CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The world into which Pre-Raphaelitism was born was far from pleasant. 1848 has been characterised as "the year of great and general revolt". At the beginning of the year there was serious apprehension of a French invasion. Then in February, revolution broke out in Paris and Louis Philippe was overthrown. Rioting continued sporadically in France, and civil war raged in Hungary in Austria, in Poland, and in Italy. This conflict of ideologies and classes throughout Europe is best epitomised by one fact: 1848 saw the publication of The Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. England was in the grip of the 'hungry forties': it was the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, when working class unrest had found expression in the Chartist risings. The panic-stricken fears of mob violence that these aroused in higher levels of society had inspired Barnaby Rudge in 1841; they survive as the nightmare ideas of the Reign of Terror in A Tale
of Two Cities (1859) and were still implicit ten years after that in Arnold’s Culture and Anarchy. But domestic uneasiness was not only due to political causes: in 1848 the dangers of over industrialisation were emphasised in the grim form of an outbreak of cholera” (Welland 21).

This was what compelled William Morris to pen the following lines:

Forget six counties overhung with smoke

Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,

Forget the spreading of the hideous town;

Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,

And dream of London, small and white and clean (84).

It was from this harsh and drab contemporary state of affairs that the Pre-Raphaelites wished to ‘escape’ from, and almost always they sought refuge in the glorious medieval past: "the literature and history of the Middle Ages provided them with a less exacting outlet for the perturbation of their emotions ... it was a world which, though its permutations in the mind were illimitable, was immune from the encroachments of the social question" (Robin Ironside 16). However, most often their medieval world was highly idealistic - they tended to ignore the harsh and brutal realities, and emphasised only the romance and the glories of that chivalric
era. As Faverty rightly remarks "the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic was essentially romantic, and in the poetry and the painting of the movement there are twin manifestations of romantic escapism which look simultaneously backward to a world of the imagination and forward to a utopian dream of the future" (258).

"Rossetti was both the herald and the master in this imaginative recoil from the contemporary prospect" (Irons 17). Rossetti's means of escape was through the twin arts of painting and poetry. With regard to painting it was through the founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and its related activities. Socially Rossetti sought refuge in the company of this closely knit circle, and his other trusted friends. Later on in life he became a recluse, and sought refuge from the harsh realities of life by his addiction to chloral. Concerning his literary escapism, one positive aspect of it was his genuine effort to breathe new life into the traditional medieval ballad. He did this by writing seven ballads in imitation of the traditional medieval ballad form. So much so, that Jerome H. Buckley calls him the "Victorian master of the ballad" (134).

Critics speak disparagingly of the escapist nature of Pre-Raphaelite poetry. Wilenski remarks disapprovingly that "in one aspect the movement was tainted at the start. It contained within itself the fatal element of 'medievalism'" (219). Even Ruskin their staunchest ally warned them that "if their sympathies with the early artists lead them into medievalism or romanism, they will come to nothing" (Doughty 164). More particularly
John Dixon Hunt expresses his displeasure by saying that "Rossetti's use of mediaeval objects does not charm, or refresh" (48). These Critics who remark adversely about Rossetti’s escapism do not offer any objective evidence to support their remarks. Even when his efforts are praised, it is done so grudgingly: Graham Hough remarks that Rossetti’s best work is in his ballads, and yet adds that these are "sheer pastiche" (71). David Daiches generalises in the following manner: "in some respects it can be said that he tried to operate in a medieval mode in the Victorian world, and that he could only achieve limited success because of the context of his operations. Sometimes his pictorial mysticism led to mere archaism or mere verbal dissipation, but sometimes it succeeds splendidly as it does in his imitation ballad, "Sister Helen", his most completely successful poem in the ballad style: (1021). But Daiches, like the others, does not reveal how or why it is successful. This is exactly what this dissertation has attempted to do. And herein lies its importance: it strongly asserts that there is nothing deplorable about Rossetti's literary escapism to the medieval past. In the criticism of a poem, all that matters is whether it has any aesthetic merit or not, and not whether it is escapist or not. In the final analysis what is significant is that how skilfully Rossetti has ‘escaped’ to the medieval past; how artistically he has imitated the traditional medieval ballad.

The first chapter is introductory in nature. It outlines the various ways in which the medieval age and literature influenced Rossetti’s career.
as a poet. Chief among these was the traditional medieval ballad. A short account of his career in writing literary ballads is followed by a detailed explanation of the linguistic and stylistic methodology to be used in the subsequent chapters. The most important reason for using a modern stylistic method of analysis is because as Leech avers along with the eminent linguist-critic Leo Spitzer "the smallest detail of language can unlock the 'soul' of a literary work". (2). However the identification, quantification and classification of the data do not become ends in themselves. The stylistic analysis is used as a method of 'Practical Criticism' to study the total communicative effect of the two poems, (Leech 4) and as a means to proving the hypothesis.

The second chapter begins with a brief introduction to "Sister Helen." It clearly specifies why it has been chosen as the subject of study of this dissertation. The chapter is a detailed and minute comparative and contrastive study of the narrative structure and the dramatic mode of presentation of the traditional medieval ballad "Edward Edward" and "Sister Helen." The linguistic and stylistic data have been carefully marshalled and the consequent semantic implications have been correctly interpreted to support and prove the subjective and intuitive judgements. At every stage the chapter establishes with certainty the superiority, and sophistication of the narrative structure and dramatic mode of presentation of "Sister Helen" over that of its original "Edward Edward." The main reasons why "Sister Helen" is more complex than "Edward Edward" is because Rossetti used
an idea which is not present anywhere in the folk tradition of balladry, namely the idea of Helen melting the wax image of Keith of Ewern. Further "Sister Helen" has a larger number of characters, and it is made more sophisticated by Rossetti's careful attention to characterisation. Rossetti's technique of narration is more vivid and complex than the medieval ballad singer's because of the equivocal questions and answers of Helen.

The next chapter marks a progressive stage in that it is an exclusively linguistic and stylistic analysis of all the lexical and grammatical categories of both the poems. The checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories found on pages 75 to 79 of Style in Fiction A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose by Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael N. Short is the framework on which this comprehensive and detailed study rests. All aspects of the vocabulary, nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, sentence types, sentence complexity, clause types and clause structure have been examined exhaustively in great detail. But more important, with the help of A Grammar of Contemporary English by Quirk et al, all the stylo statistic data have been used to unravel all the various semantic implications of the carefully marshalled data. The rigorous and scientific analysis establishes clearly at every stage the higher degree of sophistication and demonstrates precisely the higher degree of complexity and density of all the lexical and grammatical categories of "Sister Helen" over that of its original "Edward Edward."
The fourth chapter deals with the different figures of speech. With the aid of Leech's *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* a detailed stylistic analysis of the various grammatical, lexical and phonological schemes and of the tropes establishes certainly the complexity and intricateness of "Sister Helen" over that of its original "Edward Edward." Rossetti's poem is more sophisticated chiefly because he uses "the modulated refrain" which as Anne Henry Ehrenpreis rightly points out "is not found in the traditional ballads, [and] is generally associated with the Pre-Raphaelites" (17). Further the poetic genius of Rossetti enables him to use a larger number of schemes and tropes, and enrich his poem by using more than one device simultaneously.

Chapter V is a detailed and minute stylistic analysis of the stanzaic structure and prosody of the two poems. All aspects of the stanzaic structure—stanzaic unity, stanzaic mobility and stanzaic progression—of both the poems have been examined minutely using the methods outlined in Ernst Häublein's *The Stanza*. Rossetti's use of the stanza is more sophisticated than the traditional ballad singer's mainly because he uses a larger variety of initial and closural devices and is able to simultaneously combine both the ex posteriori and a priori methods of stanzaic progression. The prosody of both the poems has been studied using G.S. Fraser's *Metre, Rhyme and Free Verse* and the more modern and comprehensive *The Rhythms of English Poetry* by Derek Attridge. All aspects of the syllable, rhythm, metre, caesura, and enjambment have been compared and contrasted carefully,
to establish the complexity of "Sister Helen's" prosody over that of "Edward Edward's."

To conclude, the detailed analysis carried out in the last four chapters definitively refutes the claim of Graham Hough that "Sister Helen" is "sheer pastiche" (71). On the contrary the exhaustive and detailed study establishes clearly that Rossetti by escaping to the medieval past by writing a literary ballad "Sister Helen" in conscious and deliberate imitation of the traditional medieval ballad "Edward Edward" was in reality creating an artistically new and independent entity with a beauty of its own.

"Sister Helen" is undoubtedly escapist for the following reasons:

(i) Rossetti has used the traditional medieval ballad form, as Hunt correctly points out, as a vehicle for literary escapism: "When they (the Pre-Raphaelites) dreamed of the past they simply translated it into actual terms, as in Rossetti's ballads" (23).

(ii) Rossetti creates a world of medieval fantasy in which Helen uses supernatural means to accomplish her revenge.

(iii) The characters, Keith of Eastholm, Keith of Westholm, Keith of Keith and Keith of Ewern undoubtedly belong to the distant medieval past.

(iv) Rossetti has used words and phrases like "waxen," "sunken," "knave," "vesper," "thinned" and "baron" to create a medieval atmosphere. But, to reiterate, the analysis has proved that "Sister Helen" is an aesthetically
pleasing and creative imitation of the original traditional medieval ballad "Edward Edward." This is not surprising for after all Rossetti helped to found and led the movement Pre-Raphaelitism which according to Fredeman "emphasized the artist as creator rather than as copyist" (2).

Further Rossetti demonstrates his poetic genius by exercising careful control over his escapist flight of fancy. The poem itself is not completely divorced from the harsh realities of daily life. Rossetti tempers his escapism in the following manner:

(i) As Derek Stanford observes correctly "Psychologically the intense subjectivity of the escape poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites heightened rather than lessened the burden of isolation, pain and sorrow as felt by the individual" (xxvi). Edward can escape the consequences of patricide by fleeing to another country, but not so Helen. She knows that soon she will be burnt alive at the stake, and that her soul will go to hell. There is no escape for her either physically or spiritually.

(ii) Welland remarks that "Rossetti always tried to temper escapist beauty with factual observation" (42). Helen's brother observes accurately and reports precisely everything that happens outside: "I hear a horse tread, and I see, / Sister Helen, / Three horsemen that ride terribly."

The present work has been a modest attempt to study and highlight one aspect of a relatively minor movement in English literature. What I wish to affirm is that although the minor movement Pre- Raphaelitism
may have been subdued by the larger school or movement Victorianism it nevertheless not only made valuable contributions to the main movement, but also influenced the writers of the future generations. For as William Fredeman affirms:

The importance of Pre-Raphaelitism as the dominant animating force in English aesthetics through four decades of the nineteenth century is indisputable. The Pre-Raphaelites were not only the arbiters, they were often the instigators of taste in literature, in art, in clothes, in houses, in book design, in furniture in wall papers — the contagion of their enthusiasm creating an atmosphere that fired the imaginations of workers in almost every field of the beautiful. A catalogue of the Movement's devotees and associates includes figures as remote as Charles Reade and William Butler Yeats. Maurice Browning Cramer has traced the influence of the group in furthering Browning's reputation between 1847 and 1856, and in kindling a devotion for Browning at Oxford during the period of the second "Brotherhood". Similarly, G.H. Ford has shown that Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites were largely instrumental in keeping
alive the reputation and influence of Keats .... It is characteristic that they championed Whitman in England long before others and William Rossetti, Swinburne, and William Bell Scott were all pioneers in the Blake revival; and Rossetti proselytized avidly for the insignificant little volume of verse that FitzGerald’s publisher had disposed of, thereby retrieving the *Rubaiyat* from possible oblivion.

Not only did the Pre-Raphaelites influence Yeats who, of himself between 1887 and 1891, says "I was in all things Pre-Raphaelite," as well as they left their mark on Shaw, who in the Preface to *Candida* (1897) specifically states that he is writing a "Pre-raphaelite" play. Beyond these — and the obvious attempt of Wilde and others of the *fin de siecle*, rightly or wrongly, to trace the origins of their aesthetic beliefs to the Pre-Raphaelites — the influence of the movement spread further: to Richard Aldington, to Pound, to the early Lawrence, and to the Imagists" (4-5).

And more specifically Jerome Buckley has this to say about Rossetti’s escapism:
"yet at its best Rossetti’s ‘medievalised’ art defined a serious, if esoteric, order of wonder and beauty that left its distinct mark on the far from Pre-Raphaelite generation of Joyce and Ezra Pound. And Rossetti’s personal alienation from the present and nostalgia for a more coherent past, whatever form of expression they took, foreshadowed almost every modern poet’s disaffection with an unaesthetic modern world" (137).

The methodology that I have employed will be useful as a model for research scholars of the future, not only in the field of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, but also for the study of poetry in general:

(i) It concentrates intensely only on the poem/poems which has/have to be analysed.

(ii) It combines both the subjective and the modern stylistic methods of analysis.

(iii) And hence it is scientific and precise and artistically pleasing.

(iv) The checklist used in each chapter to deal with every single aspect of the two poems, can be used as it is or adapted judiciously to serve the particular needs of other research scholars.
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