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## Millais's *Mariana*: Literary Painting, the Pre-Raphaelite Gothic, and the Iconology of the Marian Artist.

"On the whole the perfectest of his works, and the representative picture of that generation—was no Annunciate Maria bowing herself; but only a Newsless Mariana stretching herself."<sup>1</sup> Thus John Ruskin pronounced on Millais's *Mariana* (1850–51; fig. 1) in *The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism* (1878), a lecture in which Millais was described as "Our best painter" (Ruskin 34: 165) but also classified as the sole member of the "uneducated" branch of Pre-Raphaelitism, whilst Rossetti and Holman Hunt were its "learned" (Ruskin 34: 168) representatives, and Burne-Jones, Ruskin's latest Pre-Raphaelite protégé, was "the greatest master whom that school has ever produced" (Ruskin 34: 148). Ruskin was not using "uneducated" in a pejorative sense, indeed he was likening Millais's realist art to the work of his beloved Wordsworth, "as opposed to the *erudite* and artificial schools" (Ruskin 34: 167).

Unfortunately, Ruskin's influential and potentially ambiguous labelling of Millais as "uneducated" probably gave him the reputation as the least literate and literary Pre-Raphaelite oil painter, which he has kept despite the fact that he was and still is a highly regarded Victorian book illustrator.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the poet-painter Rossetti habitually wrote poems for and on pictures, and Hunt filled *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) with such literary clues as the unfurled sheet music for Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears," Millais subordinated overt literariness to realism, excelling in what Ruskin calls his "physical power . . . an intense veracity of direct realization to the eye" (Ruskin 34: 167).

It is because of Millais's "intense veracity" that the literariness of *Mariana* is under-

estimated, which is rather ironic since its title announces a Tennysonian and Shakespearean subject. Even when *Mariana*'s literariness is acknowledged by modern critics such as Malcolm Warner it is only to observe that "The work remains a subject-picture" because it uses symbolism "in the service of narrative," whereas *Autumn Leaves* (1855–56) apparently transcends the realm of narrative despite its anecdotal associations with Tennyson and "the happy Autumn-fields" (4) of "Tears, Idle Tears."<sup>3</sup> In trying to rehabilitate Millais's "perfectest" work I shall firstly try to show how it relates to works by Tennyson and Shakespeare and to specific Pre-Raphaelite paintings, many of which also illustrate works by these writers, thus constituting a significant and homogeneous body of Pre-Raphaelite literary paintings.

My second concern is to show *Mariana*'s significance in the evolution of the Pre-Raphaelite Gothic, a phenomenon first analysed by Walter Pater in his seminal review of "Poems by William Morris."<sup>4</sup> As Herbert Sussman has shown, the "early Victorian sacramental medievalism" of Carlyle and Ruskin was subverted by what Pater calls a "profounder medievalism."<sup>5</sup> The values of monastic order and Gothic workmanship celebrated by Carlyle and Ruskin respectively had to compete with the Pre-Raphaelite fantasy of a world in which repressed female sexuality resulted in what Pater calls "the idolatry of the cloister," which he claims "transformed the whole religion of the middle age into a beautiful disease of disorder of the senses" (106–07). It is this "Gothic" world which Millais's *Mariana* inhabits.