Chapter Four

SCRIPTURE AS HISTORY

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position.

"Musée des Beaux Arts," W. H. Auden*

The Brotherhood's figuralism is executed most
directly and most consistently in the treatment
of scriptural subjects. Self-consciously termed
"Christian Art design" (PRBJ, 9) or "sacred picture" (PRBJ, 13),
biblical painting was a major occupation of the circle and forms
an important portion of its production during the Brotherhood
years. In one sense, these works can be considered literary
paintings, attempts to translate Scripture into an equally
typological visual language. More importantly, they can be seen
as a form of history painting in representing as accurately as
possible the appearance of an event that actually occurred, or
that might have occurred. It is through this historical treatment
of Scripture that the Brotherhood can most nearly show histori­
cal fact as figure since, particularly to their Protestant audience,
the associations of biblical events are so immediately present
that to show the biblical action is simultaneously to present its
transcendental significance.

The work that most clearly exemplifies Brotherhood aims for
biblical painting, and thus most clearly exhibits the implicit
tensions of this position, is Millais's Christ in the House of
His Parents (R.A., 1850), also known as The Carpenter's Shop.
There is, most strikingly, a virtually obsessive concern for the
particularity of physical fact. Millais worked in his studio from
two sheepsheads obtained from a nearby butcher; he used his
father as a model for Joseph's face, but a London carpenter for
the exact musculature of the arms. And if, in his hard-edged
style and clear modeling of each specimen-object, he is emulat­
ing the scientist, in his imaginative re-creation of the domestic
reality of the childhood of Jesus, he is emulating the contempo­
rary historian. As in the writings of Carlyle and Ruskin, the very
form works to draw the audience into participation in the events

*W. H. Auden, Collected Poems, ed. Edward Mendelson. Copyright 1940 and
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of the past. In this characteristic Brotherhood composition, the use of a three-sided room, presumably historically accurate in showing the open-fronted shops of the East, sets the viewer into the role of passer-by, an unobserved witness to an actual event. Even the use of members of the Brotherhood circle as models enforces the sense of participation in significant events of the past; historical empathy becomes a means of transcending the secular present.¹

As religious artist, Millais sought not only to enforce the historical reality of Jesus but also to suggest through this imagined event the prefigurative quality of each action in His life. As William Michael Rossetti notes of the painting, "[It is a] typical utterance. . . . Of the treatment . . . we need only say that it is throughout human—the types humanly possible and probable (never merely symbol independent of the action)" (Fine Art, 204–5). As in the prose of Carlyle and Ruskin, this transformation of thoroughly "human" actions into figure is achieved through formal correspondence with traditional symbols. The sheep could perfectly well be kept by a Galilean carpenter, and yet, through a readily available public reference, they figure Christ's future mission as Shepherd and His Sacrifice. Similarly, the dove upon the ladder is painted as a natural fact, without a nimbus, but becomes through an equally available visual parallel, a figure for the appearance of the Paraclete at the Crucifixion. But, since Millais can create religious resonance only through reference to public symbols, he must work into his historical scheme just those iconographic conventions that the Brotherhood dismissed as drained of meaning by centuries of use. The young John the Baptist wears a fur loincloth. The wounded palm and the blood dripping on Jesus' foot form the stigmata; the kneeling Mary presents a visual allusion to a Pietá.

The overall form also emphasizes its visual equivalence to the typological quality of Scripture. The painting was originally exhibited with no title, only with the words from Zechariah 13:6: "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." To the audience steeped in biblical exegesis, this verse is a clear reminder that just as the events of the Old Testament prefigure those of the New, so this event of Jesus' childhood prefigures subsequent events in His life. As a whole, then, the work resembles an Interpreter's Bible in which the New Testament text is glossed through references to prefigurative events in the Old. And yet the characteristic Brotherhood habit of providing a verbal gloss to their paint-
ings suggests, as much as do the overt visual allusions on the canvas, the unacknowledged necessity of giving meaning to their invented subjects through clearly available parallels to traditional iconography.

In accord with Brotherhood ideas, Millais is trying to re-create the figural mode of Scripture not by imitating the early-Italian painters but by employing the methods that characterize the nineteenth century, in particular through what William Michael Rossetti in his important essay "The Externals of Sacred Art" (1857) calls "naturalism . . . the consentaneous tendency of all the living art of the time . . . more systematic, more downright, and more thorough . . . than has ever before been sought or professed by art" (Fine Art, 42). And here, as in other Brotherhood work, the style of the scientist becomes an appropriate means of expressing figural vision. Each natural fact is treated as a specimen, given a clear focus of definition irrespective of the distance from the notional picture plane; the face of Mary and the shavings are modeled with the same hard-edge distinctness as the dove and ladder in the background. Rejecting the theatrical chiaroscuro advocated by the Academy, Millais fills the canvas with bright, uniform light so that shavings and stigmata receive as much illumination as the boards at the periphery. This lack of visual distinction opposes the Academic composition in which the lines of the painting point toward the central event, the prefiguration of the stigmata. This equality of visual emphasis, then, expresses the perception, shared by Carlyle and Ruskin, that no matter how apparently trivial, each fact in the phenomenal world is meaningful if only read rightly; shavings as well as stigmata, dove as well as carpentry tools (as Ruskin demonstrated in his reading of Tintoretto's Annunciation) lead toward the same sacramental truth. Only when sacramental assumptions weaken or disappear, do the minute particularity and overwhelming detail appear to the viewer as showing an accidental universe in which boards and baskets, nails and human bodies, doves and sheep are merely tangible, contiguous objects.  

Although in theory, each object, every historical event embodies transcendental meaning, the problem for the artist lies in communicating this virtually infinite symbolic richness. In a letter on The Hireling Shepherd, Hunt notes, "In my mind incidents for treatment by Art are either extraneous facts or typical circumstances. A man walking along a road is an example of what I mean by the first. But one setting out from his home or arriving at his journey's end becomes a subject of a typical
kind." Although sacramental theory would not admit to "extraneous facts," Hunt seems to mean by this term incidents that do not in themselves elicit strong symbolic resonance. Hunt sees that in order to convey symbolic meaning through a realistic style, the artist cannot merely reproduce the visible world, but must carefully select subjects "of a typical kind," those that, like the example of "one setting out from his home," carry traditional associations. But within a style that rejects Raphaelite abstraction, the canvas cannot consist wholly of "typical circumstances"; there remain "facts" that are, within Hunt's terms, indeed "extraneous" in being outside any public iconographic system.

In the specific case of The Carpenter's Shop, only the natural facts that correspond to traditional iconography, such as the sheep, the dove, the wounds, become easily available to a public reading. As appalled as the contemporary critics were by the stylistic divergence of the work, they found the typological meaning of the central event easily accessible. The reviewer for the Art Journal, for example, writes, "The child Jesus has wounded his hand and in showing it to his mother she kisses him. This is a prefiguration of the Crucifixion; and John brings a vessel of water in order that the wound may be washed. This is an allusion to the future mission of St. John." Difficulty arises in reading the other natural facts that are given an equal stylistic emphasis—the basket at the lower left, the door itself, the shavings—but exhibit no evident iconographic associations. Within the figural context, the impulse is to search for meaning in each detail, but in a work committed to representing the multitudinousness of the visible world, a complete symbolic reading appears impossible. Some details of the painting remain, in Hunt's term, "extraneous facts."

The difficulty in reading The Carpenter's Shop, the tension between public and private symbol, between allusion to traditional iconography and a wholly novel subject, point to the inherent difficulties that emerged in carrying out Brotherhood aims. The Brothers' purpose was to revitalize the tradition of sacred art and thus restore to the artist the lost role of public sage. In spite of their creation of a small, tightly bound group and the public secret of their name, they sought to create an art whose appeal was not inward to the initiated but outward to the general public. Their choice of name expresses the desire to recall the artist to the position that he occupied in the period preceding Raphael when, as integrated member of the society, he could represent in vivid yet intelligible form the shared moral
and religious values of the community. The Brotherhood strategy was to restore this function by effecting a Wordsworthian revolution in the language of art. Just as Wordsworth had restored the vatic function of the poet by rejecting a poetic diction that no longer had power to move the reader, so the Brotherhood sought to replace the exhausted artistic conventions that, passed down from Raphael and attenuated by the Academy, no longer had the power to convey to the audience the idea of the sacred. Like Wordsworth’s new poetic language, the new art language of the Brotherhood was to be rooted in the common experience of men, in their ability to perceive the visible world as it actually exists.

The effort to describe scriptural events in this new language so as to restore an intense awareness both of their historicity and of their sacredness was central to the Brotherhood. Hunt provides a clear statement of this aim in the 1846 conversation with Millais that he saw as marking the beginning of the Brotherhood:

The language they used was then a living one, now it is dead.... In the figure of the risen Lord, for instance, about which we began to talk, the painters put a flag in His hands to represent His victory over Death: their public had been taught that this adjunct was a part of the alphabet of their faith.... If I were to put a flag with a cross on it in Christ’s hand, the art-galvanising revivalists might be pleased, but unaffected people would regard the work as having no living interest for them. I have been trying for some treatment that might make them see this Christ with something of the surprise that the Maries themselves felt on meeting Him as One who has come out of the grave.” (Hunt, 1:84-85)

Hunt started to carry out this plan with a historical treatment of Christ newly risen, Christ and the Two Marys, begun in 1847. Although he anticipated his later methods by painting the palm trees at the right from a specimen in Kew Gardens, the work gave him trouble; the classical massiveness of the kneeling Mary and the generalized landscape suggest that in 1847 Hunt had not completely shed the Raphaelite manner. The painting was not completed until the end of the century when Hunt finished the Christ and, now familiar with the Holy Land, painted in the geology of the mountains of Moab in the background.

The Carpenter’s Shop exemplifies this effort to use stylistic innovation to present the life of Christ with freshness and vividness. Certainly, the intense attack by critics indicates that this picture, like other Brotherhood works, did genuinely diverge from mid-Victorian visual expectations. Although the language of their criticism is vague, its unanimity is significant. All the critics express their sense that the people appear deformed. To
the *Art-Journal*, the painting is seen as "distorting the body." 6 To *Blackwood's*, "emaciation and deformity constitute their chief stock in trade. They apparently select bad models, and then exaggerate their badness till it is out of all nature." 7 And to the *Athenaeum*, it seems "difficult in the present day of improved taste and information to apprehend any large worship of an Art-idol set up with visible deformity as its attribute." 8 These comments suggest how deep "Raphaelite" visual expectations were. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* sets forth as the "highest perfection" in art Raphael's cartoon of "Paul Preaching at Athens." To this reviewer, "there is no historical evidence that the apostles bore any outward indication in their forms or faces of their divine mission, yet how offensive, how monstrous, would be the error of that artist who should seek the fitting type of St. Paul in a common sailmaker or of St. Peter in a fisherman! The duty of the painter when he deals with these subjects is, to give material form and colour, to render palpable to the outward sense the image created in the mind by the grandest and holiest associations." With this idealized, nonhistorical treatment of biblical material as his model, the reviewer perceives the figure of Jesus as "unhealthy." 9

The intensity of the attack on *The Carpenter's Shop*, so puzzling to modern critics, emerges, in part, from the reviewers' quite accurate perception that these genuine divergences from artistic decorum were signs of a more general attack on the entire model of art history and theory maintained by the Royal Academy. The reviews are less concerned with the individual work than with the dangerous principles of the group as a whole. The *Athenaeum* speaks of "the doings of a school of artists whose younger members unconsciously write its condemnation in the very title which they adopt—that of pre-Raffaellite:—and we would not have troubled ourselves or our readers with any further remarks on the subject, were it not that eccentricities of any kind have a sort of seduction for minds that are intellectual without belonging to the better orders of intellect." 10 The reviewers focus on the challenge of the Brotherhood to the received belief that, in the manner of a science, visual art in the Renaissance made certain discoveries, such as the use of perspective, that culminated in the Grand Style of Raphael and Michaelangelo, a style that the artists of succeeding generations have been emulating. As the reviewers recognize, admiration of the "pre-Raffaellite" implies a subversive primitivism that sees premodern art as exhibiting a vitality that has been destroyed by the techniques used from the Renaissance to the present day. The *Athenaeum* speaks of the
Brotherhood as "setting at nought all the advanced principles of light and shade," the Spectator of going back "not to the perfect schools, but through and beyond them to the days of puerile crudity," the Art-Journal of returning to the "time when Art was employed in mortification of the flesh," and Blackwood's of "renouncing, in fact, the progress that since then has been made; rejecting the experience of centuries, to revert to models, not to art in its prime, but to art in its uncultivated infancy." Dickens entitles his attack on the painting "Old Lamps for New Ones" and sees the group as the emblem of "the great retrogressive principle" that will demand not only a "Pre-Perspective Brotherhood" but even a "Pre-Newtonian Brotherhood" that might object to the laws of gravitation.

The intensity of the attack on The Carpenter's Shop, then, dramatizes the atmosphere of artistic dissent generated by the Brotherhood effort to restore what they considered to be the authentic tradition of sacred art. But such a stance of opposition was inevitable. The modern religious artist, the members of Brotherhood in the nineteenth century or Roualt in the twentieth, must replace a visual language that has become drained of intensity through familiarity, and he can restore the sense of sacredness to art only by creating new styles, new modes of presenting traditional subjects. Only through such innovation can orthodox truths be presented freshly and intensely to the religious imagination. But such innovation inevitably opened the Brotherhood, all their orthodoxy of content and didacticism of purpose notwithstanding, to charges of "desecration" and "blasphemy" for violating the received ways of representing the divine. The historical irony—that at mid-nineteenth century religious purposes demanded rejection of the artistic tradition offered by established institutions—does much to explain how the Brotherhood effort to revive sacramental art gave rise to avant-garde movements later in the century. Once the religious motivations dissolved, the sense of opposition remained, to be passed on through Rossetti to Morris, Swinburne, and the aesthetic movement.

The reviewers' intense sense of the dangerousness of Millais's painting also indicates the degree to which Brotherhood style, as well as the immediate reaction against it, drew energy from notions not only of aesthetics but of social class. The most evident stylistic divergence of The Carpenter's Shop is its violation of Raphaelite decorum in treating a high biblical subject in the particularized style that the Victorians saw as more appropriate to representations of lower-class life, such as Dutch genre.
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scenes. Millais is here fulfilling Carlyle's call for a "Biography" (Sartor, 224) of Jesus, a historicist treatment that would, in the words Hunt attributes to Carlyle, "provide a veritable contemporary representation of Jesus Christ, showing Him as He walked about" (Hunt, 1:356). But the result of this break with Raphaelite practice is to shift Jesus' social class, to transform him from a person of high station into a worker actively engaged in making a living within the family shop.

Two years after the 1848 revolutions, these democratic implications were not lost on the reviewers. They saw that by rejecting a style that implicitly presented Jesus as a hero of high degree, Millais identified Jesus with the working class of their city, with an "unwashed brat, scratching itself against rusty nails in a carpenter's shop in the Seven Dials." In this context, Dickens's well-known condemnation of Jesus as a "hideous, wry-necked, blubbering . . . boy, in a bed-gown" and Mary as "so horrible in her ugliness that . . . she would stand out from the rest of the company as a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin-shop in England" indicates not the eccentricities of genius but the representative middle-class sensibility he brought to the unaccustomed role of art critic. In part, since his visual model is Hogarth's Gin Lane, Dickens is articulating his sense that the methods of detailed realism are more appropriate to depictions of tavern scenes. But, like other bourgeois critics, Dickens, conveniently forgetting the New Testament narrative, cannot accept the association of Jesus with the inhabitants of "the vilest cabaret" or "lowest gin-shop." For other critics, outrage at the association of Jesus with the working class was expressed through religious terminology; the work is "heretical and damnable," a "pictorial blasphemy."

The Carpenter's Shop also exemplifies a popular subject of the time, the childhood of Jesus, a subject that particularly appealed to the Brotherhood because it so readily lent itself to typological treatment. Original scenes could be invented, treated with historical and naturalistic accuracy, and yet easily achieve religious meaning as prefiguring the later life of Christ. The second volume of The Germ begins with an illustrated poem by James Collinson, entitled "The Child Jesus." Both drawing and poem are explicitly figural. The poem has as its subtitle "A Record typical of the five Sorrowful Mysteries" and, like The Carpenter's Shop, an Old Testament epigraph to suggest the need for typological interpretation. The five parts of the poem create a series of historically possible incidents in Jesus' childhood that are "typical" in being prefigurations of later events in His life.
For example, in part one, "The Agony in the Garden," the young Jesus sees his pet dove attacked and killed by a hawk. The frontispiece of volume two of *The Germ* illustrates the third stanza in which, as a type of "The Crowning with Thorns," a group of Jesus' playmates place on his head a "wreath / Of hawthorn flowers" (Germ, 53). More than Millais, Collinson here has difficulty fully integrating natural detail into the symbolic scheme. The shells, the marine animals, the seaweed-covered rocks in the foreground would do credit to Philip Gosse in their detail and clarity of outline (plate 1); yet, without clear correspondence to iconographic conventions, they remain merely isolated physical objects. Unlike Millais, Collinson is unable to invent an incident that would draw even a large portion of his carefully detailed natural fact into a symbolic configuration. Whereas the poem remains consistent with the domestic life of the young Jesus, Collinson can find a visual equivalent for the poem only by violating its "typical" quality through the introduction of supernatural symbolic apparatus. Jesus is given a halo, and the cross in his hand carries a banner reading "Ecce Agnus Dei." With the use of these non-naturalistic elements, the work loses any of the sense of surprise and of interest that derive from the illusion of witnessing an actual scene in the childhood of a historically real Jesus.

Millais's other scriptural painting of his Brotherhood period, *The Return of the Dove to the Ark* (R.A., 1851), illustrates a variation of the Brotherhood desire to create a new typological art-language for Scripture. The theory behind such a work is best described by William Rossetti, who notes in "The Externals of Sacred Art" that for the culture of Victorian England, in which the defining qualities are "naturalism" and "Protestantism," the public is predisposed to "receive gladly any conscientious and heartfelt representation of Scriptural history, in which the aim is to adhere strictly to the recorded fact, merely transferring it from verbal expression to form, and depending for its impressive enforcement upon the fidelity of the transfer" (Fine Art, 42). The detailed accuracy shown in the handling of the individual stalks of hay and what Ruskin praised as the "ruffling of the plumage of the wearied dove" (12:235), as well as the rejection of idealization through the coarse features and ungainly posture of the daughters, enforces the historical actuality and particularly the domestic quality of biblical events. By illustrating an event recorded in Scripture rather than by inventing a wholly original scene, and by selecting an event whose typological significance in prefiguring the New Covenant is evident, Millais here suc-
ceeds in fusing historical truth with sacred meaning, in directly "transferring" the figural quality of Scripture "from verbal expression to form."

During his Brotherhood period, Rossetti, too, devoted a good part of his effort to scriptural subjects. In their conception, these works conform to Brotherhood theory; Rossetti even hoped to accompany Hunt on a proposed journey to the Holy Land in 1850 (PRBJ, 73). And yet, filtered through Rossetti's distinctly non-naturalistic imagination, Brotherhood figuralism takes a distinctive form. Working outside Protestant tradition, Rossetti creates scriptural works that take on a medieval, hieratic quality.

His first completed painting, The Girlhood of Mary Virgin (1849, no. 40), was conceived within the Brotherhood aesthetic. In a significant letter of 1848 describing his aims, Rossetti, like the writers of The Germ, criticizes Raphaelite treatments of this subject for failing in historical accuracy. Such works are "very inadequate" since "they have invariably represented her as reading from a book under the superintendence of her Mother, St. Anne, an occupation obviously incompatible with these times, and which could only pass muster if treated in a purely symbolical manner" (Letters, 1:48). Rather than working in a "purely symbolical manner," Rossetti seeks to create a scene both freshly original and compatible with historical fact: "In order, therefore, to attempt something more probable and at the same time less commonplace, I have represented the future Mother of Our Lord as occupied in embroidering a lily,—always under the direction of St. Anne" (Letters, 1:48). Although it is scarcely less "incompatible" to have the Virgin working at embroidery rather than reading a book, Rossetti's intentions are clear: to convey the figural quality of the Virgin's Life by showing such traditional signs as the lily as both symbol and domestic fact. In similar fashion, other symbols are absorbed into the daily reality of household life, notably the Cross, which forms a trellis for the ivy, the True Vine being pruned by Saint Joachim, and the Robe of Christ, which becomes the red cloth in the center. Even the modeling of the Virgin and of Saint Anne from his sister and his mother indicate his desire to fuse the sacred with the domestic.

Yet, Rossetti's stated aim of creating a scriptural work "more probable and . . . less commonplace" by applying historical methods to a traditional subject remains unfulfilled in the finished work. The first painting to exhibit the initials "P.R.B." shows how uncongenial the group's aim of historical accuracy, indeed, how uncongenial any thoroughgoing naturalism, was to
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his imagination. Unlike Millais's dove in *The Carpenter's Shop*, this dove, whose prefigurative meaning is identical, is given a nimbus; Mary and Saint Anne are each given a halo. Such objects as the angel watering the lily or the six volumes bearing the names of the virtues violate the naturalistic premise. As in Collinson's work, mottoes appear within the work itself—the briar and the palm in the foreground bear the inscription, "Tot dolores tot gaudia"—rather than, as in the work of Millais and Hunt, as glosses that frame a naturalistic representation.

With the subversive implications of the initials "P.R.B." yet unknown, the medievalizing quality of the work attracted favorable notice. The *Art-Journal* noted, "The artist has worked in austere cultivation of all the virtues of the ancient fathers."24 And the *Athenaeum* approved the painting as one "in which Art is made the exponent of some high aim, and what is 'of the earth earthy' and of the art material is lost sight of in dignified and intellectual purpose."25

Curiously, without knowing the meaning of the initials on the painting, the reviewers praise the work for its "Pre-Raphaelite" quality, for its imitation of the same early-Renaissance artists that the members of the Brotherhood believed themselves to be emulating. To the *Art-Journal*, Rossetti's painting is "successful as a pure imitation of early Florentine art... With all the severities of the Giotteschi, we find necessarily the advances made by Pietro della Francesca and Paolo Uccello." The reviewer for the *Athenaeum* is reminded "of the feeling with which the early Florentine monastic painters wrought; and the form and face of the Virgin recall the works employed by Savonarola... Mr. Rossetti has perhaps unknowingly entered into the feelings of the renowned Dominican who in his day wrought as much reform in art as in morals." And the *Observer* sees the painting as "partaking of the hard manner of the period of Italian art which preceded Raffaelle."26 The *Art-Journal* is quite exact in giving the stylistic elements that make the painting appear Pre-Raphaelite: "There is no shade in the picture, the figures being rounded by gradations jealous of the slightest approach to depth. The expression and character of the features are intense and vivacious, and these, together with the draperies and accessories, are elaborated into the highest degree of nicety." These remarks suggest that in 1849 there was a constellation of stylistic elements—lack of chiaroscuro, hard-edge modeling, flatness of picture plane, clear detailing of secondary objects—that both Rossetti's circle and the Victorian public would call "Pre-Raphaelite." Furthermore, the uniform praise of this first paint-
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...ing suggests that these particular stylistic elements were not in themselves revolutionary, particularly when used in a work perceived as an imitation of an earlier style.

Rossetti's next painting, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1850, no. 44), more nearly achieves the figural aims of the Brotherhood to create not merely the most successful Brotherhood religious painting but one of the most lastingly attractive works of Victorian art. In its conception, the work rejects the traditional idealized treatment of the Annunciation to represent an event occurring at a particular moment and place within historical time. As William Rossetti noted in 1849 of the first sketch of the work, "The Virgin is to be in bed, but without any bedclothes on, an arrangement which may be justified in consideration of the hot climate" (*PRBJ*, 29). Of poor family, the Virgin is simply clad, and the brilliant use of an awkward, shrinking posture enclosed by the angles of the wall conveys a historically real individual understandably withdrawing from an awesome responsibility.

The ascetic spareness of the scene, again historically consistent with the Virgin’s social class, does much to resolve the formal difficulties in presenting fact as figure. Rossetti’s imagination shuns the obsession with the overwhelming plenitude of the physical world, with the multitudinous detail that his colleagues could not endow fully with sacramental meaning. Instead, Rossetti shows a sparsely furnished room in which almost every household object, the lighted lamp and the completed lily embroidery, for example, can be read as figuring the blending of divine and human in the central event.

These two early paintings were originally conceived within a larger scheme, as part of a triptych whose formal principle is distinctly typological. In the first of the sonnets attached to the original frame of *The Girlhood*, Rossetti so accurately describes his Annunciation—"Till one dawn, at home, / She woke in her white bed"—as to indicate that he already had this second painting in mind. To indicate the way in which the events of the second are prefigured by the first, he shows in the *Ecce Ancilla* the lily embroidery of *The Girlhood* now completed. If he had carried out his original intentions, he would have accompanied the Annunciation with a third piece, "its companion of the Virgin’s Death" (*PRBJ*, 29), so that the *Ecce Ancilla* as well as *The Girlhood* would have been seen as prefiguring the mission and the death of Mary within historical time.

Of the two sonnets attached to *The Girlhood* on its exhibition, the whole of the second ("These are the symbols") and the octet of the first ("This is that blessed Mary") are stylistically analo-
gous to the medieval, ahistorical quality of the painting. The opening lines of the first—"This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect / God's Virgin"—describe a Mary beyond historical time, with the opening word "This" stressing her function as icon. The octet becomes a litany; echoing the "Hail Mary," it numbers her virtues in an abstract diction, with the omission of the verb emphasizing existence beyond the realm of human action:

From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;
Strong in grave peace; in duty circumspect.

But as the sestet of this first sonnet shifts to describing the more historical conception for the Annunciation, the poetic style shifts from the iconic to the historical and psychological mode of the *Ecce Ancilla*:

So held she through her girlhood; as it were
An angel-watered lily, that near God
Grows, and is quiet.

The word *grows* transforms the traditional sign of the lily into a metaphor for human development within historical time. "Till one dawn at home" places the action at a particular moment and a specific place. As in the *Ecce Ancilla*, Rossetti's imagination characteristically focuses on states of consciousness, on how the historical Mary "felt": "She woke in her white bed, and had no fear / At all,—yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed." Even the final line, "Because the fulness of the time was come," refers to the fusion of the sacred and the personal, suggesting both the physical fact of Mary as now bearing Jesus and that this physical change fulfills patterns beyond time.

This same occupation with the historical Mary marks his Brotherhood drawing of *The Virgin Mary Being Comforted* (1852, no. 51) and of *The Maries at the Foot of the Cross* (1852, no. 52), as well as his major Brotherhood poem on a scriptural subject, "Ave." The 1870 text of this poem grew from a pre-Brotherhood poem, "Mater Pulchrae Delectionis," of 1847 (*Works, DGR*, 661-62), a medievalizing poem intended for "Songs of the Art Catholic" and giving an iconic presentation of the enthroned Virgin adored by angels. According to William Michael Rossetti, between 1847 and 1869 the poem "was subjected to a great deal of alteration" (*Works, DGR*, 661), alteration that consists primarily of the addition of material emphasizing the historical and the psychological. Perhaps it is because the poem represents so well his earlier Brotherhood manner that, according to his brother,
Rossetti "rather hesitated about including" the revised poem in the collection of 1870 (Works, DGR, 661).

Only the opening and concluding sections of the 1870 text retain the manner of the original poem. The opening stanza shows the Virgin as icon:

Mother of the Fair Delight,
Thou handmaid perfect in God's sight,
Now sitting fourth beside the Three,
Thyself a woman-Trinity.

The second section, however, moves into historical time in the empathic mode shown in the poems on The Girlhood and in the Ecce Ancilla itself. Seeking what he calls in a note on the poem "an inner standing-point" (Works, DGR, 661), he enters the consciousness of Mary at the Annunciation to evoke through a metaphoric diction the inward experience of the sacred:

Until a folding sense, like prayer,
Which is, as God is, everywhere,
Gathered about thee; and a voice
Spake to thee without any noise,
Being of the silence.

The other historical events that Rossetti adds to the original text, such as the eating of the Passover, are clearly prefigurative; but his occupation is consistently with the emotive, the way in which this young girl responded inwardly to the sacred quality of her daily life:

And through His boyhood, year by year
Eating with Him the Passover,
Didst thou discern confusedly
That holier sacrament, when He,
The bitter cup about to quaff,
Should break the bread and eat thereof?

The resolution of the poem comes with the recognition that Mary's life was indeed psychologically different from our own, that she did indeed feel the divinity informing her domestic round:

Work and play,
Things common to the course of day,
Awed thee with meanings unfulfill'd.

Only in the final stanza does the poem leave the temporal Mary to return to a medievalized picture of the Heavenly Mary:
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Unto the left, unto the right,
The cherubim, succinct, conjoint,
Float inward to a golden point,
And from between the seraphim
The glory issues for a hymn.

(101–5)

Like the first, this final stanza defines the essentially pictorial form in which icons of Mary outside of time frame a series of figural events in her earthly life.

The historical incidents that form the center sections of “Ave” are also the subject of an unexecuted triptych conceived by Rossetti in 1849 as illustrating the prefigurative continuity of Mary’s life. Rossetti envisioned “two side-pieces,” one of the “Virgin planting a lily and a rose” (“Ave,” 14–22), the other of the “Virgin in St. John’s house after the crucifixion” (“Ave,” 64–68) (PRBJ, 13). For the “middle compartment,” to “represent her during his life,” he thought of “the eating of the passover by the Holy Family” (PRBJ, 13). Sketches for each panel were presumably made, but those of the two side panels have been lost. We have only their completed form in, respectively, Mary Nazarene (1857, no. 87) and Mary in the House of St. John (1858, no. 110). Only the original design for the middle compartment survives (no. 78A). The figural scheme for this study of the Holy Family gathering bitter herbs is best described in Rossetti’s own words: “The scene is in the house porch, where Christ (as a boy) holds a bowl of blood from which Zacharias is sprinkling the posts and lintel. Joseph has brought the lamb and Elizabeth lights the pyre. The shoes which John fastens, and the bitter herbs which Mary is gathering, form part of the ritual.” Other prefigurative elements include the cruciform structure of the porch and the table set for the Passover meal with wine and unleavened bread.

In 1854, Ruskin saw the design and commissioned a water color from it. The completed work, The Passover in the Holy Family: Gathering Bitter Herbs (1855–56, no. 78), continues the typological conception, only substituting for the lamb and pyre a well with a cruciform support. But as Rossetti worked on the commission, there was much discussion of the project within his circle. Coventry Patmore wrote to Rossetti in 1855 that the “symbolism is too remote and unobvious to strike me as effective” (RRP, 139). In a supportive note to Rossetti, Ruskin praised the historical treatment: “Patmore is very nice; but what does he mean by Symbolism? I call that Passover plain prosy Fact. No symbolism at all” (RRP, 140). Rossetti’s reply indicates not only
his clear typological intentions but also his willingness to defend such aims well into the 1850s. For Rossetti, the chief merit of his scheme is its historicity, its existence, in Ruskin’s words, as “plain prosy Fact”: “Its chief claim to interest, if successful when complete, would be a subject which must have actually occurred during every year of the life led by the Holy Family, and which I think must bear its meaning broadly and instantly—not as you say ‘remotely’—on the very face of it,—in the one sacrifice really typical of the other” (Letters, 1:276). In showing a historical event that must have occurred rather than an invented episode that might have occurred and, furthermore, an event whose typological meaning is so traditional as to be “broadly and instantly” available, the work is, for Rossetti, superior even to Millais’s Carpenter’s Shop: “In this respect—its actuality as an incident no less than as a scriptural type—I think you will acknowledge it differs entirely from Herbert’s some years back, Millais’ more recently . . . not one of which . . . is anything more than an entire and often trifling fancy of the painter, in which the symbolism is not really inherent in the fact, but merely suggested or suggestible, and having had the fact made to fit it” (Letters, 1:276). As Rossetti notes in the opening lines of the poem accompanying the water color, “Here meet together the prefiguring day / And day prefigured.”

1. This quality of participation in Brotherhood work is emphasized in Stein, The Ritual of Interpretation, chap. 5.
2. In The Finer Optic, Christ discusses the relationship of Brotherhood style to sacramentalism, pp. 60–61.
4. Art-Journal n.s. 2 (1 June 1850): 175.
5. The British Quarterly Review 16 (August 1852): 197–220, one of the most intelligent contemporary accounts of the Brotherhood, notes the relationship to Wordsworth.
6. Art-Journal n.s. 2 (1 June 1850): 175.
7. Blackwood’s 68 (July 1850): 82.
13. Art-Journal n.s. 2 (1 June 1850): 175.
15. Household Words 1 (15 June 1850): 266.
16. Ibid.
27. The text here is that of the sonnets originally affixed to *The Girlhood* (Surtees, 1:10–11).
28. See D. M. R. Bentley, “Rossetti’s ‘Ave’ and Related Pictures,” for fuller discussion of these post-Brotherhood works.
29. Mariller, p. 68. Mariller also reproduces this work.
30. J. R. Herbert, *Our Saviour subject to His Parents at Nazareth* (1847). See n. 22.