

## THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE VICTORIAN ARTIST: FAMILY BIOGRAPHIES<sup>1</sup>

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Richard Altick argues that "English biography in the nineteenth century was a rich but unstable compound of history, journalism, eulogy, inspiration, and material suitable for the study of the mind" (*Lives* 181). A hybrid genre, Victorian biography took many forms: the "compilation," "life and letters," "reminiscences," "memoirs" (*Lives* 193, 196). Altick points out that literary biographies throughout the Victorian period discursively intersected current events, theories of the creative mind, critical judgments, aesthetics, theories of personality traits, and the equation between character and work which biographies sought to explain. Though the development of the biography was complex and asymmetrical, as Altick demonstrates, realism increasingly replaced or modified didacticism and hero worship, as biographical narratives struggled to order and thematicize voluminous, heterogeneous details and multiple sources of information for Victorian readers who consumed quantities of "collective lives, biographies in series, and biographical dictionaries" (Nadel 13).

Examining in detail a number of "hybrid" artists' biographies written between 1890 and World War I, I will argue that their authorships by the artists' widows and children exploited the hybridity of Victorian biography to assert a domestic authority necessary to the construction of an artist compatible with Victorian social values.<sup>2</sup> From the 1890s to WWI these posthumous biographies were the last appeal from a fading Victorian art world whose principal representatives were dying out: John Everett Millais, Ford Madox Brown, John Hungerford Pollen, William Richmond, Charles West Cope, Richard Redgrave, Edward Burne-Jones, George Frederick Watts, William Quiller Orchardson, Thomas Woolner, and William Morris.<sup>3</sup> These artists had been very successful, enjoying long, prosperous lives (Gillett 20). Their biographies mixed autobiographical content (letters, diaries) with a biographical narrative and a unique visual para-text of reproductions and photographs that represented the abstract issue of artists' sociality through images of the artists' bodies and domestic environments. Furthermore the new discipline of art history (it became a university subject in the 1870s) and the changing