

A Pre-Raphaelite Dispute:
"Rosabell," "Jenny," and Other Fallen Women

The argumentative memoirs of the aged Pre-Raphaelites suggest that the anxiety of influence is most severe when artists actively collaborate with one another. Dante Gabriel Rossetti first sought the friendly support, as well as guidance, of many older poets and painters who became his close friends at the same time as they became, at least in the public eye, spear-carriers to his imperial artistry. Ford Madox Brown's own genius and equable temperament seem to have spared him any need for the competitive Rossetti-baiting that marks the retrospective accounts of the Pre-Raphaelites by Holman Hunt and William Bell Scott.¹ It is a distinctly minor poem, "Rosabell," and the curmudgeonly Scott's autobiographical claims for it that raise interesting questions about creative sources, influence, and mastery among those treating the subject that captured the imagination of so many of Victoria's artistic gentlemen--the fallen woman.

During most of his life as an artist, Rossetti revised and repainted two of his famous works on this favorite topic--the reflective monologue "Jenny," which he began as early as 1847-1848 and was still reworking for the 1881 Poems, and the large-scale oil painting Found, which he began sometime in 1853 and left unfinished at his death though he worked with serious intentions to complete it as late as February 1881.² Given the obsessive energy with which Rossetti labored over these two projects, it is curious that critics generally accept "Rosabell" as a major influence without discussing the different kinds of influence a minor poem can have on later, more ambitious works of art.³ Thematically all three deal with the fallen woman, but Found directs us more to the strategies and techniques of other pictorial works, and "Jenny" is an ambitious reminder of the limitations of Scott's conventional melodrama in dealing with complex issues.

Scott himself regularly maintained that the genesis for Found was "Rosabell." Long before meeting Rossetti, he published (in Leigh Hunt's monthly Repository in 1837) his narrative poem about a country girl who leaves her family and rustic lover, Andrew, goes to the city to become a seamstress, succumbs to the temptations of a life as a kept woman, and, after being