

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI AS *DISEGNATORE*:  
*HESTERNA ROSA, FOUND, HAMLET AND OPHELIA, AND*  
*MARY MAGDALENE AT THE DOOR OF SIMON THE*  
*PHARISEE*

D.M.R. Bentley

*He showed me many designs for pictures: they tossed about everywhere in the room; the floor at one end of the room was covered with them, and with books.... He taught me to have no fear or shame of my own ideas, to design perpetually.*

– Edward Burne-Jones remembering Dante Rossetti (qtd in Georgiana Burne-Jones 1:130, 149)

In its entries for “design” as a noun and as a verb, the *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the origin of the word in both lexical categories to the Renaissance Italian *disegno* and its cognates, which denote activities and their outcomes that are both representational and intellectual: to design or to make a design is to realize a rational concept (plot, purpose, intention) in a visual form that is often preliminary to a final image. In *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Michael Baxandall further clarifies the meaning of *disegno* with reference to Cennino Cennini’s *Il Libro dell’Arte* (1437), where it is associated with “pencil, lines, the representation of edges, [and] perspective” and distinguished from *colorire* and its associations (“brush, tones, the representation of surfaces, [and] *rilievo*”) in a “dichotomy ... [that] made drawing and painting ... the ‘foundation of the art of painting’” as it would be “taught and ... observed” for centuries to come in Europe (139-40). Little, if any, of this would have been news to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who read Italian, owned Giorgio Vasari’s *Vite* (1550, 1568) (where the drawing/painting dichotomy is assumed),<sup>1</sup> and may have used Cennini’s handbook as a basis for his depiction of Chiaro, the literally pre-Raphaelite and prototypically Pre-Raphaelite artist of “Hand and Soul” (see my “Merrifield’s Edition”). But the