

HIDDEN ICONOGRAPHY IN *FOUND* BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Béatrice Laurent

Found (fig. 1), the famous unfinished painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, is a singular work in the production of the artist. Begun in 1853 and occupying the artist until his death in 1882, *Found* belongs neither to the category of water-colours inspired by Arthurian legend or the poetry of Dante, which form the bulk of Rossetti's production up to the 1860s, nor to the standard female portraits in the Venetian style, which later became his specialty. The painting's uniqueness has often been ascribed to the theme it illustrates: Rossetti's rare attempt at dealing with a "modern subject." However, even though the theme of the "fallen woman" was undoubtedly on his mind when he undertook his project for this picture, it seems that with the passing of years his intention became increasingly sophisticated, and he meant to achieve in a single painting purposes not only sociological and allegorical but moral and mystical as well. It is, I would suggest, the very ambitious character of the project, rather than the artist's loss of interest in the subject, which prevented *Found* from ever reaching completion.

Much has been written about *Found*, and a quick survey of the critical literature identifies six different readings. One focus considers it as a "social subject" upon the theme of contemporary prostitution, such as the young Rossetti could witness on his way to school from his parents' home in Charlotte Street. A second focus considers it as an illustration of William Bell Scott's poem "Rosabell" or of "Jenny," a poem Rossetti wrote as early as 1848 but remained unpublished until 1870. The similarities between "Jenny" and the painting have been demonstrated by G.L. Hersey (17-32). A third focus, based on the topography of the cityscape and the symbolic aspect of the bridge linking the country to the metropolis, considers it as an allegory on natural heaven and urban hell, as suggested by Linda Nochlin. A fourth considers it as