Modern Gender Politics:

The Pre-Raphaelite Legacy of Evelyn De Morgan

by

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ABSTRACT

Evelyn Pickering De Morgan's position at the end of the Victorian Age situates her uniquely at several crossroads of time. Her artistic style and influence intersect with that of the Pre-Raphaelites, Aestheticism, and the Symbolist movement, and her life coincides with early feminism, the Suffrage Movement in Britain, and the Great War, all informing the content of her work. Scholars have informally positioned her as a feminist Pre-Raphaelite artist, as a seemingly antidotal contrast to earlier members and followers of the Brotherhood. Symbolism in her art threads through a variety of allegorical, political, and spiritual subjects to convey ideological messages to her audience about the nature of the soul. I will argue that her status as a feminist Pre-Raphaelite artist is, in fact, informed by influences from Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, particularly in her use of personal symbolism in her art. By examining the artistic relationship between De Morgan and Rossetti, I argue that a feminist strain in her work acknowledges the symbolic connection from Rossetti's influence, while still emphasizing her own agency in her artmaking. Comparisons made between De Morgan and fellow artist Marie Spartali Stillman will underscore this, uncovering places for further critical examination of gender in Victorian art.

DEDICATION

To my mother Aubrey, who instilled in me my love of art by taking me to the Philbrook Art Museum at four years old. To my younger self, who was obsessed with Matisse's *Purple Robe and Anemone*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Evelyn De Morgan (1855-1919) was a Victorian painter associated with the Pre-Raphaelites and the International Symbolist movement and sharing an artistic style similar to Aestheticism.[1] De Morgan's life coincided with the Suffrage movement in Britain, the Boer War which was the last of England's major colonial wars, and the Great War, all informing the content of her work. Her work is almost entirely figural, influenced by the Italian Renaissance, paralleling similar interests among other Victorian artists. Thematically, figures fly and float throughout the scenery, playing out biblical or classical mythological stories. Though concerned from the start of her artistic career with equality, there is a perceptible shift in her choice of subject throughout her life as her art became more and more socially aware, responding to the social issues of her time.

Both suffrage and Spiritualism meld in her work. As an active suffragist, De Morgan advocated not only for women's right to vote but also championed their access to artistic education. In the last two decades of her life, her art reached its political zenith, responding directly to the loss of life, inhumane conditions, and spiritual damage that the Boer War and World War I inflicted upon humanity. Another key component of De Morgan's art is her interest and belief in Spiritualism. Spiritualists maintained that the soul's evolution undertaken upon death went through numerous stages of expansion until reaching its ultimate state. De Morgan was an ardent Spiritualist, practicing seances and spiriting writing, and hosting spirit parties to receive messages from spiritual and angelic

visitors. Her art conveyed this interest throughout her career, starting with didactic moralistic messages aimed at the viewer and becoming more and more pronounced at the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout this direction, De Morgan's art still remained visually reminiscent of Pre-Raphaelite art.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) was a group of painters founded by seven members, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882).[2] The artistic impulse for the PRB came from a desire to return to a style of art "pre-Raphael," rejecting the academic style of art supported by the Royal Academy of Arts. The Victorian critic and writer John Ruskin (1819-1900) was also a notable influence upon the PRB, and he in turn championed their initial visual and literary works. The influence of the PRB extended beyond their initial circle, influencing and inspiring subsequent "generations" of artists like Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), William Morris (1834-1896), George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) and even later artists such as John William Waterhouse (1849-1917)**.** Many women artists were also inspired by and connected with the PRB, such as painter Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927), photographer Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), model and embroiderer Jane Morris (nee Burden) (1839-1914), artist and poet Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862), as well De Morgan. Informally named the Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood by modern scholars, this loose association of women artists was largely integrated within the wider Pre-Raphaelite movement, collaborating with and learning from the core members while producing artwork in their own right.[3]

Scholars have informally positioned De Morgan as a feminist Pre-Raphaelite artist, as a seeming antidotal contrast to earlier members and followers of the Brotherhood. Female figures, flying or insubstantial bodies, and chromatic mist symbolically thread through a variety of allegorical, political, and spiritual subjects to convey ideological messages to her audience. I will argue that her status as a feminist Pre-Raphaelite artist is, in fact, informed by influences from Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, particularly in her use of personal symbolism. By examining the artistic relationship between De Morgan and Rossetti, I argue that a feminist strain in her work acknowledges their symbolic connection, while still emphasizing her own agency in her artmaking. Comparisons made between De Morgan and fellow artist Marie Spartali Stillman will underscore this, uncovering places for further critical examination of gender in Victorian art.

Positioning De Morgan's art as responsive to similar social and political issues with which the Pre-Raphaelite movement initially engaged rather than constructing her as a follower or limiting her to the "Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood" which implies imitators or followers, I undertake to construct her artistic identity as enmeshed and engaged with vital social and political issues creatively and innovatively inspired by Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites. I propose to disrupt the notion of the Pre-Raphaelite generations as simply imitatively succeeding one another and the core Brotherhood by analyzing the historically entangled social and artistic issues that interested multiple innovative women

artists building on, transforming and even disrupting what had become by the 1870s the Pre-Raphaelite tradition.

In the first chapter, I discuss De Morgan's artistic education and influences, beginning with her time at the Slade School of Art and eventual mentoring under her uncle, John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, often considered a second-generation Pre-Raphaelite. Her early works articulate her comprehensive education, full of classical and medieval subjects. Her works show influences of Stanhope and the wider Pre-Raphaelites known to her through her uncle and social circles. Later in her education, De Morgan spent much time in Florence, especially after her uncle's move there, contributing to the equally important influence of the Italian Renaissance on her art, specifically the work of Sandro Botticelli. Making a study after *The Birth of Venus* (1485-86) during her time there, she was inspired by Botticelli's central figure echoed notably in her painting *Flora* (1894). Marie Spartali Stillman's artwork will also be considered in this chapter, as she, too, was greatly influenced by the Italian Renaissance, and drew upon mythological and literary sources in her art. Examining these two artists and their shared artistic impulses as part of the larger Pre-Raphaelite "Sisterhood," I will situate them in the broader context of nineteenth-century Victorian gender identities in England as a basis for critical analysis of their relation to the wider Pre-Raphaelite movement.

In the second chapter, I situate De Morgan's art in relation to her predecessors' Pre-Raphaelite depictions of women by critically comparing her art to that of Rossetti. De Morgan's female figures share many formal properties with Rossetti's, especially in both

artists' depictions of women's emotional states, painting them in moments of contemplation and reverie, and depicting women as goddesses and historical figures. Furthermore, De Morgan and Rossetti shared at least one model, the well-known Jane Morris, a focus of comparison that has yet to be fully, critically investigated. Comparing and contrasting De Morgan's use (and subversion) of gender and the female body with Rossetti's depictions, I suggest a more encompassing reading of both De Morgan's and Rossetti's work as the basis for further studies of critical issues of gender and feminism within Victorian art.

In the third chapter, I further connect De Morgan's feminist ideology to the use of personal symbols by examining the impact of the socio-theological Spiritualism movement on De Morgan's art. Aligned with the broader Victorian idea of progress, De Morgan believed in the perpetual betterment of the soul and practiced automatic writing and spirit rapping as ways to generate enlightenment and revelations about the nature of the soul. Later, she saw it her duty as an artist and well-to-do woman to speak out against the abhorrent conditions of the Great War, concerned that young soldiers' spiritual salvation was at risk due to the violence. The content of her later art addressed this concern by promoting pacifism and decrying the evil she saw pervading the world through the war. Likewise, she connected her spiritualist faith to social issues like suffrage, understanding the two as interdependent and intertwined with one another, believing that only by addressing both could the emancipation of body and soul be possible.

Literature Review

Scholarship on De Morgan, while critical and informative, has been limited. The most prominent literature on her life and artistic career are Jan Marsh and Pamela Nunn's two publications on Pre-Raphaelite women artists, Elise Smith's monograph, and a catalog raisonné produced by the De Morgan Foundation. A fair number of articles have been written about her pacifistic views and her interest in Spiritualism in her work, both as manifestations of her early feminist ideas.[4] More recently, literature on De Morgan has been varied, concerned with her role in the Suffrage movement, as a member of a Pre-Raphaelite "Sisterhood," and on the artistic partnership shared between her and her husband William De Morgan, as researched by Lucy Rose. Most recently, *A Marriage of Arts and Crafts: Evelyn and William De Morgan* was the first retrospective exhibition of the two artists to be shown in America at the Delaware Art Museum, promising increasing interest in De Morgan's art.

Literature on Rossetti and the wider Brotherhood is plentiful and varied, with contributions from numerous scholars in multiple fields. Scholarship spawning from second-wave feminism cast off Rossetti and the Brotherhood, seeing their art as patriarchal conformations, subjecting women to the patriarchal gaze (Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock).[5] This view has been challenged by Jay Sloan and Julie Codell who argue that Rossetti was not patriarchal and did not indulge in reifying women as much as has been argued, partly evidenced by the prominent proto-feminist and activist Barbara Smith Bodichon's friendship with Rossetti and further evidenced through Rossetti's

bohemianism, rejection of Victorian masculine norms, and care for his working-class models.[6] Scholars like Elizabeth Prettejohn focus on his (and the Pre-Raphaelites') aesthetic qualities. More recent scholarship is focused on global and material aspects of Pre-Raphaelite art like Martin Ellis, Tim Barringer, and Victoria Osborne's publication for *Victorian Radicals* exhibition, Jo Briggs's analysis of hair as relics as the "material culture of memory" and Thomas J. Tobin's overview of the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism world-wide.[7] The literature analyzing medievalism in the art of the Brotherhood and their followers is equally as plentiful and varied, emphasizing their diverse educational backgrounds and deep knowledge of pre-modern literary sources, like Ayla Lepine's study of the profound "response to the Middle Ages" in PRB art and literature, or Thomas L. Jeffers's intertextual analysis of the Lady of Shalott's popularity.

[1] The International Symbolist movement spawned from the French and Belgian Symbolism movement, beginning in 1886 with Jean Moréas's publishing of the Symbolist Manifesto in *Le Figaro*. Symbolism was concerned with evoking emotions and sensations through symbolic imagery, rather than depicting reality itself. The French Symbolists were, in part, influence by the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, specifically citing Dante Gabriel Rossetti among influences. See Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 1-7, 17-23. Aestheticism's (1860's-1890s) primary concern was that art should be beautiful, not didactic in its aims, as the phrase "art for art's sake" sums up. Primarily taking place in England, writers like Walter Pater (1839-1894) and Oscar Wilde (1854-

1900) supported the movement, while artists like Rossetti, Simeon Solomon (1840-1905), James McNeil Whistler (1834-1903), and Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) were associated with the movement. See Lynn Federle Orr, *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Gard 1860-1900* (England: V&A Publishing, 2012) and Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2007).

[2] The complete, originally Brotherhood was compromised of William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, William Michael Rossetti, James Collinson, Frederic George Stephens, and Thomas Woolner, founded in 1848.

[3] Elizabeth Prettejohn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-10.

[4] Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish, Nunn. *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement* (London: Virago, 1989); Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* (Manchester: Manchester City Art Galleries, 1997); Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (Madison N.J: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002); Catherine Gordon, ed., *Evelyn De Morgan: Oil Paintings* (London: De Morgan Foundation, 1996); Lucy Ella Rose, *Suffragist Artists in Partnership: Gender, Word and Image* (Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Margaretta Frederick, ed., *Evelyn and William De Morgan: A Marriage of Arts and Crafts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

[5] Griselda Pollock and Deborah Cherry "Women as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddal" Art History 7 no. 2 (1984): 206-227.

[6] Jay D. Sloan, "'How grew such presence from man's shameful swarm': Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Victorian masculinity" in *Pre-Raphaelite Masculinities: Constructions of Masculinity in Art and Literature*, ed. Amelia Yeates and Serena Trowbridge (Oxford: Routledge, 2016): 11-24; Julie Codell, "Dress and Desire: Rossetti's Erotics of the Unclassifiable and Working-Class Models" *in Fashion in European Art: Dress and Identity, Politics and the Body*, 1775-1925, ed. Justine De Young (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019): 91-119.

[7]Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn and Edwin Becker, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*New York, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003); Thomas J. Tobin, ed., *Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism* (New York: State University of New York, 2005); Martin Ellis, Victoria Osborne, and Tim Barringer, *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 2018). Jo Briggs, "Pre-Raphaelite Hair Relics," Special issue on "Material Culture and the Pre-Raphaelites," ed. Julie Codell, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* ns 31 (Spring 2022), 23-38. Ayla Lepine, "The Pre-Raphaelites: Medievalism and Victorian Visual Culture" in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism*, eds. Joanne Parker and Corinna Wagner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 488-506. Thomas L. Jeffers, "Tennyson's Lady of Shalott and Pre-Raphaelite Renderings: Statement and Counter-Statement," Religion *and the Arts* 6, no.3 (2002): 231-256.

CHAPTER 2

EVELYN DE MORGAN AND THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

In this chapter, I will discuss Evelyn De Morgan's artistic education and influences, beginning with her private tutorship and her eventual enrollment at the Slade School of Art. A variety of literary sources influenced the subjects and themes of De Morgan's work. Her paintings drew inspiration from disparate historical markers, associating medieval and biblical subjects with a classical setting, drawn from the Italian Renaissance. Her early works, predominantly history paintings, demonstrated her comprehensive education, rife with classical and medieval subjects, influenced by her uncle John Roddam Spencer Stanhope and other Pre-Raphaelites, in her social circles. Later in her formative years, De Morgan spent much time in Florence, beginning in 1875 until 1914, and especially after marrying her husband. The Italian Renaissance was a major influence on her art, specifically, the work of Sandro Botticelli, producing studies after the Renaissance master during her time there. Botticelli's influence is clear in *Flora* (1894), where the goddess's body amalgamates Venus, and the goddess Flora in *Primavera* (1477-1482). Marie Spartali Stillman's artwork is also considered in this chapter, as a basis for comparison with De Morgan. Stillman, like De Morgan, was greatly influenced by the Italian Renaissance, drawing upon similar mythological and literary sources in her art. Personal friends as well as professional colleagues, De Morgan and Spartali Stillman both exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery numerous times, sometimes at the same shows. By examining De Morgan's influences and contemporaries, I

emphasize the importance of her artistic impulses, contextualizing her place as an artist within the legacy of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Born Evelyn Pickering to Percival Pickering and Anna Maria Wilhelmina Spencer Stanhope, sister of John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, De Morgan was raised in a wealthy family. She was the eldest of three siblings, followed by her brother Percival Spencer, a chemist, and her younger sister Wilhelmina, who would write De Morgan's biography. De Morgan's "lineage included a great number of artists and art patrons" as Elise Lawton Smith describes. Most notably, her uncle Spencer Stanhope, a painter closely associated with the Pre-Raphaelites and especially Edward Burne-Jones, but also De Morgan's great-aunts on the same side of the family who "studied with [Thomas] Gainsborough." De Morgan's own mother studied art to some degree, too, but Smith suggests that she saw her "sketches as only one of the genteel accomplishments expected of a lady," rather than pursuing them like her brother. [1]

De Morgan received the same education as her brother in her youth at her mother's insistence, trained in several modern European languages as well as Greek and Latin. During this time, Evelyn's diaries tell of her passion for art, and the constant conflict her passion generated with her parents, noted in Evelyn's sister's biography of her youth. Her interest in art became an "obsession" that Evelyn felt obliged to hide from her parents, due to the family perception of her uncle's deviation from "the broad highway of the socially select." [2] As an artist himself, her uncle advocated for her education, desiring that she should be formally trained, but his support did not have a

positive effect on getting her enrolled in art classes. As a compromise of sorts, a series of private instructors were hired to teach her foundational art skills when she was 15, that were still appropriate for a lady of her birth. Following a contentious period (as Wilhelmina describes it, at least) between Evelyn and her parents and numerous art teachers, her parents finally relented, deciding that she should be trained to the best of her ability, if trained at all.[3]

De Morgan studied at the South Kensington National Art Training School, and then the Slade School of Art, in 1872 and 1873 respectively. As Judy Oberhausen points out, the latter school was particularly advantageous to De Morgan's education, as Edward John Poynter (1836-1919) was headmaster of the school at that time, and was a strong advocate for women in life drawing classes as well as for the study of Italian art, both subjects De Morgan was keen to master.[4] De Morgan favored her life drawing classes most, as seen in her drawings from this period.

De Morgan's predominant focus for roughly the first decade of her professional career from 1875 to 1885 was on history paintings. As pointed out by Smith, "since the Renaissance," history paintings have been placed at the topmost of art's hierarchy, being among the most challenging and therefore impressive to produce. The education needed, particularly in the classics, was deemed more of a "man's prerogative,", and thus more impressive in Evelyn's accomplishments.[5]

Botticelli in the Nineteenth Century

De Morgan's 1875 *Tobias and the Angel* had "distinct echoes of Raphael," indicative of the profound influence the Italian Renaissance had on her.[6] De Morgan would travel to Italy for the first time later that year, initially staying at her uncle's home in Florence, but then traveling solo to Rome. According to Oberhausen, this solo trip imbued Evelyn with a newfound "sense of self-reliance," while also "deepening" her artistic knowledge of Italian art. Her uncle Stanhope's villa though, in Oberhausen's view, was the impetus for De Morgan's "love of Italy and its art," a place she would return to numerous times.[7] While not a formal teacher for De Morgan, Stanhope's influence on her, personally and professionally, was profound through his own artistic accomplishments, working with Dante Gabriel Rossetti on the Oxford Murals and his numerous paintings.

Stanhope's work reflects a distinct Botticellian influence. As Burne-Jones said of Stanhope's work, "It was a great pity that he ever saw my work or that he ever saw Botticelli's." Burne-Jones's commentary on Stanhope's work reduces him to simply a "copyist," but as Madeleine Emerald Thiele observes, Stanhope's specific interest in the Italian Master speaks to the much larger "late Victorian interest in Botticelli." The publication of Alexis-François Rio's *De L'Art Chrétien* (published in Britain in 1854) was a catalyst for the interest in Botticelli. As Theile summarizes, Rio transcribed Botticelli's "stylistic tendencies," like the "[melancholic] Madonna figure [recognized] in Stanhope's… chapel painting *Hagar in the Wilderness* [1875].[8] Even more explicit in its "articulation of beauty" that parallels Botticelli is Stanhope's *Love and the Maiden*

(1877), given his proximity to Botticelli's pieces in the Florentine galleries while living there.[9]

De Morgan's artistic style throughout her oeuvre and certainly in her earlier works, exhibits Stanhope's influence, and probably contributes to much of the critical dismissal of her work as merely "copyist" (like Burne-Jones' assessment of Stanhope). Critics' reaction to Botticelli's influence was "often perceived negatively," because of their "melancholic" and "androgynous" features. The "contemporary figurative style" of Botticelli was synonymous with "Walter Pater's definition of masculinity" by the 1870s as not only a "desiring body, but also, a fallible and dying body."[10] While Theile's concern was how Stanhope negotiated issues of manliness within the wider context of late Victorian art, Theil's observations are still adaptable to understanding De Morgan's work and its reception. De Morgan's figures in her early work (and throughout her career) are predominantly feminine in their rendering but certainly lean towards androgyny and are often shown in states of contemplation or reverie. Paintings such as *Cadmus and Harmonia* (1877), *Ariadne in Naxos* (1877), *Night and Sleep* (1878), *The Dryad* (1884-5), *Gloria in Excelis* (1893), *Flora* (1894**)** (Figure 1), and *Eos* (1895) all recall Botticelli to varying degrees, and especially so in the last three paintings where Botticelli's influence is most explicit.

De Morgan's interest in Italian Renaissance art parallels other Pre-Raphaelites' own interest in the Italian Masters. British public interest in Botticelli can be traced to the *Art Treasures of Great Britain* exhibition in 1857, featuring Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity*

(1500-1501), a piece Rossetti himself praised as "glorious, glorious, glorious."[11] Other Pre-Raphaelite members and associated figures like William Morris positively received Botticelli's *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus* in the 1860s respectively.[12] Rossetti was particularly interested in the Venetian style of art, but also produced several paintings inspired, in part, by the Florentine artist. The infatuation with Botticelli extended to other nineteenth-century English figures.[13] In 1870, Walter Pater (1839-1894) wrote an essay entitled "Fragments of Botticelli" about how Botticelli's "artistic genius could thrive" under the medieval "religious and ecclesiastical shackles" that the period placed on artist's creativity. John Ruskin, too, in a lecture given in the 1870s was interested in how Botticelli reconciled "pagan and Christian thought" in his paintings, regarding the mythological paintings of the 1480s (*Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus*), as well as *Venus and Mars* (1485) and *Pallas and the Centaur* (1482). The Neoplatonic figure of Venus was seen as the bridge between those two diametrically opposed theological viewpoints.[14] Numerous other English painters were inspired by Botticelli during his Victorian revival as well, including Charles Fairfax Murray, Morris, and Edward Burne-Jones.[15]

From 1877 on, De Morgan would periodically holiday in Italy, visiting her uncle in Florence, before spending every summer from 1893 after marrying William whose health benefitted from the warmer climate, until her last visit in 1914. There, De Morgan frequented the museums including the Uffizi and Académie di Belle Arti, where some of Botticelli's paintings were housed. De Morgan, spent hours viewing and sketching *Birth*

of Venus (Figure 2) and *Primavera* (Figure 3), creating a study after *Venus* (Figure 4) and *Primavera* (Figure 5) as well as a study of *The Madonna of the Magnificent* (1483) (Figure 6), but only copying the heads of the two boys in the bottom left of the original painting. The bodies of both goddesses, Flora in *Primavera* and Venus in *Birth of Venus*, were melded into the form of De Morgan's own goddess of flowers, *Flora* (1894), possibly the artist's best-known piece.

Flora depicts the Roman goddess of flowers, and more generally of spring, standing in front of a loquat tree, with roses in hand and blooming flowers underneath her bare feet. Flora's flowing red hair is like that of *Venus*, as is her contrapposto stance and the tilt of her head, partially obscuring the right half of her face. The right hand clasped at her waist is more reminiscent of the goddess in *Primavera*, as is the floral-patterned diaphanous gown she wears. Flora's body dominates the frame, her asymmetrical stance imbuing her posture with fluidity and life. Flora does not appear static but seems to move through the garden, caught in this single moment. The background of the painting is gold like that of early Florentine paintings but then painted over, creating a subtle luminous glow in the piece that is particularly noticeable in the hair and gown.[16]

As Patricia Yates observes, the result of melding both Botticellian goddess figures into this single form does not produce a mere copy of either figure, for Flora is alone in the painting, unlike the two precursors. De Morgan's Flora addresses "her audience in the manner of Ovid's Flora," drawing upon Ovid's *Fasti* as an additional inspiration for the depiction of the goddess in this painting.[17] Yates claims De Morgan describes the

transformation of the nymph Chloris into the goddess Flora, which caused the "whole earth to blossom" in the process. Depicted in the painting is not just an aesthetic figure amalgamated from the Renaissance, but an allegorical figure that is representative of "perpetual spring," of cycles of never-ending rebirth.[18]

The very specific Botticellian inspiration seen in three of De Morgan's paintings demonstrate the depth De Morgan interest. The themes of perpetuity, growth, and rebirth that exist in *Flora* as well as *Eos* and *Gloria* hint at another important interest of De Morgan's: the nineteenth-century philosophical-religious movement Spiritualism. While the third chapter will explicitly analyze this thread throughout her art, these themes are not dissimilar to Neoplatonism which was one basis for her conception of Spiritualism.[19] The Neoplatonic idea of a secondary, ideal realm existing beyond the physical world is something Botticelli explored in pieces like *Primavera and Birth of Venus,* allegorized in the figure of Venus, who "occasionally overlapped in meaning" with Flora in Botticelli's paintings.[20] Just as in De Morgan's *Flora,* the physical world and the divine world are shown to be united and harmonious, as the lush vegetation springs up around the divine figures. The figure of Venus in both of Botticelli's paintings allegorically represents love, not just in the carnal, earthly sense, but also the intellectual, Neoplatonic form, encouraging viewers to feel inspired and their soul uplifted through divine love. [21] Though associated and inspired by Aestheticism to some degree, De Morgan believed art should be didactic, and sought to convey didactic, moralist messages that would inspire the viewer. Smith argues that De Morgan's interest in Botticelli is not merely from her

"extended study of his works," or the wider "Pre-Raphaelite, Aesthetic, and Symbolist fascination" bestowed upon the Florentine painter, but also is a natural precursor to De Morgan's later Spiritualist pieces. [22] "The Neoplatonic content of Botticelli's paintings," Smith surmises, was perhaps appealing to her, because of the "layering of Christian meaning over pagan imagery" as in the "paintings of Botticelli." Also notable are other depictions of Flora by Victorian artists which relegate her to a "minor pagan goddess" emphasizing her erotic, physical qualities and the sentimentality of the flowers associated with her, such as in Burne-Jones's *Spring* (1869) and a tapestry of the titular goddess he made in 1885. De Morgan's own uncle Spencer-Stanhope similarly "derives" his own painting of *Flora* (date unknown) in part from *Birth of Venus*, but situates the goddess within a series of other nude figures (*Andromeda* (ca. 1870) and *Venus Rising from the Sea* (1885)) that Smith argues emphasizes the "erotic implications" of the figure.[23] De Morgan elevates Flora to a complex, conceptual figure, representative of Neoplatonic ideals as much as an synthesized figure that represents De Morgan's interest in the Italian Renaissance and her artistic adroitness.

In the intervening years between De Morgan's first trip to Italy and completion of *Flora* in 1894, the artist would exhibit approximately nineteen pieces at the Grosvenor Art Gallery, in every year except for 1889 and 1890. Starting with *Ariadne in Naxos* in 1877, De Morgan's interest in the mythology and the Italian Renaissance, as a source for her paintings, evolved and developed, and her paintings were at home with the other pieces on display that similarly drew on the Renaissance. Edward Burne-Jones's *The*

Mirror of Venus (1877), Gustave Moreau's (1826-1898) *L'Apparition* (1876), and Walter Crane's (1845-1915) *Renaissance of Venus* (1877) (taking Botticelli's *Venus* for its inspiration just as De Morgan did) were all shown in the inaugural show alongside *Ariadne*. In 1878, De Morgan's *Venus and Cupid* (1878) hung in the East Gallery (a more prestigious gallery than the side galleries where women artists were generally relegated)[24], the same as where Burne-Jones's *Pan and Psyche* (1872-1884), and in the next year De Morgan and Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927) were displayed in the West Gallery together, with *Night and Sleep* and *Gathering Orange Blossoms* (1879) respectively. The Grosvenor Gallery was a space for artists to "assume the centre stage of English artistic life," as the gallery gave space to artists who "refused to send their works to the Royal Academy summer exhibition" (like Burne-Jones and James Whistler) while also drawing in other, more "academic" artists like Frederic Leighton and Edward John Poynter. De Morgan was fully situated in this complex network of contemporaries, all engaging with modernity with an "extraordinary range of styles and degree." [25]

During the same time, a critical response to De Morgan's work developed, at first casting her as primarily as a "Burne-Jones' follower," dismissing her work as technically admirable (for her gender), but also acknowledging her successful understanding of anatomy and dynamic poses.[26] Many Pre-Raphaelite artists exhibited in the gallery during the same years as De Morgan, including a small group of women artists. The Grosvenor's inaugural exhibition in 1877 triggered a deluge of critical commentary, with regards to the aims of the new gallery, casting a spotlight on all artists there. As Susan Casteras

describes it, the reception was "unusually polite" with a sense that there was "forced applause" for the opening, at least toward the women artists.[27] Amongst critics, there was a sense of treating the exhibiting women with chivalric respect for their "admirable" (but still lesser) contributions, something Pamela Gerrish Nun says resulted from women "being appraised by virtue of sex rather than skill."[28] Responses from her fellow artists and exhibitors seemed slightly more sincere, such as George Frederic Watts's (1817-1904) comment that he "looked up to her as the first woman-artist of the day - if not of all time." He certainly saw a kindred artistic spirit in De Morgan's art, sharing her "mystic ideals" and desire to create art "that helps 'humanity ascend the heights human footsteps might not tread, and… lift the veil that shrouds the enigma of being," but even with this positive tone, it is still hard to accept that he is not judging De Morgan against a "different set of standards" because of her gender.[29] The term "female artist" was recognized as a "term of contempt" by *Art Journal* in 1870, which began omitting this qualifier, as Smith points out, but the "gendered categorizations" of critical reception still dogged women's art careers throughout the end of the nineteenth century (and certainly into the new millennium). Despite the chauvinistic attitude from certain critics, De Morgan (among other women artists) preferred these male-dominated networks "… seeing it as more profitable," to put up with the demeaning reception.[30]

The profitability of these male-dominated networks was important, especially to De Morgan. In the same intervening years, Evelyn met William De Morgan in the spring of 1883 and would marry him in 1887. Her senior by 16 years, William was an artist, too,

known for his ceramic tiles and pottery, as well as a lifelong friend of Morris. Evelyn was the predominantly financial supporter of their marriage for the first two decades, using the sale of her art to support William's business before his successful publishing of a novel in 1906 gave them financial security. Prior to William's success, and even with Evelyn's routine sales, the couple encountered financial difficulties, not uncommon to many "artists-couples" of the time. Evelyn stopped routinely exhibiting her pieces after the novel, with the presumed reason being that she no longer needed to sell pieces to bring in money. [31]

Evelyn De Morgan and Marie Spartali Stillman

Marie Spartali Stillman (1844-1927) lived roughly during the same time as De Morgan. Both artists found inspiration in the Italian Renaissance, moved within similar social circles, and shared similar egalitarian relationships with their husbands within their respective marriages. Stillman became associated with the Pre-Raphaelites through her modeling, introduced to Rossetti by James McNeil Whistler. She initially desired that Rossetti be her art teacher, expressing great interest in learning to paint under him. He recommended Ford Maddox Brown instead, and she studied with him over the course of 5 years. During her training she sat for numerous Pre-Raphaelite painters, including Burne-Jones, Stanhope, and Rossetti, and exhibited her own work at the Grosvenor and then New Gallery, in many of the same shows as De Morgan. Spartali Stillman's relationship to Rossetti, and the rest of the Pre-Raphaelites, was more direct than De Morgan's, as Stillman and Rossetti regularly corresponded, especially during her time in

Italy, when he kept her and her husband abreast of the Pre-Raphaelites and associated artists.[32]

Like De Morgan, Spartali-Stillman was deeply inspired by the Italian Renaissance, spending time from 1878-1883 in Florence, and living in Rome until 1898, developing a complex personal and artistic circle that inspired her. Her studio in Florence in 1880 overlooked Spencer Stanhope's studio, where she met him for the first time.[33] In Stillman's work, the Italian Renaissance influence is apparent in the narratives she chose to depict, deriving them often from popular Renaissance literary figures and scenes, as well as inspired by the Italian landscapes she encountered. She was especially inspired by the Italian Poet Dante Alighieri, sharing that same passion with Rossetti. Figures in both De Morgan's and Stillman's work, however, share similarities of depicting women posed in moments of suspension, in what Rossetti observed in Spartali-Stillman's work as elevating the figures "beyond mere images" through an infusion of emotion, and what contemporary academics have said is indicative of the Symbolist associations in both artists' works. [34]

Spartali-Stillman's 1884 *Madonna Pietra degli Scrovigni* (Figure 7), exhibited at the Grosvenor that same year, depicts a woman from the waist up, dressed in a Renaissance gown, holding a crystal orb in one hand and the branch of a blooming tree in the other. The painting's title comes from Dante Alighieri's poem, translated by Rossetti sometime in the 1840s, *Sestina of the Lady Pietra degli Scrovigni*. The poem speaks of the titular woman, who despite her beauty, stoically sits frozen, "no more moved than the

stone."[35] Reflected in the orb held by the figure is the scene of The Annunciation, possibly alluding to the Feast of the Virgins, which takes place March 25th. Coinciding with the end of winter and paralleling the poem, the painting juxtaposes the promise of spring against the coldness of winter inhabited by the woman, emphasizing the contrasting elements within the piece. The Walker Art Gallery, the current owner of the painting, describes it as a "half-length femme-fatale in Renaissance costume" drawing from the influence of Rossetti, who "initiated" the style and was popularly "imitated by others in his circle," suggesting the work to have been produced in homage to Rossetti, who died two years prior.[36]

Like *Flora*, *Madonna*'s Italian Renaissance inspiration is obvious. Formally, the watercolor of Stillman's piece is softer and less vibrant than *Flora*'s oil composition, at the same time though, the watercolor is more characteristic of a "Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic."[37] The strongest correlation between the two though, is the elevation of the figure beyond mere adaption of their accompanying poem. Stillman's painting, compared to Rossetti's nude pastel sketch of the same subject, emphasizes the "winter-flowering blossoms of blackthorn and hellebore" as Marsh and Pamela Gerrish observe.[38] Stillman's *Madonna* sits stoically, yes, but is not the cold frozen lady the poem describes. Painted while living in Rome, *Madonna* depicts an "authentic Italian location" as much as it reflects her Dantean knowledge.[39]

Perhaps the most significant similarity though, and the most prudent fact, is the sale of both De Morgan's and Stillman's paintings. *Madonna* was exhibited at the

Grosvenor and then shown at the Walker Art Gallery, where it was immediately purchased. Stillman "painted to sell," motivated by financial necessity, making a career out of painting.[40] Like the De Morgans, the Stillmans faced financial instability, and both women were providers for their families. *Flora* was purchased by the shipowner William Imrie (interestingly also from Liverpool, where Madonna was bought), who bought at least seven others of De Morgan's paintings.[41] Samuel Bancroft, the American industrialist who collected Pre-Raphaelite art, purchased several of Stillman's works, including *Love's Messenger* (1885) for one hundred pounds in 1901, alongside works by Madox Brown, Burne-Jones, and most significantly, Rossetti. [42]

Despite varying degrees of social resistance and critical volatility at times, De Morgan, and Stillman, still carved out a career as artists. The Italian Renaissance proved to be a source of immense inspiration and motivation to De Morgan as it was for the artists around her. De Morgan's engagement with Botticelli, while part of a wider trend, is unique in its multilayered imbuement with personal symbolism. Understanding that De Morgan was not an artist in isolation, but responded to and even challenged her peers through her creative practice positions her as an important artist, not merely important for being a "female artist".

[1] Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 18.
[2] Smith, 19.
[3] Smith, 19-21.
[4] Judy Oberhausen and Nic Peeters, "Friends and Family: An Artist's Journey from Privilege to Freedom in the Late Victorian Art World" *in Evelyn and William De Morgan: A Marriage of Arts and Crafts*, ed. Margaretta Frederick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 20.
[5] Smith, 63.
[6] Jan Marsh, "Evelyn De Morgan and Italian Art" *in Evelyn and William De Morgan: A Marriage of Arts and Crafts*, 30.
[7] Marsh, 29-31.

[8] Madeleine Emerald Thiele, "Stanhope and the Aesthetic male body" in *Thomas Carlyle and the Idea of Influence*, eds. Paul Kerry, Albert Pionke, Megan Dent (New Jersey: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), 7-8.
[9] Melissa E. Buron and Susanna Avery-Quash, *Truth & Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelites and the Old Masters* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco/Legion of Honor, 2018), 22.
[10] Thiele, 9.
[11] Elizabeth Prettejohn, "High Renaissance Inspirations: Raphael and the Venetians" in *Truth & Beauty: the Pre-Raphaelites and the Old Masters*, 168.
[12] Marsh, 35
[13] Marsh, 29.
[14] Mark Evans and Stefan Weppelmann, eds., *Botticelli Reimagined* (London: V&A Publishing, 2016), 47-49.
[15] See Evans and Weppelmann, 198-226.
[16] Evans and Weppelmann, 197.
[17] Patricia Yates, "Evelyn De Morgan's Use of Literary Sources in her Paintings" in *Evelyn De Morgan: Oil Paintings*, ed. Catherine Gordon (London: De Morgan Foundation, 1996), 68.
[18] Ibid.
[19] See Elise Lawton Smith, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Evelyn De Morgan: Progress of Spirit," *Nineteenth Century Studies*, no. 27 (2013): 109.
[20] Smith 91.
[21] Buron and Avery-Quash, 129-134.
[22] Smith, 90.
[23] Smith 90-92.
[24] Smith, 33.
[25] Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery exhibitions: change and continuity in the Victorian art world* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-4. For list of artists by year exhibited, see Newall, 41-183.
[26] Smith, *Allegorical Body*, 35-37.
[27] John Ruskin's infamous critical attack on James McNeil Whistler's painting exhibiting at the same show (and the subsequent libel case) led to a surge of public interest in the gallery, as well as cementing it as the epicenter of the Aesthetic movement. See Susan P. Casteras, "Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle at the Palace of the Aesthetes" in *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, eds. Susan P Casteras and Colleen Denny (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 75-79.
[28] Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 51.
[29] G.F. Watts, "Present Conditions of Art," The *Nineteenth Century* (February 1880), 241, 250-255 as quoted in Smith, 38.
[30] Smith, 35.
[31] Marsh and Nunn, 141.
[32] David B. Elliott, A Pre-Raphaelite Marriage: The Lives and Work of Marie Spartali Stillman and William James Stillman ()111-114,170
[33] Elliot, 117.
[34] Susan Casteras, *The Pre-Raphaelite Legacy to Symbolism* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 39.

[35] Dante Alighieri, "Sestina of the Lady Pietra degli Scrovigni," translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in The Early Italian Poets from Ciullo D'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri (1100-1200-1300), the Alderman annotated copy (England: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1861), 324.

[36] "Madonna Pietra Degli Scrovigni," Walker Art Gallery, Accessed March 2024, https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/artifact/madonna-pietra-degli-scrovigni.

[37] Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement*, (London: Virago, 1989), 102.

[38] Marsh and Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, 133.

[39] Marsh and Nunn, *Women Artists*, 104.

[40] Marsh and Nunn, 102.

[41] Smith 33, 84. Alongside De Morgan, Imrie's art collection included works from Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Spencer Stanhope, and other associated artists.

[42] Marie Spartali Stillman to Samuel Bancroft, 11 April 1901, Delaware Art Museum, Bancroft Archives. See also Elliot, 191.

CHAPTER 3

EVELYN DE MORGAN: PRE-RAPHAELITE (OR) FEMINIST?

In the second chapter, I situate De Morgan's art in relation to her predecessors' depiction of women within the Pre-Raphaelite movement by critically comparing her art to that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). De Morgan's female figures share many formal properties with Rossetti's, especially in both artists' depictions of women's emotional states, painting them in moments of contemplation and reverie, and depicting women as goddesses and historical figures. Furthermore, De Morgan and Rossetti shared at least one model, the well-known Jane Morris. Comparing and contrasting De Morgan's use (and subversion) of gender and the female body with Rossetti's depictions, I suggest a more encompassing reading of both De Morgan's and Rossetti's work as the basis for further studies of critical issues of gender and feminism within Victorian art.

The link between Pre-Raphaelitism and feminist studies began with feminist critiques of women's representation in Pre-Raphaelite art, surging in the 1980s, most notably with Griselda Pollock and Deborah Cherry's essay, "Woman As Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddall." Pollock and Cherry aligned their critique with broader discussions on patriarchal power, particularly its manifestation in visual consumption, such as the male gaze. Siddall changing her name to "Siddal " at Rossetti's suggestion is seen by Pollock and Cherry as emblematic of her subordination and as her "function as a sign" of Rossetti's genius.[1] Pollock and Cherry argue that the Pre-Raphaelite movement was not a subversive challenge to these

power structures, but rather a perpetuation of them through "masculine creativity" representing women.[2] While artists associated with and belonging to the Brotherhood were subject to such critiques, Rossetti seems to have been the most contentious figure among them; Pollock cites his paintings as representative of "the central problematics of Pre-Raphaelite art" in *Vision and Difference,* her 1988 historical analysis of critical moments in modern visual culture.[3] In their argument, Pollock and Cherry construct femininity as a fixed, binary category that is oppressed by sheer virtue of its opposite, the male patriarchal power they claim Rossetti inhabits. This rigid representation of femininity in Pre-Raphaelite art, in turn, serves to reinforce traditional gender roles and patriarchal power structures, in which women are relegated to passive objects of male desire.

Rebuking Pollock and Cherry's assessments, Jay D. Sloan points out that feminist forays into critical gender issues within Victorian art have increasingly only focused on the "place and power of male-produced and male-consumed Victorian art," which emphasizes and over-essentializes gender as a binary. In Sloan's view, Rossetti inhabited and critiqued various "constructions" of masculinity through his poetical works, acutely aware of the "gender violence enabled by a strict adherence to separate sphere ideology," which he suggests Rossetti himself "significantly blurs the between."[4] The insistence upon a power imbalance between the model as the subject of the male gaze, and the artist enacting that gaze ignores the agency of the many working-class Pre-Raphaelite models. Rossetti himself took Siddall on as a student in 1852, a year prior to Siddall's modeling

for Rossetti's Dante-inspired series.[5] Fanny Cornforth (born Sarah Cox, 1835-1909), the original model for Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* (1866-68, 1872-74) among many other works, was employed by Rossetti as his housekeep/caretaker and he desired to provide for her even after the end of their affair and her second marriage.[6] Furthermore, the focus on depictions of Siddall's beauty, sensuality, and other physical attributes neglects other symbolic and sensorial aspects that imbued much of Rossetti's work. Siddall's friend, the suffragist Barbara Bodichon, named "Rossetti her favorite Pre-Raphaelite," as pointed out by Julie Codell. Rossetti's well-documented use of working-class models and the "bricolage" styling of their dress simultaneously "rejected… Victorian dress protocol and challenged… the symbolism of dress [itself]," making his models "agents of their own eroticism of the unclassifiable," and therefore being active, collaborative agents in the artmaking process.[7] Colin Cruise also complicates Pollock and Cherry's interpretations of Rossetti's representation of "ideal female beauty," by suggesting that Simeon Solomon's male figures share many formal similarities to Rossetti's, namely in their "remoteness of gaze" and "suggestions of internality" like found in Rossetti's portraits.[8] These examples emphasize the complicated and non-traditional manner in which Rossetti worked and even subverted dominant gender ideology.

Jane Morris

Jane Morris (born Burden, 1839-1914) wife of William Morris, was an important model, not only to Rossetti but to the Pre-Raphaelite movement as a whole. She was an artist in her own right, an outstanding weaver and embroiderer, as well as a close friend

of the De Morgan's.[9] Evelyn and William were great friends with both her and her daughter May, especially after William Morris's death. A letter from Jane Morris to William De Morgan addresses him as "Dear Bill," informally warm and characteristic of the very deep and mutual friendship between the two families.[10] De Morgan traveled to Kelmscott Manor to sketch Morris, her model for *The Hourglas*s, 1903 (Figure 8). The drawings produced during this period include detailed sketches for *The Hourglass* painting and a sketch that was possibly used for *The Love Potion* (1903), as well as a portrait sketch of Morris produced simply as a testament to the two women's friendship (Figure 9).[11] The portrait shows Morris in old age, white hair starkly contrasting with the blue pillow on which she reclines as she looks beyond the artist with a distant expression. Completed between 1904 and 1905, *The Hourglass* depicts a woman seated in an immaculately carved chair, with rich, detailed tapestries adorning the walls surrounding her. Her gown is warm and brightly accentuated with jewels at her neck, echoing the colors of the carpet beneath her and the tapestry behind her. Her headdress is likewise adorned, with strands of graying hair beneath it. To the figure's left, a brightly colored angel representative of life plays a pipe in an open doorway with blossoming flowers. Morris ignores the scene outside, instead lost in thought as she gazes off to her right, her hand clasped on an hourglass that has almost run out. Beneath the table holding the hourglass is a book entitled *Mos Janua Vitae* (*Death is the door/passage of/to life*) while a wilting rose lays beside it. The melancholic aura that permeates the frame, while perhaps sad, also hints at the figure's inner state. By ignoring the angels outside as much

the hourglass in her hand, she knows death's inevitability, but it does not consume her thoughts.

Scholarly interpretations of De Morgan's *The Hourglass* stem from the scrutiny of Morris's and Rossetti's relationship, seeing De Morgan's depiction of the model artist as an indictment of Rossetti's depictions. Smith describes Morris in *The Hourglass* as "overcome by… melancholia or lethargy" and "without hope as she thinks of death." Sterling, De Morgan's sister, describes the tapestry behind her as the women's happy memories passing her by.[12] Sarah Hardy, scholar and director of the De Morgan Foundation, claims this painting turns Morris "into a sliver of her former glory, morbidly willing away the time until her impending death, shrinking away from decadent costume…[using] the Pre-Raphaelite's model and style to show that their ideals of beauty have been destroyed by time," as a satirical rebuke of the movement itself. [13] Smith and Hardy's commentary on this painting positions it as an antidotal and reactive portrait of Morris that shows us a woman similarly effaced by Rossetti, like Siddall.

Rossetti's *Proserpine* (Figure 10), originally started in 1872, but of which eight total versions exist as well as several prints, feature Morris as the model.[14] *Proserpine*, like *The Hourglass*, conveys sadness. Depicting the Roman Goddess who spent half the year in the underworld, the painting is considered a biographic analogy for Morris and Rossetti's affair. The fleshly pomegranate that doomed her to spend winters underground is grasped in her hand, matching the color of her lips. Scholarly analysis of the dual worlds Proserpine straddles are seen to parallel Morris's struggle between the summers

spent with Rossetti and the winters when she returned to live with her husband.[15] The composition's dark and dreary coloring, the grays that Rossetti describes in a letter, have been contrasted with Proserpine's scarlet lips and the matching pomegranate, details that serve as examples of the erotic readings of this painting.[16] However, these contrasting elements are not true for every version, especially in its eighth version (Figure 11). Finished in 1882 prior to Rossetti's death, it shows the goddess's hair a striking shade of red, chromatically echoing the lips and fruit, as well as the censer on the table; the colors are bright, her skin lively and not at all chthonic. Different too, is the 1880 chalk version (Figure 12) commissioned by the merchant William Graham (1817–1885), wholly muted in its coloring of fruit and lips.[17] A version of Proserpine called *Blanzifiore* (Figure 13) was exhibited posthumously at the show "Pictures, Drawings, Designs and Studies by the Late Dante Gabriel Rossetti" in 1883 at the Burlington Fine Arts Club. Likewise, the Royal Academy's posthumous show of the same year exhibited the seventh version, the 1874 oil painting. While De Morgan's attendance to both exhibitions is not confirmed, given that she still lived in London full time as well as marrying her husband that same year, it is almost certain she attended them, encountering the multiple versions of *Proserpine*.

I bring this up to draw attention to the images she would have encountered of Morris at this point in life. Not to suggest that *The Hourglass* is produced as a response to *Proserpine*, but rather to draw attention to the multiple and significant forms in which Jane Morris was portrayed by both artists. Between De Morgan's and Rossetti's

depictions, we encounter what Elizabeth Prettejohn calls a "Pre-Raphaelite collaboration," not only between the two artists but with Morris as well.[18] Through both depictions, if we view *Proserpine* as the beginning and De Morgan's painting as the end, we glimpse the entirety of Morris, as a model, wife, friend, and human. There is a perceptible melancholy shared in both *Proserpine* and *The Hourglass* as temporality and time haunt each painting. Both the ending of the woman's life and the goddess's descent back into the underworld parallel each other in their eventuality. While a sense of sadness does permeate both paintings, neither figure engages with the viewer, but instead looks off to the side in contemplation. Their innermost thoughts are entirely their own. To depict these women in moments of intense personal thought not only conveys their intellectual depth but inherently makes them inaccessible to the viewer. Their eyes do not engage us nor does their mind. They are wholly their own in contemplation, emphasizing their intellectual capacity and autonomy.

Prettejohn points out the prevalence of *doubling* in Pre-Raphaelite art, drawing upon Freud's psychoanalytic theory "of a person who looks exactly the same as oneself or important friend or relation," where the "real identity of the as present-day model" is conflated (or doubled) by the "imagined identity as the character in the pictorial narrative."[19] Prettejohn observes this to be especially true in Rossetti's later works depicting Morris, as the effect occurs intensely in the individual works, but gains in power and uncanniness through the repeated use of Morris as a model of various figures. This frightening reality of these portrait-pictures "obliterates the difference between

imagination and reality" by depicting models in such identifiable detail in these fantastical narratives.[20]

The depiction of Morris in De Morgan's *The Hourglass* and the portrait sketch might be seen as depicting the "real Jane," compared to Rossetti where the identity of the goddess may overpower Morris. Prettejohn, however, argues that the impact of the image of the supposed real is only gained through the "haunting double" of the many other depictions of Morris. Rossetti does not overpower Morris's identity by depicting her as the goddess Proserpine precisely because he depicts her in such a portrait-like manner so that the goddess is unmistakably Morris.[21] De Morgan's depiction of Morris in *The Hourglass* is in keeping with Rossetti's for the same reason. The importance of the painting within De Morgan's oeuvre comes precisely from the fact that the figure is identifiable as Morris. As Prettejohn emphasizes the significance of Morris's identity in *Proserpine* and others, so too is her identity wholly significant in *The Hourglass*.[22] This depiction of Morris, rather than a single, static piece, but across multiple artistic and temporal depictions, comes as close to a holistic and "real" view of Morris than any singular portrait could. To read *The Hourglass* as an antidotal correction of Jane Morris's identity and view the painting as a recovery of Morris's Rossettian effacement, assumes Rossetti's depictions of Morris are wholly negative and reifying. It places De Morgan in a camp diametrically opposed to Rossetti's interpretations and depictions in art. Presuming De Morgan's piece as antidotal limits both the figure and identity of Morris to

only De Morgan's portrait, once again only considering her identity through a single portrait, rather than holistically.

Fair Rosamund

Depictions of King Henry's supposedly murderous wife Queen Eleanor and his illicit/innocent lover Fair Rosamund were common in the nineteenth century and especially within Pre-Raphaelite circles.[23] It is not surprising that both De Morgan and Rossetti turned to the tale, given their interest in medievalism and Arthurian figures. What is notable, however, is the treatment both artists afforded the subject. Painted in 1861(Figure 14) and 1902 (Figure 15), respectively, Rossetti and De Morgan chose to focus on the women in the tale from seemingly opposite sides.

Painted in 1901-1902, De Morgan's take on the subject is a more traditional rendering of the tale, showing the Queen having found Rosamund at the center of the maze. De Morgan's tackling of women subjects in historical and mythological settings usually subverts or otherwise undermines nineteenth-century depictions that condemn the "evil" femme fatale figure.[24] However, in Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamund, produced in the latter half of her career when her paintings took on even more social commentary, there is a lack of immediate "correction" to the Arthurian tale. Eleanor towers over Rosamund, as dark, foreboding mists and demons swirl about her body, clasping a presumably poisonous concoction in her hand meant for Rosamund. In contrast, angelic putti surround Rosamund's seated figure, fleeing opposite the dark forces of the advancing Queen. From both the title and its composition, De Morgan is privileging the

Queen's position in the tale over Rosamund's.[25] Smith's interpretation of this scene draws on De Morgan's spiritualist beliefs, illustrating the "fatal consequences" of surrendering oneself over to earthly love and passion. The temporary nature, and thus the inherent folly, of the mortal love is represented through the "transparent doves, wilted roses, and weeping putti," all imagery that parallels Algernon Charles Swinburne's 1860 play about the same legend, *The Queen Mother and Rosamund*. Swinburne continuously references flowers that have "spent, wilted, or dropped" and names Rosamund the "rose of the world." The red roses littering the composition contrast with the "single white rose at the lower right which Smith notes as De Morgan's depiction lacking the "sexual suggestiveness" of the play, as well as the horrific confrontation between the two women. Eleanor's decisiveness was problematic in the nineteenth century, her agency turned into aggression to be vilified.[26] Without condemning Eleanor's actions, De Morgan positions her as powerful and efficacious, if at Rosamund's expense because the viewer knows how this story ends.

Rossetti produced a cropped portrait of Rosamund in 1861 as part of his "fleshly painting" turn that marked the latter half of his career.[27] Rosamund is the only figure in the frame, depicted from her clavicle up. In fact, the only clues to her identity apart from the title itself are the rose motifs throughout and the red string that is drawn from her hand out of frame towards us. This painting does not offer moral instruction to the viewer like De Morgan's painting, and the Aesthetic style leads to reading the painting as one of "[pure] sexual yearning," as Smith does.[28] Nancy Rose Marshall considers the double

meanings and interpretations within Rossetti's painting solely in *Fair Rosamund*, rather than across multiple portraits like in *Proserpine*. Marshall observes the multiple "elements of color, narrative, and gender" employed to present several "identities to its viewers" simultaneously. The numerous reactions the painting can invoke in a viewer, "from desire to rage and murderous impulses to sympathetic care," by taking on the role of either illicit lover (Henry) or vengeful wife (Eleanor), emphasize the destabilized nature of the painting, and the woman herself. Rosamund, Marshall notes, does not engage with the viewer, but rather at something beyond reflected in her eye; Rosamund's preoccupation denies knowledge of her interiority, as in the cases of *Proserpine* and *The Hourglass*.[29] Rosamund denies us not only access to her eyes, but to the knowledge of this tale's ending. Rossetti has avoided the issue of Eleanor by omitting her from the scene, her presence perhaps hinted at by the inclusion of the string, but her murderous intentions are no clearer than the King's advances. Rosamund's fate is undetermined and thus her own in Rossetti's work.

Rossetti's Rosamund is not morally didactic as she is in De Morgan's painting, and by removing most narrative clues as to the figure's identity, the seemingly erotic qualities of Rossetti's painting are magnified. Prettejohn points out that the sensual qualities of Rossetti's paintings were revelatory in his time and caused adverse reactions in Victorian viewers by the figures inviting such romantic (or erotic) responses. His paintings were by no means the first to convey eroticism; the Venetian Renaissance paintings which inspired him also focused on color over design and displayed a high

degree of sensuality within them. Furthermore, as Prettejohn identifies, color had long been "associated with the pleasures of the senses" while design bespoke a more "intellectual" conception.[30] While De Morgan's art demonstrates her excellent draftsmanship, it is the coloring of her compositions, and especially those later in her career, that I would argue her paintings are known for.[31] In paintings like *Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamund*, the "sensual pleasure" might better be understood as "sensorial pleasure" for as Prettejohn points out, "sensual pleasure need not… always be… sexual or erotic."[32]

Conclusion

Further considerations must be made about Rossetti's emphasis on the physicality of the women he painted, especially in those portraying Jane Morris. Critics, both Victorian and current, have debated whether the women he depicts are powerful or eroticized and reified. Prettejohn instead insists that the "vivid and immediate physical form" is not merely a reduction to their status in society or in Rossetti's life, but rather as encompassing the largest and "most abstract" of human issues, while never deviating from the precise characteristics of the individual painted.[33] I find this quality shared with De Morgan's works as well, specifically in her depiction of Jane Morris as an aging woman, not as a rebuttal against Rossetti's depictions, but as a representative of these universal human issues. On the comparison between De Morgan's and Rossetti's depictions of the Arthurian tale, Smith summarizes it succinctly: "In De Morgan's iconography, women could act as powerful, skilled, intelligent protagonists, without

being either manipulative or threatening; they were also revealed by her brush as being fully human at times bound by the desires of the flesh, at other times able to transcend their mortality in their journey toward spiritual enlightenment."[34] As true as that is of De Morgan's women, those same qualities, of being simultaneously revealed as both human and something more, echo in Rossetti's work.

The issue of social context can be further extended to the opportunities women themselves were afforded in the social worlds of De Morgan versus Rossetti. In the beginning decade of Rossetti's career, limited options for women's art education existed. As Jo Deveraux points out, Royal Academy schools had yet to admit women, and "the co-educational Slade School had yet to be founded," leaving women with few ways to gain "the same qualifications as men." While Deveraux concedes the presence of women artist's work in some Royal Academy exhibitions during this time, the stature and mood of the selected pieces were "delicate," allowing them to be "overshadowed by the much larger works of most male artists at the same exhibition." It would not be until 1871 that the Slade would open, and De Morgan would not attend until 1873. In the more than two intervening decades between the start of Rossetti's career and De Morgan's, access to professional education was one of the many milestones that opened for women. In the 1850s, the Langham Palace Circle was established, led by Bodichon, an eventual friend of Rossetti, as the first Suffragist group in the U.K. [35]

In the same decade, the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 transitioned divorce from a church issue to that of the courts. The same act would be amended in 1871, further

loosening restrictions on divorces by allowing local justices of the peace to preside over such cases, offering an avenue, albeit expensive, of recourse for women. Educational and career opportunities for women expanded in the 1860s, as training for teaching became available, an especially attractive career to women of the lower middle class, and in 1874 a physician's college opened for women. Rossetti's art must be considered in the social context as should De Morgan's: her focus on the social and political state of women in her paintings is a result of a society already interrogating the status of women.[36]

From Rossetti to De Morgan, the recurrent depictions of Jane Morris within multiple narratives explore ideas that intertwine the personal and universal. Rather than obscuring Morris's identity, both Rossetti and De Morgan leverage her figure to convey nuanced insights into universal themes as well as a personal relationship with her. De Morgan constructs intricate images of women, portraying them as complex and contradictory beings. Her artwork tackles complex, human issues, employing a visual language rooted in a Pre-Raphaelite tradition that I argue Rossetti himself utilized.

Like context, interpretations are historical, unstable, and situated in time, such as the 1980s for Pollock and Cherry's critiques of Rossetti as patriarchal. More nuanced and open-ended interpretations that consider possible meanings, like Codell and Sloan, deny a dominant narrative of either artist or any of their paintings. Recognizing these nuances challenges the fixation of Rossetti, Morris, and even De Morgan within binary identities imposed upon them. Furthermore, nuanced readings reveal the malleability with which these artists approached issues of gender and identity, contesting the binary gender

identity inherent in earlier feminist studies. Embracing a nuanced approach to reading these paintings and their scholarly interpretations provides holistic interpretations that are as open-ended and unfixed as the artists themselves. We can read De Morgan's work critically and contextually in this light, understanding the influences on not just her but on our own interpretations and assumptions of her work.

[1] Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, "Woman as Sign In Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A study of the representation of Elizabeth Siddall," *Art History* 7, no. 2 (1984): 207.
[2] Cherry and Pollock, "Women as Sign," 224.
[3] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity, and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 2003), 121.
[4] Jay D. Sloan, 'How grew such presence from man's shameful swarm': Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Victorian Masculinity," in *Pre-Raphaelite Masculinities: Constructions of Masculinity in Art and Literature*, ed. Amelia Yeates and Serena Trowbridge, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 12-19.
[5] Jan Marsh, *Elizabeth Siddal: Her Story* (London: Pallas Athene, 2023), 27-30.
[6] Cornforth "valued independence" and her "affectionate informality [with Rossetti] is evident in a portrait he made of her [*George Price Boyce with Fanny Cornforth in Rossetti's Studio, Chatham Palace*. ca.1858, ink on paper, 22.2cm x 31.8cm, Tate London]". See Carol Jacobi, "Found: Love in a Capitalist Climate" in *The Rossettis* ed. Carol Jacobi and James Finch (London: Tate Publishing, 2023), 108-109.

[7] Julie Codell, "Dress and Desire: Rossetti's Erotics of the Unclassifiable and Working-Class Models," in *Fashion in European Art: Dress and Identity, Politics and the Body, 1775 - 1925*, ed. Justine De Young (London, New York: I. B. Taurus, 2017), 111.
[8] Colin Cruise, "Lovely Devils: Simeon Solomon," in *Re-framing the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Ellen Harding (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 195.
[9] William De Morgan and William Morris were already friends prior to the De Morgan's marriage, and he designed tiles and furniture for Morris & Co. While the exact timeline of Evelyn De Morgan and Jane Morris's friendship is imprecise, it is reasonable to assume it began sometime in the 1880s, between Evelyn meeting William and their marriage in 1887.
[10] Letter to William De Morgan from Jane Morris, 1907. MS-0743, Box 2, De Morgan Foundation, London, U.K.
[11] See Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (New Jersey: Associated Press University, 2002), 177-179. Jane and May Morris were dear to both Evelyn and William, keeping in contact with them throughout the rest of both women's lives. In a notable letter to William in 1906, May expressed her joy at his newly published novel, lamenting her own writing skills.
[12] Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan*, 177-188.
[13] Sarah Hardy, "Why Evelyn De Morgan is NOT a Pre-Raphaelite painter," De Morgan Foundation, 2018, https://www.demorgan.org.uk/why-evelyn-de-morgan-is-not-a-pre-raphaelite-painter-by-sarah-hardy/ .
[14] Like De Morgan, many of *Proserpine*'s versions were conceived at Kelmscott, as pointed out by Margaretta Frederick. Frederick also points out that in (one of) Rossetti's last paintings completed, *Mnemosyne* (1881), Jane Morris's features are the most idealized of all portraits of her, virtually unrecognizable as an "androgynous mythic creature… [with both] male and female characteristics merged" suggesting a resolution to the both the woman question that "plagued Rossetti" as well as "the sexes harmoniously coexist[ing] in one body." Margaretta Frederick, "Troubling Women: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Portrayals of Modern Beauty" in *The Rossettis*, 200.
[15] See Wendy Parkins, "'The Works Are There to Tell Their Own Tale': Jane Morris in the Work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti" in *The Rossettis*, 202-225. See also Henrietta Garnett, *Wives and Stunners: The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Muses* (London: Macmillan, 2012), 269-271.
[16] *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Volume 5: The Chelsea Years 1863-1872, ed.* William E. Fredeman (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 105-106.
[17] Ibid. See also "Proserpine," The Rossetti Archive, accessed November 2023, http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1872.s233.raw.html
[18] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 205.
[19] Prettejohn, *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 201-205.
[20] Prettejohn states that "[Morris's] identity is essential to the picture's impact" (*Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 205).
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] The subject of Eleanor and Rosamund was also taken up by Edward Burne-Jones in addition to Swinburne's play and Rossetti's painting. Alfred Lord Tennyson, whose works served as a foundational inspiration to the Pre-Raphaelites, penned "A Dream of a Fair Woman."

[24] Medea is the most notable example from her oeuvre, depicting the classical figure in a sympathetic light, prior to the killings she is famous for (and usually depicted during). Smith, *Allegorical Body*, 100-102.
[25] Other depictions of this tale, like Edward Burne-Jones's pieces from 1861 and 1862, for example, place Rosamund's name before the Queens. John William Waterhouse's 1916 painting of the subject omits the queen entirely, titling it *Fair Rosamund*, despite both figures appearing in the piece.
[26] Smith, *Allegorical Body*, 105-106. Both beauty and love fade, and De Morgan is condemning themes of courtly love and chivalry that so many compositions of the subject focus on. Rather, her interest is on the women, and especially the one so maligned.
[27] Nancy Rose Marshall, "'This Bold-Browed Damsel': Unexpected Views of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Fair Rosamund," (Paper presented at International Nineteenth Century Conference, Tennessee, April 2023), 1.
[28] Smith, *Allegorical Body*, 104.
[29] Marshall, "'This Bold-Browed Damsel,'" 1, 10-11.
[30] Elizabeth Prettejohn, Julian Treuherz, and Edwin Becker. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 72.
[31] In De Morgan's obituary, written by May Morris, her "sumptuous coloring" and "exaggerated insistence on decorative detail" is said to make up the "epic quality" of her paintings. Obituary, "Evelyn Pickering De Morgan" by May Morris, 1917. MS 0622-1, Archive Box 21, De Morgan Foundation, London.
[32] Prettejohn, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 72.
[33] Ibid., 108.
[34] Smith, *Allegorical Body*, 108.
[35] Jo Devereux, "The Evolution of Victorian Women's Art Education, 1858–1900: Access and Legitimacy in Women's Periodicals," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 4 (2017): 752-753.
[36] Jo Devereux, The *Making of Women Artists in Victorian England: The Education and Careers of Six Professionals* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2016) 167.

CHAPTER 4

EVELYN DE MORGAN'S SPIRITUAL POLITICS

In this chapter I identify De Morgan's two prominent strands of concern for the spiritual well-being of the soul: the violence wrought by England's colonial wars and the First World War, and the socio-political status of women in their campaign for suffrage. These themes were not isolated in De Morgan's mind, but part of the broader, universal concern she expressed for the salvation of one's soul through her Spiritualist faith. Her husband William De Morgan was equally as interested in Spiritualism as well as a staunch supporter of the suffrage movement and an ardent pacifist, fostering a creative and political partnership between the two. First, I will define what Spiritualism was, the seriousness with which De Morgan practiced it, and how it influenced her art. Next, I will identify proto-feminist imagery in De Morgan's art, explaining the correlation she saw between the Suffrage campaign in England and her spiritual philosophy on life. Finally, I will consider De Morgan's response to the Boer War and World War I in the context of her Spiritualist pursuits. Despite castigation from critics like the commentor in *Art Journal* from 1890, that described her style and themes as antiquated and misaligned with contemporary times, "merely derivative" of the Burne-Jones school, and trivial in subject, I posit that De Morgan's commentary on social inequality and the horrors of war are thoroughly modern in their concern.[1]

Despite exhibiting sparingly in the last two decades of her life, De Morgan's thematic and stylistic evolution as an artist became increasingly pronounced, marked by a discernible shift towards more pointed social commentary in her art. This transformation, undoubtedly influenced by her ever-deepening engagement with Spiritualism, reached its zenith in the early twentieth century, in response to the momentum of women's suffrage in England and unprecedented violence and chaos of wars.[2] Notably, she and her husband's candid accounts of séances and automatic writings were published anonymously in *The Results of an Experiment* (1909), providing invaluable context into Spiritualism's profound impact on her artistic vision and life.[3] The political and spiritual are not separate themes in her art but rather are intertwined to emphasize her belief in material change being necessary for spiritual transcendence. The weightless bodies De Morgan painted synthesize her material and spiritual concerns into cohesive narratives depicting souls in progressive states of transformation.

Spiritualism

Broadly defined, Spiritualism was a socio-religious movement purporting the soul's persistence after death. Swedish Philosopher Emmanuel Swedenborg and German Physician Franz Mesmer influenced the movement by their writings on the nature of the afterlife and hypnotism, respectively. Spiritualism arrived from America to England in the 1850s, immediately subject to varying attitudes, from those viewing it with clinical interest and sincere respect, and those mocking its practice. Patrons and

practitioners were equally varied, with large swaths of well-to-do individuals taking a particular interest in it, as spirit parties became the social event *du jour*.[4]

Within Spiritualist circles, women were seen as particularly adept psychics, picking up "the techniques of mediumship more rapidly and effectively than men," more capable of advancing "[swiftly] to the fore as developing mediums," as Alex Owen notes. Women's presumed predisposition to emotionality was thought to explain this belief, allowing them to be more receptive to spiritual contact. As such, women held a particularly advantageous role within Spiritualism, acting as an integral "intermediary" between the circle and the spirits they wished to contact. For particularly skilled female mediums, they could exert a considerable amount of influence over the circle, with the possibility of a "purely private medium [gaining] notoriety within wider spiritualist circles and the public at large." Even for those from less than well-to-do means, it allowed social and economic advancement, especially for women, in the lucrative unregulated market of seances and spirit parties. This emboldened economic independence created an interesting tension between the well-to-do participants and their quasi-scientific curiosity about the seances, seeking to oust scammers and frauds, wishing to patronize only those deemed "genuine."[5]

Inherently undogmatic, Spiritualism became popular in Victorian England during the crisis of faith spurred by Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory. Evolutionary symbolism in much spiritualist writing (also reflected in De Morgan's work) was drawn from this Darwinian influence. Exact beliefs varied, although contact and

communication with spirits through table rapping, automatic writing and drawing, as well as the belief in an evolutionary process the soul underwent, were all customary. For De Morgan, Spiritualism was a lifelong interest starting in childhood with her reading of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry, and increasing after meeting her eventual mother-in-law, Sophia De Morgan, well-known Spiritualist in her own right and author of the treatise *From Matter to Spirit: The Result of Ten Years of Manifestations* (1863). Neoplatonic ideas drawn from her knowledge of the Italian Renaissance and theosophical notions of light were also influential in developing De Morgan's specific notion of the nature of the soul.

Over the course of a decade, Evelyn and William De Morgan conducted numerous seances and automatic sessions both privately and with friends, recording many of the experiences and the messages that Evelyn allegedly received (or channeled) in *The Results of an Experiment.* In this writing, produced during automatic trances, De Morgan shows us the profound sincerity with which she treated Spiritualism and its influence on her art and life. The first two sections of the text divide the messages as having been received from a Spirit or an Angel respectively, while the final section consists of messages of lessons, moralistically instructive. The distinctions seem arbitrary retrospectively, but I believe they highlight De Morgan's complex construction of the hierarchies between souls in various stages in their evolutionary journey, and those souls who had fully transcended, resulting in their angelic status.[6]

De Morgan's belief in the afterlife was as steadfast as it was intricate, as was the concept of reality and its permeability, also important to her. She saw the division between our world and the next as two parts of the same whole, describing it as "encompass[ing] both the material and spiritual worlds." Under the guidance of an Angel, she wrote:

> Heaven is not a place. It is a condition… you are in the mire but on the verge of a new birth, and light is breaking. Sickness and trouble are not realities: they are phantoms born of the mire. Realities are life, light, hope, and expansion of the power of thought, till in the end infinity is grasped, and brightness such as you never dream attained… Life is a continuous advancement to the path of light.[7]

The imagery of light and growth is essential to understanding the evolutionary progress the soul undergoes.[8] *The Kingdom of Heaven Suffereth Violence and the Violent Take it by Force* (1878; Figure 16) visualizes the spiritual evolution the soul underwent. This painting was the ultimate statement on Spiritualism by De Morgan, conceptualizing many of its core tenets. Despairing mortals chained to the material world in the lower register give way to serene, unbound souls, preceding those fully transcended at the top, cast in celestial light from above. The coloring of the transcended suggests them to be more tangible than those at the bottom, illustrative of Spiritualism's core belief. Death was not the end but precipitated a soul's cyclical growth, eventually resulting in the soul's ultimate state of being and total transcendence. Preoccupation with material wealth and greed was thought to be anathematic to the soul, impairing its ascension. Only "...free-will moral choices," as

Judy Oberhausen describes, could nourish the soul, allowing it to eventually achieve this state.[9]

The themes of spirituality, souls, death, and a higher state of being are certainly to be found in works by other Pre-Raphaelite artists. J.B. Bullen has identified themes of Spiritualism in Rossetti's later poetic works and paintings, centered around negotiating his feelings of loss and mourning with his belief in the afterlife.[10] However, De Morgan uniquely utilizes it within her paintings to an extent and complexity that sets her apart from predecessors, Pre-Raphaelite or otherwise. Furthermore, De Morgan proclaiming her Spiritualist faith through her art was not simply for her own soul's sake. She believed the life of the spirit was as dependent on spiritual fulfillment as the body was dependent on physical well-being, leading her to incorporate a political strain into her spiritualist work.

Suffrage and Creative Communities

In 1889, De Morgan was a signatory supporter of "The Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage" and William was the vice-president of the *Men's League for Women's Suffrage* as late as 1913.[11] The theme of women's suffrage and its intrinsic link to the soul's freedom was a pervading theme throughout De Morgan's *oeuvre*, aligned with the political positions of both her and her husband. It was important to De Morgan to manifestly depict what change could look like, offering hope to viewers. Popular proto-feminist iconography used symbols such as light, dawn, and daybreak, signifying such changes suffragists fought for.

Lucy Ella Rose identifies the "feminist network" De Morgan enmeshed herself as represented in paintings such as *Daughters of the Mist* (1900-1919; Figure 17) and *The Storm Spirits* (1900; Figure 18). This feminist network was established during De Morgan's formal education at the Slade School of Art and actively continued throughout her life. De Morgan was also an inaugural member of the Women's Guild for Art (1907), co-founded by May Morris (1862-1938), daughter of William and Jane Morris, and Mary Elizabeth Turner (1845-1907). Another initial member, Emily Ford (1850-1930), later sat as vice-chairmen for the Artists Suffrage League. Though a pacifist herself, De Morgan was intimately connected to more active and militant suffragist artists like Olive Hockin (1881-1936), notably imprisoned for four months for arson attacks on Lloyd George's house, and Marion Wallace Dunlop (1864-1942), who was among the first hunger strikers in imprisonment.[12] Notably, Ford, Hockin, and Dunlop all studied at the Slade School of Art during De Morgan's attendance.

Despite De Morgan's art "imitating earlier styles like Renaissance art [and the Pre-Raphaelites]," the thematic content of her work was expressly modern because it contended with contemporary issues, as Richenda Roberts argues.[13] Probably based upon Hans Christian Anderson's short story "The Little Mermaid," *Daughters of the Mist* depicts four figures surrounded by chromatic light and mist, their lilac robes indistinguishable from the surrounding atmosphere.[14] In the Anderson story, the Mermaid is granted a soul after completing good deeds for three hundred years to live an immortal life with the prince she loved. Swedenborgian-influenced Spiritualism

encouraged moralistically good actions to groom the soul, caring and nurturing for it to promote its transcendence upon the body's death. De Morgan's painting appropriates this story, turning the narrative into one of sisterly solidarity and community by depicting the women as part of the coming dawn.[15] Only as a community do the sisters achieve immortal life - the chromatic refractions emanating from their bodies suggest they are as much a part of the light as the dawn rising behind them is. The significance of the dawn functions multiply as the hope for women's emancipation and the spiritual rebirth coming with the rising sun, a signifier of the light triumphing over darkness.

Extending the correlation between suffrage imagery and Spiritualism further, Spiritualism envisions the soul as being encased in the body, trapped until death. In this vein, the soul is trapped in its own prison as much as the woman is. Presumably, the inverse is true, and women living in an unjust society, where they are not universally afforded the same rights, opportunities, and privileges as men would hinder their spiritual development as much as this hindered their material development. The soul suffers because the body suffers. Thus, for De Morgan, women's suffrage was not only a personal issue for her own sex, but a universal one, a component of her much larger Spiritualist strife.[16] For her, women's subjugated status was symptomatic of the larger, cosmic conflict between light and darkness.

The Storm Spirits suggest a simultaneously aggressive and naturalized interpretation of communal solidarity "at a time when the women's movement was gaining momentum."[17] Three spirits, symbolizing Rain, Lightning, and Thunder

seemingly sow chaos over a stormy sea. In the center of the painting between the three figures, an island unravaged by the storms sits like an oasis. This painting stands as much as a testament to De Morgan's belief in the power of the creative community in which she embedded herself, as much as it represents the destructive forces of war.[18] We can extend the destruction embodied by the spirits as not just representative of the physical wars that distressed De Morgan, but also the universal ones.

As elemental forces, each woman wears a robe of primary colors--red, blue, yellow-- personifying "the positive energies of creative expression," capable of shaping the world as much as art can shape it. Furthermore, the association with elemental forces--wind, water, air, thunder--in both *Daughters* and *Storm Spirits* suggests a naturalization of freedom. As Elise Lawton Smith points out, the land and earth can be tamed and mastered, "tilled, planted, domesticated," but women depicted as "water and air…[are] free from such control." The long correlation between women and nature traditionally emphasized their emotional and uncontrollable nature when compared to the "cultured" male. Here, De Morgan eschews this historical correlation, avoiding the "rotting [and] corrupt" images of women popular in fin-de-siècle art, as Emile Zola depicts in *Nana* (1890): "a force of nature, a ferment of destruction, unwittingly corrupting and disorganizing Paris between her snow-white thighs."[19] Instead, these forces are energized and unconstrained, emblematic of the coming dawn for both women and the soul. The complex activist-creative web in which De Morgan found herself demonstrates the seriousness of her ambitions. De Morgan's allegorical figures simultaneously stand for

numerous social issues: war, women's suffrage, and her Spiritualist faith all at once.[20]

Material Support, Immaterial Needs

On March 29th, 1922, the *Boston Evening Transcript* published a posthumous biographical sketch of De Morgan entitled, "The Art of Mrs. De Morgan and Her Gift to England's Blind Men," giving a comprehensive overview of De Morgan's life. The most compelling piece of this article, though, came in the second to last paragraph describing De Morgan's "gift: to the disabled veterans of the First World War," as the title emphasized:

> […]and it was like her to direct in her will that the proceeds of all works in her studio (to be sold at Christie's salerooms) should be handed over to the funds of St. Dunstan's for the benefit of its work and the blinded soldiers and officers in residence there. It is the works thus dispersed in the cause of charity that her sister and biographer has made it her mission to recall as far as possible.[21]

War was deeply disturbing to De Morgan, anxious about the immense loss of life and pain those on the battlefield endured and wary of nationalistic motivations of such campaigns. Wounded soldiers returning from the front lines were a particularly disadvantaged group that De Morgan was adamant about supporting, as disabilities prevented jobs, and governmental support was scarce. This disturbance compelled her to react artistically as well as financially to the horrors brought on by war.

In 1916, De Morgan's final exhibition was a charity event for the benefit of the Red Cross. Of the eleven pieces shown, only two had been on public display prior to this exhibition, drawing in an audience eager to see these sequestered works and subsequently

raising a considerable sum of money.[22] Displayed in the exhibition was one of her most recently completed pieces produced 1914-1916, titled *S.O.S.* (Figure 19), serving as a visual and conceptual centerpiece for the exhibition. Dark serpent-like entities surround a lone figure on a rocky island whose arms spread wide as she faces the sky. Her desperate plea for deliverance is juxtaposed with the violent waves around her, painting a bleak image of despair. Judy Oberhausen points out De Morgan's "explicit use" of a Christ-figure was unusual, as her paintings tended away from "orthodox" representations, opting for "more mystical" devices to convey the artist's spiritual beliefs.[23] Despite the classical drapery of the figure, the dramatic title embeds it in modernity through the Morse Code message, and through the figure itself. De Morgan's frank treatment of the subject marks this piece and the exhibition, as her most explicit, and perhaps most successful, response to war.[24]

Although the painting was produced at the start of WWI, De Morgan had long become disillusioned with the British Empire. As a staunch pacifist, De Morgan abhorred the colonial violence wrought by the Second Boer War (1899-1902) questioning the loss of life of tens of thousands of Boers and Africans in concentration camps as well as those sent off to fight in this war. Chivalric imagery was common for war art through the end of the nineteenth century, but as public perception of war changed with the turn of the century, Oberhausen argues that the optimism of such imagery was "eroded by the realities of modern warfare." Coupled with the horrific conditions of the trenches being made known to the British public, any notion of the

moralistic honor of war was exhausted.[25] The figure's white robes could represent the "innocent victims of war" all over the Continent as much as England's loss of innocence during the Boer War and WWI. In this light, De Morgan's pacifist morals can be seen to be anti-jingoist, protesting the chauvinistic attitude in which "Britain entered the conflict" and the resulting loss of life.[26]

Her vocal protesting of war and violence, encouragement of pacifism, and commitment to material support of those most immediately affected were characteristic of her Spiritualist beliefs. Seeing violence and devastation as hindering the many souls on the battlefield, De Morgan thought war to be representative of a larger cosmic struggle between light and darkness. This is summarized in an automatic message on the futility of war:

> The few destroy the many, and the cry of betrayed innocence goes up to heaven. Allis dark and Devils rejoice. You, my dearest child, are safe in body but assailed in mind: only peace can restore what war robs the earth of. You in your quiet home feel but faintly the horrors of the world, where good loyal men slay each other fighting, because their rulers bid them […] Light will dawn and slowly the carnage will cease, and on earth peace will again reign; but the darkness of Hell is in war, and woe to those willfully bring it on earth.[27]

The Angel's message concludes with a message of salvation to those who cause such devastation: "You are sick at heart; work flags and hope is faint; but I charge you, out of the mire that surrounds you look up and see God." [28]

No single cause held greater significance for De Morgan who viewed war, violence, women's inequality, and materialistic greed as symptomatic of the larger

cosmic evil pervading the world, threatening everyone's immortal souls. Through her art, De Morgan translated her profound Spiritualist convictions into affecting material issues of the world around her. Not blind to the immediate needs of those she prayed for, De Morgan recognized the imperative of working towards an egalitarian society to realize her Spiritualist goals. Even in death, De Morgan's presence lingers through her paintings, serving as a testament to her belief in an afterlife as much as her belief in humanity. Sold off, not only would the paintings economically benefit the soldiers, but her moralistic messages of virtue would ever circulate. While De Morgan believed in the joy of the next life, she recognized the needs of those still on Earth, leaving behind her art to guide them to find their own spiritual joy.

Her art, whether responding to the war or social status of women, incorporated Spiritualist themes to convey messages through multiple symbolic registers, consistently showing the divide between the spiritual and material as permeable and arbitrary. As Roberts and Oberhausen have argued in different ways, despite her stylistic treatment of figures and themes still echoing a Renaissance classical/Pre-Raphaelite style, her subjects were thoroughly modern responding to the contemporary issues of her time. At the same time, her interest in Spiritualism was as immutable as she believed the soul to be. By believing the soul to be affected by the body that housed it, her artmaking became a praxis for her Spiritualist theory as much as for her political activism. The synthesis of material and spiritual concerns through her art positions De Morgan's as an important artist in her own right, and a unique figure

within the Pre-Raphaelite legacy. On the subject of her art, another message obtained under the influence of a séance leaves us with a pertinent message: "I am glad of my art, it was of use to the world. Never doubt the great gain of beauty. It does more than much wordy preaching."[29]

[1] Claude Philips, "The Summer Exhibitions at Home and Abroad," *Art Journal* (1890): 166, quoted in Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (Associated University Press, London: 2002), 35. See also Smith, 36-38.

[2] Catherine Gordon, "Works exhibited during Evelyn De Morgan's lifetime" in *Evelyn De Morgan: Oil Paintings*, ed. Catherine Gordon (De Morgan Foundation: London, 1996), 28-30. De Morgan exhibited almost thirty times from 1876 to the turn of the century, including exhibiting at the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery opening in 1877. After 1900, she exhibited sparingly, though did have a large retrospective at the Wolverhampton Gallery in 1907 showing 26 pieces. It is thought the sudden decrease in exhibitions coincides with financial security brought on by William De Morgan's successful publication of his novel *Joseph Vance* in 1906. Prior to that, De Morgan was the primary provider, selling her works to financially support her husband's writing and ceramic career.

[3] Though published anonymously, De Morgan's sister, Wilhelmina Stirling is the source that claims Evelyn and William's authorship. Stirling's biography of Evelyn and William recounts the journal Evelyn kept detailing spirit contact and seances held. See A. M. Stirling, *William De Morgan and His Wife* (H. Hold and Company, New York: 1922).

[4] Spiritualism's inherent moralism easily aligned with the De Morgan's ideology who regularly hosted their own spirit parties and seances, attended by their innermost circle. With a small hint of irony, the interest of well-to-do middle- and upper-class patrons aligned with broader trends at the turn of the century, in what William Greenslade has described as "an ethically conscious and politically engaged generation…emerging" throughout England. Further, De Morgan's politically motivated spiritualist impulses aligned with a larger interest in spirituality and occultism across Victorian England, in what Matthew Beaumont has identified the tendency for occultist interest to "entangle" with socialist ideology and movements: both De Morgans were self-described socialists. See William Greenslade, "Socialism and Radicalism" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin De Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 5, and Matthew Beaumont, "Socialism and Occultism at the Fin de Siècle: Elective Affinities" *Victorian Review* 36, no. 1, (Spring 2010): 218.

[5] Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 4-6.

[6] Some of the angels she received messages from were named angels from the Bible, while others were simply denoted as angels.

[7] Judy Oberhausen, "Evelyn De Morgan and Spiritualism," in *Evelyn De Morgan: Oil Paintings*, ed. Catherine Gordon (De Morgan Foundation: London, 1996) 47-48; Anonymous, *The Results of an Experiment* (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co. Ltd: London, 1909), 32.

[8] See Emma Merkling, "Physics, Psychical Research, and the Self: Evelyn De Morgan's Spiritualist Portraits" *Art History* 46 no.3 (2023): 1-26 for more about spiritualism's relationship to science in turn of the century England.

[9] Oberhausen, "Evelyn De Morgan and Spiritualism," 38. The free-will moral choices that Oberhausen describes are drawn from De Morgan's Swedenborgian influence that equated the soul to that of a plant or flower, for which grooming and pruning would allow it to flourish.

[10] J.B. Bullen, "Raising the Dead: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Willowwood' Sonnets" in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. Matthew Bevis (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2013); Anna Mary Howitt-Watts and Georgiana Houghton were the only other two artists I could identify in my research that produced self-ascribed Spiritualist art in Victorian England.

[11] Lucy Ella Rose, "The Feminist Network of Evelyn De Morgan" in *Evelyn and William De Morgan: A Marriage of Arts and Crafts*, ed. Margaretta Frederick (Yale University Press, New Haven & London: 2022), 151.

[12] Rose, "The Feminist Network of Evelyn De Morgan," 154.
[13] Richenda Roberts, "Evelyn De Morgan, War, and the Representation of Modernity," in *Evelyn and William De Morgan,* 141.
[14] In Anderson's traditional tale, the titular character longs to be with a prince she falls in love with but is dismayed at the human's shorter lifespan and immortal soul. Despite their longer lives, mermaids turn to sea foam upon their death, as they have no soul.
[15] Rose, "The Feminist Network of Evelyn De Morgan," 156.
[16] Indeed, De Morgan enjoyed considerable economic, educational, and social freedom compared to lower-class women. The marriage with William was consistently described as a partnership by the couple and close friends and family. See Rose, "The Feminist Network of Evelyn De Morgan" 154.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Readings of this painting have revealed various possible messages, ranging from commentary on the destruction wrought from war to the emancipatory power sought by suffrage. Neither reading seems incompatible with the other and given the very personal nature of the symbolism De Morgan employed, the layered readings only serve to reinforce her various didactic messages. See Smith, *Evelyn De Morgan and the Allegorical Body*, 119-122.
[19] Smith, *Evelyn De Morgan and the Allegorical Body*, 121. Emile Zola *Nana*, trans. George Holden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 221.
[20] Richenda Roberts, "Evelyn De Morgan, War, and the Representation of Modernity," 146.
[21] J. P. Collins, "De Morgan's Gift to England's Blind Men," *Boston Evening Herald*. March 29, 1922, Box 21, De Morgan Archives, London, England.
[22] *Victoria Dolorosa* (1902) and *The Poor Man Who Saved the City* (1901) were previously shown together at Leighton House in 1902-1903. The exact sum generated from the show is unknown, but the limited time of the exhibition (a matter of weeks if not a few days) and publications advertising the limited time suggest a positive turnout. See Catherine Gordon, "Works Exhibited," 30-31.
[23] De Morgan was tapping into common symbols used in war art of the time, through her use of the crucifixion and depiction of Belgium. See Oberhausen, "The Horror of War," 86. The sibling painting, *The Red Cross* (1914-1916), shows Christ himself being carried over the battlefield of Belgium, paralleling the figure in *S.O.S.*, in a similarly explicit comment on the war.
[24] Judy Oberhausen, "The Horror of War," in *Evelyn De Morgan: Paintings*, 86.
[25] De Morgan herself grappled with this change in symbolism, as seen in the paintings *Victoria Dolorosa* (1901) and *Our Lady of Peace* (1907). Both paintings raise questions about chivalric notions of morality.
[26] As the last of Britain's Victorian colonial wars, The Boer War was a watershed moment that was deeply "unpopular among Britons," as the "scorched-earth policies" resulting in detestable conditions within the concentration camps made it entirely unconscionable to many in England. See Oberhausen, "The Horror of War," 76-83. For more on the casualties of the Boer War, see Emanuel Lee, *To the Bitter End: A Photographic History* of the Boer War (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985). For more on World War I, specifically the dismal realities of the trenches, see Nicholas J. Saunders. *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War* (New York: Berg, 2003).
[27] *The Results of an Experiment,* 34.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid, 80.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I have argued for the Pre-Raphaelite legacy that De Morgan inherited, while still emphasizing the unique aspects of her art and interests that make her modern and worthy of study. Like other artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, De Morgan found the Italian Renaissance to be a fruitful source of inspiration to draw upon. Botticelli, due to his recent re-discovery in England, proved to be an especially important figure to these artists who adapted his figural and thematic qualities for their own. De Morgan was a complex painter in tune with broad artistic trends, such as the Victorians' Renaissance revival and the contemporary history she experienced.

Where she differed from the Pre-Raphaelites is also important. Throughout her life, she navigated the tumultuous social and political landscape of Britain, marked by significant events such as the Suffrage movement, the Boer War, and the Great War, all of which left indelible imprints on her work. Divergent from her earlier works, her later Spiritualist-focused pieces reflect Botticelli's influence molded to late Victorian social issues. Spiritualism, an immensely important part of De Morgan's life and artistic practice, was not divorced from social issues, but combined with them through her vision of spiritual needs with resolutions for social injustice melding with resolutions for spiritual well-being. De Morgan's paintings are a testament to her belief in an afterlife as much as her faith in humanity. The shared tombstone of De Morgan and her husband attests to this, reading: "Sorrow is of the Earth; the life of the Spirit is Joy."

Just as nuanced and open-ended readings serve us in understanding depictions of Jane Morris, De Morgan's art represents her specific views of the world as a woman, artist, and spiritualist. No single reading or explanation of her life or work can wholly represent her. Instead, understanding the multiple, complex, and even contradictory facets that constitute her art suggests further critical studies in gender, Victorian art, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Understanding her position within the field of Pre-Raphaelite studies helps us better understand the Pre-Raphaelites and what of their work resonated with later generations of artists. Assessing her artistic relationship to Dante Gabriel Rossetti reveals the nuance necessary in constructing these artists' identities, nuanced and deconstructed as they recently have been. Her work also reveals that women artists of the so-called "Pre-Raphaelite sisterhood" need to be carefully differentiated and distinguished rather than lumped together, as each had her own way of drawing on past art and expressing contemporary issues and concerns. Their relationship to the Pre-Raphaelites can also be seen as forms of collaboration, rather than as simple followers, given Rossetti's support of women artists.

Decoupling them from the Pre-Raphaelites and considering them as modernists may open up new ways of understanding De Morgan, Marie Spartali Stillman, Elizabeth Siddall, Kate Bunce, Joanna Boyce Wells, among others. Recent studies of modernism have opened up new perspectives and redefinitions and De Morgan merits attention as a modernist as well as a Pre-Raphaelite (PR) heir. Finally, their responses to important changes like war, suffrage and imperialism needs attention, as Jeff Rosen has recently

demonstrated regarding Julia Margaret Cameron.[1] Though De Morgan staked a claim within the legacy of the Pre-Raphaelites, her contributions are unique and relevant beyond the movement itself.

[1] Jeff Rosen, *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Colonial Shadows of Victorian Photography* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2024).

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