

ELIZABETH SIDDAL:
THE “ANNUNCIATION” RE-DISCOVERED

Jan Marsh

A very small watercolour by Elizabeth Siddal depicting two figures in a dense woodland has long been known as *The Haunted Wood*, which is a fair description of the scene in which a blue-gowned female leans away from a taller, more indeterminate shadowy figure who stands with hands upraised, as if saying, “Here I am,” or even “Boo!” (fig. 1).

Reconstructing Siddal’s oeuvre has its tricky elements, despite Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s careful assembly and reproduction of all, or many, of her drawings and sketches into albums, two of which are preserved in the Fitzwilliam and the Ashmolean Museums. Rossetti also assembled as many of her watercolour works as he could, famously hanging them in his Cheyne Walk house. The watercolours were not photographed, owing to the poor results from the monochrome prints then available from photographs. *The Haunted Wood* is one such watercolour. It is assumed to be the same work as was exhibited at the Russell Place exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite works in the summer 1857, the work cited as no. 68 “Sketch: ‘The Haunted Tree.’” It was given to Wightwick Manor in 2001 by William Michael Rossetti’s great-granddaughter Helen Dennis (Mrs. Guglielmini), and thus has a firm line of provenance, which assumes that William inherited it from his brother in 1882. It is signed with initials and date – “E.E.S / 56” – and is labelled on the back: “Elizabeth Rossetti (Siddall) The Haunted Wood.”

There is no reason to doubt this information – and yet it perhaps may link to another piece of information regarding Siddal’s art. The 1892 posthumous sale of works owned by Liverpool shipowner Frederick Leyland includes four works (lots 21-24) attributed to “Mrs Rossetti.” They include two that can be identified with known pieces – a Lady Clare pen-and-ink drawing and a Virgin and Child – and two works that are less certain. One was called “Figures in a landscape,” which might be identified with the equally mysterious couple seated by a field gate and serenaded by Oriental musicians, now known as *Lovers Listening to Music* (1854).