

MINIATURE PAINTING, DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI,  
AND THE “STUNNER”: FREDERIC WILLIAM BURTON’S  
*THE CHILD MIRANDA* AND ITS SOURCES IN CONTEXT

Larissa Vilhena

By 1864 Irish watercolour painter Frederic William Burton (1816-1900) had been living in London for six years. Settling down in the capital in 1858, after seven years in Germany, the artist soon became acquainted with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and Edward Burne-Jones, eventually becoming an integral part of a wider circle of Pre-Raphaelite friends connected with them (Mclean 56). That same year (1864), Burton exhibited a watercolour, titled *Hellelil and Hildebrand, the Meeting on the Turret Stairs*.<sup>1</sup> Today the work resides in the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin. Like a medieval relic contained in a reliquary, the painting is safely stored inside an enclosed shrine-like cupboard in a dimly lit exhibition room in the Gallery, revealed to the public for only a few hours on two days per week. *Meeting on the Turret Stairs* is undoubtedly Burton’s best-known work, having been elected “Ireland’s favourite painting” in 2012 by a popular vote organized by the national broadcaster of Ireland, RTÉ. To date, most published works about Burton and his career focus on this painting.

Setting aside Burton’s most celebrated artwork should enable us to form a new perspective on Burton’s oeuvre. I am thus turning to a much less-known watercolour, one which is part of a private collection. Completed in 1864, *The Child Miranda* (fig. 1) is a graphite and watercolour work on paper, measuring 37.5 by 27.3 cm (Mclean 62). The painting was sold at Christie’s of London on 9 June 2004.<sup>2</sup> The three-quarter portrait shows a pubescent girl wearing a loose, shimmering pearl-white and light-pink dress fastened in a blue belt with floral print made of soft fabric, providing a high colour-contrast effect. Her voluminous shoulder-length, wavy hair is worn down, its strawberry-blond colour being a conspicuous feature of the picture. Her smooth and ivory complexion highlights her full, rosy lips and hazel eyes. Miranda is staring at the viewer with her head slightly inclined to the left, whereas her