth-century writers and artists worked.

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

In addition, the essay examines a commonality, which points to the cultural context of Victorian societal transition and early death, in the fictional narratives inhabited by Dickens's characters and evoked by the Pre-Raphaelites' painted figures. A secret lies at the heart of the central mythical and fictional lives represented, one hidden from the self. It is the exposure of this secret, this new knowledge of self, that destabilizes, as if it were a contagion, the progress of maturation. The event of exposure is double-sided in nature. It is necessary to self discovery, a product of the maturation process endorsed by those of the nineteenth century, and yet drives the circumstances of the storyline dangerously close to the deaths of its main actors. Sometimes, like so many real-life Victorians, they do not escape and in the end are denied opportunity to benefit from the advantages of self-knowledge.

Being a Victorian Often Meant Dying Young

Death is a common subject in Victorian literature; and while Victorian consumers preferred paintings incorporating domestic treatments over grand themes, death often is anticipated in works of art if not featured. The frequency of the death motif in the literature and art of the time is not surprising considering Victorians of all classes were surrounded by death and reminders of death, especially in the cities, and especially of the young. While not a primary focus of this essay, Millais's *Apple Blossoms (Spring)* (Fig. 1), first exhibited in 1859, serves as an appropriate backdrop to this discussion and a few observations about it at this point would be helpful. Taken as a whole, the painting and its title speak of the pattern of life and death, of birth and rebirth. It features a group of young girls in their early to mid-teens having a picnic in a contemporary Victorian setting. Their sober facial expressions—a contrast to the scene's vibrant colors—the circular position of the figures, and the passing of food and drink around the circle suggest ritual and pattern. Yet the silence and formality of the setting does not obscure the youthfulness and beauty of the figures. Into this depiction of glowing youth, Millais introduces the scythe as a *memento mori*. While the medievalizing element is disquieting enough, it also disturbs through its placement over the reclining figure, the only one to look directly and knowingly at the viewer. Thus while the scythe plays its part in creating the notion of a cyclical pattern of birth, death and rebirth, at the same time it deconstructs the pattern, as if Millais is reminding his viewers that not only will death come, and that it can come at any moment, but that, very likely, it *will* come upon the young.

The painting was too jarring for Victorian audiences and they did not receive it well at first, perhaps, because Millais had gotten too close to one of the most painful realities of nineteenth-century family life: the sudden loss of children. Real-life infants and children were at risk more than any other age group due to multiple reasons, including lack of prenatal care, water polluted by sewage, and—in an age without antibiotics or most inoculations—epidemics of influenza, typhus, and cholera. Scholar Andrew Sanders (1982) reports that from 1839 until the end of the century, the infant mortality rate in London was 150 out of every 1,000 births (p. 6). By examining the most recent figures released from the London Health Observatory (2009) for the 33 London boroughs of today, we can see that from 2005-2007 the average infant mortality rate per 1,000 was 4.7. The lowest rate on the spectrum was at Richmond upon Thames with 2.6, and

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

the highest rate was found in Enfield at 6.7. Evidently, in comparison to the Victorians, the majority of London's parents today know little of infant death.

It was not only infants but young Victorian children and adolescents who were among the most vulnerable of the populous. During the first two decades of the Victorian era, in the poor sections of urban Britain, almost one in five children born alive died before reaching the age of six (Evans, 2009). But Edwin Chadwick presented in his 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* that dying under age 20 was a hardship endured by all classes. The proportion of deaths of those under 20-years-old to the total number of deaths stood at one in three and a half for those belonging to gentry, one in two for families of farmers or tradesmen, and one in one and a half for families of laborers (p. 228).

As with most Victorians, death of the young was all too real to Dickens and the Pre-Raphaelites. Dickens and his wife Catherine unexpectedly lost her younger sister Mary Hogarth at age 17 to what might have been congenital heart failure. Mary was Catherine's chaperone during the couple's courtship and began living with them soon after they wed. She had become Dickens's favored young critic and companion while he was starting to serialize his first novel, *Pickwick Papers*. Her sudden death devastated him in ways not even the deaths of his father and his seven-month-old daughter Dora did who died within a month of each other fourteen years later. For the Pre-Raphaelites, an early and profound loss as a group was that of their associate, friend, and model Walter Deverell of Bright's disease at age 27. In one of the many odd coincidences marking the lives of the Pre-Raphaelites, it was Deverell who first discovered Elizabeth Siddal, the most important model for the P.R.B. and the future mistress and wife of Rossetti. Before her marriage she would endure years of poor health—exacerbated certainly, if not initially brought about by Rossetti's off and on resistance to marrying her and his numerous affairs. Two years into their marriage Siddal would die at the age of 32 from an overdose of laudanum after their child was stillborn. For many years it was thought she was one of the tens of thousands to suffer from consumption, the name given at the time to various forms of tuberculosis, which was the biggest and most persistent killer of the century. Recently, however, that diagnosis has been fuel for debate among historians (see Ash, 1995).

Nell and Ophelia: The Softened Death of a Virgin Betrayed

In light of the demise of their loved ones, as well as that of the thousands surrounding them, it is little wonder that the dead and nearly dead featured often and early in the works of Dickens and Hunt, Millais and Rossetti. Dickens experienced the death of the first character he would call "'the child'" (as cited in Forster, 1872-4/1966, vol. 1, p. 121) after writing *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and two novels. His creation, Nell Trent, known by all who read *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41/2000) as Little Nell, a fourteen year old orphan, virtuous and wise beyond her years, spends the greater part of the novel leading her grandfather away from the city of London after the predatorial moneylender, Daniel Quilp, takes possession of their shop of odds and ends. Though poverty-stricken, Nell has a middle class sensibility—refined, gentile, delicate, private—who while living as a beggar on the road is thrust through no fault of her own into the coarseness

of the lower class. In this, Dickens's plot resembles the governess novels, a popular genre of Victorians. Helena Michie (1999) writes that the Victorians had idealized the bourgeois body, granting it classical impermeability and perfection, yet at the same time they were fully aware that their cities and the rural areas were "inhabited by bodies far from ideal" (p. 409). The fantasy of the governess appeased middle class anxiety about the "vulnerability of the female body" (p. 411) to external forces in that the governess heroine remains morally intact despite being torn from her middle class roots. Likewise, Nell makes up for youth and physical frailty through moral integrity despite her poverty, the deterioration of her grandfather's mind, and falling in with a ruffian crowd on the road.

In this internal stability, Nell is a sister-type to Dickens's earlier character Oliver Twist, who remains unchanged in his middle class sensibility despite being thrown in with Fagin's criminal gang. Their goodness is an inherited quality rather than one acquired through experience or education—a characteristic emblematic of man's perfectibility in the face of such terrors of industrialization as crime, financial loss, and homelessness.

The subject of Nell's innate purity is taken up by Hunt in his early work, "Little Nell and Her Grandfather" (1846) (Fig. 2). The painting depicts the pair while on the road. Nell has obtained some water from a nearby pond and in her action of handing her grandfather the cup, she evokes the biblical character Rachel and the parabolic Good Samaritan in their care for the sojourner. She has shed her stockings and shoes as if the dirt road of the country is now holy ground, and the bend of her bare foot surrounded by the billowing and folds of her dress recalls biblical figures in renaissance works. It is significant that the faint outline of a graying London lies in the background, for though Nell's grandfather has turned his back toward the city and is facing a countryside setting, the city, as in Dickens's novel, is ever present, its poison spreading out towards them as they attempt their escape.

If London is a microcosm of the world, then in the end, unlike the governess, Nell is unsuitable for this world and it for her. She is not meant to marry—nor can she live a long and happy life as the reader supposes Oliver will. Goldie Morgentaler's (2000) argument is useful here. She contends that while Dickens traces Nell's virtue back to the saintliness of her mother and maternal grandmother, rather than existing as a shadowy image of her ancestry, she is the culmination of previous generations, much in the same ideological way as the New Testament genealogies "anticipate the arrival of the Messiah" (p. 28). Her apotheosis then can only end in death—a leaving of this wretched earth. Dickens beatifies the tragic death of a child by adding elements befitting what the Victorians called a "good death": For instance, the novel serves as one long preparation for the end of Nell's life; in the rural village where she and her grandfather finally come to rest, there is time for reflection and softened conversation with a schoolteacher; and though Nell dies alone, her friend Kit and her great uncle soon discover her body lying on a bed in peaceful repose.

It is often pointed out that Mary Hogarth inspired the creation of Nell, and it is through Nell's death that Dickens subconsciously tried to come to grips with his loss. There is evidence, however, in Dickens's letters to his friend and biographer John Forster that Dickens was

consciously retrieving his feelings of loss. In the novel, instead of mentioning Nell's new heavenly abode directly, Dickens's narrator presents the idea of goodness continuing on, even multiplying afterward, and the reader can almost hear Dickens comforting himself and others:

> Oh! it is hard to take to heart the lesson that such deaths will teach, but let no man reject it, for it is one that all must learn, and is a mighty, universal Truth. When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. (p. 544)

In a vein similar to Dickens's softening for Victorian audiences the death of a child, Millais portrays a sympathetic version of suicide in his 1851 painting, *Ophelia* (Fig. 3). The days had passed when suicides were buried at the crossroads with a stake through the heart, but suicide was still illegal. And while views on suicide had diversified, many Victorians still considered it a sin. The predominant attitude, however, was one of fear, compelling society to suppress public discussion of the issue (see Gates, 1988). Instead of exploiting Victorian fears through dramatizing Ophelia's death as a theatrical event, Millais emphasizes quietude. Elizabeth Siddal as Ophelia is situated similarly to Nell who is on her deathbed surrounded by the natural elements of berries and flowers. In Millais's work, the gentle billowing of Ophelia's dress, true to Shakespeare's textual description, her partially submerged body, and the faithful rendering of floral and fauna suggest a return to nature. Yet there is more than a nod to spirituality in the upturned hands of the victim as if in prayer. The figure is eroticized by a slightly opened mouth and heavy lids, features seen in Millais's later works of children just about to enter puberty; but like Nell, Ophelia is not allowed to achieve sexual maturity, ensuring her purity remains unmolested. In contrast to contemporary paintings of suicides, which often featured tragic prostitutes, here, suicide would seem to be at its most soothing.

For our discussion, what is most intriguing about the intersections between the portrayals of Nell and Ophelia is the hint that it's the exposure of a secret that brings both characters to their deaths. During Nell's journey, she discovers that her grandfather—in an endeavor to raise their economic level and ensure provision for Nell's future—turned to gambling and became immersed in debt, and that it was this misfortune that cost them their shop and home. But what undermines her trust more so is that after falling for the shenanigans of scam artists, her grandfather steals money earmarked for their food and shelter while on their journey. In the story behind Millais's painting, Ophelia learns that not only has her beloved Hamlet spurned her love, but he has also killed her father. While the reader/viewer knows that Hamlet's cruel treatment of her is a ruse, there is a ruthlessness to his actions overall that bespeaks a dangerous aspect of his nature heretofore unseen by his family and friends. The betrayals prove too much for both Nell and Ophelia, weakening them and making them unfit for this world. Millais's refusal to medievalize his subject and his choice, instead, to place the floating figure in the contemporary scene of Ewell in Surrey connect her to contemporary pictures of drowned Victorian women, in whose deaths some betrayal often played a role, altering their perception of themselves and others.

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

The Lady of Shalott and the Women of Satis House

Another dramatic change in perception, indeed, an implosion of assumptions and illusions forms the primary narrative event for the female figure in *The Lady of Shalott* (Fig. 4), by Hunt (1886-1905), and Miss Havisham and her adopted daughter Estella in their last encounter in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1853). In Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott," on which Hunt's painting is based, the female weaver is locked away from the outside world in a tower on an island and is allowed to glimpse only the reflections of life in Camelot in the mirror, drawing inspiration for the images in her creations. For some unknown reason, she is under a curse preventing her from looking directly at the outside environs, though the fact that such an action on her part would bring about her demise is hidden from her until too late. The appearance of Lancelot, the celebration surrounding him, and finally his sexually suggestive melody of "Tirra Lirra," which can be read on the surface as the mating call in answer to her own singing earlier, compels her to abandon her web and gaze upon the scene, thus putting the wheels of the curse in motion. In comparing this figure to Hunt's earlier drawings of the same, Elizabeth Prettejohn (2000) observes that this later Lady of Shalott "is no longer the waif-like girl of the first; she has grown so that her body dominates the space around her" (p. 228). Hunt depicts the artist as she enters the throes of death. However, the mood observed here is not the melancholic fatigue of Millais's *Mariana* (1850-1), the abandoned lover, also inspired by a poem of Tennyson's. Nor is it the sorrowful bewilderment of John William Waterhouse's *Lady of Shalott* (1888). The scene stands in stark contrast also to the peaceful repose in death of Dickens's Nell and Millais's Ophelia. As Prettejohn argues, Hunt's figure is enraged and defiant (p. 228).

Dickens's spinster Miss Havisham of Satis House is similarly cursed, but the curse has been brought about under her own direction. Out of grave disappointment at being jilted at the altar, she has desperately attempted to live locked in the moment of her betrayal within the confines of her wedding dress and the single shoe she had just put on. However, just as her wedding garments and accouterments decay with time, her mind and attitudes spiral downward into the nadir of selfishness until she becomes something worse than the adolescent who has never matured, evidenced by her life's project of molding Estella into a beauty who spurns all men. In a reversal of the Pygmalion myth, in which Dickens anticipates W. S. Gilbert (1871) and George Bernard Shaw (1912), such "work" has been Miss Havisham's revenge. But while she accepts the decaying rags her bridal gown has become, she has misjudged the power of time and the subsequent changes it can wreak on the human mind and emotions. True to the influences of her upbringing, Estella is incapable of love, even of returning affection or love to her adoptive mother, Miss Havisham. In the face of the older woman's shock at this discovery, Estella calmly and logically poses the question—one recalling Lady Shalott's avoidance of life's realities—that if Miss Havisham had taught her adopted daughter that daylight was her "enemy and destroyer and she must always turn against it. . .and then for a pupose, had wanted her to take naturally to the daylight and she could not do it," would Miss Havisham have been dismayed? (p. 306).

In these late works of Dickens and Hunt, both the Lady of Shalott and Miss Havisham have gazed at the truth of the past and the present, and as a result their futures are in imminent danger.

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

In the figure of *The Lady of Shalott*, her left arm and clothes twisted up against her, the thread constrictive and in disarray, we can perceive Miss Havisham, the aged adolescent, caught in the web of her decisions, now fitful as she has seen the truth of herself in the mirror that is Estella. The figure's hair, a signifier of female sexual desire in Victorian literature, is at once poised and in motion, as is the entire body of the figure, caught on the threshold of liberation, great discovery, and consequently death. Similarly Miss Havisham will die in a conflation of flames and rotting cloth, while Estella's contradictory mixture of insouciance and deliberate rebellion of society's mores will lead her to marry the physically abusive Drummle. The same sorts of readings Prettejohn (2000) says have traditionally been given to Hunt's figure can easily be shared with Havisham and Estella: sexual frustration, a sexual awakening that meets with punishment, and a brave revolt against patriarchy that is doomed to failure.

Prettejohn makes a strong case for an additional reading by considering the *Lady of Shalott* with its clogs and centrally located mirror in light of Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (p. 261), thus leading to a comparison of the figure to the rebel artist—and in the end since the figure supports multiple readings, Prettejohn's characterization of it as elusive is fitting. Certainly Miss Havisham and Estella who play ingenious games of manipulation on male outsiders could be read similarly, at once emblematic of the sexualized female and the isolated artist, who struggles against patriarchy and society's protocol, as well as Victorian materialism.

Though not mentioned by Prettejohn about Hunt's painting, the small, muscular figure of Hercules in the roundel to the right of the mirror seems to look at the much larger Lady, as he plucks an apple from the tree in the garden of the Hesperides. His victory is nearly complete; however, her runaway web threatens to interfere. His right arm, upturned to grasp the apple, and her right arm, bent downward to pull against the web, suggest a sober tug of war and offer balance to the composition. Yet, the female figure's size relative to that of Hercules and her huge fan-shaped hair dominate the painting. While readers of Tennyson's poem know the Lady loses the battle, the strength of Hunt's figure complicates this outcome by tempting the viewer to forget that fact of the narrative; and the implied competition between the figure of the weaver and the figure of Hercules depicted in the midst of natural elements suggest life's struggle, common to all, rather than to a single gender.

In light of this interpretation of Hunt's work, Miss Havisham's desolation after her last meeting with Estella and the betrayals she undergoes as a would-be bride, an adoptive mother, and a suppressed artist can be read as elements of that condition, again, common to all, of alienation from society and even from oneself that threatens to doom the human race. With this in mind, the secret intuitively discovered by the Lady of Shalott, Miss Havisham, and Estella is that their own participation in this system, as it were, perpetuates its effects of pain and destruction and has brought about their own downfall. Perhaps the surprise for the reader/viewer is that the substance and discourse of their narratives are so expansive.

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

Seeing Oneself in Doppelgangers and Live Specters

It is fitting in this exploration of secrets as harbingers of death that we now come to the final painting under discussion: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's haunting *How They Met Themselves* (1851-60) (Fig. 5) shows a young medieval couple encountering their doppelgangers in the forest, which puts the earthly woman in a near-death swoon even as she reaches for her double who bends in concern and sympathy. Though the couples wear medieval garb, the portrait-like figures, modeled on Rossetti and his wife, who would die the following year, would have brought a contemporary feel to the Victorian viewer. Traditionally, meeting one's doppelganger is an omen of death. A literary substitute for the doppelganger is the twin, often an evil one, suggesting that the good and evil twins represent the dual nature of the whole person. Rossetti had been fascinated by the lore of the doppelganger since childhood. This piece he referred to as "the Bogie drawing" (Tickner, 2003) is remarkable in that there is no savvier, worldlier twin—only four figures, all very surprised by this encounter, two unearthly, signified by the slight glow around the outline of their shapes, and two of this dimension. Both couples are of equal importance to the drawing, echoing Rossetti's poetic interest in exploring the metaphysical side of earthly life, particularly love and beauty, which can be observed, for instance in his 1850 poem "The Blessed Damozel."

The uncanny meeting in *How They Met Themselves* and the empathic, though possibly deadly connection between the female figures intersects with the encounters between Lady Dedlock and Esther Summerson in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), as they discover they are mother and daughter. Upon seeing Lady Dedlock and hearing her voice for the first time, Esther notes, "There arose innumerable pictures of myself" (p. 309). Not coincidentally, Esther contracts and nearly dies from smallpox after this psychic recognition. She is permanently scarred—the face acting as an external sign of the change in self-identity. Eventually, the mother and daughter's full discovery of the truth of their kinship leads to the death of Lady Dedlock on a freezing night by the tomb of her former lover, Esther's father, and a second episode of illness for Esther. The older generation has passed away, leaving Esther with a new life, but not without branding her, in a sense, with its mark, a process that nearly kills her.

The psychic connection between Lady Dedlock and Esther reflects Dickens's deep interest in the world of invisible forces. Like many of his contemporaries Dickens examined the supernatural seriously. The debates around the definition and authenticity of supernatural phenomena were highly complex during the Victorian era and cannot be understood as a contest between the scientists against the non-scientists. Dickens was among those who tended to stress the physiological explanation of supernatural phenomena. Louise Henson (2004) writes that "Throughout his life he collected ghost stories as an important source of enquiry into the mysteries of the mind, and it was as contributions to human psychology that he viewed many of the sensational tales that came under his notice" (p. 45). He also studied and practiced mesmerism from a therapeutic perspective and, as Rossetti did later in life, investigated spiritualism.

The boundaries between the seen and unseen worlds for both Dickens and Rossetti were not hard-edged, placing them actually in the mainstream of Victorian thinking. Neither was a materialist, thus, unsurprisingly, artistic explorations crossing the borders of the visible and invisible showed up in their works. *How They Met Themselves*, with its dreamscape setting, and the mother-daughter story of Lady Dedlock and Esther, which involves a sort of primal memory, both suggest things of a psychological and intuitive, even spiritual, nature and exemplify the widespread Victorian fascination from all walks of life with the supernatural.

Conclusion

The novels of Charles Dickens and the paintings of the founding Pre-Raphaelites were written in an age that was turbulent with change. Industrialization had brought great promise of invention and economic success, as well as the problems of congested cities, displacement, disease, and death, which cost society its young in large numbers. The British approached change more quietly than the revolutionaries in Europe, but passions still ran high as Corn laws and political and social improvements in the form of Chartism were debated. Attempts were being made to define and redefine the elements of the visible and invisible worlds, and the assumptions and beliefs of previous generations about the nature of humans were being revisited. In the art of Dickens, Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti, growing up and realizing self-potential during this time was a process fraught with danger.

References

Ash, R. (1995). *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Brighton: Pavilion Books, 1997.

Chadwick, E. (1965). *Report on the sanitary condition of the labouring population of Great Britain*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. (Original work published 1842).

Dickens, C. (1850, June 15). Old lamps for new ones. *Household Words, 12*.

Dickens, C. (1971). *Bleak house*. London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1853).

Dickens, C. (1996). *Great expectations*. London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1860-61).

Dickens, C. (2000). *The old curiosity shop.* London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1840-41).

Evans, E. (2009). Overview: Victorian Britain, 1837-1901. In *British History in-depth* (BBC). Retrieved on Dec. 1st 2009 from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/overview_victorians_01.shtml

Forster, J. (1966). *The life of Charles Dickens* (Vols. 1-2). London: J. M. Dent & Sons. (Original work published 1872-4).

Gates, B. T. (1988). *Victorian suicide: Mad crimes and sad histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Henson, L. (2004). Investigations and fictions: Charles Dickens and ghosts. In N. Brown, C. Burdett, and P. Thurschwell (Eds.), *The Victorian supernatural* (pp. 44-63). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hunt, W. H. (1905). *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood* (Vol. 1-2). New York: Macmillan Company.

Landow, G. P. (2009). Charles Dickens and the visual arts. Introduction. In G. P. Landow (Ed.), *The Victorian Web*. Retrieved on September 17th 2009 from http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/dickens/dickens2.html

London Health Observatory (2009, November). *Indicator 11.3—data—infant mortality rate*. Retrieved November 12 from http://www.lho.org.uk/Download/Public/9301/1/Indicator_11.3_1.xls

Michie, H. (1999). Under Victorian skins: The bodies beneath. In H. F. Tucker (Ed.), *A companion to Victorian literature and culture* (pp.407-24). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Mill, J. S. (1986). The spirit of the age. *The collected works of John Stuart Mill: Newspaper writings December 1822—July 1831* (A.P. Robson & J. M. Robson, Eds.), vol. 22, pp. 210-11. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. (Original work published 1831).

Morgentaler, G. (2000). *Dickens and heredity: When like begets like*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Prettejohn, E. (2000). *The art of the Pre-Raphaelites.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sanders, A. (1982). *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist*. London: Macmillan Press.

Tickner, L. (2003). *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. London: Tate Publishing.

Tobin, T. J. (2002). Charles Dickens and the Pre-Raphaelites. *The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society, 10*(2).

Vanden Bossche, C. R. (1999). Moving out: Adolescence. In H. F. Tucker (Ed.), *A companion to Victorian literature and culture* (pp. 82-96). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Appendix: Figures

See the five figures below.

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(**10**): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

Fig. 1. Millais, John Everett (1829-1898). *Spring (Apple Blossoms)*. 1859. Oil on canvas, 113 x 176.3 cm. © National Museums Liverpool (Lady Lever Art Gallery).

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

Fig. 2. Hunt, William Holman (1827-1910). *Little Nell and Her Grandfather*. Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust, UK/ © Museums Sheffield/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

Fig. 3. Millais, John Everett (1829-1898). *Ophelia*. 1851. The Tate Gallery/Digital Image © Tate, London 2009.

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

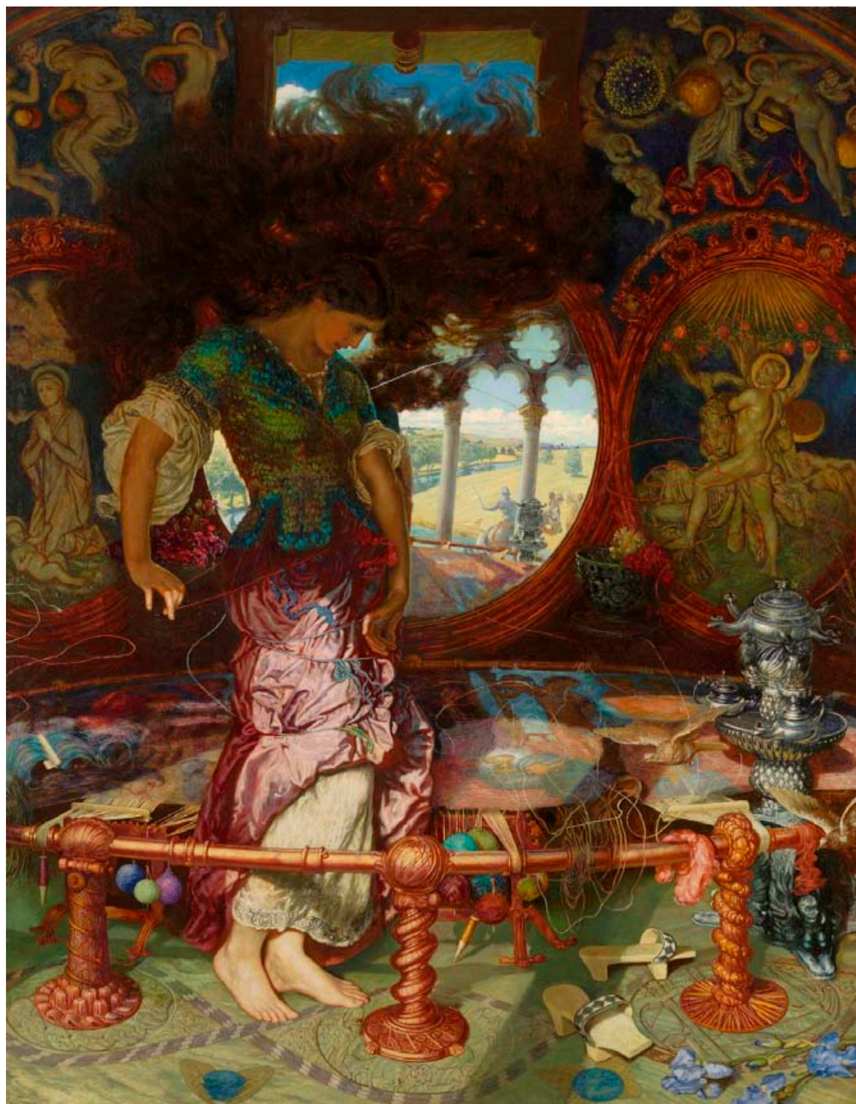

Fig. 4. Hunt, William Holman (1827-1910). *Lady of Shalott*. 1886-1905. Oil on canvas, 74 1/8 x 57 5/8. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

International Journal of Arts and Sciences
3(10): 127 - 142 (2010)
CD-ROM. ISSN: 1944-6934
© InternationalJournal.org

Fig. 5. Rossetti, Dante Charles Gabriel (1828-1882). *How They Met Themselves*, c.1850/60 (pen & Indian ink). Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, UK/ The Bridgeman Art Library.