Visual, vital, and vibrant: Artistic / aesthetic New Woman figures and Pre-Raphaelitism in late-nineteenth-century novels by women authors

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Abstract

This research paper examines the New Woman figure by paying attention to her beauty which stands out through its reminiscence of Pre-Raphaelitism. A focus on Mary Ward's Rose Leyburn, the girl violinist in *Robert Elsmere* (1888) and Lucas Malet's Mary Crookenden, the talented art student in *The Wages of Sin* (1890), allows a fruitful comparison with six paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The analysis leads to the conclusion that Rose fits the appearance of these Pre-Raphaelite women particularly when considering her beauty that is not only visual but also vital and vibrant as it mobilises her and boosts her confidence finally to gain entrance into the public sphere. Mary, in contrast, may be matched with those Pre-Raphaelite women through her visual and vibrant beauty only since her association with the Virgin Mary, indeed part of her vital beauty, puts her at some distance from the other earthly counterparts.

Keywords: The New Woman, Pre-Raphaelite paintings, late-nineteenth-century novels, Mary Ward, Lucas Malet

1. Introduction

This research paper focuses on selected products of two phenomenal artistic movements – one pictorial and the other literary – which occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was the founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848 that would lead to a heavily mixed reception due to the controversial nature and subjects of paintings by this exclusively male clique of artists. Half a century later, in 1894, another controversy arose following the morally ambiguous figure of the New Woman that emerged and soon occupied the pages of novels and periodicals, as well as literary critical reviews. The Pre-

Raphaelite artists and the New Woman authors share a common trait as they both concentrated on female figures. Another notable similarity is that their works became the focus of applause as well as derision due to the radical depiction of women. Consequently, a look at the New Woman of the 1890s, like the *femme fatale* in the sensation novel of the 1860s, "both conceals and reveals contemporary anxieties over Pre-Raphaelite transgressions of gender constructs" (Andres, 2005, p. 3). This growing unease was caused by the Victorian culture that frowned upon unconventional behaviours of those who did not observe the rigidly – because fixed – constructed gender roles.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood owed its reputation to the talents of the founders, namely Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), and John Everett Millais (1829-1896) "who advocated a return to simplicity and honesty in the visual arts" (Tobin, 2002, p. 2). Unlike Raphael (1483-1520), the Renaissance master who had been universally admired, the Pre-Raphaelite painters preferred bright and vibrant colours to the more sombre tones or the use of light and dark shadows that had earned Raphael the respect of not only Renaissance artists but also the Royal Academicians in nineteenth-century England. Their growing influence was manifold, for their "challenge [against] the authority of the Royal Academy … had the effect of generally lightening the tone of most paintings thereafter. In addition, the Pre-Raphaelites introduced literary subject matter and aimed at fidelity to nature, often showing meticulous attention to detail" (Robinson, 2012, p. 98). More significantly, as Michael Robinson observes, the "early Pre-Raphaelites did for the visual arts what Dickens had done for literature, creating an awareness of many of the social issues of the day, such as poverty, fallen women, and inequality" (Robinson, 2012, p. 98). Their concerns clearly anticipated the same anxieties at the end of the century.

The break between the Pre-Raphaelites and the English conventions was a crucial one. Despite the positive reception garnered in 1849 for "technique and characterization," the tone changed once their identity became public (Smith, 2013, p. 8). As art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn (2007) remarks, critics regarded them as "unconventional" (p. 48) and "rebellious" (p. 52). A notably hostile response came from Charles Dickens's attack entitled "Old Lamps for New Ones" which avows that their works rank below "the lowest depths of what is mean, odious, repulsive, and revolting" (Dickens, 1850, p. 265). His "extravagant denunciation" (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 48) was the archetype of contemporary receptions since the paintings were living proofs of how the artists were working against the established conventions of the time.

Despite such openly dismissive reactions, however, the avant-garde styles continued. It was John Ruskin (1819-1900), whose *Modern Painters* (1843) had inspired them (Smith, 2013, pp. 7-8) and whose letters to *The Times* rescued their reputation. Highly esteemed for an enormous corpus of art

criticism, he has been held as one of the quintessential Victorians. Opposing Dickens (1850) who deems the artists the "symbol of the great retrogressive principle" (p. 266), Ruskin (1851) lauds the revolutionary way in which

> the pre-Raphaelites [sic] intend to surrender no advantage which the knowledge or inventions of the present time can afford to their art[,] … [who] will draw either *what they see* [emphasis added], or what they suppose might have been the *actual facts* [emphasis added] of the scene they desire to represent, *irrespective of any conventional rules of picture making* [emphasis added]. (p. 8)

It was Ruskin's emphasis on truth that influenced them and which he in turn praised in recognition of its practical application.

More significantly, Ruskin' s creeds influenced how these painters, particularly Rossetti, formed and expressed their ideas and ideals of female beauty. The Pre-Raphaelite women not only serve to underscore Ruskin's notion of aesthetic beauty, but the antagonism between the New Woman, the Old Woman, and the *femme fatale* also highlights the debates surrounding the Ruskinian view that idealised the "inherent qualities of femininity," namely "passivity, submission, dependence, and selflessness" (Kent, 1990, p. 30). As feminists (a slightly anachronistic term but which it is necessary to adopt here) were incensed by such patriarchal attitudes, it led to a multitude of controversies. Culturally and socially, the nineteenth century was renowned for its ideology of separate spheres associated with the ideal of femininity and the cult of domesticity. Middle-class people were living in two different worlds as men were moving freely in the world of trade and business, speculating on stock investments, or participating in politics, while women were confined to the home, in charge of housekeeping and constant childcare. It is no wonder that *The Angel in the House* (1854), a narrative poem by Coventry Patmore (1823-1896), achieved instant popularity as it amplifies the feminine ideal and exemplifies ways women should mould themselves.

This fascination with the feminine ideal proved to have staying power. These inveterate notions formed the main argument in Ruskin's 1864 lecture titled "Of Queens' Gardens" which contends that women should be worshipped as queens who rule their own territories of the home. The separate-sphere ideology is at its clearest when Ruskin (1865) characterises the male sex as "active, progressive, [and] defensive" for he is "eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender" while "the woman's power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision" (pp. 146-147). Despite his seeming adoration, Ruskin in fact reduces women to a very limited "power" they can exercise only within the domestic realm. Such gendered prejudices inevitably led to what

contemporary feminists regarded as "the exploitation of women" (Heilmann, 1998, p. xv) as it apparently restricted their intellectual development

Thus, the mid-Victorian stress on femininity as an ideal is in evidence. It idolises, among others, women's self-abnegation, which fuelled the debates surrounding the nineteenth-century 'woman question' that sought the emancipation of women. What had been a simmering conflict finally erupted into a heated debate in 1894 when the New Woman was birthed following a journalistic exchange between 'Sarah Grand' and 'Ouida,' pseudonyms of Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke McFall (1854-1943) and Marie Louise de la Ramée (1839-1908). Grand's "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," to which Ouida satirically replies in her aptly titled article "The New Woman," paved the way for ensuing debates that found their most common platform in the novel. Despite antagonistic attitudes among authors and critics, positive as well as moralistic portrayals of the New Woman, such as seen in the selected novels and elsewhere, are a typical result of their "attempt to portray her as an upholder of traditional values typically associated with the Victorian notion of femininity" (Khunpakdee, 2013, p. 43). In other words, the New Woman embodies a nascent ideal which, while it frees her from traditional constraints, still positions her within social respectability.

Similar to the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the New Woman heroines are depicted as admirable, though unconventional, women who are the fruits of their transitional times. While the former marks the new era of Pre-Raphaelitism led by Rossetti, the latter, also frequently referred to as the *fin de siècle* (a French phrase for the end of the century) is associated with an apocalyptic fear of moral decline. Such fear led to Decadence, a literary movement that reflected such decline. The term comes from *de* + the Latin verb *cadere*, meaning to "fall away" (Denisoff, 2007, p. 33). Characteristic of the *fin-de-siècle* literary style, typical decadent themes included sickness, perversion, and artificiality (Khunpakdee, 2013, p. 219) perceptible in New Woman writing, particularly when authors exposed shocking truths including marital abuse, venereal diseases, and prostitution. Paralleled with Decadence is Aestheticism, which also bears a close relationship with Pre-Raphaelite paintings principally through its emphasis on pure beauty and optical pleasure. Critics often accused Aestheticism of causing artists to abandon morality and didacticism that had been considered the main purpose of art to embrace the notion of 'art for art's sake.' However, the pictorial and literary representations of feminine grace and virtues examined here reflect an endeavour to fend off moral decline in order to restore ethical stability to the society.

In short, this research paper aims to explore two kinds of art produced in the latter decades of the nineteenth century to try to find out what it means when the New Woman figure in the works of women novelists is vividly portrayed in recognisably Pre-Raphaelite styles. To form the conceptual framework, they are

categorised into three classes of beauty according to their 'visual,' 'vital,' and 'vibrant' qualities which are the traits that stand out across all of the works in focus. These terms prove pertinent to the comparative analysis discussed in Part 3 as they invite an original interpretation based on the definitions drawn from both dictionaries and what this research has discovered. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), visual is defined as "relating to seeing," while vital's multiple meanings include "necessary for the success or continued existence of something," "extremely important; energetic," and "relating to life," (Cambridge, n.d.) with vibrant meaning "energetic, exciting, and full of enthusiasm" (Cambridge, n.d.). As these denotative meanings suggest, the New Woman characters and the women in the paintings prove to be similar on both concrete and abstract levels.

To underscore the focal interest in the significant relationship between painters and writers of different decades through the depiction of beauty that links the New Woman figures with the Pre-Raphaelite women by the three aforementioned aspects, this paper further provides definitions of the three terms and how they will be used subsequently. For visual, similar to the immediate, apparent, striking looks of the painted women, it looks at the ways in which Ward and Malet vividly create the perfect beauty of their New Woman characters. For vital, which denotatively means essential, crucial, life-giving, it refers to the purity of the New Woman characters' mind and body that saves them from falling prey to seduction and abandonment, which in turn emphasises the victory of art, both literary and pictorial, in liberating and empowering women. Finally, for vibrant, it focuses on how the New Woman achieves her freedom by emerging in the public sphere, full of vivacity and confidence, and exuding the same energy readily perceivable in the painted beauties.

2. Pictorial and Textual Beauties

2.1 The artistic / aesthetic women in Pre-Raphaelite paintings

To appreciate comprehensively the immense reach that Pre-Raphaelite paintings had achieved among the Victorian exhibition-going public and patrons may post a challenge for scholars of Victorian literature. It is possible perhaps to try and grasp the significance of Pre-Raphaelitism in the Victorian novel, one small part at a time. Thus, this research, in the words of Sophia Andres (2005), limits its scope to "only part of the fascination, excitement, and exquisite appeal that Pre-Raphaelite art generated in the past, continues to emanate in the present, and no doubt will stimulate in the future" (p. xv). Among the most remarkable is Dante Gabriel Rossetti who has been acknowledged as a leading Pre-Raphaelite artist. He produced numerous famous paintings immediately recognisable through his unique techniques and subject matters. While his earlier paintings were inspired by medievalism as seen in his

Arthurian and biblical narrative paintings, they would be replaced with sensuality in the paintings executed in the 1860s and 1870s which reflected the anxieties caused by a sense of social decline. Significantly, he is famous for his female figures whose beauty becomes the most striking aspect of his works. A selection of paintings from these two phases in Rossetti's career will serve as a point of comparison with the New Woman characters due to the similarity in their characterisation and representation.

The first chosen painting is *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849-1850) or *The Annunciation* in English. One notable characteristic is that, particularly when compared "with early Renaissance scenes of the Annunciation, it is startlingly simplified in form and colour" (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 51). With regard to the Virgin's embroidered banner in the right-hand corner, "the combination of its blood-red with the symbol of the lily (for innocence or chastity) makes a striking visual emblem for the conception of a child by a virgin" (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 51). Crucially, this Italian tradition of using the lily to embody the beauty and purity of the Virgin is pertinent to the nineteenth-century feminine ideal.

In complete contrast to the religious subject of his early work, the second selected painting, *Found* (1854-1881) features the figure of the Fallen Woman, a theme emerging from anxieties caused by the contemporary social ill that had been plaguing Victorian society from the mid-century onwards. Rossetti' s painted prostitute, who represents the ""fall" from sexual respectability" (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 94) demands a "strong sense of moral judgement" (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 218). Viewers are stricken by the diseased figure of a prostitute who turns her face away in shame. The man, in having accidentally "found" his first love wandering the streets of London at dawn, instantly leaves his cart that carries a netted calf and tries to save her from hitting the cemetery wall but to no avail. Symbolically, the white calf entangled to be sold and slaughtered represents both the fate and the "fundamental innocence" of this country girl (Barringer, 2012, p. 109). The narrative of the painting serves as a reminder of the effects urban prostitution had on women and offers itself as a matter for moral judgement. It remains the only painting by Rossetti that addresses a contemporary issue. The fact that this painting was never completed signifies the sensitivity of the subject directly related to unrespectable female sexuality. In subsequent paintings, nevertheless, Rossetti would return to the subject of sexualised femininity but he would represent it in a much subtler manner.

Indeed, the use of single beautiful female figures has become an iconic feature of Rossetti's well-known paintings. It became an established trait at the end of the 1850s as can be seen in the third painting, *Bocca Baciata* (1859) , or the kissed mouth, which "was immediately seen as marking a significant shift in his work" (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 108). However, Hunt strongly

disapproved of the painting not only because of its "gross sensuality of a revolting kind peculiar to foreign prints" but also as he recognised that "Rossetti is advocating as a principle the mere gratification of the eye and if any passion at all – the animal passion to be the aim of art" (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 108). In spite of his righteous stance, Hunt's censure acknowledges the appeal of the subject's physical beauty. Moreover, his reference to the presence of animalistic desires serves well to suggest the radical, liberating power that Rossetti's women are allowed to have in expressing their personal needs.

Having been the target of much contemporary criticism, his own colleague not excepted, Rossetti's works underwent yet another elemental change in the 1860s. As Prettejohn (2007) observes, they create a distinctly different category, that of the "sexualised woman" as his emphasis "shifted away from issues of sexual morality and toward an exploration of the erotic in terms of the physical beauty of the human figure" (p. 218). The fourth chosen painting, *Fazio's Mistress* (1863), is an epitome of Rossetti's sexualised woman in its attempts to capture feminine perfection. Rather than furnishing viewers with "narrative clues" found in his previous works, this painting relies on "visual cues" that promptly invite us not only to "admire" the subject's beauty but also to "desire" her for "the luscious red lips, the gleaming gold earring, the luxuriant ripples of red hair, the sleeve sliding from the creamy white shoulder, [and] the toilet accessories on the foreground parapet that suggest the woman's attentiveness to her own beauty" (Prettejohn, 2007, p. 218). This preoccupation would undergo further transformation.

In fact, the 1860s and 1870s saw Rossetti's increasing fascination with women's beauty expressed through the "opulent colouration" as well as the costumes (Barringer, 2012, p. 161). The fifth selected painting, *Veronica Veronese* (1872), or "Veronica from Verona," is a resplendent specimen of feminine beauty deliberately enhanced by the use of the "luxuriant green and the sheen of the woman's velvet sleeves" (Barringer, 2012, p. 165). The last painting, *La Ghirlandata* (1871-1874), significantly attests to his radical technique in showcasing a beautiful woman "surrounded by rare and luxurious objects" by employing "a rich display of color" like the "lush green velvet" that symbolically links "her loveliness" with nature (Mancoff, 2012, p. 42). The rich colours and confident brushwork in the selected paintings signify Rossetti's increasingly unique style that will be reproduced in the novels.

Thus, the six Pre-Raphaelite women share attributes that not only make them outstanding in their own right but also shed light on the unconventionality of their creator. In addition to the obvious similarity which is their aesthetic beauty that serves as the main focus of this research paper, the contrast between the pious and the sensual, the symbolic use of both simple and rich colours, and the vivid details, all allow the viewers to draw a parallel with radical literary representations of the New Woman discussed in the next section.

2.2 The artistic / aesthetic women in late-nineteenth-century novels

The portrayal of the artistically inclined New Woman characters in the novels of two highly-esteemed best-selling women authors shows how both characters, despite their authors' differing literary style and focus, rebel against the conventional notion that confines women to the domestic sphere. Through their female protagonists, both *Robert Elsmere* (1888) by Mary Augusta Arnold Ward (1851-1920), better known as Mrs. Humphry Ward, and *The Wages of Sin* (1890) by Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison (1852-1931) who published pseudonymously as Lucas Malet, accurately anticipated the birth of the New Woman in 1894. The fact that Ward's Rose Leyburn and Malet's Mary Crookenden demonstrate a strong sense of independence, confidence, and determination to succeed in their respective arts, namely music and painting which requires their presence in the public sphere, does affirm that they are truly an iteration of the New Woman.

Despite *Robert Elsmere*'s principal concern about the eponymous hero's crisis of faith, Ward indeed is "serious about her female artist … [as] Rose's talent, ambition, and growth are in the first two-thirds of the novel documented and celebrated" (Wilt, 2005, pp. 70-71). Textually, Rose appears as the opposite of her eldest sister, Catherine, later Mrs. Robert Elsmere. With Catherine taking the place of their deceased father in managing their household, Rose emerges unburdened as an extremely beautiful girl with a musical talent. Her yearning to play in London and Europe makes her disobey Catherine's advice against moving among men in the public sphere. Through their attitudes, it becomes apparent that the author means Rose to represent the New Woman whereas Catherine embodies the Old Woman who upholds the traditional values that concede the restrictions exercised on women. Even the beauty which Ward profusely lavishes on both characters appears to be of different kinds. While Rose's appeal can be described as lush and human, Catherine is characterised as a frigid, saintly beauty which serves to heighten her strong faith in Christianity.

With a similar religious tone to Malet's title, *The Wages of Sin* is rooted in a love triangle between one man and two women. James Colthurst, a successful painter, falls in love with a young talent, Mary Crookenden, who also reciprocates his love. He teaches at an art school where she enrols in the pursuit of painterly excellence. Their engagement to be married is thwarted by Colthurst's mistress, Jenny Parris. A peasant beauty much older than Mary, Jenny posed for Colthurst while he was an obscure artist and fell for him despite his poverty. Jenny requests that the engagement and marriage be terminated, while the New Woman heroine is determined to succeed both professionally as a painter and personally as Colthurst's wife. On learning about Jenny's terminal illness, Mary agrees to end her engagement to him so that he can nurse Jenny. The novel clearly juxtaposes the cold pure beauty of Mary with the coarse pathetic charms of Jenny. Textually, Mary represents the Virgin Mary while

Jenny serves as a *femme fatale*. While her professional ambition confirms her status as the New Woman, the fact that Mary's physical and moral purity are intact aligns her with the Virgin Mary as both are "sinless" and have "remained a virgin" (Herringer, 2008, p. 20). Moreover, the vivid contrast in Malet's depiction of the New Woman heroine in comparison to that of the *femme fatale* reflects the quintessentially Victorian dichotomy of the Virgin and the Whore also evident in the chosen paintings as will be discussed below.

Since these pictorial and textual beauties are products of different decades, it may be assumed hypothetically that the former influenced the latter. Significantly, Pre-Raphaelite painters did have an impact on shaping the ideas of both contemporary women authors and later novelists whose works prefigured feminist writing. In George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), for instance, critics recognise "various Pre-Raphaelite paintings Eliot used to guide her own portrayals of her fictive characters, especially in her work from 1856 to 1871" as when scholars identified "Millais's *Mariana* with images of Dorothea in *Middlemarch*," or regarded her "portrait" as "a genuinely pre-Raphaelite [*sic*] Madonna" (Andres, 2005, p. 97). Another link between the two arts and periods comes from Edward Burne-Jones's paintings of "androgynous figures" that informed the shaping of characters in *Jude the Obscure* (1895) which reflects Thomas Hardy's "engage[ment] in contemporary debates over the destabilization of gender constructs the women's movement had created since the 1860s" (Andres, 2005, p. 158). This is also the case with the chosen novels which have a close affinity with the paintings. It is the strength of the rebellious nature found among all these women that informs the main argument in this research, which contends that both the Pre-Raphaelite women and the New Woman heroines emerged to the public as rebels who departed from the traditionally conceived ideals in order to achieve what women had been for centuries deprived of: freedom. The textual and pictorial representations examined in this paper are how their authors envisioned what the liberated woman was like. Despite the different disciplines in which they produced their art, the finished visions, indeed, appear to correspond. The textual-pictorial interconnection will be made clear in the subsequent comparative analysis where the qualities of the chosen women's beauty are examined not only in terms of an exterior or "visual" trait, but also as an essentially abstract yet fundamental element as it enables the possessor to become "vital" and "vibrant" in their own environment as well as in the formerly inaccessible public sphere.

3. The New Woman and the Pre-Raphaelite Women

Both *Robert Elsmere* and *The Wages of Sin* portray the New Woman figure in terms so vividly visual that their splendid beauty instantly attracted the attention of contemporary critics. In an unsigned article, *The Illustrated London News* reviewer (1888) observes how the novel's "scenes" "are enlivened by the

presence of a charming figure, Rose Leyburn, a lovely, high-spirited, willful, girlish beauty" before he recognises her as "a violinist of rare talent, passionately fond of her art, intensely desirous to excel," which becomes secondary to her appearance ("Novels," 1888, p. 465). Likewise, *The Literary World*'s unnamed critic focuses on the awe-inspiring "charms" of Malet's New Woman character repeatedly described as "*the refined and charming* [emphasis added], but essentially modern young lady … *a charming character* [emphasis added], touched but not spoilt by that *over-refinement* [emphasis added]" ("The Wages of Sin," 1891, p. 115). The fact that their stunning looks leave a very clear impression on readers attests to the "visual" quality of their beauty. With regard to "vital" beauty, however, only the Old Woman represented by Catherine possesses it as her devout faith and selfless devotion to others' needs make evident. The New Woman in comparison appears to be self-centred, and for this reason, lacking in Catherine's moral vitality especially as Rose is only concerned with what she needs to fulfil her dreams of becoming an accomplished violinist. Nevertheless, her single-minded determination is considered an admirable trait for the New Woman. Unlike Rose, however, Mary in *The Wages of Sin* shares the same vital beauty that Catherine exudes, which then underlines another similarity, namely their spiritual purity. Besides, both New Woman heroines share their "vibrant" beauty as Rose and Mary have overcome social strictures by resolutely joining the public sphere in London and Europe, and at the Connop School of Art.

To examine the New Woman protagonists in relation to Pre-Raphaelitism, this research focuses on the three facets of their beauty – visual, vital, and vibrant – and considers each according to its role in dividing the women in focus into binary oppositions. The following binaries serve as a conceptual framework that reflects the multifarious ways novelists and painters conceive and express beauty. This categorisation reflects the Victorian inclination to arrange everything neatly into appropriate classes and the desire to achieve perfection in all aspects including what was deemed a proper role for each sex. Victorian England was indeed "a culture intent on distinguishing the genders" (Herringer, 2008, p. 3). Influential authors including Ruskin and Patmore confirm this through their elaborate ideas of the ideal womanhood. Thus, in examining the central female figures, it is first and foremost necessary to consider how the novelists and the painter conceive their beauty by asking whether they 'idealise' her or make it an inherent, therefore 'natural,' part of her character.

Furthermore, the external appearance of both the characters and the painted women must not be overlooked, particularly as "dress functions within structures of characterisation and narration, and the politics and poetics of representation and genre, in telling the heroine's story" (Seys, 2014, p. iii). Central to narratives, clothing offers an economic means for authors and painters

to add symbolic dimensions to their beauties. Hence, readers are presented with a familiar sight of "aesthetes in silks and velvets" or the "New Women [sic] in grey" (Seys, 2014, p. iii). In addition to accentuating (or concealing) their beauty, the choice of wearing (un)fashionable clothes also determines and reveals their identities and textual or pictorial function. As Madeleine Seys (2014) observes, "[d]ress sites the heroine within fashion history and in relation to Victorian notions of femininity and female sexuality" (p. iii). Because this tension between fashionable and conventional representations of femininity forms one of the focal points here, it is pertinent to determine how each of the women is clothed.

Additionally, as this research focuses on the period between the 1860s and the 1890s, it follows that aestheticism and decadence provide the last conceptual framework for the consideration of beautiful women especially since they were dominant concepts and left clear marks of influence on the creation of these women. Scholar Carolyn Burdett explicates the relationship between the artists and aestheticism based on the tendency among experts to

> associate the movement with the Pre-Raphaelites, who were active from the mid-19th century. Their emphasis on sensual beauty and on strong connections between visual and verbal forms was certainly highly influential. Perhaps the most important inaugurating phase of aestheticism, however, occurred during the late 1860s and early 1870s. (Burdett, 2014, para. 2)

The artists' close affinity with decadence is similarly apparent since both seriously "alarmed those who valued "traditional" norms and values. It seemed to signify a society and culture threatened to its core with decline and decay. By the 1890s, decadence was associated with degeneration" (Burdett, 2014, para. 14). Indeed, these movements bear an obvious link with the chosen novels and paintings both in terms of their subject matters and the time periods.

In short, since to examine the women as a pair of binary oppositions serves as a more profound approach, literary, analytical, and cultural, than to consider each of them one-dimensionally, this paper will first investigate the conceptual difference with which the novels and the paintings juxtapose beauty that is idealised with beauty that is natural. Then, by focussing on the women who are purposefully made picturesque through costume and jewellery, it classifies them into two opposing camps, that is, the fashionable versus the conventional. Finally, it looks philosophically as well as morally at their beautiful appearance in order to separate them into two groups that reflect the concerns prevalent during the periods in question: the aesthetic / artistic versus the decadent.

3.1 Visual beauty

3.1.1 The idealised versus the natural

Mary Ward emphasises the remarkable beauty of her main female characters by contrasting Catherine's fervent spirituality and purity of mind with the earthly qualities of the New Woman's beauty. Symbolically, this stark difference in the visually beautiful protagonists communicates their inherently opposite natures. Ward highlights Catherine's religious character by focussing on the external, immediately noticeable looks of her Old Woman character whose impressive, saintly beauty shines through "the fine Madonna-like face" (Ward, 1888, p. 13). The novel subtly suggests that nothing can ever lessen her beauty, not even her hard work and selfless devotion to others, who are again and again "greatly struck by the face—by its ascetic beauty, the stern and yet delicate whiteness and emaciation of it" (Ward, 1888, p. 497). In addition, her complexion is also an outstanding part, for "her pale beauty, which now at twenty-nine, in spite of its severity, ha[s] a subtler finish and attraction than ever" (Ward, 1888, p. 511). Ward further idealises the beautiful Catherine chiefly through the striking visual resemblance between her and the Virgin Mary, along with their symbolic association with the colour white. Catherine's beauty may be visualised in terms of *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849-1850) especially when Ward makes it very clear how she is moulded in the image of the Mother of God. In the painting, the Virgin is also pale, her skin looking transparent, complete with an angular, unsmiling yet kind and attractive face. The white dress signifies the purity which accompanies the virginal birth of Christ, the same selflessness shared by Catherine who takes on tremendous responsibilities to assure peace and happiness among her people.

With no trace of sensuality, together with her close connection with the Virgin, it becomes clear that Catherine's beauty is idealised while Rose is portrayed as a natural beauty from the start. Robert Elsmere recognises in his future sister-in-law a "vivid creature" whose "still unsoftened angles and movements [are] in the first dawn of an exceptional beauty" (Ward, 1888, p. 29). Implicitly, his remark reveals that the girl will become perfectly beautiful while Catherine's beauty will prove to remain unchanged. As Catherine herself observes: "The child was more beautiful than ever … A year ago she had been a damsel from the "Earthly Paradise;" now, so far as an English girl can achieve it, she might have been a model for Tissot" (Ward, 1888, pp. 160-161). Rose's striking looks, "with all her lithe shapeliness," turn her into "the girl whom all the world was beginning to talk about—both as a beauty and as an artist" (Ward, 1888, p. 441). A visually captivating character, Rose reminds us that her beauty, which is earthly, is completely different from the saintly beauty of her sister. Rose's extravagant visual appearance can be read in *Fazio's Mistress* (1863) that showcases the woman's exceptional charms as well as shapely figure clad in rich attire, captured at a moment of natural ease. Besides, as an aspiring

violinist, Rose resembles *Veronica Veronese* (1872) particularly as the painting features a beautiful woman touching her violin, and whose lightly smiling face and feminine figure in a loose long-sleeved dark green velvet gown recall the very vision of Rose. Furthermore, Veronica's contented dreamy look and the violin can be compared to the main figure playing at the harp in *La Ghirlandata* (1871-1874) as it evidently presents an identical-looking green garment and the beautiful face under the flowing locks of her rich red-gold hair, all of which corresponds to Rose's artistic persona and her overall image down to the "red-gold" of her hair (Ward, 1888, p. 440).

Similar to Ward, Lucas Malet characterises both central female figures with apparent beauty but which appears unexpected where the New Woman is concerned. Mary's striking beauty is essentially idealised rather than natural for Malet portrays her heroine as "proud and brilliant … in her suit of fairy-mail, unassailable in the bravery of her spotless maidenhood" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 2, p. 64). Significantly, Malet stresses the unattainability of the New Woman's beautiful yet aloof character, a quality which serves as an apparatus that assists Mary in guarding her purity, that which her foil, Jenny, has lost. The close association between Mary and the Virgin comes through the delicate accessories that highlight the ethereal spirituality of their wearer. Mary is, through "her rich dress … with the cold brilliance of those superb jewels in her hair and upon her neck and bosom—a *glorious* [emphasis added], but really a quite uncomfortably *ghostly* [emphasis added] young beauty" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 3, p. 66) . Mary's visually spiritual beauty draws a comparison with the withdrawn face of the young Virgin in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* Moreover, as the Virgin's halo calls our attention to the region of her face, Mary's jewels do the same, which allows both viewers and readers to appreciate the figures' beauty that is clearly idealised to reflect the purity of both. The fact that the New Woman's "glorious" beauty is "ghostly" also implies that she appears to belong to another world, which further emphasises her similarity with the Mother of God. In this respect, the novel establishes the New Woman's purity through her idealised, saintly beauty.

Most notably, while the New Woman heroine's exceptional beauty is portrayed as idealised because otherworldly, Malet creates Jenny as a woman whose pronounced beauty clearly belongs to this world of flesh and blood and which appears supreme even in its natural state. When compared to other women, she is "less well-dressed … but taller and more stately than they. Her complexion had the peculiarly rich bloom on it … The coils of her dark hair … unfastened and hung untidily perhaps, but with an undeniably picturesque effect, below her waist" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 37). Clearly a natural beauty, the fact that Jenny is doomed to fall from feminine virtue haplessly connects her with *Found* (1854) which features a 'fallen' prostitute who turns her face away in shame but who nevertheless still looks stately. Although the hair is red and

gathered up much more tidily than Jenny's unkempt black hair that foreshadows her loosening morals, readers and viewers are reminded of these women's sexualised bodies through the Victorian symbolic association of hair with female sexuality. Both Jenny and the prostitute in the painting tell of the unfortunate consequence of their striking but sordid beauty that brings about the tragic fate of the Fallen Woman.

3.1.2 The fashionable versus the conventional

The New Woman characters in focus are represented as fashionable especially through their endeavour to stand out among others. Rose's impressive outfit is described in Catherine's terms as:

> Yet another gown of strange tint and archaic outline. Rose's gowns were legion. They were manufactured by a farmer's daughter … under her strict and precise supervision. She was accustomed, as she boldly avowed, to shut herself up at the beginning of each season of the year for two days' meditation on the subject. (Ward, 1888, p. 11)

Indeed, Rose devotes much of her attention to appearing fashionable in everything she wears. On one occasion, she is "clad in some soft fawn-coloured garment, *cut very much in the fashion* [emphasis added]" (Ward, 1888, pp. 160-161). On another, she appears even more so:

> Some soft creamy stuff was folded and draped about Rose's slim shapely figure in such a way as to bring out all its charming roundness and grace. Her neck and arms bore the challenge of the dress victoriously. Her red-gold hair gleamed in the light … A knot of dusky blue feathers on her shoulder … gave just that touch of purpose and art which the spectator seems to claim as the tribute answering to his praise in the dress of a young girl. (Ward, 1888, p. 440)

Rose's figure, pose, hair, and garment readily invite a comparison with *Fazio's Mistress* particularly as the painting reflects the softness of the material that perfectly reveals not only her round shoulder but also all the graceful charms of a fashionable woman. The hair, the blue strip below her shoulder, and the bare neck absolutely fit Rose's description in this passage. The praise for her remarkable style can indeed be accorded the painted woman.

Visually, Rose's exceptional beauty is enhanced through her great sense of fashion, which serves to place her on the opposite side of Catherine's much more subdued style. Significantly, Catherine not only disregards the fashion of

the time but also seems to ignore even time itself altogether as she chooses to favour the dress inherited from her foremother instead of trying to appear ahead of her time. Suitable to her devout character, Catherine emerges in "a soft black brocade, with lace collar and cuff, which had once belonged to an aunt of her mother's. It [i]s too old for her both in *fashion* [emphasis added] and material, but it g[i]ve[s] her a gentle, almost matronly dignity, which bec[o]me[s] her" (Ward, 1888, p. 11) . The dark hues, although they look becoming on her, provide a stark contrast to the light, soft, pastel tones of her New Woman sister. At the same time, the subdued colours serve to express her righteousness and conventional beauty.

Likewise, Jenny's visual beauty is described in sombre tones as the narrator notes how the "bodice of her old grey stuff dress was hardly full enough for the rounded bust it covered; while her scanty skirts clung somewhat closely to her limbs as she moved" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 37). However, the way Malet focuses specifically on Jenny's female attributes reminds readers that, while she appears conventional in her coarse garment which does nothing to accentuate her beauty, it reveals her feminine appeal which Catherine's black dress serves to conceal. More importantly, the dull colours with which both Ward and Malet paint their Old Woman and *femme fatale* respectively find no resonance in the Pre-Raphaelite women as these figures are usually representatives of the fashionable type.

Indeed, as an attractive woman whose beauty is enhanced through her clothes, Mary characteristically demonstrates a unique sense of fashion. In fact, Malet also draws attention to the beguiling power of her ethereal feminine yet fierce but cool beauty through her:

> Close-fitting blue-gray gown … with silver embroidery. Her shadowed fair hair was surmounted by a hat or bonnet … blue and silver too … Arrayed in this *suit of fairy-like armour* [emphasis added], … [h]er *moonlight beauty* [emphasis added] gained a certain *dainty* [emphasis added] edge, a hint of *delicate audacity* [emphasis added] from her costume." (Malet, 1891, Vol. 2, p. 62)

It is important to note that *The Wages of Sin* belongs to a much later date, which explains why Mary's fashion here, especially her bonnet, does not correspond with any of the chosen paintings which, naturally, are innocent of the *fin-de-siècle* fashion. Moreover, her fair hair, the cold tones of blue, grey, and silver, and the angelic yet elusive character of her beauty serve as the opposite of the bright and warm colours that bring life to the majority of the chosen Pre-Raphaelite women. Nevertheless, the use of war and celestial imagery aligns Mary with what the "the unorthodox Pre-Raphaelite vision" of Rossetti's women reveals, namely the contradictory characteristics of "feminine

fragility in masculinity, and masculine strength in conventional femininity" (Andres, 2005, p. 3). Through this complex similarity, the New Woman and the Pre-Raphaelite women, though different in their visual appearance, have a close affinity in spirit.

3.1.3 The aesthetic versus the decadent

The two enchanting New Woman artists are similarly characterised with beauty in visually aesthetic terms. Their association with art, although of different forms, explains their textual connection with aestheticism. Catherine's character, in contrast, does not involve art at all. Considered in this light, her visual beauty can neither be expressed nor explained in aesthetic terms, while her goodness as well as "extraordinary moral strength" (Ward, 1888, p. 13) clearly removes her from the decadent tendencies that shape the Fallen Woman epitomised by Jenny. However, when viewed through a Ruskinian lens, "woman begins as a paragon of [Ruskin's] aesthetics," and it is indeed "her physical-moral beauty" which renders her "a work of art herself" (Austin, 1987, p. 30) . Thus, in a Ruskinian sense, as Catherine appears "so saintly and so Beautiful [*sic*]" (Ward, 1888, p. 27), the blended beauty between her actual looks and ethical strength promptly allows her to be added to the visually aesthetic women. In other words, the fact that she textually symbolises the Old Woman does not exclude her from having an aesthetic quality added to her beauty, only that it is conceptualised as coming from a different source compared to that of the New Woman. In consequence, Catherine may be envisioned in the figure of the quietly yet aesthetically beautiful Virgin in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*

Rose, in contrast, is a straightforward aesthetic beauty. She shows an early awareness of the style when the novel recalls how as a girl she used to favour those "puffed sleeves, [and] the æsthetic skirts" (Ward, 1888, pp. 160-161). Rose reminds the viewers of Pre-Raphaelite women in *Bocca Baciata*, *Veronica Veronese*, and *La Ghirlandata*. While the decorative flowers in the background of *Bocca Baciata* compliment the hair and gold accessories painted in intricate detail which lends an aesthetic feel to the overall effect, the velvet dresses, complete with puffed sleeves and long aesthetic skirts adorning the women in *Veronica Veronese* and *La Ghirlandata*, help us visualise Rose' s aesthetic beauty more clearly. Like the painted women, Ward's New Woman is a visually aesthetic beauty.

Similarly, Mary symbolically embodies aesthetics not only because she devotedly embraces the painterly art but also because she is characteristically represented as exceptionally beautiful with intricate adornments. In effect, the novel acknowledges the importance of accessories. As Colthurst admits: "he held it sentimental cant to assert that beauty when least adorned is most adorned. Not a bit of it. A woman' s beauty gains by fine

dressing, as a precious stone by fine setting" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 3, p. 75). More importantly, an illuminating moment in the novel provides us with details of Mary's vivid appearance in reality which serves to prove Colthurst's aesthetic theory to be true, especially as the "contrast between what he saw in imagination and saw *in fact* was sufficiently violent. … Mary Crookenden stood upright, … her *beauty* [emphasis added] emphasized by her *rich dress* [emphasis added], her *flashing diamonds* [emphasis added], by *the stately pose of her figure* and *the carriage of her head* [emphasis added]" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 3, pp. 83-84). The passage deftly enhances Mary's visual beauty to an aesthetic plane designed to fit the artistic New Woman heroine. Pictorially, her elaborate dress and jewellery may be envisioned in the form of the ring and earrings in both *Fazio's Mistress* and *Bocca Baciata*, while the latter also features a dainty gold necklace and hair pin showing off rich pearls set in gold. In addition, *Veronica Veronese* reveals an exotic sea-shell necklace and a silvery bracelet on the figure's right wrist, while *La Ghirlandata* boasts nothing in terms of accessories but for a single gold bracelet on the beauty's left wrist. Apparently, Malet's intricate characterisation of her aesthetically beautiful heroine matches the details in the Pre-Raphaelite women visually. In other words, both the novelist and the artist are propelled by aesthetic thoughts which they express in strongly similar terms through their respective art.

While Mary and Rose (and Catherine when viewed in Ruskinian terms) represent aesthetically beautiful women, Jenny offers a crucial comparison in her ostensible beauty associated with decadence. *The Wages of Sin* expresses the decadent notions through Colthurst who, in a lecture, makes a startling claim: "I want to show that, if intelligently looked at, poverty, disease, sorrow, decay, death, sin—yes, I am not much afraid of the word—are ideally beautiful too, paintable too, intrinsically and enduringly poetic" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 202). Indeed, his reference to such subjects draws attention to his obsession with "sickness" and "perversion" characteristic of decadence (Khunpakdee, 2013, p. 219) which usually were not allowed to appear in Victorian "healthy" fiction (Machin, 2018, p. 50). However, Colthurst's very idea effectively encapsulates Jenny's narrative and symbolic role as that poor, diseased, sorrowful, decaying, dying, and sinful Fallen Woman pictorially comes to life in *Found*. Moreover, especially when read through Colthurst's decadent lens, both women are 'ideally' beautiful and clearly paintable (both by brush and in words). As a result of their blatant association with decadence, their beauty can by no means be considered 'aesthetic.' In short, both textual and pictorial *femmes fatales* pose a contrast to those visually aesthetic New Woman protagonists through their decadent narratives.

3.2 Vital beauty

3.2.1 The idealised versus the natural

Catherine's vital beauty may be seen in its idealised form pronounced through her lack of regard for herself and devotion to helping others tirelessly by sacrificing her own happiness. Interestingly, the novel indirectly emphasises Catherine's physical perfection through her saintly attributes by directing our attention to "the pale virginal grace of look and form" (Ward, 1888, p. 154). In fact, her close connection with the Virgin continues to be extensive. For instance, appearing in unflattering attire all "in white," she cannot hide her delicate but remarkable beauty and slim figure as the hero catches:

> The fine outline of the head, the unusually clear and perfect moulding of the brow, nose, and upper lip. … The face, though still quite young, and expressing a perfect physical health, ha[s] the look of having been polished and refined away to its foundations. (Ward, 1888, p. 29)

Ward's idealisation of Catherine's beauty, through her indefatigable assistance and dedication to the poor, reminds us of *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* Catherine's lean figure represented through the gentle but prominent kind of beauty can be traced to the figure of the Virgin who similarly devotes herself wholeheartedly to doing God's will. Both selfless women metaphorically uphold the traditional values that inform the Victorian feminine ideal symbolised by their vital beauty.

In contrast, Rose's beauty is vital but not in the same selfless sense that characterises Catherine. She is represented radically with her natural obdurate determination to achieve her goal in succeeding as a violinist even if that means rebelling against her sister, as the vicar recounts to his wife how the two "are always half at war. Poor Catherine said to me the other day, with tears in her eyes, that she knew Rose thought her as hard as iron" (Ward, 1888, p. 78). To overcome that imagined "iron" barrier built by Catherine, the New Woman confidently resorts to her vital beauty that enables her to win her way into the public realm. The strength of Rose's passion for the violin is reflected in *Veronica Veronese* through the ease with which the figure touches the instrument. Being "half at war" with her sister, Rose further resembles the central female figure in *La Ghirlandata* whose defiant gaze directed at viewers may very well replicate the New Woman's challenging look at her traditionally idealised sister. Likewise, the verdant colour that graces the bodies of both painted women unmistakably associates Rose with nature, since her vital power which drives her towards her goal serves to enhance her natural beauty more than ever.

Similarly, Lucas Malet's New Woman heroine is vital in her beauty, which serves to underline the strength of her moral character when she eventually manages to rise above her self-centredness to sympathise with Colthurst's decision to part with her as well as to protect her physical purity and proud dignity from his sexual and moral contamination. Textually, Mary represents Malet's feminine ideal, particularly as the author underscores her beauty by highlighting its frank, brave and sharp character:

> Mary Crookenden was very beautiful just then. Her lips smiled, her eyes positively blazed. But her beauty was a trifle hard, perhaps. The strength of the woman's nature, not its sweetness, was evident. … The girl's face kept its pure waxen whiteness. (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 225)

Thus, Mary's vital beauty, which is part of her New Womanhood, confirms her association with *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* As the painting highlights the similar white waxen look of the Virgin Mary, it reflects the pure and hard beauty of Mary. Although neither Rossetti's pictorial nor Malet's textual representations pronounce their respective central figures as sweet, they both idealise its beauty through their close association with morality, strength, and purity.

Jenny, meanwhile, is endowed with the kind of beauty that is natural, in addition to its vitality as can be seen in her self-sacrificing act of becoming a prostitute to earn enough money to save her lover's life. Her affectionate attachment to Colthurst drives her to make that fatal decision which ironically allows her to preserve her previous image of a beauty, at least in Colthurst's eye as he observes in one of his lectures: "You apprehend it more with your intellect than with your eyes" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 197). In the same way that Jenny relies on her vital beauty to ensure Colthurst's survival, the female figure in *Found* also appears to be strong and muscular enough to resist the old lover's attempt to raise her from the ground. Moreover, as Jenny is ashamed of her past, the same gesture may be noticed in the painted prostitute's attempt to turn away from the public eye and to hide herself under the shadow of the wall. As it has happened to numerous women who out of necessity turn to prostitution to support not only themselves but also their family, Jenny is fatefully forced to abuse her moral purity to care for her unwedded partner as a result of her vital beauty.

3.2.2 The fashionable versus the conventional

In terms of beauty's vital role in forming and preserving feminine virtues, it is crucial to note that the meaning of vital beauty is rather multi-faceted. On the one hand, it signifies the moral integrity of Malet's New

Woman heroine whose purity is outstanding and is enhanced by her strong beauty. In fact, its force is vital and, though abstract, tangible enough to boost her charms to the extent that "Colthurst [i]s filled with a madness of worship for her. Not only of worship for her physical beauty, but for her maidenhood, for the unstained fairness and purity of her" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 3, pp. 83-84). The power of her beauty in this sense is sufficient to override Mary's evidently fashionable person, as purity must indeed take priority over appearance. In other words, the power of her maidenly chastity causes her beauty to appear conventional.

On the other hand, vital beauty is perceived in Ward's Old Woman protagonist through Catherine's willingness to sacrifice her own happiness to serve others' needs. Her "practical ability" is universally acknowledged while the fact that she "never took any thought for her appearance" is consistent with how Catherine characteristically adopts the least fashionable style in dressing herself (Ward, 1888, p. 12). Her preference suits her religious inclination reinforced by the strong determination to assist others very well. While Ward draws attention to the vital force of her central character, she simultaneously conceals Catherine' s beauty under her plain garment. Catherine comes forth as "a young and vigorous woman in the prime of health and strength. The lines of the form were rather thin and spare, but they were softened by the loose bodice and long full skirt of her dress" (Ward, 1888, p. 8). It is indeed in these unfashionable clothes that Catherine efficiently exercises her power in tending to others' welfare, complete with her soft yet vital beauty.

Paradoxically, it is Jenny who also exercises her feminine power in tending to Colthurst's welfare. But such devotion only leads her to a tragic fate as a prostitute, which immediately recalls the parallel with *Found* as this painting also illustrates the vital beauty of the Fallen Woman. It is important to note that beauty and sympathy, though abstract in their existence, are regarded as an interconnected feminine virtue that may be made externally obvious:

> Clothes are the second way in which a lady exhibits her vital beauty, or imaginative sympathy. Her mind … is a divine gift revealed in her vivid garments, the counterpart of the vibrant colors of paintings. She dresses herself like … a Pre-Raphaelite subject, in resplendent colors and patterns. (Austin, 1987, p. 32)

Such notions propose that sympathetic women fashion themselves in the Pre-Raphaelite style. Significantly, however, neither the altruistic Catherine, the virtuous Mary, nor the self-sacrificing Jenny may be called Pre-Raphaelite based on the lack of bright colours, although they all share their vital beauty.

Furthermore, while Catherine's unfashionable attire and Mary's distinct moral purity may suggest that they both bear a remarkable resemblance to *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, Rose, on the other hand, is unconventional in her vital beauty that feeds her active and confident pursuit of independence. She resembles *Fazio's Mistress* as well as *Bocca Baciata* in her rebellious insistence on being herself without living in the shadow of her sister as suggested by the painted women's pensive looks which very well reflect Rose's earnest complaint:

> We owe everything we are, almost everything we have, to her. Her nursing has kept mamma alive through one or two illnesses. Our lawyer says he never knew any business affairs better managed than ours, and Catherine manages them. The one thing she never takes any care or thought for is herself. What we should do without her I can't imagine; and yet sometimes I think if it goes on much longer none of us three [namely their mother, Agnes, the middle daughter, and Rose herself] will have any character of our own left. (Ward, 1888, p. 109)

The passage in effect underlines both the difference between the sisters, and Catherine's essentially conventional beauty and vital force behind the running of her household. Additionally, instead of reducing the vitality of Rose's character, the contrast in fact serves to highlight the character's recognition of her true place and selfhood, that is, the knowledge that she is best suited to the public sphere where she has untiringly striven to be.

3.2.3 The aesthetic versus the decadent

The New Woman protagonists, Rose and Mary, share a similar vital trait as their beauty is represented through their aesthetic and ethical characters respectively. Rose's beauty renders the character's strong dedication to her "art" (Ward, 1888, p. 83), that of "playing" the violin (Ward, 1888, p. 12), all the more spectacular as both qualities have become the main occasion for "the compliments of the neighbourhood" (Ward, 1888, p. 12). In the same way, Mary's jealous guard of her loveliness as well as purity of mind and body is depicted in terms of "whitewash," which can be read as both a painterly technique and a symbolic metaphor for moral cleanliness: "Miss Crookenden refused to see what was unlovely, to admit the existence of what was impure. If she needs must touch pitch, she would whitewash her pitch first, believing thereby to escape defilement" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, pp. 136-137).

The determination of both extremely beautiful and purely artistic New Woman characters communicates their vital force in fulfilling their self-obligations. This notion draws an apposite image of the earlier Ruskinian feminine ideal of duty:

> In addressing young women, Ruskin consistently translates the fulfilment of function into a notion of duty amounting to the exercise of imaginative sympathy. It is the chief attribute of the exemplary artist, which the ideal woman displays through acts that fuse (or confuse) aesthetics and ethics. (Austin, 1987, p. 31)

Both New Woman protagonists, while vitally pursuing their own dreams without committing any ethical breech, embody the aesthetic ideal that not only ensures their future artistic success but also serves to amplify their perfect beauty.

Significantly, the aesthetic New Woman's concentrated endeavour to achieve her desired excellence suggests a stark contrast with the decadent beauty of the Fallen Woman. As a beautiful prostitute, Jenny becomes a typical specimen of the *fin-de-siècle* decadence which characterises her impressive beauty, one that is corrupted by the decadent hero through their sinful love affair. Her "defiled" past, much to Mary's disdain and avoidance, forces Jenny to occupy the same position as the figure in *Found*. The tension between the vital beauty of the New Woman and the *femme fatale* in *The Wages of Sin* underlines the conflict between aestheticism and decadence in the novel. Meanwhile, as stated above, Ward' s 1888 novel actually predates the *fin de siècle*, which means that technically it must be excluded from discussion in this section. However, Catherine's vital beauty with which she undertakes all her philanthropic activities is represented through her saintliness, which is pictorially and aesthetically embodied by the figure in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*

3.3 Vibrant beauty

3.3.1 The idealised versus the natural

Both Rose and Mary emerge as the New Woman protagonists whose beauty is instantly recognised and admired in the public sphere traditionally closed off to women. Such beauty is perceived as vibrant particularly as it underlines their energy and enthusiasm that impress those around them. In this regard, Catherine is by default exempted from sharing the same kind of beauty since much of her activities are among children, the sick, and the old within the immediate community of her husband's parish. Moreover, Catherine never agrees to Rose leaving the traditional domestic sphere in pursuit of personal glorification. Considering Rose's vibrant character, she as the New Woman appears as an idealised beauty whose determination leads her radically to conquer the old barriers that discourage women from fulfilling their dreams. As the novel points out: "Berlin had developed her precisely as she had desired that it might. The necessities of the Bohemian student's life had trained her to a new independence and shrewdness" (Ward, 1888, p. 389). The emphasis on Rose's newly gained confidence and personal development while abroad poses a

notable contrast to Catherine, who is also vibrant but specifically within the traditionally feminine sphere which underlines her naturalness, both in terms of her beauty and place in the society.

Similar to Rose, Mary in her New Woman role also evolves enthusiastically as a student trained to become a professional artist. Despite her extraordinary beauty, she never becomes complacent and allows herself to stop trying. To achieve painterly excellence has been her only goal as may be seen in her unrelenting attitude suggested by the fact that she has "always wished, and tried, too, in a hundred little ways, to differentiate herself from the ordinary run of social young womanhood. She ha[s] struggled to rise from the ranks" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 226). In comparison to Mary whose admirable endeavour is never diminished by a sense of over-confidence many associate with her extremely good looks, Jenny may not be categorised into the same class as a natural vibrant beauty. Although she moves freely in the public sphere, it causes her to feel ashamed, not proud and victorious like Mary.

Significantly, such beauty which accompanies each character's vibrant energy and which mobilises her in the male-dominated society is elusive as it exists very much in the abstract and hence impossible to illustrate pictorially. Nevertheless, we may look at the vibrant colours that brighten the central figure in *La Ghirlandata* and imagine the same sort of vigorous beauty that pushes the New Woman figures like Rose and Mary forward.

3.3.2 The fashionable versus the conventional

As an aspiring New Woman violinist, Rose emerges in the public sphere and allows herself to be exposed to elating, because so long-awaited, experiences away from home. Ward often underlines Rose's vibrant beauty through the character's energetic personality and strong desire to excel in her musical career, which matches perfectly with the inclusion of a musical instrument and the bright colours employed in bringing out the beauty of the Pre-Raphaelite woman, particularly that in *La Ghirlandata*. Rose's vibrancy underlies her beauty which leads to her becoming "the pretty, clever, unformed creature of London and Paris and Italy, and set her pining for that golden *vie de Bohème*" (Ward, 1888, pp. 88-89). The reference to a bohemian lifestyle places Rose instantly within the realm of the fashionable.

In addition, Rose's animated character feeds her vibrant beauty which in turn allows her to become very active in all her daily pursuits as may be seen in the way "her delicate cheek flushed with her gymnastics, her eyes sparkling" (Ward, 1888, p. 7). Ward characterises Rose as an exuberant young woman drunk with her own sense of liveliness. Moreover, associated with music, Rose also emerges as a great dancer who never hesitates to express her joy through music as she once "broke into a Strauss waltz, dancing to it the while, her cotton skirts flying, her pretty feet twinkling, till her eyes glowed, and

her cheeks blazed with a double intoxication—the intoxication of movement, and the intoxication of sound" (Ward, 1888, p. 90). Such a lively personality, as evident in her joyful waltz and crimson cheeks, further allows us to see the resemblance between Rose and *Bocca Baciata* apparent in the figure's healthy rosy face that, despite her stationary pose, betrays the vibrant energy hidden behind the still façade. Rose, in her beautiful energetic persona here linked with *La Ghirlandata* and *Bocca Baciata*, distinctly belongs to the fashionable Pre-Raphaelite clan.

In contrast, however, the oxymoronic vibrancy of Catherine's peaceful beauty is noticeable not because she desires acceptance or entrance into the public sphere. Rather, it shines through as she consistently demonstrates her ready willingness and power to reach out to those who need her help, a trait which suggests the secret power hidden within her. Her appearance is monochrome and, therefore, conventional since she refuses to adorn herself as doing so will clash with her faith deplorably. Typically, there are "traces of *patient* fatigue round the eyes and mouth, but all her emotion was gone, and she was *devoting* [emphasis added] herself to the others, responding with *quick* [emphasis added] interest and *ready* [emphasis added] smiles to all they had to say" (Ward, 1888, p. 174) as she appears in an unflattering "loose white dress with a black lace scarf draped about her head and form" (Ward, 1888, p. 174). Catherine's patience, emotionless expression, flowing white dress, and her noble charities that take place within the confines of domesticity immediately invite a comparison with *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* especially as the Virgin appears within an enclosed space with only the Archangel Gabriel to witness her calm beauty.

As opposed to Catherine's beauty confined mainly to the private sphere, Mary's passionate yearnings for success as a female painter allow her beauty and its vibrancy to fully come into play: "All the latent ambition had been stirred into activity within her. The possibilities of life had grown august, imposing. She had always been impatient of restrictions, of mediocrity" (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, pp. 226-227). In enrolling herself at the Connop School of Art, Mary is radiating the confidence and defiance of an unconventional young woman who pursues her goal in a decisive manner as suggested by how she finally awakens from her dormant ambition. Her vibrant beauty is further enhanced especially after she receives such reassuring remarks regarding her promising future that altogether serve to urge her more forcefully to realise her dreams. To imagine Mary as an expectant artist, the longing looks of the woman in *Bocca Baciata* who gazes with expectation into what the future holds echo the New Woman's impatience to rise to distinction. Her enthusiasm as well as rebelliousness against limitations and abhorrence of middling performances implicitly establishes her as a fashionable young beauty ready to strive for perfection.

Jenny, in contrast, creates a problematic irony as her vibrant beauty draws her to the public sphere not of her own accord but as a necessity. As the need to raise enough funds to save Colthurst's life forces her into prostitution, it unmistakably links her to *Found*. Because of her stigmatised past, she is no longer part of respectable society. Her energy, which has enabled her beautiful person to persist until taken down by sickness, ironically shuts her off from Colthurst's world. In this light, Jenny's vibrant beauty is unconventional as it resides in a *femme fatale*, not a traditional self-sacrificing heroine. Her self-sacrifice is different from that of Catherine because, while it is obviously not for a righteous cause, it is associated with an unsavoury profession, unacceptable according to the Victorian standards of morality.

3.3.3 The aesthetic versus the decadent

To embody her New Woman's vibrant beauty, which is an essential part of her powerful character, Ward depicts it in direct relation to her musical talent and aesthetic inclination. Rose's perfect physical charms are highlighted as we watch her "fling the fir cones lying about her at a distant mark with an energy worthy of her physical perfections and the aesthetic freedom of her attire" (Ward, 1888, p. 7). Reminiscent of the dresses that grace the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, such freedom of movement allowed by her typically aesthetic garments not only accentuates her beauty but also metaphorically suggests the liberated New Woman's enthusiasm which has taken her very far into the public sphere. The extent of the New Woman's success can be seen in her personal influence that is so effective that it entices a newly rich couple to court her stardom as they "*fêted* [emphasis added] her in their own house" (Ward, 1888, p. 391) after realising that Roses's "*vivacious beauty* [emphasis added] and *artistic gift* [emphasis added] made a stir wherever she went, [which] was a very welcome addition to their resources" (Ward, 1888, p. 391).

Indeed, Ward's stress on Rose's public fame that is derived from a combination of her stunning, lively looks and musical talent reinforces the aesthetic quality of Rose's vibrant beauty considered essential even to the New Woman herself as it means life. Likewise, Mary demonstrates profound passionate yearnings for success as a professional female painter, which is one of the "august" "possibilities of life" she often ponders (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 226). Consequently, especially after having been encouraged by Colthurst's prediction for her achievements which "dazzled her imagination," she entertains "magnificent hopes and sensations" that draw her into the public world where both her artistic abilities and aesthetic beauty are universally admired (Malet, 1891, Vol. 1, pp. 226-227). Thus, always adorned with beautiful attire and jewellery, Mary appears as an aesthetic New Woman character which in effect serves to intensify her vibrant beauty.

Significantly, Rose, Mary, and Jenny move freely in the public sphere, either voluntarily or inevitably, whereas Catherine does so purely as part of her philanthropy and Christian creeds. While all four women display their vibrant beauty, only the New Woman protagonists, Rose and Mary, may be considered aesthetic thanks to their excellence in music and painting. Importantly, Catherine's moral character, strength, and efforts expended on her admirable cause may also be considered, though vicariously, an aesthetic side of her discreetly vibrant and ethical character. In other words, her moral vibrancy is indeed the inward reflection of the external appearance of her beauty. Jenny, meanwhile, represents the notion of decadence after she has fallen from the feminine grace and virtues pictorially encapsulated in *Found*. Judging by the aesthetic / artistic qualities of Rose and Mary, both characters simultaneously lend themselves as a perfect match with *Bocca Baciata*, *Veronica Veronese*, and *La Ghirlandata* through the aesthetic clothes and jewelled accessories with which the beauty of all three painted women is embellished.

4. Conclusion

This research has found that there is a crucial link between the characterisation of the New Woman protagonists in the selected novels published at the end of the nineteenth century, especially in terms of their beauty, and the immediately identifiable styles of the Pre-Raphaelite women in the paintings from earlier decades. Rose Leyburn in *Robert Elsmere* and Mary Crookenden in *The Wages of Sin* are created with a strong visual appeal similarly underlying the central female figures in Rossetti's paintings. Moreover, the New Woman's vital beauty, which plays a crucial role not only in enabling both characters to fulfil their professional ambitions but also in allowing them to maintain physical purity, and moral integrity, also finds a subtle echo in the Pre-Raphaelite women through their pictorial expressions of determination as well as defiance aimed at viewers who dare to resist their powerful allure. In addition, the vibrant beauty that accompanies the New Woman protagonists who move freely and confidently in the predominantly male sphere of activities resonates with the bright colours that enliven the Pre-Raphaelite beauties on the canvas.

Such an interconnected web effectively weaves these different women together not through their stunning looks alone. The similarities between the paintings and the novels extend to include the women's impressive costumes, glorious hair and brilliant complexion, graceful poses, shapely figures, and feminine charms, as well as accessories of intricate precious metals and stones. The textual and pictorial representations of beautiful women which feature such similar details suggest that it is highly likely that the extraordinary beauty of the Pre-Raphaelite women not only inspires but also informs the formation of the beautiful New Woman characters as their rebellious character naturally reflects most of Rossetti's radical portrayal of women very well. It is necessary to

emphasise that Mary differs from Rose slightly as the former, through her involvement in the novel's concerns about morality, also resembles the traditional figure of the Virgin in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* Considering the influence that decadence had over authors in the last decade of the nineteenth century, it is understandable why a New Woman heroine like Mary needs to uphold her purity as a means to maintain ethical stability that ensures the continuity of a peaceful existence.

In order to make more substantial the inter-disciplinary connection between the New Woman figure and the Pre-Raphaelite women, further research may be conducted where the pictorial and the literary representations of women taken from other works by Rossetti himself as well as those by other Pre-Raphaelite artists, and novels by New Woman authors of both sexes, are explored. Such inquiries will offer opportunities for scholars of New Woman writing as well as broader, related fields including Victorian, feminist, and gender studies to better understand how literary representations of femininity could and did achieve more realistic human depths by founding their basis in visual arts, particularly since "the Pre-Raphaelites offered Victorian novelists innovative ways to represent perceptual, psychological, and poetical realism" (Andres, 2005, p. 20). A larger-scale comparative study of the literary and visual arts will contribute to a clearer, more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between the New Woman and the Pre-Raphaelite women.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849-1850). Oil on canvas laid on panel, 28½ × 16½″. Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 2. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Found* (1854-1881, unfinished). Oil on canvas, 36 × 31″. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

Figure 3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Bocca Baciata* (1859). Oil on panel, 12¾ × 10¾″. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 4. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Fazio's Mistress* (1863). Oil on panel, 17 × 14½″. Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 5. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Veronica Veronese* (1872). Oil on canvas, 43 × 34¾″. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

Figure 6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *La Ghirlandata* (1871-1874). Oil on canvas, 48.8 × 33.4″. Guildhall Art Gallery, London.