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ФЕМИНИЗМ МАРИИ СПАРТАЛИ-СТИЛЛМАН ПРОТИВ ГЕНДЕРНЫХ СТЕРЕОТИПОВ ИСКУССТВА БРАТСТВА ПРАФАЭЛИТОВ

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В середине XIX в. в Великобритании королева Виктория навязывала свою новую систему этических правил в социальной и культурной сферах, явно обостряя и без того глубокие различия гендерных стереотипов. Художники-прафаэлиты отреагировали на «стерильный» способ живописи, продиктованный академиями художеств, с точки зрения как тематологии, так и техники, предложив новый, революционный, способ живописи, но не смогли избежать монолитной культуры гендерных стереотипов. Несмотря на свои новаторские художественные идеи и достижения, прафаэлитам не удалось преодолеть социально-системные взгляды, и поэтому образы их героинь часто отождествлялись с униженным положением викторианской женщины. Однако искусство в различных формах, исполняемое в основном женщинами, сыграло особенно важную роль в создании нескольких типов феминизма и в отчаянной попытке помочь викторианской женщине отстоять свои права как в домашней, так и в общественной сфере. Цель этой статьи – изучить и прокомментировать роль Марии Спартали-Стиллман, одной из самых харизматичных моделей Братства прафаэлитов, а позже и самой известной художницы, в живописной сцене того времени. На основании своих личных и профессиональных отношений с прафаэлитами и посредством глубокого анализа избранных картин автор пытается пролить свет на то, как М. Спартали-Стиллман удалось представить подрывные феминистские

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взгляды в своей работе, следуя в некотором смысле феминистическим путем других художников-женщин того времени. Также были пересмотрены условия, при которых художник мог создавать образ доминирующей, самодостаточной и сильной, противостоящей predetermined социальным ролям женщины.

Ключевые слова: прерафаэлиты; Мария Спартали-Стилман; живопись; Викторианская эпоха; гендерные стереотипы; феминизм.

ФЕМІНІЗМ МАРЫІ СПАРТАЛІ-СЦІЛМАН СУПРАЦЬ ГЕНДАРНЫХ СТЭРЭАТЫПАЎ МАСТАЦТВА БРАТЭРСТВА ПРЭРАФАЭЛІТАЎ

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У сярэдзіне XIX ст. у Вялікабрытаніі каралева Вікторыя навязвала сваю новую сістэму этычных правілаў у сацыяльнай і культурнай сферах, відавочна абстраючы і без таго глыбокія адрозненні гендарных стэрэатыпаў. Мастакі-прэрафаэліты адрэагавалі на «стэрыльны» спосаб жывапісу, прадыктаваны акадэміямі мастацтваў, з пункта гледжання як тэматыцы, так і тэхнікі, прапанаваўшы новы, рэвалюцыйны, спосаб жывапісу, але не змаглі пазбегнуць сваёй маналітнай культуры гендарных стэрэатыпаў. Нягледзячы на свае наватарскія мастацкія ідэі і дасягненні, прэрафаэліты не маглі пераадолець сацыяльна-сістэмныя погляды, і таму вобразы іх гераінь часта атаясамляліся з прыніжаным становішчам віктарыянскай жанчыны. Аднак мастацтва ў некалькіх формах, якое выконваецца ў асноўным жанчынамі, адыграла асабліва важную ролю ў стварэнні некалькіх тыпаў фемінізму і ў адчайнай спробе дапамагчы віктарыянскай жанчыне адстаяць свае правы як у хатняй, так і ў грамадскай сферы. Мэта гэтага артыкула – вывучыць і пракаментыраваць ролю Марыі Спарталі-Сцілман, адной з самых харызматычных мадэляў Братэрства прэрафаэлітаў, а пазней і самай вядомай мастачкі, у маляўнічай сцэне таго часу. На падставе даследавання сваіх асаблівых і прафесійных адносін з прэрафаэлітамі і з дапамогай глыбокага аналізу абраных карцін аўтар спрабуе праліць святло на тое, як М. Спарталі-Сцілман удалося прадставіць падрыўныя феміністычныя погляды ў сваёй працы, адначасова прытрымліваецца феміністычнага шляху іншых мастакоў-жанчын таго часу. Таксама былі перагледжаны ўмовы, пры якіх у мастака атрымлівалася стварыць вобраз дамінуючай, самадастатковай і моцнай жанчыны, якая магла супрацьстаяць прадвызначаным сацыяльным ролям.

Ключавыя словы: прэрафаэліты; Марыя Спарталі-Сцілман; жывапіс; Віктарыянская эпоха; гендарныя стэрэатыпы; фемінізм.

MARIE SPARTALI-STILLMAN'S FEMINISM AGAINST PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD GENDER STEREOTYPES ART

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In the middle of the 19th century Great Britain, Queen Victoria had been imposing her new ethical code system on social and cultural conditions, sharpening evidently the already abyssal differences of the gendered stereotypes. The Pre-Raphaelite painters reacted to the sterile way of painting dictated by the art academies, both in terms of thematology and technique, by suggesting a new, revolutionary way of painting, but were unable to escape their monolithic gender stereotypes culture. Using female models for their heroines who were often identified with the degraded position of the Victorian woman, they could not overcome their socially systemic views, despite their innovative art ideas and achievements. However, art, in several forms, executed mainly by women, played a particularly important role in projecting several types of feminism, in a desperate attempt to help the Victorian woman claim her rights both in domestic and public sphere. This article aims at exploring and commenting on the role of Marie Spartali-Stillman, one of the most charismatic Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood models and later famous painter herself, in the painting scene of the time. Through the research of her personal and professional relationship with the Pre-Raphaelites, and mainly through an in depth analysis of selected paintings, the authors try to shed light on the way in which M. Spartali-Stillman managed to introduce her subversive feminist views through her work, following in a way the feministic path of other female artists of her time. The ways and the conditions, under which the painter managed to project women as dominant, self-sufficient and empowered, opposing their predetermined social roles, have also been revised.

Keywords: Pre-Raphaelites; Marie Spartali-Stillman; painting; Victorian era; gender stereotypes; feminism.

Introduction

The period from the early Renaissance Italian art, the renowned Quattrocento, to the early years of Raphael and the Flemish painters, such as Van Eyck, was ideologically and stylistically the greatest source of inspiration for a group of impulsive, talented and quite daring English painters who, together with their wider circle of supporters, formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848¹. Their main claim was the renewal of English painting through their art, which combined the naturalistic realism with the tendency for moral education. At the time, the academies of art believed that they represented the tradition of Raphael, that is, his «High Magnificent Style», according to which European painting was shaped through the «idealisation» of nature and the search for beauty at the expense of truth. On the contrary, the Pre-Raphaelite painters argued that in order for the art to be reshaped, it had to derive its truth from the painting tradition that was formed before Raphael's mature period, that is, since the time when artists still had medieval innocence and were just «honest craftsmen before God», trying to copy nature without worrying about secular success and glory [1, p. 512]. It was therefore to be expected that their work would be subjected to a host of fierce attacks by the art status quo of the time. In terms of personal worldview and attitude towards life, the Pre-Raphaelites had adopted a bohemian lifestyle, which dictated a liberated way of thinking, unbridled attraction for night entertainment, numerous love affairs, but also an unquenchable passion for art. All these had a serious impact on the general Victorian culture, literature and even politics, and thus they became by the time a significant part of modern English mythology [2, p. 3]. It is obvious then, they constituted a strictly male-dominated group, which at the same time had adopted the scandalously favourable role for men at the expense of women, imposed by the strict Victorian morals.

Lily Katzman and Nadine Daher state in their article «The Women behind the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood»: «...simply put, the Brotherhood was a boys' club that intentionally excluded women... The PRB was founded in a spirit of waggish male camaraderie which expressed itself in pranks, late-night smoking sessions and midnight jaunts around London's streets and pleasure gardens»². However, at the foot of this narrowly androcratic, but majestically artistic boulder, there was observed the constant and inextricably active presence of women in multiple and unquestionably controversial roles. Their presence was fundamental, however, only as being the basic models and muses of most of their works, but also, in many cases, as being their mistresses, spouses, partners or just helpers. It is no coincidence, then, that in this turmoil of sometimes

artless and other times biased personal, artistic and professional relationships, women in Pre-Raphaelite painting seemed to be represented as subjects that expressed many of the social, ideological and cultural aspects of the time [3, p. 14]. Specifically, in many of their works, the Pre-Raphaelites, guided by the phallic syndromes of the Victorian socio-ethical scene, would represent these women in roles through which the stereotype of female weakness would thoroughly be portrayed. Deeply erotic mistresses, heroines with tragic endings, but also decent, vulnerable, fragile and even fatal women would star in the Pre-Raphaelite compositions, vividly depicting the contribution of the «strong male sex» to the social stereotypes shaping in Victorian England.

However, even these depictions of women were far removed from reality. The middle-class Victorian woman stereotype was formed after a long series of developments that had begun as early as in the 16th century and were based on her gradual exclusion from the social, political, commercial and cultural life of the country. Her role was fatally limited within a domestic level, namely to her strict duties as a housewife, wife and mother, and her life in general revolved around the will and desires of her almighty husband-master. As C. W. Marsh characteristically stated, «...nature made woman weaker, physically and mentally, than man, and also better and more refined...» [4, p. 298].

Since the above problems were particularly augmented and thus were seeking immediate solutions, legal science, but above all art played once again very important roles. Legislations, special events, such as public lectures and debates, but mainly essays, poetry and novel publications talking about the importance of equality between sexes, especially education and women's rights in voting, property, child custody and work, constituted some of the most powerful forms of protest to the horrible status quo of female devaluation and oppression. Specifically, the publication of some literary works, such as Charlotte Brontë's «Jane Eyre», the first Victorian feminist novel published in 1847, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's «Aurora Leigh», the first and most feminist of all Victorian poems published in 1857, Christina Rossetti's subtle feminist ideas through her poetry in which she explored the gender ideology and the philosopher and writer's, John Stuart Mill's, essay «On the Subjection of Women», published in 1869, were some of the most renowned feminist works which triggered a series of vivid discussions and debates, but also reactions of any kind [5, p. 3].

Within this context, fine arts, especially painting, started also to constitute a new language of feminism reaction: through their derogatory social behaviour, but

¹The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was widely known with the initials PRB, with which they used to sign their early works.

²Katzman L., Daher N. The Women behind the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood [Electronic resource] // Smithsonian Magazine. 2020. 22 Jan. URL: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/revisiting-women-behind-pre-raphaelite-band-brothers-180974035/> (date of access: 22.01.2021).

mainly through their splendid artistic achievements, a small group of lesser-known female painters with vague, but firm feministic ideas, including Marie Zambaco (1843–1914), Evelyn De Morgan (1855–1919) and Marie Spartali-Stillman (1844–1927), emerged³. These women managed to defeat their predestined fate that condemned them to remain plain models for life and flew like young, lively insects in the flowered garden of the Pre-Raphaelites' art. Inspired by their divine work, these women followed their own creative, although undoubtedly rutty, path producing some of the most expressive works of the era, showing, in a way, their strong will for progress and distinction, two indisputable forms of emancipation. Perhaps the most important figure of all, Marie Euphrosyne Spartali-Stillman⁴ as her full name was, was the one who tried to redefine the role of the Victorian fair sex through her later powerful artwork. In addition, she was probably the only painter who did not hide her discomfort with the use of the female figure by the powerful male-dominated group of the Pre-Raphaelites as an object of desire, coquettishness, questionable morality, social decline and lack of self-esteem. After all, that was relevant to the fact, that women, who were involved in modelling at that time, were associated with immorality and lack of spiritual

values, even with prostitution⁵. Through her multifaceted artistic career, both in terms of subjects and style, M. Spartali-Stillman tried to redefine the hitherto unjust portrayal of Victorian women by the Pre-Raphaelites and to subvert it, through some unquestionably new views of their social roles.

The main objective of this research is to dive into M. Spartali-Stillman's both enlightened thinking and creative commitment, in order to reveal her individual feminist ideology through the new artistic language she created by portraying female models in her painting compositions, in a revolutionary way. Having already experienced her apotheosised and, at the same time, underestimated role as a sitter by high-profile artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1898), she decided to restore the distorted image of women in Pre-Raphaelites' works using as a weapon her decisive, heretical visual language. The reasons why she challenged the male-dominated painting dogma of her time, but also the ways in which she tried to reshape the female figure and attitude through her own art, constitute a rather corresponding form of protest such as that of the writers and poets of the time, are commented on and revised by the author in detail below.

Marie Spartali-Stillman as a Pre-Raphaelite model

Understandably, female models were particularly important in formulating Pre-Raphaelite art. Their contribution was not merely procedural, as they participated throughout the creative process, they could acquire more than one role and exert influence on the painter himself, and consequently they could dramatically shape the total result⁶. All of that was perhaps more visible in M. Spartali-Stillman herself, as she was the one who, more than any other model, had the ability to get deeply involved in the artists' works [6, p. 20].

With an impressive posture, long brown, rich hair, imposing gaze and seductive smile, but also with a cor-

respondingly modest character, M. Spartali-Stillman had only admirers, mainly through the social circles of her family, since there were few times when she did not catch the male eye⁷. A fanatical admirer of exquisite beauty was also the chief representative poet of the Victorian era Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)⁸, whose work would be a rich source of inspiration for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but also for M. Spartali-Stillman herself up to a point, in her following career as a painter. In contrast to many female poets and novelists, male poets like A. L. Tennyson embodied Victorian era social stereotypes in their work and therefore began to

³Judah H. Pre-Raphaelite sisters review – the heroic women behind the frilly-shirted bro-fest [Electronic resource]. 2019. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/oct/16/pre-raphaelite-sisters-review-national-portrait-gallery-forgotten-women> (date of access: 21.01.2021).

⁴Born in Tottenham, Middlessex, she was the eldest daughter of the prosperous family of Michael Spartalis (1818–1914), who, in addition to being a successful merchant and patron of the arts, was also the Greek consul in London from 1866 to 1882. He was from Sparta of Pisidia in Asia Minor, the current city of Isparta in Turkey. Her mother Effrosini (Effie) Barsami (1842–1913) also came from a large Pisidian family engaged in trade. The fates were generous with her as they gave her beauty, talent and longevity, so as to rank among the «Three Graces», namely, the muses of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, along with her cousins Maria Kassaveti-Zambako and Aglaia Coronio.

⁵Ekkelenkamp M. Exhibition review of «Pre-Raphaelite Sisters» [Electronic resource] // Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide. 2020. Vol. 19, No. 1. URL: <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring20/ekkelenkamp-reviews-pre-raphaelite-sisters> (date of access: 20.01.2021).

⁶Frey A. The women of Pre-Raphaelite art [Electronic resource] // Art & Object. URL: <https://www.artandobject.com/articles/women-pre-raphaelite-art> (date of access: 25.01.2021).

⁷The Greek romantic poet, novelist and politician Alexandros Rizos Ragavis (1809–1892) was also among the ardent admirers of her beauty and talent. He met her in London in July 1868, at her paternal home, as he was returning to Greece from America. He visited the British Museum with her, where they were welcomed by the museum director, to whom M. Spartali-Stillman said that she copied Raphael's paintings in order to practice and that she loved sketching the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum. Ragavis wrote about her that «she was beautiful as an ancient Muse... <...> ...Above all she painted with rare tastefulness and skill».

⁸Tennyson was a prodigy in poetry, thus some of his early poems were in print long before he graduated from Cambridge College, as he had won the first prize in a poetry competition. However, he became widely known after the publication of his two-volume poetry collection in 1842 and his work inspired profoundly D. G. Rossetti.

raise questions about the sharp separation of gender roles in society [7, p. 1650]. D. G. Rossetti was one of the most important representatives of Pre-Raphaelitism to identify these particular features in Tennyson's work. Through his multiple artistic references to it, he reproduced in various ways the gender stereotypes of the Victorian era, projecting gently, but also ostentatiously several times, the social and cultural differences of the two sexes, in the way they were revealed in the narrative magic of Tennyson's poetry.

His first contact with M. Spartali-Stillman was in 1869, when, incurably fascinated by her seductive beauty, he asked her to pose for one of his most important works, which was to about be completed later in time, «Dante's Dream on the Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice»⁹. However, after making several studies on her head, D. G. Rossetti found it particularly difficult to draw¹⁰. Andrea Rose mentioned on her precious work «Pre-Raphaelite Portraits» (1981) that D. G. Rossetti himself admitted his failure, as drawing her head «depended not nearly so much on real form as on subtle charm of life which one cannot re-create» [8, p. 106]. However, this was not an event that would discourage him, as in the years that followed he managed to depict her figure in some of his most wondrous works, including the famous oil painting «A Vision of Fiammetta» (1878) (fig. 1, see insert). In this work, D. G. Rossetti would discover M. Spartali-Stillman's dignified beauty, unpretentious grace, vivid expressiveness, ethereal, soft and pure femininity, that is, the qualities that would make her stand out from the rest of the Pre-Raphaelite muses, such as the sensual Fanny Cornforth or the mysterious Jane Morris. It was based on the heroine of the Florentine writer Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), Fiammetta, who first appeared in his novel «Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta» (1343–1344) as a tragic romantic woman fatally deceived by her lover¹¹. In this work, D. G. Rossetti focused on M. Spartali-Stillman herself and through her singular figure projected many symbolisms that had to do with the connection of the love concept with those of life and death. Her beautiful, har-

monic face, her vacant gaze, which deliberately does not stare out of the canvas, and thus, does not meet the eyes of the viewer, her characteristic hairstyle, her fine alabaster skin and the sense of ethereal, but, at the same time, attractive purity that exudes the whole of her figure, allude to the ideal type of Victorian woman. Although his love for Italian poetry, literature and their heroes and heroines was indisputable, D. G. Rossetti in this work seems to ignore Fiammetta's real drama, as he transforms her into a modern, sensual goddess who bears all the feminine aesthetic and moral ideals of the Victorian era.

Although Maria Zambaco (1843–1914)¹² was the most influential muse for Edward Burne-Jones, as she was also his mistress for a certain period of time, M. Spartali-Stillman, her beloved cousin, was also one of his most favorite models. In his ambiguous oil painting «The Mill: Girls Dancing to Music by a River» (1870–1882)¹³, E. Burne-Jones, inspired by the large Italian early Renaissance mural «The Allegory of Good and Bad Government» made by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in Sienna between 1338 and 1339, would depict the Three Graces dancing to the music of Apollo (fig. 2, see insert).

The central figure of the three was M. Spartali-Stillman, whereas the other two were M. Zambaco, on the far left, and Aglaia Coronio-Ionides (1834–1906)¹⁴, on the right. In the first level of the composition, the women seem to dance gracefully in an idyllic renaissance garden on a summer afternoon. However, we cannot ignore the male presence in the work that seems to be dominant overall spectacular scene. The naked male figures bathing in the clear river water in the background of the composition, but also the watchful gaze of god Apollo on the right, reveal the absolute control exercised on the movements of the beautiful, modest and jaunty female figures by the «unquestionable male power». Consequently, this painting seems to project effortlessly, albeit through the depiction of an earlier era, the masculinist views of the Victorian times, which the painter himself could hardly renounce, as could not the entire Brotherhood.

⁹The work was completed in 1871, but the model for the basic character of Beatrice Portinari (from Dante Alighieri's poem «La Vita Nuova», which the painting subject was based on), was not M. Spartali-Stillman, but Jane Morris, William Morris's wife. M. Spartali-Stillman has a rather subordinate role here as the attendant figure on the right.

¹⁰*Karambini-Iatrou M. Μαρία Σπάρταλη Στίλμαν, η ομορφιά που σώζει* = Marie Spartali-Stillman, the beauty that saves [Electronic resource] // Χάρτης 24. 2020. URL: <https://www.hartismag.gr/hartis-24/eikastika/maria-spartalh-stilman-h-omorfia-poy-swzei> (date of access: 26.01.2021).

¹¹Madonna Fiammetta falls in love with Panfilo and starts having an affair with him, until Panfilo returns to his hometown, Florence. However, he promises to return one day to Naples, where Fiammetta lives, but she soon realises that he is married there. The plot of the whole work revolves around her feelings of anger, despair, jealousy and disappointment, which led her to the brink of committing suicide. Nevertheless, both her loyal nurse and her constant hopes that Panfilo may come back one day, keep her alive. G. Boccaccio would use the same name to describe a completely different character, the dynamic heroine Fiammetta in his famous work «Decameron», which he wrote a few years later (1349–1352).

¹²She was born as Maria Terpsithea Cassavetti and was the daughter of the rich Anglo-Greek businessman Demetrios Cassavettis and niece of the Greek consul, noted patron and art collector Alexander Ionides. She was a renowned model in the Pre-Raphaelite circle, but also a talented sculptor.

¹³The painting was really big and particularly complex in terms of composition. Thus, it took to E. Burne-Jones almost twelve years to finish.

¹⁴Aglaia Coronio-Ionides, daughter of Alexander Ionides, was not just a Pre-Raphaelite model, but also a keen fashion designer and a charismatic bookbinder. Additionally, she was an art collector and patron of the arts, just like her father.

The distinguished painter Ford Madox Brown (1821–1896) whose paintings coincided thematically with those of the Pre-Raphaelites, as they also dealt with social and religious subjects inspired by medieval stories, and who, in spite of not belonging to their Brotherhood, was considered by them to be their ancestor, soon became one of M. Spartali-Stillman's fiery admirers. However, their deep and lifelong relationship began when in 1864 her father decided to hire him as her teacher of painting, an art in which she had begun to show a particular inclination from an early age [9, p. 108]. During his long tenure as her art teacher and specifically during a painting lesson, F. M. Brown asked her to make her portrait and M. Spartali-Stillman's accepted willingly [10, p. 65]. In this work, of 1869, F. M. Brown would reveal all the deep erotic feelings he had begun to have for her, which, however, would nevertheless remain forever without response¹⁵. Here M. Spartali-Stillman's is not part of one of his many and complex compositions on religious subjects, nor does she represent a medieval literature heroine. The work seems to depict more of a simple, spontaneous scene unfolding during one of their painting lessons. F. M. Brown has managed to portray her figure with excessive grace, beauty and innocence, describing once again the ideal Victorian woman. This can also be visible from the quality of natural shyness that the Victorian woman should have and here M. Spartali-Stillman is depicted so. As in the case of Fiammetta, M. Spartali-Stillman does not stare out of the canvas deliberately; she turns instead her gaze to a neutral corner of her workshop, trying not to challenge the viewer (fig. 3, see insert).

However, it was her first contact with modelling that would determine her later career as a painter, but also as a personality. Her collaboration with the pioneer female photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879), influenced her ideology, as far as the feminist issues concerns, especially in personal matters. J. M. Cameron, a strong, radically emancipated woman, based on her enviable position in the intellectual and artistic elite circles of her time, did not hesitate to invade the purely male-dominated professional arena of photography and claim a place in the hierarchy of traditional male photographers. With this daring decision, she deservedly won the title of female photogra-

pher specialising in close-up portraiture and especially in the sensitive thematology of children and women¹⁶. Specifically, her work, which constituted a new, challenging, mythical, and at the same time, competitive medium to the traditional painting of full-length portraits, focused on depicting young women in the role of mother, as well as children often disguised as little, innocent angels, rendered her one of the most eccentric, but also celebrated artists of her time. J. M. Cameron merely ignored the initial negative public opinion for her bold work, claimed and finally gained success [11, p. 11].

However, she never hid her interest in portraying female figures with strong personalities who, despite their objective feminine beauty, could still resist, and even oppose, to the sweeping social dominance of the male stereotypes of their time. Her choice to use M. Spartali-Stillman in a series of portraits of such distinctive characters was not accidental, as, knowing her Greek origin she believed that she was ideal to sit for some of the strongest female personalities of Ancient Greece. The fourth-century Greek philosopher Hypatia¹⁷, the mythical figure of powerful Mnemosyne¹⁸, or even the female figure of The Spirit of the Vine, which represents the wine-fueled ancient rituals of Dionysus, are personalities distinguished for their combativeness, sharp critical spirit and imposing power [12, p. 19] (fig. 4, see insert).

In «Mnemosyne», M. Spartali-Stillman appears completely different from what we have seen so far. It is, of course, a full-length photographic portrait and not a painting, and perhaps this is why we can identify some particular aspects of her independent personality more easily. Her unpretentious and, perhaps, audacious gaze at the camera, her unruly, dynamic and slightly aggressive style, her imposing posture, her sloppy hairstyle take away the mythical deity of the photo from the established social characteristics of the average Victorian woman, in contrast to what we have noticed in the aforementioned paintings. Here, M. Spartali-Stillman does not idealise the beauty, as it is not a male but a female artist the one who directs and actually promotes her own feminist identity through her groundbreaking work. J. M. Cameron proposes a new, subversive way of portraying the female figure, which M. Spartali-Stillman would later adopt in her career as a painter.

The feministic approach in M. Spartali-Stillman's painting

Having also started her career as a painter in the late 1860s, M. Spartali-Stillman signed her early works

under her family name. Her first attempt to exhibit her work, five impressive watercolors, was first at, the spe-

¹⁵At that time, he was married to the former model Emma Hill (1829–1890), with whom he had already had a daughter in 1850, that is, three years before they got married, in 1853.

¹⁶The portraits of great Victorian men, which J. M. Cameron captured with her camera and which reveal secret sides of people such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Charles Darwin, Henry Taylor and many more, are also known.

¹⁷Hypatia was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 370 AD, and was the daughter of the philosopher Theon. She was a great mathematician and neo-Platonist philosopher, while she had a great reputation for her physical and mental beauty. She was savagely murdered by a fanatical mob of Christians in Alexandria in 415 and she has since become a legend and gone down in history.

¹⁸In Greek mythology, Mnemosyne was the mother of the nine Muses and the goddess of Memory. She belonged to the Titans, her parents were Saturn and Gaia and she was considered one of the most powerful first generation deities in Ancient Greece.

cialised in artworks on paper, Dudley Gallery in 1867, as well as at the notable Grosvenor Gallery, later in the same year [13, p. 159–161]. The three, best known works of the five depicted respectively an Ottoman pasha's widow, the Theban poet Corinna, and herself as the allegorical figure of The Lady Prays-Desire, a character borrowed from Edmund Spenser's poetic work «*Faerie Queene*»¹⁹.

At that time, according to A. Chapman and J. Stabler, her political views on national issues, but also her social ideas on the liberation of women from the oppressive gendered stereotypes and consequently their equal treatment in relation to men, dominated as idealistic symbols in both her personal life and art [13, p. 160]. Of course, M. Spartali-Stillman's acquaintance with M. J. Cameron, with whom she often exchanged views on the traditional position of women in Victorian society, played a very important role in the shaping of these rather radical and advanced views. In her first period works (1867–1871), M. Spartali-Stillman chose as her main heroines, women from the Greek Mythology, but also from the English Renaissance literature, who were as powerful, emancipated and self-luminous as J. M. Cameron's female figures, but seemed to display, however, more spiritual freedom than a substantial tendency for independence. However, several of these characteristics would also be attributed to the female figures depicted in her later works and derived from characters of the Italian Medieval and Renaissance literature (fig. 5, see insert).

In her work titled «The Lady Prays-Desire», M. Spartali-Stillman portrayed a young, not particularly attractive woman in green, with laurel leaves in her hair, holding a small book and staring out of the canvas with great confidence. Here, the laurel leaves should be interpreted as the classical emblem of glory and success, and the whole painting seems to promote not the value of female beauty, but that of ambition [14, p. 12]. The name of the female figure, «Prays-Desire», has not been chosen at random, as it represents the secret desire of the hitherto oppressed Victorian woman to gain fame, prestige, but above all acceptance from her social environment in which she was considered weak, fragile and timid. In contrast to the way a female model would be depicted in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, here the

female figure, portrayed by a young, inexperienced but daring female painter, looks assertive and determined to claim her personal rights and social position. However, it is true that Spartali has portrayed herself as a quite mature and dynamic figure because she focused on the strength of her character, spirituality and talents rather than on her objective beauty. The owl symbol at the top left of the painting constitutes yet another proof of her Greek heritage. This work, like many others, was made in watercolours, a rather symbolic technique, synonymous with the social position of the middle and upper class Victorian women who, along with other conventional «accomplishments» such as knitting, sewing, singing, embroidering and learning foreign languages, such as French and Italian, were being prepared for their future housewife, wife and mother roles.

J. M. Cameron's extraordinary views seemed to have an immediate effect on M. Spartali-Stillman's private life. In 1871, without parental approval and, in particular, in defiance of her conservative father, she married the American journalist and painter William James Stillman (1828–1901)²⁰. Having no support from her husband, neither in her artistic career nor in her maternal and domestic duties, M. Spartali-Stillman began to paint methodically, after a period of low production during the first years of their marriage, to contribute to the family income [15, p. 88].

In spite of her colossal will to resist to the Victorian mentality (according to which women had to be always far behind men), her deep, patriarchal family roots (as well as her fear of competing with the strictly male-dominated arena of the arts, especially that of painting), made her be afraid of and hate publicity, despite the fact that she aimed at it. Thus, although she had already begun to exhibit at the deeply conservative, but, at the same time, institutionally important Royal Academy since 1870, she did not really want to put herself forward, as she was particularly concerned about being criticised and possibly despised for her work²¹.

After the first years of her marriage, mainly due to her close artistic and personal connection with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, she adopted their classic thematology, painting female characters, with an emphasis on the female protagonists of the works of

¹⁹An epic, long poem written in archaic style and published by E. Spenser in the end of the 16th century. Each of its twelve books describes the adventures of medieval knights, each of whom is associated with the qualities of temperance, sanctity, justice, friendship, purity, nobility, etc.

²⁰In addition to being a journalist and painter, W. J. Stillman was a diplomat, publisher, historian and photographer. When he met M. Spartali, he was already a widower, as his wife had committed suicide two years before. Having served as a diplomat, consul and newspaper correspondent during the Cretan Revolution (1866–1869), he also served as a correspondent for «The London Times» in Athens. After their wedding, he continued to work as a foreign correspondent for the same newspaper, and so the couple occasionally lived between London and Florence, from 1878 to 1883, and then between London and Rome, from 1889 to 1896. We owe to Stillman some of the most important photographs of the 19th century Athens, especially its antiquities in the condition they were during the 1860s.

²¹It was no coincidence that she was accepted by such an important, but austere and unapproachable cultural institution, which rejected not only most of the female artists, but also many male painters specialising in the watercolour technique. The fact that in the period 1870–1877 she displayed seven of her works there, constitutes an important presumption for her painting skills and reputation.

Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch and Shakespeare and also a plethora of splendid, romantic landscapes inspired by the Italian nature²². Although she was considered as part of the Pre-Raphaelite movement second generation, her work was special, as she had developed a completely personal style in terms of technique and thematology, especially as regards the way in which it presented female figures [16, p. 45]. Because of her American husband, she had had frequent opportunities to show her work at many galleries in New York and Boston, as well as at the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia in 1876 and at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. Being thought as the only English Pre-Raphaelite painter showing in the USA, she managed to develop a particularly extensive international network for her work, which made her quite well-known within the elite art circles²³.

It is true, however, that her work received the scornful criticism she was afraid of. The fact that the female artists of her time were considered to be incapable of competing professionally with the male ones, and, furthermore, that she never shied away from using the highly «feminine» watercolour technique, reinforced the aggressive attitude of her critics²⁴. The negative comments that often overshadowed the praises for her «flawless» work would come from the male-dominated art critic circles and would be indicative not only of the exclusion of Victorian women from the Academy of Arts and the art community of the country in general, but mainly of their broader social and cultural degradation and exclusion. However, what she did not dare to claim in the long-suffering arena of professional painting, she bid it on through her own art. During the mature period of her career (1880–1890) and later her works began to reveal more aspects of her personality, as they displayed important feminist and political positions through empowered female characters that would project their own sense of free will and action. Unlike the way the Pre-Raphaelite heroines gazed, most of her women seem to stare out of the paintings trying, not only to meet the viewer's gaze, but also to challenge it in a rather decisive and demanding way²⁵. Perhaps this way of gazing is one of the most characteristic features that the artist employed in her compositions in order to pass the indirect, but strong message to her exhibitions visitors, both in Europe and America, that the

woman of her time was not willing to play none of her predetermined roles any more. On the contrary, it expressed her reaction to all forms of oppression and devaluation, emphasising her bravery and strength (fig. 6 and 7, see insert).

Characteristic is her work titled «Madonna Pietra degli Scrovigni» (1884), in which she depicts the icy, but imposing and alluring beauty of the same name woman, a distinctive character of Dante Alighieri's poetic works, who looks restless and confident of her superiority in a blooming winter garden²⁶. In one hand she holds a small glass sphere on which the scene of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary is reflected, which illustrates the importance of the female sex as chosen by God, while in the other a large flowering almond tree branch, which symbolizes the coming of Spring. Her haughty, calm and penetrating gaze seems as if it tries to be imposed on the viewer, skillfully passing on M. Spartali-Stillman's feminist views. Perhaps this gaze prevents the viewer from seeing the sensual, feminine beauty of this Early Renaissance woman, as it constitutes a barrier to any emotion other than the viewer's initial surprise, and possibly bewilderment, for what it implies.

A work on the same subject had been created ten years before by D. G. Rossetti, though projecting, a completely different image for Dante Alighieri's heroine. In stark contrast to M. Spartali-Stillman's dynamic woman, D. G. Rossetti portrayed his own «Madonna Pietra» as a half-naked female figure, strongly erotic and provocatively sexual, holding a large plain sphere with no particular meaning. In this work, too, the Rossettian woman looked as if she wanted to avoid looking at the viewer, which may suggest the guilt and the shame she might have felt for her nudity and may also reveal the deep-rooted sexist stereotypes of the Victorian era.

Nevertheless, M. Spartali-Stillman created works in which women were depicted in a completely different manner. Without their familiar, intense gaze coming out of canvas, they were shown either as intellectual individuals and deep thinkers, absorbed in their thoughts and reflections, or as talented musicians who played musical instruments or sing. Here, too, she probably gives women active and creative roles, a fact, which brings them in complete contrast to the aesthetically far-fetched Pre-Raphaelite female figures (fig. 8 and 9, see insert).

²²Her stay in Italy had a great impact on her work, as she followed her husband on his two major professional missions there. She was thus given the opportunity to get acquainted with the early Italian Renaissance art, but also with the dreamy landscapes of Tuscany that later determined her mature painting style.

²³Thiele M. E. Marie Spartali-Stillman at the Watts Gallery [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://madeleineemeraldthiele.wordpress.com/2016/05/13/marie-spartali-stillman-at-watts-gallery/> (date of access: 02.02.2021).

²⁴Art critic William Michael Rossetti, once an active member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, was one of her fiercest critics as he argued that her work, in spite of its grace and predictable «feminine» beauty, was clearly weak, both in terms of technique and creativity, implying indirectly that these were qualities that only male painters could possess and handle successfully.

²⁵Komacek C. Marie Spartali-Stillman – a Pre-Raphaelite feminist painter empowered women [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://moorewomenartists.org/marie-spartali-stillman> (date of access: 03.12.2020).

²⁶The work was accompanied by a small, explanatory note, something that was common to the Pre-Raphaelites, especially those of the first generation. In this particular note there was Dante's homonymous translated poem, which referred to a woman, as hard and cold as a stone, in an impressive winter garden.

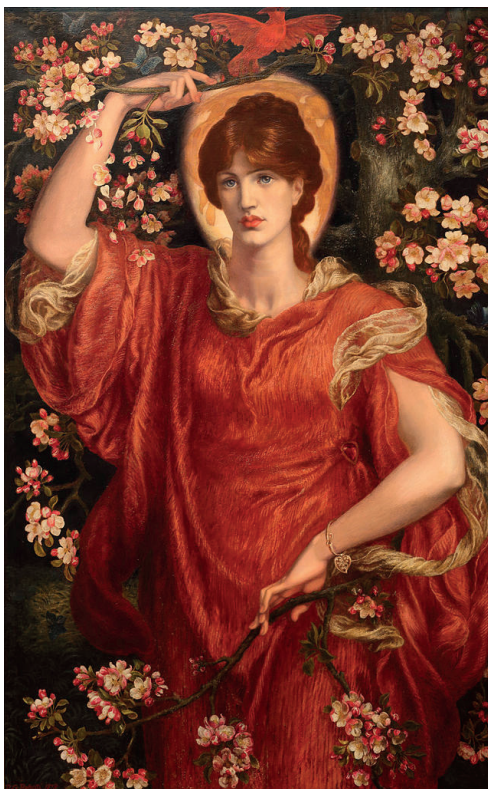


Fig. 1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
A Vision of Fiammetta. 1878
© Collection of Andrew Lloyd Webber



Fig. 2. Edward Burne-Jones.
The Mill: Girls Dancing to Music by a River. 1870
© V & A Museum



Fig. 3. Ford Madox Brown.
Marie Spartali's portrait. 1869
© Artribune Magazine



Fig. 4. Julia Margaret Cameron.
Mnemosyne (model Marie Spartali). 1868
© Jan Marsh blogspot.com

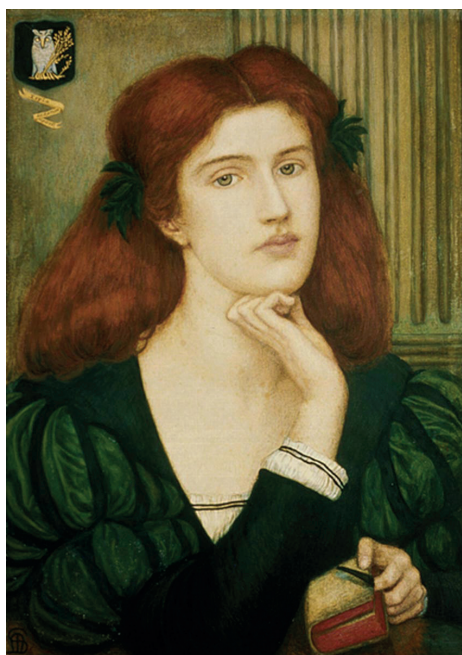


Fig. 5. Marie Spartali-Stillman.
The Lady Prays-Desire. 1867
© Jan Marsh blogspot.com

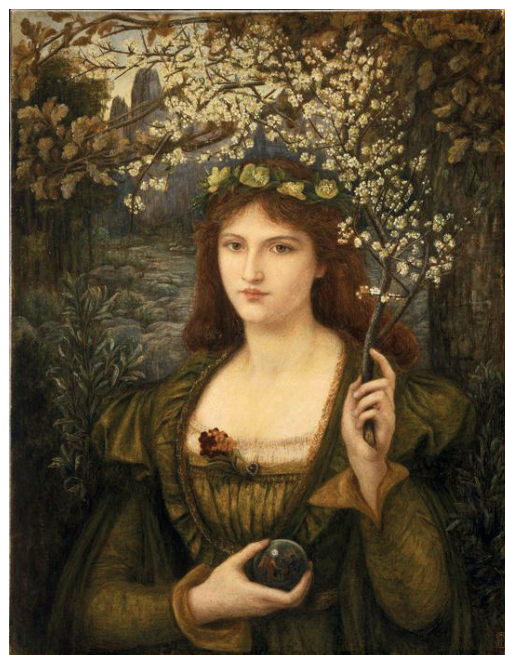


Fig. 6. Marie Spartali-Stillman.
Madonna Pietra degli Scrovigni. 1884
© National Museums Liverpool



Fig. 7. Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
Madonna Pietra. 1874
© Koriyama City Museum of Art

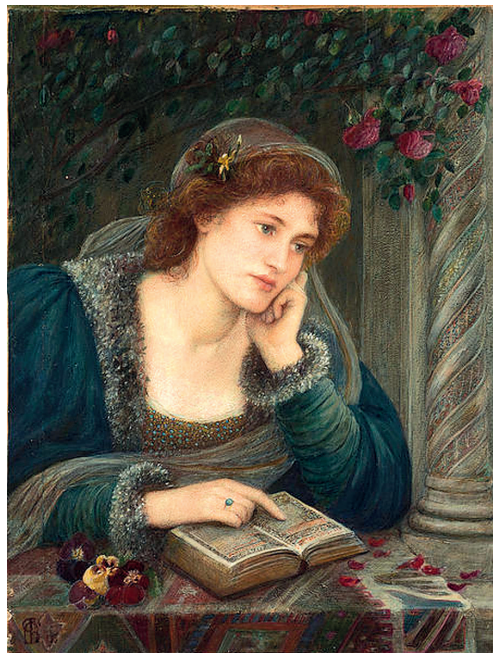


Fig. 8. Marie Spartali-Stillman.
Beatrice. 1895
© Delaware Museum

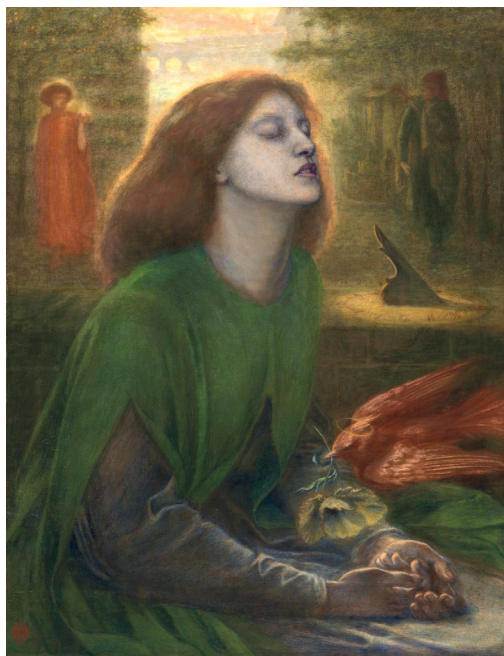


Fig. 9. Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
Beata Beatrix. 1864
© Tate Gallery

In «Beatrice» (1895), obviously influenced thematically by Dante Alighieri's heroine Beatrice²⁷, but also by a D. G. Rossetti's much older work titled «Beata Beatrix» (1864)²⁸, M. Spartali-Stillman portrayed the female figure as an idiosyncratic individual with noticeable spiritual quests. In stark contrast to D. G. Rossetti's heroine who is depicted in a provocatively erotic way with her eyes closed and her lips half open, otherworldly and, at the same time, lustful and attractive, in a pose of ecstasy and jubilation that aims at capturing the male viewer's eye, the heroine of M. Spartali-Stillman is depicted in a romantic, yet intellectual way. Her «Beatrice» seems to be lost in the vastness of her thoughts in front of a small open book, perhaps of religious content, as the decoration of its pages refers to medieval illuminated manuscripts, just like those published by William Morris's Kelmscott Press Publishing House.

Her gaze seems to be deliberately turned somewhere in space rather than in the viewer, and her body seems to be methodically hidden behind a tall balcony sill, urging the viewer to focus on her intellect and cultural refinement, rather than her eroticism. By the book, we can also notice a small bunch of colourful pansies, the very symbol of intellectuality and deep thinking, which enhances even more the artist's intentions. It is a work full of meaningful symbols and allegories, and constitutes an important example of the new artistic language that M. Spartali-Stillman invented and employed in order to make her feminist views known to a wider audience. After all, it has been highly noticed that many of the second generation Pre-Raphaelites, had enough in common with the Symbolists who were particularly active in the fin de siècle Europe, predominantly in France [17, p. 39].

Conclusion

One face looks out from all his canvases,
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
A saint, an angel – every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more or less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream [18, p. 5].

With these highly progressive verses in her poem «In an Artist's Studio» (1856) D. G. Rossetti's sister Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) would decry the tendency of male artists of her time to objectify their sculpture or painting female models²⁹. As she was not the only female of her time who would protest for women's rights through their art, we can understand that women's need to free themselves from the personal, social and cultural passivity reserved for them by the Victorian morals, was imperative. Thus, M. Spartali-Stillman, knowing much better than any other Pre-Raphaelites' views, both as being their model and peer artist, launched a symbolic campaign against their gender stereotype art in order to restore the socially distorted female image. M. Spartali-Stillman represented female figures in the way to succeed in breaking the stereotypical relationship between the male artist and the female model, and, at the same time to promote her

feminist views via a brand new visual language of equity and social justice between the two sexes. Just like J. M. Cameron's independent female characters and C. Brontë's and B. Browning's emancipated heroines, in her work women ceased to be portrayed in extreme and superficial roles, such as those of the saint, the seductive or corrupted female or even the flawless lady, the virgin or the temptress, which degraded the female personality. On the contrary, their innovative portrayal as empowered female entities, helped them to claim new ways of acceptance within the society as a whole object, and paved the way for many greater claims in the hitherto authoritarian, male-dominated theatre of the arts. Generally speaking, her work constituted a small, but valuable achievement in the collective effort to restore the position of women in the political, social and cultural scene of the country, which began to bear fruit in the first decades of the 20th century.

²⁷Beatrice was the first platonic love of Dante Alighieri, who, however, was deeply hurt by her early death in 1290. This fact seems to have been the reason for Dante's complete devotion to Latin literature, philosophy and science. Later, Beatrice would be presented as the central character in his «Divine Comedy» (1314–1321).

²⁸The sitter for this painting was Elizabeth (Lizzie) Siddal, D. G. Rossetti's wife, who suffered from constant and severe health problems and died as early as 1862, that is two years before the painting was finally completed.

²⁹However, it was not published until C. Rossetti's second brother, W. M. Rossetti, released it along with many other unpublished poems in an edited collection in 1896, that is, two years after C. Rossetti's death.

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