THE LANGUAGE OF THE LANDSCAPE: LANDSCAPE IN THE WORK OF
JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON LATER
PRE-RAPHAELITE ARTISTS AND VICTORIAN SOCIAL REALISM

by

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ABSTRACT

The British artist, John Everett Millais, is most often celebrated for his role in founding the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848, and similarly for his works from this time. Millais also sustained a successful artistic career outside of the Pre-Raphaelite realm. It has been the tendency of recent art historians, however, to strictly divide Millais’s career between his Pre-Raphaelite paintings and those that came after. In this division it becomes implicit that Millais’s paintings from the Pre-Raphaelite period are innovative and even avant-garde. Meanwhile, Millais’s paintings after his career with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are often considered lackluster and traditional to a flaw. This myth regarding the later phase of Millais’s career negates his status as an avant-garde artist and does not acknowledge the substantial influence he had on subsequent Victorian artists.

This thesis works, through a reconsideration of Millais’s paintings both from his Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood period and the years after, to dispel that myth. In specifically examining Millais’s unique manner of employing landscape in his earlier and later paintings, I have proven that Millais exhibited Pre-Raphaelite tendencies, many of which were avant-garde, throughout his entire oeuvre. In further highlighting Millais’s unique use of landscape and his position as an avant-garde artist, his direct influence on later Victorian artists is provided as well. In result, Millais is portrayed as a significant Victorian artist who not only made advancements in his use of landscape during his Pre-Raphaelite years, but also continued to do so in his later career. Thus, this thesis proves that Millais ultimately succeeded in contributing to the complex, ever-evolving vision of nineteenth-century British landscape.
DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this thesis to my family, especially to my husband, Steven, and my dogs, Bronco and Chief, for their love and support.
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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: SITUATING THE WORK OF JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: THE FORMATION OF THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD, AVANT-GARDE NOTIONS, AND THE JOHN RUSKIN EFFECT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: MILLAIS’S LANDSCAPES AS AN EVOCATION OF MOOD</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: MILLAIS’S INFLUENCE ON LATER PRE-RAPHAELITE ARTISTS AND THE SOMBER LANDSCAPE</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: LANDSCAPE AS A METAPHOR IN THE WORK OF FREDERICK WALKER</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Charles Eastlake, <em>The Escape of Francesco Novella Di Carrara, with his Wife, from the Duke of Milan</em>, 1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Charles Eastlake, <em>Salutation to the Aged Friar</em>, 1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Raphael, <em>Madonna in the Meadow</em>, 1505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Francis Grant, <em>Queen Victoria Out with her Gentleman</em>, 1838-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, <em>Ophelia</em>, 1851-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, detail from <em>Ophelia</em>, 1851-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, detail from <em>Ophelia</em>, 1851-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, <em>The Bridesmaid</em>, 1851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gustave Klimt, <em>Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I</em>, 1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Richard Redgrave, <em>Ophelia Weaving Her Garlands</em>, 1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, <em>Portrait of John Ruskin</em>, 1853-55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, <em>The Blind Girl</em>, 1854-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, <em>Autumn Leaves</em>, 1855-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Armand Guillaumin, <em>Sunset at Ivry</em>, 1873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, <em>Spring</em>, 1856-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>John Everett Millais, <em>The Vale of Rest</em>, 1858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Henry Wallis, <em>The Stonebreaker</em>, 1857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>William Dyce, <em>Pegwell Bay: A Recollection of October 5th</em>, 1858, 1858-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>William Dyce, <em>The Man of Sorrows</em>, 1860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. Arthur Hughes, *The Knight of the Sun*, 1860.................................76
21. Frederick Walker, *The Vagrants*, 1868......................................77
22. Frederick Walker, *The Harbour of Refuge*, 1872..........................77
23. John Everett Millais, *Chill October*, 1870....................................78
INTRODUCTION
Situating the Work of John Everett Millais

John Everett Millais (1829-1926) is a distinguished British painter from the mid-nineteenth century. He is celebrated for his prolific career, but is best known for his founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848, along with fellow British artists William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.¹ The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood never agreed upon a common purpose per se, but they did, as is suggested by their self-conceived name, intend to emulate—in their own work—early Italian art before that of Raphael. They also shared a common dissatisfaction with the “artificial” work that was being produced from within the Royal Academy, and thus sought to produce what they felt was a more truthful art. ² In their determination to produce a more truthful art, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, with Millais at the forefront, openly rebelled against the Royal Academy. The group made this abundantly clear when, in 1848, they began signing their paintings “P.R.B.”, standing for Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and essentially mocking members of the Royal Academy who similarly signed their paintings “R.A.”³

Signing their paintings with the group’s initials was only one aspect of their rebellion against the Royal Academy, however. The unique artistic methods of the Pre-Raphaelite

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² Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1999), 9-23. The Royal Academy was founded in 1768 under the leadership of British artist Joshua Reynolds (1723-92). His intentions for the Academy were to raise the status of the painting profession and essentially foster a national school of painting. Since its formation, the Academy was considered the most respectable locale for an artist to exhibit his work.

Brotherhood, as well as their initial goals, set them even further apart from the artistic traditions found within the Royal Academy. Traditions within the Academy included paintings exhibiting Classical poses and elegant compositions similar to those found in High Renaissance paintings, as well as paintings executed in the “Grand Manner” style (put into effect by Sir Joshua Reynolds) that stressed an idealization of the imperfect. When the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Millais especially, exhibited paintings that contradicted these traditions, their work was met with great hostility. In time, however, critics would begin to appreciate their novel methods.

Yet, as a cohesive movement, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood began to disperse almost as quickly as it had formed. This is seen particularly in Millais’s work beginning around 1854, when his paintings begin to exhibit signs of the initial Pre-Raphaelite ideals transitioning and evolving into a manner unique to Millais. Because of this, Millais’s oeuvre is varied and extends outside the Pre-Raphaelite realm. For this reason, situating his entire artistic career within a particular school or style proves quite difficult. Instead, it has been the tendency of recent scholars to bisect Millais’s artistic career: his Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood years and, the years beyond the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Further augmenting this schism, scholars often consider the first phase of Millais’s career, where his Pre-Raphaelite tendencies are most evident, as more innovative and even avant-garde. In the arts the term “avant-garde” indicates an artistic movement or style that essentially interrupts the natural progression of art history and leads admiring artists in another direction. This term, although put into effect as it applies to the arts after the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, is often used to describe the earlier work of Millais. Meanwhile, many scholars consider the later phase, or his career after the Pre-

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Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 57-64. The term “avant-garde” is a French military term for a small detachment that marches ahead of the main body and points the way to the future, but, according to French writers from the mid-nineteenth century, it refers to the above art historical definition.
Raphaelite Brotherhood, as lackluster and traditional to a flaw. While I agree wholeheartedly with the first sentiments regarding the earlier phase of Millais’s career, I can hardly sympathize with the latter views. This is because, in my opinion, to designate such a stark division in Millais’s career is not only inaccurate, but also does a great disservice to the artist and the many paintings he produced directly after his years with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Therefore, in this paper, I will argue that several of the avant-garde tendencies that are associated with Millais’s paintings from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood years continue into the later phase of Millais’s career. In proving this argument, I will explore in detail both the earlier phase of Millais’s career, taking place, roughly, between the years 1848 to 1853, as well as the later phase where his Pre-Raphaelite tendencies still exist, roughly the years 1854 to 1860. In doing this, I will demonstrate that Millais’s paintings from the years directly after his strongest relationship with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were anything but mundane. Instead, Millais continued to demonstrate Pre-Raphaelite and avant-garde tendencies that stimulated the work of other artists. This direct influence from Millais can be seen in the work of later Pre-Raphaelite artists as well as in the work of Frederick Walker, a Victorian Social Realist.

In validating these arguments, particular focus will be given to Millais’s unique, critical

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6 Jason Rosenfeld and Allison Smith, Millais (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 150-243. In the late 1860s and early 1870s Millais’s work underwent a significant change. This period of Millais’s oeuvre will not be of central focus in this essay. This is primarily because its subject matter is so divergent from Millais’s earlier work where landscape is essential that it does not contribute to my argument. This later period of Millais’s career was a time of commercial ascension, as he was interacting with many different dealers. Desperate to provide for his large family of eight children, he began to paint primarily commissioned portraits. Although they are exceptionally painted and not lacking in refinement, again the paintings do not lend to any discussion pertaining to Millais’s use of landscape, and therefore will not be included for consideration in this essay. In exception, one painting by Millais from 1870 that is a pure landscape will be considered in the last chapter of this essay.
practices in his use of landscape, as well as the use of landscape by later artists directly influenced by Millais. This emphasis on landscape is imperative because Millais’s Pre-Raphaelite tendencies in his paintings are most vividly illustrated in his works where landscape is an essential element, and even further, such tendencies directly influenced later artists’ own use of landscape. Therefore, Millais represents an avant-garde artist that halts the natural progression of art history, in this instance with the traditional depiction of landscape, and leads admiring artists in another direction. In examining Millais’s use of landscape within his paintings and the direct influence he had on the use of landscape for subsequent artists, I thus hope to enhance Millais’s avant-garde status and simultaneously dispel the myth of him as an artist whose career can be so quickly divided between the superior and the insipid.

The value of my argument lies in its ability to overcome this perceived stark division in Millais’s oeuvre, which makes his status as an avant-garde artist problematic. This is because it generates a myth about Millais’s career that forces his later work to be understood as a decline in his artistry, which essentially negates his continued influence on later artists. In discussing this falsehood surrounding Millais’s career, Debra Mancoff explains how many scholars envision the artist. She describes him as a type of David up against the Goliath that was the Royal Academy. In this metaphor, one envisions a young, ambitious artist who steps out bravely on his own to counter greater forces. True, he succeeds in eventually battling the opposition, hence his eventual success with paintings such as *Ophelia*, but then Mancoff introduces another metaphor. She next compares Millais to Icarus, one who flew too close to the sun. It leaves one with an impression of Millais as an artist who nearly attained pure artistic innovation of his own only to succumb to

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7 Mancoff, *John Everett Millais: Beyond the Pre-Raphaelite Years*, 4.
the greater forces of the Royal Academy. Although Millais did eventually exhibit paintings that were deemed agreeable to the Royal Academy, I do not believe they should be considered an immediate return to the traditional. On the contrary, I believe Millais’s paintings executed directly after his years with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood illustrate several avant-garde tendencies first associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Again, this is most evidenced through an exploration of Millais’s use of landscape in his paintings.

Thus, instead of envisioning Millais like the metaphor of Icarus, falling out of the sky to the hard earth below, I believe that Millais tactically transitioned between his Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood phase into the later phase of his career. Therefore, Millais’s oeuvre cannot simply be divided into artistic successes or failures—although I would hardly refer to any of his paintings as the latter. Instead, in examining Millais’s use of landscape in his Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood years and the years directly after, I will prove how Millais carried out a successful transitional phase. I will illustrate how, within this transitory phase, his paintings where landscape is an essential element display Millais’s continued use of Pre-Raphaelite tendencies that essentially guide the way to Millais’s later career. Lastly, in highlighting Millais’s unconventional use of landscape, I will explore later Pre-Raphaelite artists’ and Victorian Social Realists’ use of landscape and its direct influence from Millais.

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In the mid-nineteenth century in Britain, the Royal Academy was the most respectable locale for an artist to exhibit his work. For Millais to paint in a manner deemed inappropriate by the Royal Academy indicated his rebelliousness. Doing so essentially jeopardized Millais’s reputation, as there was little artistic support outside of the Academy.
CHAPTER ONE
The Formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Avant-Garde Notions, and the John Ruskin Effect

In order to fully appreciate the transitional phase of Millais’s career it is necessary to discuss the formation of the Brotherhood itself, as well as Millais’s paintings from this phase. Thus, I will examine, first, the original ideas behind the formation of the group, and second, their technical methods of painting, both within their Victorian context and while considering specifically the work of John Everett Millais. I will also discuss the important mid-nineteenth-century critic, John Ruskin, who helped to advance Millais’s paintings in the art world despite their rebellious tendencies. Ruskin greatly influenced Millais’s work, particularly with his methods of utilizing and depicting landscape. In discussing these items, it becomes possible to see the avant-garde notions associated with the movement that Millais would eventually carry into his work outside of the Pre-Raphaelite realm. Yet, before one can fully understand that transitional phase and Millais’s distancing of himself artistically from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, one must examine what made the original movement itself so unique.

In 1848, a young and ambitious Millais convened with the equally young and ambitious artists William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti to found what would become the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.¹ As mentioned in my introduction, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood never agreed upon a common agenda, but it did initially intend to emulate—in the artists’ own work—early Italian art before that of Raphael. They also shared a common dissatisfaction with

¹ Allen Lane, ed., The Pre-Raphaelites (London: The Tate Gallery, 1984), 11-12.
the “artificial” work that was being produced from within the Royal Academy, and thus sought to rebel against the Academy by producing what they felt was a more truthful art. The notion of “artificial” versus “truthful art” as it applied to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s ideals becomes more definitive when discussing the critic, John Ruskin, whose thinking had a tremendous impact on the Pre-Raphaelite artists. Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite artists believed that art within the Royal Academy was not truthful in its depiction of nature. Instead, they felt that it was an “artificial” representation of the world around them. The Pre-Raphaelites also believed that the painting methods applauded in the Royal Academy, such as the use of chiaroscuro and the mixing of pigments, resulted in generally “mucky” paintings that did not reflect the natural world. On the contrary, they felt their highly technical painting approaches, for example painting with “pure” (unmixed) pigments on top of a layer of zinc white paint, produced works of visual clarity that were, in essence, formally pure and truthful. Thus, their attempt to gain artistic truth within their work instigated a rebellion against the traditional art in the Royal Academy.

Even the name “Pre-Raphaelite” signified confrontation with the Academy since Raphael was considered the most exemplary of High Renaissance painters. This notion was blindly accepted by the students of the Royal Academy, and thus was not a topic of debate. In fact, the common presumption was that art before the year 1500 was considered “primitive” in


\[\text{3 Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, and Alison Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 18.}\]

\[\text{4 Barringer, Rosenfeld, and Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 18.}\]

comparison to the supposed refined and mature art of Raphael and later generations.\(^6\) The notion of turning to “primitive” art for inspiration recalls the artistic methods of the German Brotherhood of Saint Luke, formed in 1809, and more commonly known as the “Nazarenes”.\(^7\) Similar to the Pre-Raphaelites, the Nazarenes turned their attention to Northern and Italian art from before 1500. In fact, the Pre-Raphaelites likely gathered some inspiration from the Nazarenes when forming their own identity.\(^8\) Yet, the Pre-Raphaelites repudiated any notion of their movement as being retrogressive or backward looking.\(^9\) The Nazarenes certainly revitalized early Northern and Italian art, as they closely emulated such prototypes in their own work. The Pre-Raphaelites also imitated elements from early Italian art in their own work, but they were actually criticized for exceeding the faults of the early Italians.\(^10\) Furthermore, and in opposition to the retrogressive nature of the Nazarenes, the Pre-Raphaelites looked to earlier art for inspiration in their original ideals, but their completed paintings were often quite modern as they incorporated elements from contemporary literature, fashion, and society.

In this manner of turning to “primitive” art for inspiration, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood becomes more comparable to later “primitivist” movements in modern art such as Post-Impressionism, Cubism, and Fauvism. This is even so despite each movement choosing

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\(^7\) Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 18.

\(^8\) Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 45. This is primarily seen in the self-conceived name of both movements, in that they both referred to themselves as a “Brotherhood”. Likely such a name was decided upon in order to denote their fraternal organization. The Nazarenes, however, took their identification a degree further. For example, the members grew their hair long and dressed in flowing robes to mimic biblical figures, hence their nickname.


different art-historical models for their endeavors.\textsuperscript{11} Such a comparison provides evidence to the notion of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as an avant-garde movement as they, too, dismissed the exemplary work of Raphael for more “primitive” art. Yet the end result was works of art that were surprisingly modern. Similar to the course of other modern art movements as well, for the Pre-Raphaelites in Victorian Britain, this return to the “primitive” was unfavorable and, indeed, not commonplace. As a result, critics were unsympathetic to the proposed ideals and methods of the Brotherhood, and took great pains to insult their paintings in their art journals. The hostile responses from the critics, again, allow the Pre-Raphaelites to be associated with later “misunderstood” artistic movements, such as the Impressionists at their first group exhibition nearly a quarter-century later.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, for the Pre-Raphaelites it was only a matter of time before they would take their reputation into their own hands and in doing so would proclaim their avant-garde status.

In the spring of 1851, William Michael Rossetti, the brother of founding Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti, wrote an article in defense of the Pre-Raphaelites in an important journal, the \textit{Spectator}. Initially, the \textit{Spectator} had been in accord with other significant art journals of the time by condemning the Pre-Raphaelite artists, particularly Millais. Yet when Rossetti secured an important position at the journal, the attitude regarding the young artists’ work changed.\textsuperscript{13} Rossetti stated of the group,

\begin{quote}
Scarcely any works will possess so strong an interest— an interest not their own only, but of the future of British art—as those of Messrs. Millais and Hunt; none, we are well assured, will more engross public attention or point more emphatically to the most vital considerations.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11} Prettejohn, \textit{The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites}, 18.

\textsuperscript{12} Prettejohn, \textit{The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites}, 48.

\textsuperscript{13} Prettejohn, \textit{The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites}, 57.
Essentially Rossetti is claiming that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood represents what, art historically speaking, would be considered “’avant-garde’.”\textsuperscript{15} Although Rossetti did not know the French term as it is applied to art, the way in which he describes the group sounds strikingly similar to the way in which French critics would later use the word to describe such artistic movements as Impressionism, Cubism, and Fauvism.\textsuperscript{16} Even further, as the Pre-Raphaelite scholars Jason Rosenfeld and Tim Barringer claim, the avant-garde indicates, “an organized grouping with a self-conscious radical, collective project of overturning current orthodoxies in art and replacing them with critical practices.”\textsuperscript{17} Thus, in so openly opposing the Royal Academy, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood essentially halted the natural artistic progression that had been taking place for nearly a century. Furthermore, in introducing unconventional methods they were pointing in a new direction for artists to follow.

Considering the above description of avant-garde and the initial goals of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the Brotherhood certainly represents the notion of avant-garde. As the scholar, Elizabeth Prettejohn, states, “if we accept the avant-garde credentials of French groups, such as the Impressionists, it makes no sense to deny the same status to the P.R.B.”\textsuperscript{18} She argues that this is because the Brotherhood not only attracted numerous followers in the years after their formation, but because they also made a discernible impact on artists of succeeding


\footnotesize{15} Prettejohn, \textit{The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites}, 57.

\footnotesize{16} Prettejohn, \textit{The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites}, 65.

\footnotesize{17} Barringer, Rosenfeld, and Smith, \textit{Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde}, 9.

\footnotesize{18} Prettejohn, \textit{The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites}, 64.
generations.\textsuperscript{19} This discernible impact, as it pertains to Millais, was essentially his influencing later artists to utilize landscape in an unconventional manner. Thus such an impact further establishes the notion of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as an avant-garde movement, and Millais as an avant-garde artist. Yet, to fully understand what allows the Pre-Raphaelite artists, Millais in particular, to be considered avant-garde, it is essential to first examine in detail the opposing, more traditional artistic methods applauded by the Royal Academy as well as the strict ideals set forth within the institution.

Since its formation in 1768, artists in the Royal Academy had turned to the Italian Renaissance for artistic guidance and inspiration, as art from this period was considered the most exemplary culmination of classical ideals.\textsuperscript{20} This was particularly illustrated in the work of Raphael along with other notable Renaissance artists. In fact, the Academy’s founding artist, Joshua Reynolds encouraged artists to paint in the lofty “Grand Manner” style, or \textit{gusto grande} of the Italians.\textsuperscript{21} Reynolds stressed this and other concepts, such as an idealization of the imperfect, in his presidential \textit{Discourses} (1769-90).\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, and despite the fact that Reynolds himself was a portrait artist, he acknowledged a hierarchical order of painting that was to be respected by artists in the Royal Academy.\textsuperscript{23} The order declared history painting the most important—this includes scenes from history, mythology, or biblical scenes—followed by domestic scenes, portraiture, and then landscape. Landscape was then only minutely more

\textsuperscript{19} Prettejohn, \textit{The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites}, 65.

\textsuperscript{20} Nicholas Penny, \textit{ed., Reynolds} (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), 27. It is noted that founding artist, Joshua Reynolds, strongly upheld that the ancients were closer to nature than modern artists, and as a result, he encouraged artists to demonstrate classical ideals in their own art.

\textsuperscript{21} Lambourne, \textit{Victorian Art}, 10.

\textsuperscript{22} Lambourne, \textit{Victorian Art}, 10.

\textsuperscript{23} Lambourne, \textit{Victorian Art}, 10.
important than animal painting, still life painting, and paintings of flowers. Therefore, landscape was not a most exalted art form—making Millais’s keen interest in the depiction of landscape even more exceptional. To appreciate this concept and the other traditional methods in the Royal Academy, it is necessary to examine paintings by conforming Royal Academicians.

Of particular interest is the work of Charles Locke Eastlake, as he was the President of the Royal Academy from 1850 to 1865. For Eastlake to hold the position of President of the Royal Academy during this time is indicative of the manner in which his own work was exalted. In particular, Eastlake was admired for his deep knowledge of Italian Renaissance art, from which he drew great influence in his own work. In his painting, *The Escape of Francesco Novello di Carrara, with his Wife, from the Duke of Milan* (fig. 1), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1850, several traditional artistic methods are illustrated. The first of these is the use of *chiaroscuro*, used in this instance to produce depth as well as to place emphasis on particular

24 Anthony Blunt, “The Heroic and the Ideal Landscape in the Work of Nicolas Poussin,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes* 7 (1944): 154-168, http://www.jstor.org/stable/750387 (accessed February 22, 2013). There are exceptions in art history where landscape painting is deemed as a more respectable genre. For example, landscapes by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) are often considered exemplary works of art. Yet, it is impossible to overlook the indebtedness Poussin’s landscapes pay to classical art. This is exemplified, for example, in his famous *Et Arcadia Ego* (1637-38). Similarly, Poussin’s landscapes quite often illustrate scenes from history. For example his painting, *Flight into Egypt* (1657), although a landscape, illustrates a biblical story.

25 It is important to note that such notable British artists as John Constable (1776-1837) and J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) had excelled in the landscape genre prior to Millais and the other Pre-Raphaelites. Even further, aspects of both Constable and Turner’s approaches to landscape were quite often deemed revolutionary. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, although likely stimulated by the work of Constable and Turner, took their approach to depicting nature a degree further. This is seen in their initial strict realism and methodical, almost scientific, approach to depicting nature. There have been comparisons drawn between the work of Constable and Turner to that of the Pre-Raphaelites (particularly between Turner and Millais as will be discussed in more detail below), but the Pre-Raphaelites were celebrated for an intensive approach to nature not yet seen in the history of British painting. For more on the history of nineteenth-century British landscape painting see Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 170-85.

26 For the purposes of this paper, it is interesting to note that Eastlake’s tenure as president encompasses the years when the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood began exhibiting their paintings at the Royal Academy as well as the years when Millais exhibited many of his later works demonstrating his unique utilization of landscape.

27 Lambourne, *Victorian Art*, 144.
figures and their actions within the painting. In the painting, Francesco Novello de Carrara and his wife are bathed in light to draw attention to their escape. Their faces, which are quite idealized, hers in particular as she recalls a type of Madonna, are highlighted to signify their importance. Meanwhile, in the background, areas are darkened to suggest depth and also to indicate the landscape as a subsidiary entity. In an attempt to create drama, the figures are strategically placed in a sort of gestural sweep that, although is pleasing to the eye of the viewer, appears staged. The landscape and background of the painting are quite generalized in that they suggest some location but do not seem to be painted from nature or a specific locale. The trees and vegetation are not recognizable, as they are not important elements in the painting in this instance, and the clouds from the sky are depicted in a highly imagined, almost theatrical manner that would hardly be found in nature.

In another of Eastlake’s paintings, *The Salutation to the Aged Friar* (fig. 2), his indebtedness to Italian Renaissance art is even more evident. The painting, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1840, recalls paintings by Raphael, such as *Madonna in the Meadow* (fig. 3), in its execution as well as in its subject matter. In Eastlake’s painting the figures are arranged in two almost pyramidal compositions—pyramidal compositions are commonly seen in the work of Raphael. The female figures are highly idealized, each recalling a type of Madonna. Each of the figures is depicted with soft modeling as their forms are gradually suggested and highlighted by simple nuances of light and dark. The background recalls an Italian landscape found in many of Raphael’s paintings, and, again, is quite generalized. It is likely that Eastlake painted his

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28 *Chiaroscuro* is a technical approach that originated in the Renaissance, which utilizes the contrast of light versus dark areas in a painting to produce depth.
landscapes with such Italian landscapes in mind as he had recently studied the works of Italian Renaissance artists in Rome, Naples, and Athens, as well as at the Louvre.29

Another painting that illustrates these traditional methods but with a more Victorian subject matter is Francis Grant’s, *Queen Victoria Riding Out with her Gentleman* (fig. 4). The painting was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1839, and its success allowed for Grant to be considered one of the most famous and fashionable painters of the mid-nineteenth century.30 Grant’s work was greatly admired, likely because he strictly adhered to the traditions applauded by the Royal Academy. As a result of his high regard within the Academy, he was elected President after Eastlake and served from 1866 to 1878. Although his painting, *Queen Victoria Riding*, is from earlier in his career, it is exemplary of the style for which he is most known. In the painting, Queen Victoria is shown riding with male companions and alongside her dogs.31 *Chiaroscuro* is utilized to place emphasis on the Queen as the central, prominent figure. She is highlighted in her brightness, appearing almost as if under a spotlight. The figures, the Queen and her horse especially, are painted with strict idealization. It is hardly a faithful depiction of the queen—Grant was applauded for his ability to produce a flattering likeness and for giving fashionable portraits a sense of charm.32 The figures are found in a rather non-descript, generalized setting. The landscape and vegetation, again due to their unimportance, are hardly recognizable and instead are merely a suggestion. The prominent architectural element found

29 Lambourne, *Victorian Art*, 144.

30 Lambourne, *Victorian Art*, 218.

31 The composition of the painting and the manner in which Eastlake depicts the Queen on her horse is clearly indebted to the *Equestrian Portrait of Charles I* (1637-38) by Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641). Van Dyck was a Flemish Baroque Artist, but became a leading court painter in England in the 17th century.

32 Lambourne, *Victorian Art*, 218.
within the painting is the arch under which they pass, perhaps suggesting the Wellington Arch, a triumphal arch built between 1826 and 1830 to commemorate Britain’s victories in the Napoleonic wars, but even further recalling the triumphal arches found in Roman antiquity.\(^{33}\)

Having considered each of the above-mentioned paintings that adhered strictly to the ideals put into effect by the Royal Academy, it becomes possible to appreciate the opposing and avant-garde artistic approaches taken by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood artists. This is especially the case with Millais as it pertains to his use of landscape. In beginning a discussion of Millais’s paintings where landscape is an essential element, his painting, *Ophelia* (fig. 5), will be a central focus. The subject of the painting comes from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, when Queen Gertrude announces Ophelia’s death. Ophelia, having been driven to madness after the murder of her father by her lover, Hamlet, takes her own life by drowning. In his depiction of her death, Millais closely adheres to Shakespeare’s text as will be explored in detail momentarily. Queen Gertrude describes her death as follows,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{There is a willow grows aslant a brook,} \\
\text{That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;} \\
\text{There with fantastic garlands did she come} \\
\text{Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples} \\
\text{That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,} \\
\text{But our cold maids do dead men’s fingers call them:} \\
\text{There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds} \\
\text{Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;} \\
\text{When down her weedy trophies and herself} \\
\text{Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;} \\
\text{And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:} \\
\text{Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;} \\
\text{As one incapable of her own distress,} \\
\text{Or like a creature native and indued} \\
\text{Unto that element: but long it could not be} \\
\text{Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{33}\) In the background of the painting the suggestion of another architectural element is depicted and likely meant to be Windsor Palace. This inclusion of the palace gives the setting of the painting a somewhat more specific locale. It is rather indistinct, however, leaving one with the impression of a landscape completed not from nature, but in a studio setting.
Pull’d the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.\textsuperscript{34}

In the painting, Millais depicts Ophelia shown just moments before sinking to her death. Millais’s handling of foliage and vegetation surrounding the central figure lends itself to a discussion of Millais’s use of landscape in this painting.

The first avant-garde method to be examined within the painting of \textit{Ophelia} is Millais’s use of the “wet white ground” technique. This technique results in the painting having hyper-detailing, vivid colors, and a flattened quality, all trademarks of Millais’s earliest paintings from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood period.\textsuperscript{35} These aspects, which set Millais’s work apart from the art found in the Royal Academy, are seen in a detail of the painting (fig. 6). The detail image depicts the flowers Queen Gertrude describes in her speech—namely the daisies and crow flowers—as well as a vivid red poppy that Millais added for further symbolic effect as will be discussed momentarily. The process of the wet white ground technique began with, at the beginning of each day of painting, applying a layer of zinc white paint to the canvas and painting over that section while the layer underneath was still wet.\textsuperscript{36} The technique, although laborious and extremely time consuming—Millais described a day’s work as being about the size of a five-shilling piece—allowed the artist to produce heightened areas of local color.\textsuperscript{37} These heightened areas of local color would be placed close to one another throughout the painting so that, when a viewer of the painting stepped back from the canvas, the colors would fuse on the retina creating

\textsuperscript{34} William Shakespeare, \textit{Hamlet: Prince of Denmark}, ed. Samuel Thurber (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1897), 111. Queen Gertrude’s speech from Act IV, Scene VII.

\textsuperscript{35} Staley, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape}, 25.

\textsuperscript{36} Barringer, Rosenfeld, Smith, \textit{Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde}, 18. Zinc white was utilized because it created a bluer, more intense white than traditional lead white, which tended to yellow over time.

\textsuperscript{37} Staley, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape}, 25. This concept of local color essentially means color that is true to its natural form, before it is obscured by the effects of light and shadow.
a unified composition. This technical approach was radical in Victorian art, and would be explored again in later avant-garde paintings by Impressionists such as Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

Millais also particularly enjoyed contrasting vivid colors to produce a brilliant, luminous effect as is seen throughout the painting. Millais’s desire to achieve such luminosity was likely influenced by Italian and Flemish quattrocento tempera and oil painting and also by the reflective brilliance of early stained glass. Yet, Millais also likely gathered inspiration from more modern modes of art, namely photography. The daguerreotype process, although not yet in color, was quite advanced by the mid-nineteenth century, as it was able to produce sharp, photographic images with a glassy luminosity—visual affects that Millais strove to achieve in his own work. For his paintings, Millais was able to obtain such brilliant pigments due to recent chemical and industrial research. Available to him and other Pre-Raphaelites were new pigments such as emerald green, varying ranges of purple, and vibrant yellows made from the newly discovered elements of chromium and cadmium. As a result, the brightness and luminosity exhibited in Millais’s work, particularly in his landscapes, was seen in strong contrast to the more subdued

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39 H.H. Arnason and Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *History of Modern Art*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2010), 33-53. Although the effects of contrasting local colors intrigued Millais, the Impressionists would explore this concept in a more theoretical manner. This is because they would have likely been exposed to recent scientific advancements in color theory put forth by Michel-Eugene Chevreul in his *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l’assortiment des objets colorés* (1839).
40 Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 150. The contrast of bright colors would also resurface in later art movements such as Fauvism and Abstract Expressionism, but these movements would take the contrasting of color a step further by depicting color where it was not seen in nature.
41 Barringer, Rosenfeld, Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 18.
earth tones found in academic work. Millais’s paintings, particularly *Ophelia*, likely appeared strangely, almost vulgarly bright compared to other paintings hanging in the Royal Academy at the time.\(^4^4\)

With *Ophelia*, Millais did not use the wet white ground technique throughout the canvas, rather he used it only where he wanted to place emphasis, particularly with the depiction of vegetation and flora. As a result of utilizing the wet white ground technique for emphasis—and simultaneously not using *chiaroscuro*—the painting lacks the traditional harmony and depth seen in paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy. Instead the organization of the painting is based on the relationship of color throughout, and not on the traditional relationship of light and dark brought about by *chiaroscuro*. As a result, the viewer’s attention when observing the painting is dispersed throughout the work instead of focusing on whatever object is depicted in the most light. The viewer observes several elements throughout the painting, but then views them all in unison. The contrasting of local color throughout the painting, as mentioned above, allows for some inconsistencies when visually spanning the painting as the gradations between the contrasting colors are stark. Yet, Millais felt that this in turn created a more truthful work of art. This is likely because in the natural world contrasting colors *are* often found next to one another. Thus, for artists in the Academy, *chiaroscuro* essentially established a formulaic approach to painting, but Millais rejected that approach. Instead he focused on his use of color throughout and in creating veracity to nature. As a result, Millais’s painting demonstrates a lack of depth and two-dimensionality.\(^4^5\) Nearly a decade later in France, the acclaimed avant-garde artist Édouard Manet would display paintings with a similar flatness. This is particularly seen in

\(^4^4\) Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 150.

\(^4^5\) Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 25.
Manet’s *Luncheon on the Grass* and *Olympia*, both of 1863, where the treatment of figures as silhouettes against the background serves to collapse space and emphasize the two-dimensional nature of the canvas. In both Millais’s and Manet’s work this flatness was initially criticized as it was viewed as a type of naivety. Yet, the lack of depth was intentional and intended by both artists as a rejection of traditional art.

Meanwhile, in *Ophelia* this flattened quality combined with intense detail also serves to effectively heighten the inner emotion taking place in the mind of Ophelia. This is because it allows Millais to place an emphasis on Ophelia’s face and hands (the only elements in the painting depicted with some modeling) and also on the natural elements within the painting. Millais does not outwardly display Ophelia’s emotion through false elements of light and dark along with melodramatic compositions. Instead, Millais leaves it to the viewer to distinguish, through Ophelia’s facial expression and the symbolism associated with the natural elements in the background landscape, her inner psychological turmoil. Ophelia’s facial expression, in particular, gives one a glimpse into the tormented mind of this defeated heroine. Jason Rosenfeld states in his monograph of the artist how Millais’s rendition of the subject demonstrates his “extraordinary understanding of Ophelia’s elusive mental condition.”

He compares Ophelia’s facial expression (fig. 7) to that of the female in another of Millais’s paintings, *The Bridesmaid* (fig.8), noting that in both they illustrate “alienated and in some cases subsequently deranged women.”

Thus, Millais invokes within the viewer of his paintings a deeper more complex understanding of the painting. This concept further enhances the notion of Millais as an avant-garde artist because he essentially developed a modern approach to history painting. Recall that

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history painting was exalted as the most respectable type of painting within the Academy. Yet, with *Ophelia*, Millais approaches the Shakespearean subject in an unconventional manner. As a result, Millais’s depiction of the subject does not recall a staged production with a backdrop, but instead appeals to the viewer on a personal and psychological level.

Furthermore, Millais illustrates the attributes of Ophelia with such fidelity to the model that it instills a sense of truthfulness. Millais’s model, Elizabeth Siddal, was admired by the Pre-Raphaelites for her unconventional beauty.\(^4^8\) In fact, this was precisely the reason Millais picked her as his model.\(^4^9\) As a result, Ophelia does not appear as a conventional Madonna type, as is seen in previously mentioned Academic paintings. Instead, she is depicted as an ordinary female. This, along with the immensely detailed vegetation and flora in background, appeals to viewers on a personal level because it conjures a realistic setting. Queen Gertrude’s speech begins by describing the precise location of Ophelia’s death. She says, “There is a willow grows aslant a brook.” In keeping with the text, Millais depicts the slanted willow found to the left with immense detail. This places immediacy on Ophelia’s death because the viewer envisions having been in a similar setting. As a result can imagine the environment of Ophelia’s death. Yet, simultaneously the vegetation and flora carry symbolic meaning of their own—namely the vivid red poppy by Ophelia’s right hand, referring not only to opium, the hallucinatory drug, but also symbolizing sleep and death, along with the forget-me-nots whose name lends to their meaning.\(^5^0\)


\(^4^9\) It will be discussed in more detail momentarily, but for the time being, it is important to note that Millais preferred to use close acquaintances and family members for his models. This was not typical, especially for artists in the Royal Academy.
Further enhancing the effective use of symbolism is the fact that varied types of flowers are depicted that do not all necessarily bloom at the same time of year, suggesting a sort of cyclical pattern hinting at notions of life and death. The liveliness of the flowers on the bank contradicts the transience of the picked flowers in Ophelia’s hand, as they will quickly die. At first glance, Ophelia’s dress seems to be made up of withering and decomposing flowers as well, while simultaneously the outlines of her dress mimic the nettles that grow around the base of the willow tree directly behind and to the left of Ophelia. Just as the nettles compress the base and suck the life out of the willow tree so too does Ophelia’s dress pull her feeble body to its untimely death, clenching her last breath. Further enhancing the element of impending death, as some scholars have noted, there appears to be a depiction of a human skull just above the algae in the water, in the vegetation to the right of the painting. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Millais intentionally included the skull, it seems unlikely that, given the time and attention devoted to the detail in the background, he happened upon such a rendering by mistake. Regardless, the vivid detailing of the plant life surrounding Ophelia ultimately serves to further heighten the intensity of the painting and evoke the inner emotion occurring within the mind of Ophelia.

The composition of the painting *Ophelia* and the way in which Millais arrived at such a composition is unique to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s style and should be considered avant-garde as well. This is primarily because Millais placed equal—if not more—emphasis on the landscape of *Ophelia* than he did on the actual figure. In fact, Millais would paint the landscapes of his paintings before adding the figures. Traditionally, landscape was considered a mere

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backdrop to the subject of central focus and was painted in the studio and not necessarily from nature. Instead, for *Ophelia*, Millais spent nearly five months completing the landscape *en plein air* before even beginning to paint in his model. Thus Millais’s immense attention to detail along with his utilization of the wet white ground technique in the landscape and natural elements is unique. But Millais also utilized both methods to assist in visually organizing the painting’s rather complex composition. This complex composition is the result of Millais’s generously infusing both the background and foreground with lush greenery and flora. This, combined with the intense flattening effect, left the painting feeling rather claustrophobic, forcing viewers to step back from the canvas to admire the painting in its entirety. Upon doing so, one notices the only glimpse of the sky is found at the top of the painting in a small rectangle. The overwhelming display of vegetation and flora allows the central focus of the painting to become not only on the figure of Ophelia, but also on the surrounding natural elements. One must admire the figure of Ophelia and the surrounding greenery in unison. This visual complexity brought about by the unison of a figure to its surrounding environment recalls later avant-garde paintings by Gustave Klimt. A major figure of the Vienna Secession, Klimt is known for his depiction of figures integrated into brilliantly decorated and patterned backgrounds as is seen in his painting, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (fig. 9). Although their backgrounds differ in that Klimt’s painting depicts mere ornamentation and Millais’s painting illustrates elements from nature, they are similar in that both artists’ elaborate backgrounds are executed with a lack of spatial depth that seem to encompass the figures in a similarly flattened manner. Interestingly, and similarly to Millais with his handling of *Ophelia*, Klimt often gave more attention to the face and hands of
his figures, sometimes even depicting them with soft modeling. Klimt is known to have been conscious of the Pre-Raphaelites.\textsuperscript{52}

Having now examined Millais’s avant-garde tendencies in his Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood painting, \textit{Ophelia}, it is beneficial to quickly revisit a more traditional painting for contrast. One such example, and of the same subject, is a painting by Millais’s near contemporary and Royal Academician, Richard Redgrave (1804-88). In Redgrave’s \textit{Ophelia Weaving Her Garlands} (fig. 10), Ophelia is depicted by the riverbank moments before she presumably will take her own life by drowning. In comparison to Millais’s painting where the heroine’s facial expression suggests her tormented inner soul, here the highly idealized Ophelia is reminiscent of a tranquil Madonna. Even further, an artificial light source appears to be highlighting her face. The emphasis of the painting is placed on the idealized figure of Ophelia and not necessarily on the tragic subject at hand. There is neither an attempt at rendering a psychological approach to the subject, nor does Ophelia participate in any sort of visual dialogue with the landscape in which she is located. Instead, the landscape provides a non-descriptive setting, and hardly alludes to the intended mood or manner of the painting or of the figure. The elusive landscape, the idealized manner in which Ophelia is depicted, and the artificial light utilized throughout the painting all represent the “false” art that the Pre-Raphaelite movement was so adamantly against and that Millais intended to counteract with his own painting of \textit{Ophelia}.

As previously mentioned, in an effort to further counter this type of “false” art found within the Royal Academy, the Pre-Raphaelites stressed within their work an idea of “truth to nature.” The influential art critic, John Ruskin (1819-1900), is responsible for formulating this

\textsuperscript{52} Arnason and Mansfield, \textit{History of Modern Art}, 97.
concept. His idea of “truth to nature” became a sort of mantra for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Even further, Ruskin became a champion for the young artists, as he would eventually put their rebellious work at the forefront of the art world and further enhance the notion of the Pre-Raphaelite movement as avant-garde. This was possible because Ruskin himself was very much a forward thinker. He quite often expressed disinterest in the work found within the Royal Academy, and in turn, applauded artists who painted in unconventional manners.  

Thus, when Ruskin began writing lengthy critiques on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, he set them even further apart from the traditions found within the Academy.

Ruskin greatly influenced the Pre-Raphaelites, Millais in particular, with his own writings. In his *Modern Painters Vol. 1* (1843), Ruskin strove to prove the superiority of J.M.W. Turner. Ruskin would eventually take to Millais and defend his work as persistently as he had that of Turner. Then, in *Modern Painters Vol. 2* (1846), Ruskin praised the work of early Italian artists Giotto, Fra Angelico, and Tintoretto. In terms of the public perception of the Pre-Raphaelites, however, Ruskin’s defense of the group was crucial in granting the Pre-Raphaelites the attention their art deserved. His most notable editorials praising the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were found in *The Times* and a pamphlet he wrote himself titled *Pre-Raphaelitism* (1851). Yet, in time, the relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood artists and Ruskin was complicated in that, as their work evolved, so too did their rapport with the critic. In particular, Millais’s and Ruskin’s relationship became increasingly strained for

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53 Tim Barringer writes that Ruskin encouraged artists to paint in unconventional manners similar to that of J.M.W. Turner. Barringer also states that Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* was “crucial in inspiring young Millais and Hunt to renounce Reynoldsian, old masterish technique and style which had been taught at the Royal Academy school.” Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, 60.

54 Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 2.

reasons that I will discuss in a moment. Through a study of Millais’s *Portrait of John Ruskin* (fig. 11), it is possible to examine the unique relationship between Millais and Ruskin as well as the avant-garde notions Ruskin assisted in instilling in the artist’s work.

Before he began working on Ruskin’s portrait, Millais had already demonstrated to Ruskin his understanding of the critic’s idea of “truth to nature” through his painting of *Ophelia*. This is because Ruskin had emphasized in his writing for artists to,

> Go to Nature in all singleness of heart and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how to best penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing in all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth.  

Essentially Ruskin stressed that artists should go out into nature, as opposed to painting in a studio, and depict what they observed with the utmost fidelity, nothing more and nothing less.

In heeding Ruskin’s advice, Millais managed to depict nature and utilize landscape in a radical manner as is seen in *Ophelia*. Julie Codell describes this radical approach by Millais and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood when she states,

> The members of the Brotherhood applied a myopic attention to the physical world in order to escape the conventions of seeing and to invent their own modes of perception to re-envision the material world and thereby imbue it with new symbolic, psychological, and historical meanings.

What Codell strikes upon is that the unique method through which the Pre-Raphaelites depicted nature was not only progressive, but also allowed for a more complex rendering as was discussed previously with *Ophelia*. Ultimately, however, this approach of intense scrutiny of detail would

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57 The young Pre-Raphaelite painters, Millais and Hunt in particular, avidly read Ruskin’s writings. Jason Rosenfeld claims that the Pre-Raphaelites adhered so strictly to Ruskin’s simple directive to “go to nature in all singleness of heart” in so much that it came to stand as a manifesto for the Brotherhood’s approach to painting. Barringer, Rosenfeld, Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 86.

result in subjects in nature (or landscape) that appeared unnatural and unpleasing to the trained Victorian eye. Ruskin, however, venerated this technical approach and the negative attention that came along with it since it provided him a platform to support the young artists. Specifically, Ruskin argued that Millais had achieved pure truth in his *Ophelia*. Therefore, when Ruskin’s father wanted to have a portrait painted of his son, both father and son agreed upon Millais as the artist for the commission. Ruskin desired to have his portrait painted at Brig o’ Turk at the mouth of Glenfinlas in Scotland. So, in the summer of 1853, Millais accompanied Ruskin and his wife, Effie, to Scotland to paint the portrait. Millais did not complete the portrait, however, until the following autumn of 1854.

The completed painting exhibits many of the same avant-garde tendencies found in Millais’s earlier painting, *Ophelia*. This is, again, due to Millais’s unique rendering of landscape. As mentioned before, Millais utilized the wet white ground technique in *Ophelia* to create emphasis on certain objects, particularly vegetation and flora. Similarly, Millais utilized the wet white ground technique on some areas of vegetation in his portrait of Ruskin, as well as in his handling of the rock formations found behind Ruskin and on which he stands. Similar to the vegetation and flora in Millais’s earlier Pre-Raphaelite painting, the precise depiction of and emphasis on the rock formations suggests the essence of time. As with *Ophelia*, references to the passing of time and notions of life and death represent avant-garde tendencies in that they elicit from the viewer of the painting a subjective response. Ruskin argued that paintings of rocks not only documented the present condition, but also suggested a geological past, and even further hinted at destruction and the ultimate Day of Judgment.\(^59\) In so much, he asserted that landscape painting was capable of rising above mere topographical representation, and instead could

\(^{59}\) Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, 65.
explore the most profound of themes. Such themes included notions of life and death and the passing of time, as are demonstrated in Turner’s watercolor, *Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire, on the Wharfe*, of 1798, which Ruskin greatly admired. In Turner’s landscape, rocks with visible strata are found in the foreground, while in the background three figures stand before the architectural remains of a church. The permanence of the rocks exists in contrast to the architectural remains of the church, yet both highlight the transience of the humans in the setting. Ruskin likely intended for Millais to achieve a similar effect in his portrait. Likewise, Millais strived to connect Ruskin to such themes because he valued the ideas put forth in Ruskin’s writings. As a result, Millais’s portrait of the critic serves as a visual manifesto for the philosophy Ruskin advanced and the Pre-Raphaelites, Millais in particular, enthusiastically supported.

True to Pre-Raphaelite method, Millais spent several months painting the landscape of the painting— the rock formations, flowing water, and vegetation— before even beginning to work on the figure of Ruskin. Millais particularly enjoyed painting the effects of cascading water. It is probable that Millais gathered inspiration for his painting of the flowing water after having viewed a daguerreotype. Ruskin had several daguerreotypes taken by his assistants while in the Alps and Italy that depicted the effects of cascading water. Ruskin was entranced by photography and its ability to capture the natural world, and likely shared this sentiment with Millais. Compared to the more traditional approaches to painting practiced at the Academy, this was an unconventional method. This is because it utilized not only observations from nature,

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60 Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, 65-81.

61 Although shown in ruins, Ruskin likely admired the depiction of such a church as it recalled Gothic architecture, which Ruskin praised in his own writings.

62 Barringer, Rosenfeld, Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, 100.
but also modern technology to create a painting that strictly adhered to nature. In the painting, the depiction of the quick movement of water serves as a contradiction to the stillness and sense of geological time depicted through the detail of strata in the rocks in the foreground and background. Concerning the attention given to the landscape, Ruskin wrote to his father on July 28, 1853 saying, “you will be delighted to hear that my portrait is verily begun today and a most exquisite piece of leafage done already.” 63 This is interesting because it not only shows Millais’s insistence on the importance of depicting nature first and foremost, but also Ruskin’s keen interest in the representation of nature. It appears that to both Millais and Ruskin, the portrait from its inception was intended to be a picture of landscape and not necessarily of Ruskin. As a result, the figure of Ruskin appears somewhat flattened, almost pasted into the surrounding elements of the painting. This is even further enhanced by Millais’s refusal to paint any light or shadow in the painting. As discussed previously, Millais intended to counteract the “artificial” contrast of light and dark produced by chiaroscuro. Millais also strove to produce the painting with areas of pure, local color, as is seen in Ophelia. Ruskin applauded Millais’s painting with such pure, unaltered colors, despite the flatness and lack of spatial depth it created within a painting. 64

Notwithstanding the rather awkward inclusion and placement of the figure of Ruskin within the landscape, the portrait itself still carries a psychological element worth exploring. This psychological element allows for the painting to be understood as avant-garde, similar to Ophelia. As mentioned previously, the intense detail given to the strata within the rock formations seems to hint at the passing of time as well as perpetuity. The rocks have been formed


64 Prettejohn, The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites, 151.
over many years, and will continue to slowly evolve over time. In contrast, the water abundantly and swiftly flows and cascades through the rocks. The water leaves hardly an impression now, but over time it will form and mold the shapes of the rocks. With that in mind, it allows for the figure of John Ruskin to appear transient, as his place in this setting is only a mere moment. Similarly, as in *Ophelia* where the depiction of a human skull can be seen in the foliage on the riverbank, I believe that upon first glance, the top of Ruskin’s hat mimics that of a human skull as well. If this is so, perhaps Millais intended to stress the transience and fragility of human life in comparison to the permanence and sturdiness of the rock formations found in the landscape background. Noteworthy as well is the amount of time Millais spent specifically on painting Ruskin’s hands. Ruskin posed for the portrait part of the painting (on a flight of steps in Millais’s studio to mimic the way in which he was to be situated on the rock formation) between the months of January and April in 1854. Yet Millais did not complete the depiction of his hands until the following autumn. Thus, Millais spent a great deal of time painting Ruskin’s hands alone. It is astounding to imagine what time and energy he consumed on just the hands of Ruskin. Looking back on *Ophelia*, however, one might recall the emphasis placed on the figure’s hands and face in that instance as well. I believe that this is because Millais likely felt that an intense psychological tension could be conveyed through a person’s face and hands. This concept is depicted more visually in his painting of *Ophelia* where the dying heroine’s face and hands are barely afloat on the water. Yet, her hands are animated, almost in an act of submission.

65 Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 49.

66 Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 49.

67 Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 49.

68 Arnason and Mansfield, *History of Modern Art*, 155. Some fifty years later, Austrian Expressionist artists such as Oskar Kokoschka would explore this concept much further, for example in his *Portrait of Adolf Loos* (1909), where the sitter’s tension can be interpreted by viewing his tense, gripping hands.
In the portrait of Ruskin, his hands are not as animated, but nonetheless, the fact that Millais spent a substantial amount of time on the hands themselves indicates the importance he felt in depicting them precisely and in a specific manner.  

As with Millais’s earlier painting of *Ophelia*, Ruskin expressed great satisfaction with Millais’s rendering of nature and depiction of landscape within his portrait. Ruskin stated in a letter to a friend that Millais was painting “a picture of a torrent among rocks, which will make a revolution in landscape painting.” Ultimately, with Ruskin’s sanction of the portrait it can be seen as the pivotal moment when Millais’s use of landscape reached its most complete rendering of “truth to nature”. In achieving these “Ruskinian” ideals, however, Millais was also expressing avant-garde tendencies within his work, particularly in his use of landscape. As a result, *Portrait of John Ruskin* can be considered the pinnacle of Millais’s Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood career. Concurrently, however, the portrait represents Millais’s last true Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood painting.

In short, this is because Millais fell in love with Ruskin’s wife, Effie, during their time in Scotland while working on the portrait. Effie, having felt neglected by Ruskin for some time, returned Millais’s feelings for her. She left Ruskin in April of 1854, and in July their marriage was annulled. Having developed an intense fondness for Effie, and having come to sympathize with her dissatisfaction with Ruskin, Millais too felt the need to withdraw himself from Ruskin both professionally and emotionally. Ruskin, on the other hand, did not share a similar sentiment. He continued to reach out to Millais and, surprisingly, be a consistent advocate of his work. Meanwhile, for Millais completing the portrait of Ruskin was an odious duty, so much so, that he

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69 Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, 64. Tim Barringer also notes how Millais granted a great deal of attention to the hands and face of Ruskin, almost as much as that given to the details of the rock formations.

attempted to abandon the painting as early as December 1853. Ruskin insisted that Millais finish the portrait, however, and so he did by the autumn of the following year.

After Millais’s strained experience with completing the *Portrait of John Ruskin* his artistic style would gradually begin to evolve. Moreover, Millais’s separation from Ruskin and his influence would also signify a withdrawal from the Pre-Raphaelite realm. Although Millais would continue to exhibit Pre-Raphaelite elements and similarly avant-garde tendencies through his use of landscape in his later work, his next paintings would diverge from the strict “truth to nature” and “Ruskinian” ideals he had adhered to so faithfully. Eventually, Millais would begin to reevaluate the more distinctive qualities of his work of previous years as he entered into the next phase of his career outside of the Pre-Raphaelite realm. This transitional phase is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

Millais’s Landscapes as an Evocation of Mood

After having completed his *Portrait of John Ruskin* in 1854, Millais’s oeuvre began to evolve, most notably in that his paintings no longer strictly adhered to the ideals of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Because Millais struggled during the final months painting the portrait, and since he had equated his Pre-Raphaelite practice with Ruskin, his undertaking a new approach to painting after its completion is comprehensible. Millais had written to Effie’s mother, just months prior to finishing the portrait, describing it as, “the most hateful task I ever had to perform.”¹ Yet, Ruskin not only continually reached out to Millais during and after the completion of the portrait, but he also maintained close ties with many of the other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. On a personal level, however, Millais felt the need to create distance between himself and Ruskin, and as a result, he detached himself from the Pre-Raphaelite realm.

Millais also did the unimaginable in the eyes of many of the Pre-Raphaelite members. Before even completing the portrait of Ruskin and having already begun to detach himself from the critic, Millais became a noticeable figure within the Royal Academy when he was elected as an associate member in 1853. Seeing that Millais had essentially built his artistic reputation on being the antithesis of everything the Royal Academy represented, this came as a shock to many artists and critics. In fact, many of Millais’s works completed in the early period after 1854 were met with the same hostility as some of his Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood paintings, which were by

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then heralded as masterpieces. Yet, Millais’s becoming an associate member of the Royal Academy should not serve to undercut his reputation as an avant-garde artist. This is because there are logistical and personal elements worth considering for his having joined the Academy. To begin, it is imperative to stress the negative critical reception that the Pre-Raphaelite artists, Millais in particular, had endured for their unconventional paintings. Likewise Ruskin’s persistent defense of the Pre-Raphaelites, again, Millais in particular, cannot be underestimated. Yet, having distanced himself from not only Ruskin but also the other members of the Pre-Raphaelite realm, perhaps Millais felt the need to assimilate himself with another “organization.” Furthermore, his joining as an associate of the Academy did not necessarily require that Millais abandon his Pre-Raphaelite or avant-garde tendencies, which, as I am arguing, he did not. Instead, I believe it demonstrated his desire to continue to represent an opposition to the more traditional art found within the Royal Academy. On his father’s decision to become an elected associate of the Royal Academy, Millais’s son, John Guille Millais, explained,

Another reason for this decision was that, having taken upon himself the championship of the Pre-Raphaelite principles, he was determined to make the Academy acknowledge his power as the chief, if not only, exponent of their principles, now that Hunt was off to the East, and Rossetti had wandered away on his own exclusive line; and if he ceased to exhibit there, some of those whose opinion he valued might perhaps think that he was afraid to continue the struggle.³

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² Paul Barlow, *Time Present and Time Past: The Art of John Everett Millais*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 93. Due to Millais’s familiar depiction of the Holy Family in his painting, *Christ in the House of his Parents*, when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1850 it caused such controversy that it was removed and taken to Queen Victoria for a private viewing. Jason Rosenfeld and Allison Smith, *Millais*, 46. Eight years later, Millais’s painting, *The Vale of Rest*, was said to have disturbed contemporary viewers as they described the nuns found within the painting as “ungainly” and “ugly”.

Thus, despite Millais’s becoming an associate member of the Academy, he still continued to exhibit Pre-Raphaelite tendencies in his work and in doing so, represented an alternative to the more traditional work found in the Royal Academy.

Regardless of Millais’s personal or artistic reasons for becoming a public figure within the Academy, it is at this point that many scholars and art historians strictly divide Millais’s oeuvre between his Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood paintings and those that came after. It is implicit in this division that Millais’s paintings after 1854 are, according to historians, lacking in innovation and uniqueness. In an effort to dispel this disservice to Millais’s work directly after his Pre-Raphaelite period, I will examine closely four of Millais’s paintings completed after 1854. Paintings included in this discussion will be *The Blind Girl* (1854-56), *Autumn Leaves* (1855-56), *Spring* (1856-59), and *The Vale of Rest* (1858). These paintings are visually distinct from his earlier work. Yet, in examining Millais’s use of landscape and other elements in these later works, I will highlight their Pre-Raphaelite tendencies, situating them in context so that they will still be understood as characteristic of the avant-garde and also modern. Similar to his method of utilizing landscape and symbolism in *Ophelia* and *Portrait of John Ruskin*, in these later paintings Millais again employs both elements in a unique fashion to elicit a psychological response from the viewer of the painting. This concept recalls Millais’s earlier avant-garde characteristics found in his paintings from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood period.

Millais began painting *The Blind Girl* (fig. 12) in the autumn of 1854 and, more so than the other above-mentioned paintings, it carries a number of Pre-Raphaelite tendencies worthy of being considered avant-garde. The first avant-garde and Pre-Raphaelite tendency of Millais with *The Blind Girl* is seen in his initial approach to the landscape. Similar to *Ophelia* and *Portrait of John Ruskin*, Millais began painting the landscape first. He nearly completed the background of
the painting before adding in the figures. As seen in previous works by Millais, this scenario created some ambiguity in the painting, but it also allowed for Millais to focus on particular natural elements found within the landscape. For example, he took great pains to accurately and precisely depict the vegetation and flora directly beside and around the two figures. This enhances the dramatic effect of the painting as will be discussed momentarily. On the more mature figure, a beautiful butterfly stands out against her shawl. Millais likely used precise detail to paint the butterfly found against what appears to be a more hastily painted shawl to capture the viewer’s gaze and allow for further symbolism—perhaps connecting the butterfly to the human soul.\(^\text{4}\) Other elements included for their symbolism are the magnificent double-rainbow, indicative of God’s covenant with all living things, as well as the ravens that serve as harbingers of death, again noting the figures’ ultimate demise.\(^\text{5}\) Such inclusions recall Millais’s symbolism meant to suggest notions of life and death found in his previous Pre-Raphaelite paintings. For the figures that are assumed to be sisters, Millais had two young females, Matilda Proudfoot and Isabella Nicol, be his models.\(^\text{6}\) As mentioned previously regarding Millais’s painting of *Ophelia*, Millais preferred to use friends and family as models. At the Royal Academy, models were available for artists to paint as needed.\(^\text{7}\) Yet, for Millais to personally select his models allowed for a more intimate, and unconventional approach in his painting. In depicting the sisters, Millais

\(^4\) Jason Rosenfeld and Allison Smith, *Millais*, 102. This suggestion of Millais’s intended symbolism in including the butterfly was first suggested by Allison Smith.


\(^6\) Allen Lane, ed., *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: The Tate Gallery, 1984), 134. Both of the young females were chosen as models by Millais’s wife, Effie. They were previous acquaintances of Effie, and Millais would also use them again as models in his later painting, *Autumn Leaves*.

\(^7\) Even further, artist and sitter rarely were acquainted. This formality dates back the time of Joshua Reynolds. As Penny Notes, “In most cases Reynolds had no prior knowledge of the character of his sitters. Indeed, he may not have always known their names, for some were first entered into his pocked book as ‘a lady’ or a ‘stranger.’” Nicholas Penny, ed., *Reynolds* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), 17.
painted their garments in rather brilliant contrasting colors. In fact, throughout the painting Millais frequently contrasted bright colors. This is also reminiscent of his contrasting of local colors to create luminosity in the previously discussed painting, *Ophelia*.

Although these Pre-Raphaelite tendencies recall Millais’s earlier paintings, *The Blind Girl* is still visually divergent from his earlier work. This is primarily because Millais enhances the effects of the landscape to further elicit a psychological response. For instance, although the foreground vegetation of the painting is hyper-detailed and allows for emphasis on the natural elements, Millais utilizes a freer handling of paint in the middle ground of the painting. Meanwhile, in the distance it appears a storm has just passed and a double rainbow shines luminously against the dark clouds. Millais utilizes bright contrasting colors to depict the green grass against the sky and the magnificent rainbow, but he does not grant as much attention to detail with these elements as is seen in his previous paintings. As a result, in utilizing hyper-detailing in the foreground, but not necessarily in the landscape background, Millais allows for the landscape to evoke a mood versus being a mere transcript of truth to nature. This deliberate action on the part of Millais is indicative of his lessening in his “Ruskinian” ideals that stressed “truth to nature”. Yet, it is important to note that this is not equivalent to the more traditional approach of Academic artists in previously mentioned paintings where landscape is generalized and subsidiary. On the contrary, in Millais’s painting, the landscape (although depicted in varying degrees of attention) depicts a specific locale. Millais spent several months in Winchelsea in East Sussex painting his landscape *en plein air* for *The Blind Girl*, and although he slightly enhanced the effects of the double-rainbow, it is noted that he actually witnessed the fleeting meteorological effect.  

Thus, unlike Millais’s previous paintings where he depicted all

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Millais was possibly influenced to depict the phenomena of rainbows because of his admiration for the celebrated British landscape artist, John Constable (1776-1837). This is because Constable depicted a rainbow in his
of nature with utmost fidelity, here Millais has taken liberties to enhance the background landscape to create a more emotional effect. Just as the blind girl utilizes her available senses—touching the grass, smelling the rain, and feeling the warm sun on her face—so too the landscape possess the viewer of the painting with a sense of awe. The achieved psychological impact is similar to the one evoked in Millais’s previous paintings, but here Millais approaches it, albeit still through his use of landscape, in a novel manner. For such a psychological element to still be persistent in Millais’s work indicates his continued avant-garde tendencies.

Meanwhile the subject of the painting is unique to Millais in that it does not depict a biblical scene or one taken from literature, as was typically the case with his Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Instead, the painting depicts a rather modern subject. The blind girl and her sister are shown in the foreground and center of the composition. In this noticeable position and upon further review, one notices that their clothes are dirty and unkempt. By placing them so prominently, Millais seems to be making a social commentary on the blind as well as the poor. Such subject matter was quite novel in Victorian art and perceived as modern. In fact, The Blind Girl was the first of Millais’s paintings after his Pre-Raphaelite years to be described as

9 Prettejohn, The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites, 92. Prettejohn argues that this subject matter was perceived as modern not only because of the novel material that was being presented, but also because the subject matter was quite serious compared to earlier light-hearted genre scenes. Modern paintings addressed sobering issues such as those that were poverty-stricken, sick, or handicapped. They did not simply gloss over the unappealing aspects of life.
This term in Victorian art essentially describes a painting that is religious without being doctrinaire.\textsuperscript{11}

Another of Millais’s paintings also considered by many Victorian viewers as “pathetic” was his \textit{Autumn Leaves} (fig. 13). Similar to \textit{The Blind Girl}, Millais includes many of his Pre-Raphaelite tendencies in this painting and utilizes landscape in such a manner so as to imbed his paintings with an evocation of mood. This notion of evoking a certain mood heightens the psychological intensity of the work and recalls the avant-garde tendencies discussed in Millais’s previous paintings. In beginning the painting, Millais focused primarily on the landscape. Similar to with \textit{Ophelia} and \textit{Portrait of John Ruskin} as well as \textit{The Blind Girl}, Millais gathered his observations and completed his landscape painting \textit{en plein air}. In fact, the exact location for the painting was a garden in Annat Lodge, Perth, Scotland, which was Millais’s new home after his marriage to Effie.\textsuperscript{12} The garden was full with deciduous trees and an apple orchard and allowed for magnificent views of the Arochar Alps, all of which are seen in his completed painting. Thus, Millais adhered to his Pre-Raphaelite approach in that he depicted an actual setting. Also true to his Pre-Raphaelite tendency of utilizing friends and family as models, Millais had Effie’s younger sisters, Alice and Sophie, as well as Matilda Proudfoot and Isabella Nicol—his models for \textit{The Blind Girl}—stand in as his figures to be painted. Millais indicated that he had chosen such models because their faces were beautiful and indicative of youth.\textsuperscript{13} As for hyper-detailing, similar to in \textit{The Blind Girl}, Millais uses it in varying degrees throughout the painting. In

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{10} Rosenfeld and Smith, \textit{Millais}, 102.
\bibitem{11} Rosenfeld and Smith, \textit{Millais}, 102.
\bibitem{12} Barringer, Rosenfeld, and Smith, \textit{Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde}, 160.
\end{thebibliography}
particular, the leaves in the foreground are depicted quite realistically and with detail. The poplar trees in the background are identifiable in their silhouettes against the twilight sky, but other natural elements seem to be more hastily drawn and not given as much artistic detail. This is likely because, as is seen with *The Blind Girl* and all the way back to *Ophelia* and the *Portrait of John Ruskin*, Millais utilized intense detail to draw the viewer’s attention to certain natural elements within the painting.

Just as vegetation and flora are emphasized and utilized in *Ophelia* to represent life and death, so too here are the leaves emphasized to symbolize the passing of time and, eventually, death. Furthermore, the young girls appear to be burning the leaves, perhaps ones that have fallen from the poplar trees, as smoke is shown rising from the pile. The smoke rising from the pile of leaves signifies a *vanitas* harkening back to Dutch still-life paintings that oftentimes included smoke or snuffed candles to suggest mortality or brevity. The young girls stand amongst the burning leaves as if to indicate that eventually all things, even the most vibrant humans, will ultimately face their deaths. Millais enhances this message by having two of the young girls, those on the left, dressed in clothes indicating their higher status, and alternatively, those on the right dressed in clothes noting their lower status. Thus Millais, similar to his approach in *The Blind Girl*, is likely making a social commentary about how all people, rich and poor, are subject to death.

Also similar to *The Blind Girl*, Millais’s freer handling of landscape in *Autumn Leaves* indicates a change from his earlier Pre-Raphaelite paintings, such as *Ophelia* and *Portrait of John Ruskin* where every depiction of vegetation and flora is depicted with utmost fidelity. In this later painting and particularly in the middle ground, Millais executes the handling of

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landscape in a more hastily drawn manner. Where before the natural elements were decipherable, here they exist more as groupings of unidentifiable plants. Upon further examination, however, it becomes possible to see how Millais utilized this change to inject his painting with a degree of somberness. Millais likely displaced all attention from the vegetation and instead enhanced the essence of the sunset landscape to create a profound effect as opposed to a literal transcription.\textsuperscript{15} Although he did paint the landscape out of doors and spent a great amount of time doing so, Millais likely exaggerated the effects of the twilight to further add to the symbolism of the painting. In a letter to Pre-Raphaelite artist, F.G. Stephens, Millais explains that paintings such as \textit{Autumn Leaves}, “are really more difficult to paint than any other, as they are not to be achieved by faithful attention to nature, such effects are transient and occur so rarely that the rendering becomes a matter of feeling and recollection.”\textsuperscript{16} Thus, Millais seems to rely on his senses versus his strict observations from nature to complete the landscape. Yet, ultimately a similar psychological effect is achieved. With this in mind, the twilight of the painting seems to suggest a passing day—the warm sun has disappeared and soon the cold, still night will set in. Impressionist artists would further explore this effect of painting at sunrise and sunset some twenty years later. The term for such painting would be called, \textit{effets de soir}, and would be practiced by artist Armand Guillamin in his \textit{Sunset at Ivry} (fig. 14). In drawing such a

\textsuperscript{15} There are no previous paintings of sunsets by Millais to utilize in comparison and to support the claim that he enhanced the effects of sunset. I make this claim based on evidence that he enhanced the effects of the rainbow-filled sky in his previous painting, \textit{The Blind Girl}. It is noted that he originally painted the double-rainbow incorrectly. In its original version, Millais painted the order of the colors similar in each arc. A writer in the \textit{Art Journal} of 1856 noted, however, that the weaker arc should be in reverse order. Millais, acknowledging his faulty depiction, altered the painting after its original exhibition at the Royal Academy. This suggests that Millais enhanced elements from nature in his painting, as opposed to depicting them with fidelity. With this in mind, I am putting forth the idea that with \textit{Autumn Leaves}, despite Millais’s painting out of doors, he similarly began to enhance the effects of nature for a more symbolic purpose. For information on Millais’s altering the image of the double-rainbow in the \textit{Blind Girl} see Lane, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelites}, 134-36.

\textsuperscript{16} John Everett Millais to F.G. Stephens, dated ‘Sunday’. The letter is located in the F.G. Stephens Papers Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
comparison it not only becomes possible to see how Millais might have influenced later artistic movements, but it also demonstrates Millais’s progressive thinking years before such notable avant-garde artists as the Impressionists.

Another element that Millais utilized within his later painting that recalls Pre-Raphaelite tendencies is his use of symbolism. Along with the burning pile of dead leaves and the twilit sky, Millais included some subtler, yet celestial symbols. The most clearly religious of these is the apple that the young girl on the far right holds. She grasps the apple tightly in her right hand and stares blankly downwards just beyond the pile of burning leaves. The apple in her hand likely indicates the fall of man and suggests that all are subject to sin and will suffer death and judgment. Similarly indicating death, just beyond the young females and to the left is a faint silhouette of a man holding a scythe. The scythe, a tool for farming, is quickly associated with dying and the Christian belief of Death as the harvester of souls.

Millais’s inclusion of such symbols along with the depiction of the four young females in the somber landscape was perplexing to many and in result caused quite a sensation. In fact, the ambiguous subject matter of *Autumn Leaves* was initially quite bothersome to Victorian viewers, and the painting was met with mixed reviews. A man from Lancashire commissioned the painting, but after having owned the painting for just a few short weeks, he grew to dislike it and promptly sold it to a collector in Liverpool. As for its public reception, critics were so astounded by Millais’s new approach to painting and lack of clear subject, that they were unsure what to think of the work. Millais’s lack of subject matter was likely not the only element of the painting that was confusing to viewers. Millais also applied a much more somber and dull palette.

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than had been previously seen in his work. For example, with *Ophelia*, not only did Millais apply brilliant pigments throughout, but the painting also exudes a general brightness (likely a result of utilizing the wet-white ground technique.) With *Autumn Leaves*, however, Millais completed the painting with relatively darker pigments. It is possible that this can be thought of as Millais’s turning to a more traditional approach within his painting. Previously, Millais and other Pre-Raphaelites had detested the more traditional technique of under-painting in earth tones or “dead-coloring.”19 Yet, Millais’s palette here is not intended to suggest earth tones, or even to utilize *chiaroscuro*. Instead, Millais used darker tones throughout, and especially within the landscape and effects of twilight, to elicit a certain mood and enhance the somberness of the painting. To that degree, Millais’s attempt to imbue the painting with a more symbolic meaning through the use of landscape recalls his earlier avant-garde tendencies.

Millais’s next work, *Spring* (fig. 15), was met with even more criticism than *The Blind Girl* and *Autumn Leaves*. This was likely because, at first glance, Millais’s approach to this painting appears to have diverged even further from that of his earlier Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Yet, upon further review of *Spring*, it becomes possible to see the ways in which Millais included many Pre-Raphaelite tendencies to present a complex, yet evocative painting. In the painting, eight young women are shown in an orchard partaking in what appears to be a tea party. Yet, after observation one notices that the young women are actually dressed as milkmaids and are pouring milk for one another. Low and wide, the painting is in landscape format, something Millais had not worked with since *Ophelia*. Similar to Millais’s Pre-Raphaelite painting, as well, the composition of the painting is rather cramped, almost claustrophobic. The

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19 Penny, *Reynolds*, 56. Again, this traditional method of “dead-coloring” dates back to the foundation of the Royal Academy. In fact, it is noted that Reynolds almost always prepared his composition in “dead-color”, or a cool monochrome under painting. Reynolds was inspired to do such in his own work after having seen this practice in the work of Corregio and Titian.
figures of the young females are situated in the foreground of the painting, protruding into the viewer’s space. Behind them, cherry blossoms are in full bloom and occupy the entire landscape. Also recalling Ophelia, only a small area of the blue sky can be seen in the upper section of the painting, granting the viewer a fleeting peek of the world beyond the orchard.

Thus, Millais presents the viewer with an overwhelmingly complex composition, and in doing so forces the viewer to observe the young females in the foreground and, simultaneously, the cherry blossoms in the landscape. As a result they are symbolically and formally equated to one another—both the trees and the young females are blossoming and budding. The notion of the young females in the prime of their youth is further suggested by their pouring milk for one another since this suggests fertility. Again, as with The Blind Girl, the flora in the foreground and the cherry blossoms in the background are shown with a varying degree of detail. Although, overall, they are painted in a somewhat freer style than in Millais’s earlier works, the flowers in the figures’ hair and beside them are still recognizable as purple and yellow violets, lilacs, and gentian flowers.20 As a result, they can be interpreted as symbols of life and vivacity, further allowing for a comparison of the young, beautiful females to the blossoming flowers and trees that, although they are plentiful in their beauty now, will surely wither and die. This is implicit as well in the title of the painting, Spring. In recalling the title of Autumn Leaves, Millais is continuing a theme of equating female beauty with natural and human mortality, as well as flowering and re-birth.21

Again, as with all the paintings previously mentioned, Millais used acquaintances as models for the figures in the painting. Alice and Sophie Gray, Effie’s younger sisters, posed for


21 Rosenfeld and Smith, Millais, 136.
several of the figures. Each of the young females is depicted rather plainly and truthfully, although they each posses attractive characteristics about them. Most notable, however, is the young female on the far right of the canvas. Not only is she depicted in brilliant gold clothing, but she also stares directly out at the viewer, while ever so slightly clamping her mouth on a blade of grass. The viewer’s attention is drawn to her, and, just as quickly as one locks eyes with her, one too notice the large blade of a scythe that rests on the ground just above and behind her. This inclusion of the scythe serves as a *memento mori*, or symbol of mortality, as does the scythe in *Autumn Leaves*.

Similar to *Autumn Leaves*, the combination of beautiful youth and symbols of mortality allows the painting to have a rather perplexing meaning, and thus it was not initially a success. The ambiguity of the subject matter, along with Millais’s technical approach, caused the painting to be received rather negatively, in fact. John Ruskin was merciless in his criticism of the painting, stating that Millais had depicted a “fierce” and “rigid” orchard.\(^{22}\) Even Millais’s wife, Effie, remarked in her journal that it was the “most unfortunate” of his paintings.\(^{23}\) Although Millais’s handling of the paint becomes freer in *Spring*, it still carries many of the Pre-Raphaelite attributes for which *Ophelia* is so heralded—specifically Millais’s utilizing the background landscape as a symbol, or rather a metaphor in itself. Thus, *Spring* is far from a travesty within Millais’s career and should be celebrated as a continuation of Millais’s artistic genius and creativity. This is especially the case when it is considered along with its intended pendant, *The Vale of Rest*.

\(^{22}\) Rosenfeld, *John Everett Millais*, 106.

\(^{23}\) Lane, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 171.
In the painting, *The Vale of Rest* (fig.16), two nuns are shown in a cemetery digging a grave. Compared to *Spring*, where mortality is implied, here it is explicit. The title of the painting suggests a final resting place. As with *Autumn Leaves* and *Spring* where Millais continues his theme of female beauty and mortality, here a similar notion is implied, but with the depiction of the nuns in a graveyard. Although the paintings seem, at first glance, unrelated, Millais’s including them as pendant paintings illustrates his desire for them to considered in respect to one another. Thus, in creating this painting where the central theme is death, Millais utilized familiar Pre-Raphaelite tendencies. Similar to *Ophelia* and *Spring*, the painting is low and wide and in landscape format. Again, the figures are found in the foreground of the painting, protruding into the viewer’s space. This is heightened by Millais’s visually cutting off the figures at their feet. Both elements essentially situate the viewer in the scene with the nuns, almost as if they have just stumbled upon the nuns in the act of digging someone’s grave. The nun on the right stares out at the viewer, and grasps a rosary, at the end of which is a symbolic skull. To her right are two funerary wreaths, further indicating the task at hand. The nun on the left is shown in mid-swing of her shovel, with her sleeves pushed upwards while her cornette swings in unison. Figures in motion were quite rare for Millais’s compositions, and thus indicates Millais’s constant creativity within his work.²⁴ Even further, the nun’s action and appearance are not idealized at all. Veins can be seen on the forearms of the nun in motion, this being considered a rather unpleasant attribute to many Victorian viewers.²⁵ In fact, the painting received negative criticism due to the portrayal of both nuns. Millais had to re-work the nun on the right who, initially, members of the Royal Academy had referred to as “ugly”, and similarly the nun on the


²⁵ This is reminiscent of the visible vein in the arm of Joseph in Millais’s painting *Christ in the House of his Parents*, for which Millais received enormous criticism because he depicted a member of the Holy Family in such a realistic manner.
left who was considered “ungainly”. Perhaps Millais intended to depict the nuns in such a manner to make their undertaking, the digging of graves, and the reality of the situation of death, felt more strongly by the viewer.

Millais also utilized the landscape in *The Vale of Rest* in the same manner as discussed in *Autumn Leaves*. In both paintings, Millais depicts the scene occurring at twilight, alluding to notions of death and dying. In the *Vale of Rest*, poplar trees create a strong silhouette against the sky at sunset. In the distance, a church tower is visible, perhaps serving as a warning to viewers of the importance of attending church before imminent death. The twilight, trees, and bell tower in the landscape again appeal to the senses of the viewer. Yet, there is a stillness about it. When observing the painting one can almost feel the cool air that begins to set in as the sun disappears and similarly hear the echo of the bells from the church tower as it chimes. The trees appear calm and still against the twilit sky. Yet the effect is fleeting and, indeed, hints at the transience of this captured moment and of life itself.

The landscapes found in *The Vale of Rest* and the other above-mentioned paintings play a substantial role in imbedding Millais’s later works with a somber mood and psychological aspect. Again, such elements are traditionally not found within Academic work, and signify Millais’s avant-garde tendencies, particularly within his use of landscape. As a result, Millais distinguished himself as a noticeable, modern artist existing outside of the Pre-Raphaelite realm. Millais’s continued explorations in landscape inevitably influenced secondary Pre-Raphaelite artists as well. This influence, a new direction in utilizing landscape set into motion by Millais, is the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER THREE
Millais’s Influence on Later
Pre-Raphaelite Artists and the Somber Landscape

Although Millais’s works painted directly after 1854 were met with mixed reviews, they would eventually serve as a source of great inspiration to later Pre-Raphaelite artists. As previously discussed, critics initially condemned Millais’s evolving style when he began to stray from his strict Pre-Raphaelite ideals. This was particularly the case with Millais’s *Autumn Leaves*.¹ Yet, despite the painting’s initially having been rejected by its intended buyer and also its receiving of indifferent reviews from critics, it eventually was heralded as one of Millais’s masterpieces—albeit one that exemplified his changed style. This was likely because the painting had considerable appeal to the Victorian public in the late 1850s and early 1860s. So much so that a wood engraving of the painting was published in the *Illustrated London News* in 1856, and it was on display at exhibitions in Manchester in 1857, Edinburgh and Liverpool in 1858, and London in 1862.² This indicates that Millais’s changed style, although initially perplexing to critics, not only intrigued Victorian viewers, but also likely influenced many of Millais’s contemporaries.

Thus, in this chapter, I will demonstrate how Millais’s manner of utilizing landscape in his paintings to imbed his work with a particular mood, as is seen in *Autumn Leaves* and other works directly after 1854, influenced later Pre-Raphaelite artists’ works as well. This genealogy

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is important to study because it provides concrete evidence for the notion of Millais as an avant-garde artist who directly influenced later artists. At this point, however, it is important to note that I am not arguing that the artists influenced by Millais’s work were necessarily avant-garde themselves. Instead, in continuing my argument of Millais as an avant-garde artist, I will demonstrate how he directly influenced a handful of later Pre-Raphaelite artists in their utilization of landscape in a manner that was reminiscent of Millais’s earlier, unconventional approach to painting. In proving this, I will discuss several works, focusing on the use of landscape in each painting, and illustrate how artists followed Millais’s technique of employing landscape to produce within their paintings a profound meaning and somber effect. The Pre-Raphaelite artists and paintings to be discussed will include Henry Wallis’s *The Stonebreaker* (1857), William Dyce’s *Pegwell Bay, A Recollection of October 5th* (1858-60) and *The Man of Sorrows* (1860), and Arthur Hughes’s *The Knight of the Sun* (1860). In each of these paintings there is a recognizable influence from Millais in the ways in which the artists have utilized landscape to evoke within their paintings a particular mood. The mood, like Millais’s previously mentioned work, is somber in tone. Thus, it is possible to draw a visual connection between his work and later Pre-Raphaelite paintings as well.

In Wallis’s *The Stonebreaker* (fig. 17), several elements within the landscape can be seen as directly influenced by Millais’s own use of landscape. The painting depicts the rather contemporary subject of a stonebreaker at the end of a workday. French artist, Gustave Courbet, who had exhibited his painting, *Stonebreakers*, at the Paris Salon in 1851 and again at the “Pavillion of Realism” at the *Exposition Universelle* in 1855, had approached the same subject.³ Wallis, an artist still situated within the Pre-Raphaelite realm and likely familiar with the work of

Courbet, perhaps took it upon himself to paint his own Pre-Raphaelite version of the subject.⁴ Wallis’s painting depicts a male stonebreaker, of about middle age, slumped downwards after presumably a rigorous day’s work. He appears to be resting, or perhaps sleeping, but upon further review one notices that he is actually deceased. A stoat is shown crawling across the deceased stonebreaker’s boot indicating his lifelessness. Further provoking empathy from the viewer, Wallis included an inscription on the frame from Alfred Tennyson’s poem “A Dirge” (1830). The line reads, “Now is done thy long day’s work.”⁵ Inclusion of such text within the painting is reminiscent of earlier works by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as many of the artists, Millais especially, expressed interest in the work of Tennyson.⁶ This element, along with Wallis’s select attention to detail and specificity of time and place, suggest more Pre-Raphaelite tendencies. Yet, the overwhelming compassion exuding from the painting derives primarily from Wallis’s use of landscape—a direct influence from Millais.

The same manner in which Millais utilizes landscape in his previous paintings, particularly in Autumn Leaves, to instill his paintings with a somber mood suggesting death and the transience of life, can be seen in Wallis’s Stonebreaker. In the painting, just as the stonebreaker’s life has come to an end, so too has the day, as indicated by the setting sun. Utilizing the same twilight effect seen in paintings by Millais, Wallis is able to create silhouettes of the trees and vegetation found behind and around the stonebreaker. The silhouettes of the trees enhance the effect of the twilight and also generate a feeling of bareness within the painting. The

⁴ Julian Treuherz, Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art, (London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd. 1987), 37. Wallis studied at the Royal Academy but also attended the École des Beaux-Arts and the studio of Gleyre in Paris, at which point he likely became aware of Courbet’s painting.


⁶ One of Millais’s most celebrated Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood paintings, Mariana (1851), depicts a subject taken from the work of Tennyson.
stonebreaker appears to be situated amongst the rocks from his labor and also leaves from the surrounding trees. In emphasizing the landscape and the natural elements, Wallis simultaneously insinuates the ultimate demise of the stonebreaker and the natural elements around him. Wallis even depicts his painting of the stonebreaker in colors that are reminiscent of Millais’s *Autumn Leaves*. The yellow, orange, green, and purple tones in the sky and in the river’s reflection suggest fall or autumn, thus the viewer is reminded of the passing of seasons and time. Another interesting element within the painting that leads to a slight ambiguity in differentiating between the figure of the stonebreaker and the natural elements is the way Wallis depicted the stonebreaker’s clothes in an almost leaf-pattern with colors suggestive of the leaves and vegetation surrounding him. This approach is reminiscent to that of Millais in his painting *Ophelia* where the dress of Ophelia mimics the vegetation and nettles around the tree found in the background of the painting. In *Ophelia*, Millais was likely attempting to equate the figure of Ophelia and her fate with the vegetation surrounding it, suggesting ultimately that both will wither and die. Similarly, Wallis is likely suggesting that the deceased stonebreaker will eventually decompose and become part of the natural world in which he is found. In this way, both artists, Millais first and Wallis subsequently, utilize landscape backgrounds and natural elements to insinuate notions of death and dying and the transience of life.

William Dyce (1806-1864) was another later Pre-Raphaelite artist who utilized landscape in a manner similar to Millais to suggest within his paintings the essence of time and the brevity of human life. This is found in his painting, *Pegwell Bay, Kent—A Recollection of October 5th, 1858* (fig. 18). The painting, like Wallis’s *Stonebreaker*, exhibited many Pre-Raphaelite tendencies, but the overall effect of the painting is achieved through Dyce’s utilization of landscape that clearly draws direct influence from the work of Millais. True to Pre-Raphaelite
form, the painting denotes a specificity of place and time, as is demonstrated in the painting’s title. Dyce began his painting while on a family vacation to Ramsgate, and although his family is depicted in a frieze-like manner across the foreground, the painting is dominated by landscape. As a result, Dyce is able to utilize the landscape to elicit a poignant effect for the viewer. The first element to be considered that is likely an influence from Millais, is the depiction of the clouds and sky. Dyce depicts, in the background to the left, glimmering pink clouds suggesting a sunset or twilight and reminiscent of Millais’s *Autumn Leaves*. Even more, above the clouds and to the right, a comet is shown soaring across the sky. This comet is actually Donati’s comet, first observed by G.B. Donati on June 2, 1858, but recorded to have been at its brightest on the date indicated in the painting’s title. Comets are typically considered bad omens, but in this instance Dyce likely included the comet to signify advancements of science in the Victorian period. Such advancements included explorations in astronomy as well as geology. This is further suggested by the figures in the foreground and background that are shown collecting fossils. Thus, in his depiction of the sunset and Donati’s comet along with the figures collecting fossils, Dyce simultaneously suggests a specific event but also the passing of geological time. This concept enhances notions of the vastness of the world in which humans are found, yet also emphasizes their transience and fragility within that world.

This suggestion of fragility and concision of human life within a vast environment is reminiscent of a similar concept found within Millais’s previously discussed *Portrait of John Ruskin*. In Millais’s portrait of the critic, the precise depiction of and emphasis on the rock formations suggests the essence of time. Millais was likely inclined to paint the rocks with such

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8 Lane, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 183.
detail because, as mentioned previously, Ruskin had argued in his own writings that paintings of rocks documented the present, suggested a geological past, and hinted at ultimate destruction. It appears as if Dyce has taken a similar approach to Millais in his handling of the rock formations, and in doing so instills his painting with a similar notion of the essence of time—present, past, and future destruction. Dyce, like Millais in his painting of John Ruskin, took great pains to accurately depict the strata in the rocks in the landscape. Interestingly, Dyce also grants about as much attention to detail in his depiction of the figures in the foreground. As I have argued about a number of Millais’s previous paintings, in depicting both the figures and landscape in detail, Millais places a particular emphasis on the figures and the landscape at once, allowing for a comparison of their relation to one another. Similarly, with Dyce’s painting his figures in the foreground in great detail it draws attention to the figures’ garments. Jason Rosenfeld comments on how the figures’ garments, especially those of the figures in the middle and far right, exhibit horizontal and vertical stripes, striated like the chalk cliffs in the background. Yet the geological formations and humans are obviously not of one element, and as a result, Dyce is drawing a visual contrast between the figures and the landscape. In doing so he implicates the figures’ brevity and fragility within their surrounding environment.

William Dyce again employs this same method of evoking a mood within a painting by situating a figure within a particular environment in his painting, *The Man of Sorrows* (fig.19). The painting, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy along with *Pegwell Bay*, depicts Jesus amidst a rocky and barren landscape—albeit it is more reminiscent of Scottish scenery than the desert of Judea. Depicting Christ as the Man of Sorrows, as the title indicates, is a tradition that

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9 Lane, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 65.

stems from the thirteenth century, particularly in Northern Europe, when such representations were used as iconic devotional images. In more traditional portrayals, Christ is depicted half-nude and from the waist up, displaying his wounds on his hands and feet, wearing a crown of thorns, and surrounded by angels. In Dyce’s rendition, however, Christ’s inward agony is conveyed not through his wounds, but through his solemn expression and Dyce’s utilization of landscape. Similar to Millais’s representation of his figures in *Ophelia* and *Portrait of John Ruskin*, and in his handling of the two young females in *The Blind Girl*, Dyce paints the figure of Christ so that he is situated within his landscape background, but there is also a disconnect about it. This is primarily because Millais utilized a freer handling to depict Christ adorned in bright garments. Meanwhile, he is situated amongst a highly detailed landscape depicted in more neutral and somber tones. Also similar to Millais in his paintings of *Ophelia* and *John Ruskin*, Dyce has completed the natural elements within the landscape with a great deal of attention and veracity. As a result, Dyce places emphasis on the natural elements surrounding the seated figure of Christ allowing the landscape to become the carrier of meaning. This signals a reverse from previously-discussed, more traditional paintings found in the Royal Academy, where attention to detail is predominantly applied to the centrally placed figure. Yet, as is seen in Millais’s paintings, the landscape is capable of becoming the carrier of meaning and an intended mood. The surrounding environment is vast, uninviting, and callous, and through this one can assume Dyce’s intentions were to make a commentary on the difficulties of a thriving Christianity in a contemporary world. Similar to in his other painting, *Pegwell Bay*, in depicting Christ in a rocky landscape, Dyce is likely referencing recent scientific advancements in geology. Christ can

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11 James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall Inc., 2005), 69-70.

12 Lane, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 186
be seen as a symbol of Christianity enduring in a period where geology seemed to be threatening the authority of the Bible.\textsuperscript{13} Dyce was a devout Christian and in many of his works made references to the state of Christianity in a modern world. Dyce’s \textit{Man of Sorrows} along with his \textit{Pegwell Bay} succeeded in doing so, but in both works Dyce also employed landscape in a similar manner to Millais in that he utilized landscape to evoke within his paintings a profound message that reached viewers on a psychological level.

Another artist who included elements of Christianity within his work as well as utilized landscape in a manner that exhibits direct influence from Millais was Arthur Hughes (1832-1915). In Hughes’s painting, \textit{The Knight of the Sun} (fig. 20), there are many elements within the artist’s use of landscape that are reminiscent of Millais’s work. In fact, it has been noted that Hughes’s initial inspiration for the painting stemmed from his admiration for Millais’s \textit{Autumn Leaves}.\textsuperscript{14} Hughes’s painting, however, approaches an entirely different subject than that of Millais’s painting. \textit{The Knight of the Sun} depicts a knight, whose badge was a sun and who had led a Christian life, shortly before his own death. The knight is shown being carried through the woods by his guards because his dying wish is to see the setting sun one last time. Thus, the scene takes place at twilight as the effects of the setting sun are vibrantly displayed within the painting. The brilliant colors of the twilight are seen in the upper right hand corner of the painting. The purple, pink, blue, and yellow tones are reminiscent of paintings by Millais, such as \textit{Autumn Leaves} and even \textit{The Vale of Rest}, and also of other paintings inspired by Millais, such as Wallis’s \textit{Stonebreaker}. The Pre-Raphaelite scholar, Allen Staley, notes specifically how the reflection of the setting sun in the river was clearly inspired by Wallis’s \textit{Stonebreaker}, but

\textsuperscript{13} Lane, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelites} 186.

behind both pictures lay Millais’s *Autumn Leaves*. Furthermore, the reflection of a church
tower in the water is a reminder of the church tower visible in both *Autumn Leaves* and *The Vale of Rest*, and as in those paintings and perhaps here as well, serves as a reminder of the
importance of attending church before death. Thus, the inclusion of the sunset in the landscape of
*The Knight of the Sun* visually reminds us of Millais’s works and other works inspired by
Millais’s use of landscape.

Like Millais in his above-mentioned works, Hughes depicts elements within the
landscape with varying degrees of attention and detail so as to allow the viewer to focus on
certain areas of the painting. For example, Hughes paints the forest with painstaking attention to
detail, drawing the viewer’s attention to the foreground. Meanwhile, the clothes of the figures are
brightly colored and reminiscent of the setting sun. Likely the intended effect is to demonstrate
the sun’s reflection onto the figures and the knight, especially, given the depiction of the sun on
their garments and the knight’s shield. In doing so it visually correlates the figures with the
setting sun in the distance. This is particularly the case with the dying knight who is shown in a
brilliant red garment and with the sun’s reflection shining on his face. In this way, similar to
what Millais had done in his previously discussed works, Hughes utilizes the landscape to equate
the setting sun with the figures in the foreground, especially that of the knight, to symbolize
impending death. As a result, the setting sun indicates the passing of time and the brevity of
human life.

Thus, through an examination of each of the above-mentioned paintings, it becomes
possible to see the direct influence that Millais’s unique use of landscape in his paintings had on
other artists who directly followed him. This is particularly the case with artists such as Wallis,

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15 Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 87.
Dyce, and Hughes, as they were all artists within the Pre-Raphaelite realm and would have been well aware of and exposed to the work of Millais. Millais’s influence on them, particularly in his alternative manner of utilizing landscape, proves that Millais was an avant-garde artist who inspired many artists after him. In further exploring this argument, it is also worth considering artists that Millais inspired who were outside of the Pre-Raphaelite realm as well. I intend to consider one example of such an artist who was not considered a Pre-Raphaelite but was clearly influenced by their work, especially that of Millais. This was the Victorian Social Realist painter, Frederick Walker. I believe that in his paintings, again, particularly through his use of landscape, a strong correlation can be made between his work and the later work of Millais. Thus, the use of landscape in paintings by Walker, and his perceived influence from the paintings of Millais is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR
Landscape as a Metaphor in the Work of Frederick Walker

Frederick Walker (1840-75) was a Victorian Social Realist, who, despite being an artist outside of the Pre-Raphaelite realm, exhibited in his own work a direct influence from Millais’s use of landscape. In this context, Millais’s influence is significant because it substantiates the notion of Millais as an avant-garde artist because he continued to influence many artists after him. In exploring this, attention will be given to Walker’s use of landscape within his paintings, as this is where the influence is notable. Other elements within the painting will be explored as well, since they too exhibit an influence from the work of Millais and oftentimes work in unison with the landscape to convey a deeper meaning. Frederick Walker’s two most celebrated paintings, *The Vagrants* (1868) and *The Harbour of Refuge* (1872), will be the central focus in this chapter. In these paintings, Walker utilized landscape to create a somber mood and to heighten the effective symbolism within the painting. Exploration of the landscapes found within these paintings will uncover the fact that Millais served as a great source of inspiration, and a leader of sorts, in the multiple facets of utilizing landscape to imbed paintings with a more profound meaning. Yet, Walker gathered such influence and resituated into his own Victorian Social Realist paintings.

Frederick Walker began to mature within his artistic practice in the late 1850s and early 1860s, at nearly the same time Millais’s paintings were transitioning from a strict naturalism to displaying a more poetic and evocative manner. Walker, a student at the Royal Academy, seems to have been inspired by Millais’s later work. As a result, unlike many other Social Realists
artists whose paintings were influenced by the more “picturesque” and “pastoral” depictions of rural Britain, Walker instilled within his painting a more somber effect.\(^1\) Also like Millais, Walker learned primarily to paint by working directly from nature.\(^2\) Walker greatly admired the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Millais, and he aspired to paint out of doors and directly from nature at all times. It is noted that he painted out of doors even in the coldest winter months, and when the wind advanced, he would place his canvas flat on the ground and hold it down with stones so as to not interrupt his painting.\(^3\) Allen Staley remarks that Walker was the most interesting Social Realist artist in terms of Pre-Raphaelitism because of his approach to nature. He also noted that when the artist died at the young age of thirty-five it “snuffed out what some later nineteenth-century critics considered the most promising developments in English painting since Pre-Raphaelitism.”\(^4\) Thus, when observing paintings by Walker, it is possible to see how he was directly influenced by earlier notable artists who also appreciated painting out of doors and directly from nature, namely Millais.

The first of these paintings to be discussed is Walker’s *The Vagrants* (fig. 21). The painting depicts a group of five vagrants—two women, two boys, and a girl—around a fire. One of the women is seated and holding a baby close to her chest to protect the child from the, presumably, cold weather. Meanwhile, the other woman stares at the fire, as one of the boys throws sticks on it, and the other boy and girl embrace to keep warm. Just behind the figures, a wagon is shown with some tools and small objects, suggesting simultaneously the trade that


\(^3\) Staley, The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape, 177.

\(^4\) Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, 178.
likely once afforded a living to the group and, also, the minimal possessions they own. In terms of handling of the subject matter, Walker depicted the figures as well as the landscape in somewhat freer style than Millais. Yet, the depiction of the background and landscape is reminiscent of Millais’s earlier works, particularly *Autumn Leaves* and *The Vale of Rest*. The sky is made up of sun-enhanced tones—golds, pinks, and soft yellows—suggesting a twilight effect. The warm hues of the sky allow for the trees and shrubs to be silhouetted against it. This same effect is seen in Millais’s earlier works, and in all instances it gives the painting a feeling of austerity. As a result, the landscape utilized by Walker instills the painting with a melancholy mood that likely reflects that of the vagrants. Although the technical approach by Walker differs from that of Millais, by including such nuances as the sunlit sky and the barren vegetation in the background, the viewer is reminded of Millais’s paintings where landscape is utilized in a similar manner to evoke a melancholy mood.

This influence from Millais within the landscape is even further appreciated when observing other elements within the painting that also are indebted to Millais’s style. First, the composition of the figures is highly similar to the composition of the figures in Millais’s *Autumn Leaves*. The two embracing children’s stance mimics that of the two young females dressed in black in *Autumn Leaves*. The woman on the right, who gazes into the fire, recalls the young girl in *Autumn Leaves* who also stares into the fire while clutching an apple. Julian Treuherz notes how Walker ennobles the vagrants, providing them with a wistfulness that recalls *Autumn Leaves*.² As with Millais, Walker used a family member, his sister, to stand in as a model. In fact, Walker had attempted to find real gypsies to stand in for his other models but was unsuccessful. This approach by Walker in specifying his models, as with Millais, illustrates the sincerity

² Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 50.
Walker felt in accurately depicting his figures and their strife. Another element within the painting suggestive of Millais’s earlier work is the fire in the foreground. In both *Autumn Leaves* and *The Vagrants* the smoke from the fire is highlighted, acting as a sort of *memento mori*, or reminder of death. Specifically, the smoke alludes to the brevity of life by its suggestion of something that was once present but is no longer. In effect, the composition of the vagrants around the fire along with the dismal landscape suggests a direct influence from the work of Millais. Further, a similar mood is evoked, hinting at notions of death, dying, and the transience of life.

Walker more clearly implicated ideas pertaining to death, while still exhibiting an influence from Millais, in his later painting, *The Harbour of Refuge* (fig. 22). The painting depicts several figures in the courtyard of an almshouse. In the middle ground, around a large statue, elderly people are resting. Meanwhile in the foreground, a young woman assists an older woman, and to their right a young reaper wields a scythe. Several notions of death and dying are illustrated within the painting, but the landscape and background are prominent and exhibit an influence from Millais. In the sky, the sun is setting as the last glimpses of light are seen just barely behind the buildings and trees. This twilight effect in the landscape indicates the conclusion of the day and suggests the passing of time. The sky glows in a warm golden tone, but just as the light is fading on the horizon, so too will darkness set in. As with Millais’s earlier paintings, *Autumn Leaves* and *The Vale of Rest*, this indication of the passing day elicits a somber mood within the painting. Similarly, the outlines of the buildings and tower along with the silhouette effect of the trees create a sense of bareness. In contrast, the inclusion of a cherry blossom tree on the right edge of the painting suggests vivacity and life as is seen in Millais’s *Spring*. As a result, Walker utilizes the sky and natural elements in the landscape to elicit a
certain melancholy mood within the painting that hints at a more symbolic meaning. This approach to depicting the landscape is reminiscent of Millais’s earlier works, and similar to Walker’s other painting, *The Vagrants*. Yet, when examining other elements within the painting, this indebtedness to Millais becomes even more evident.

The representation of the figures and use of symbolism within *The Harbour of Refuge* also allude to perceptions of life versus death, thus recalling not only Millais’s *Autumn Leaves* and *Vale of Rest*, but also *Spring*. The elderly group of figures in the middle ground represents a strong contrast to the young male and female in the foreground. As the elderly people rest, the young remain active. The young female walks, acting as a support to an older woman by her side. Meanwhile the young male forcefully swings his scythe. This recalls the image of a man holding a scythe in *Autumn Leaves*, the isolated depiction of a scythe in *Spring*, as well as the action of the nun who digs the grave in *The Vale of Rest*. The notion of digging a grave is further enhanced by the shovel found on the brick wall in the central foreground of the painting. Other symbols within the painting include the cherry blossom, which suggests, as mentioned above, life and vivacity. On the near opposite side, however, a small black cat can be seen. This inclusion of the cat is representative of a bad omen and likely indicates impending death. Even the title of the painting, *The Harbour of Refuge*, suggests a final resting place. This reference in the title to a final haven is similar to and likely influenced by Millais’s own painting, *The Vale of Rest*. Such inclusions, along with the utilization of landscape, give the painting a melancholy mood suggesting life, but even more overwhelmingly, death.

As mentioned previously, Walker did not live a very long life, and as such his career and the number of paintings he produced was rather limited. His two paintings under discussion, however, *The Vagrants* and *The Harbour of Refuge*, achieved acclaim during his lifetime. In fact,
Walker was credited by many critics with initiating the representation of poignant pathos in landscape. Similarly, this was attributed to Millais nearly a decade previous when his paintings *The Blind Girl* and *Autumn Leaves* were deemed “pathetic”. Some years after Walker exhibited his painting *The Vagrants*, at the Royal Academy Millais began to paint strictly landscapes.

Millais’s first venture into pure landscape was a painting he completed in 1870 titled *Chill October* (fig. 23). In Millais’s landscape no figures are present, yet given the glimmering effect of the sunlit sky along with the wistful manner of the natural elements, one is able to associate it with the pathos conjured in *The Vagrants*. The scholar, Anne Helmreich, argues that Millais benefited by not including figures. She states how Millais’s landscape can “refer to larger ahistorical questions about the unending succession of the seasons and the possibility of finding grandeur and nobility within pathos and decline.” Ultimately, it seems as though this is what Millais was attempting to and did achieve all along. Essentially, within all of Millais’s paintings discussed within this essay, he intended for the landscape to serve as a carrier of meaning. With or without figures, the landscape almost always achieves this effect, although this concept becomes ever more tangible when considering a landscape such as *Chill October*. Helmreich describes Millais’s *Chill October* as a type of “singular tour-de-force in landscape painting” in that it substantiates the earlier work of Walker and other Victorian Social Realists. Thus, the effect, Millais’s influence within landscape over later artists of succeeding generations, comes full circle. Yet, in a circuitous manner it further serves to prove that Millais was continually innovative in his use of landscape. Although he possibly was stimulated by the work of Walker,

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Millais’s paintings represent the primary source of inspiration for the younger artist. Thus, Millais continually served as his own well of inspiration and innovation.
CONCLUSION

Although this essay begins by discussing John Everett Millais as a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, it ends—after having observed several of his later paintings and their influence on subsequent artists—by understanding Millais as a versatile artist whose oeuvre extends well beyond the confines of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Ultimately, through a thoughtful consideration of his unique use of landscape, Millais should be placed amongst the ranks of such celebrated British artists as John Constable and J.M.W. Turner. Although Millais’s paintings, particularly with his manner of employing landscape, were executed in a way markedly different from that of Constable and Turner, like both artists he succeeded in making considerable contributions to the overall vision of landscape painting in Britain. Millais’s use of landscape is often compared to that of Constable and Turner, which this essay has also demonstrated, and this places Millais in a succession of notable British artists who helped devise the ever-changing face of British landscape painting. As a result, despite Millais’s rapport with the Pre-Raphaelite realm, he should be celebrated for his significant advancements in the use of landscape, and the effect it had on later Victorian artists.

With the introduction of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848, Millais, along with other members of the movement, professed their avant-garde ideals. Although they did not know the artistic term at it is applied today, they nonetheless exhibited its tendencies in their own work. In so doing, Millais established himself as a beacon to other artists who did not want to conform to the exact ideals of the Academy, but who instead wished to venture on a road less
traveled in their artistic journey. At the lead, Millais traversed this road for some time, all the while receiving reinforcement from fellow Pre-Raphaelite brothers as well as the influential John Ruskin. It was at this time that Millais was able to begin unique critical practices in his use of landscape, an element within his paintings that would evolve throughout his entire artistic career. Although quite often (initially, at least) misunderstood, Millais ultimately succeeded in his battle against prevailing critics and the distinguished Royal Academy with paintings such as *Ophelia*. Yet, at the age of 24, he was still maturing in his artistic career and personal life. Thus in 1853, Millais further expanded in his career, leaving the confines of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and all it entailed, and returning to an institution he felt he could no longer eschew, the Royal Academy itself.

It is at this point in Millais’s oeuvre that many art historians believe his work becomes more traditional, or more specifically, that he abandons his Pre-Raphaelite tendencies. This is primarily because his transition from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to the Royal Academy is perceived as rather abrupt. As I have established this is a falsehood and should thus not serve to degrade the later work of Millais. Instead, Millais should be celebrated as a continually innovative and influential Victorian artist, regardless of his association with any organization. As I have demonstrated through an examination of Millais’s use of landscape in his work directly after 1854, Millais’s paintings continued to exhibit avant-garde tendencies and simultaneously influence surrounding artists. It was during this later phase in Millais’s career that he produced significant paintings such as *Autumn Leaves*, and through such works that he secured an identity for himself as a considerable artist outside of the Pre-Raphaelite realm. Furthermore, Millais’s later paintings greatly influenced several subsequent artists, particularly in their own manners of utilizing landscape. This is most vividly illustrated in works by
secondary Pre-Raphaelite artists, Henry Wallis, William Dyce, and Arthur Hughes. Even further, and nearly a decade later, this same direct influence was demonstrated in the work of Victorian Social Realist artist, Frederick Walker, through his utilization of landscape along with other elements.

Thus, Millais’s designation as a radical and influential artist should not be limited to his period in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Instead, he should be celebrated as a considerable Victorian artist who, in continuing his explorations in landscape painting, assisted in formulating the face of nineteenth-century British art, and all the while influencing artists of succeeding generations in their own use of landscape. Millais, in short, should not be understood as an artist who simply advanced in his Pre-Raphaelite years only to cease in innovation and influence. True, Millais began his artistic career by situating himself atop a platform of Pre-Raphaelite ideals and methods. At one point, it seemed he had nowhere else to go in his explorations except to back down. Yet, instead of envisioning Millais as Icarus, one who flew too close to the sun only to fall to the hard earth below, I envisage him as an artist who thoughtfully reevaluated his use of landscape. In doing so, Millais grew in exceptional talent, influenced several artists along the way, and incidentally, albeit gracefully, ended up in the place where he had begun.
REFERENCES


Rossetti, William M. “The Royal Academy Exhibition.” *Spectator* (April 26, 1851), 402-03.


ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Charles Eastlake, *The Escape of Francesco Novella di Carrara, with his Wife, from the Duke of Milan*, oil on canvas, 1850. Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 2. Charles Eastlake, *Salutation to the Aged Friar*, oil on canvas, 1840. Forbes Magazine Collection, New York.
Figure 3. Raphael, *Madonna in the Meadow*, oil on board, 1505. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Figure 4. Francis Grant, *Queen Victoria Riding Out with her Gentleman*, oil on canvas, 1838-39. Royal Collection, London.
Figure 5. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, oil on canvas, 1851-52. Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 6. John Everett Millais, detail from *Ophelia*, 1851-52. Tate Gallery, London.
Figure 7. John Everett Millais, detail from *Ophelia*, 1851-52. Tate Gallery, London.


Figure 11. John Everett Millais, *Portrait of John Ruskin*, 1853-55. Private Collection.

Figure 13. John Everett Millais, *Autumn Leaves*, 1855-56. City of Manchester Art Galleries, Manchester.

Figure 15. John Everett Millais, *Spring*, 1856-59. Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool.

Figure 16. John Everett Millais, *The Vale of Rest*, 1858. Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 18. William Dyce, *Pegwell Bay: A Recollection of October 5th*, 1858, 1858-60. Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 20. Arthur Hughes, *The Knight of the Sun*, 1860. Private Collection.
Figure 21. Frederick Walker, *The Vagrants*, 1868. Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 22. Frederick Walker, *The Harbour of Refuge*, 1872. Tate Gallery, London.
Figure 23. John Everett Millais, *Chill October* 1870. Private Collection.