

KINDRED SPIRITS: REFRAMING ELIZABETH SIDDAL'S
A WOMAN AND A SPECTRE

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In the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, sits a drawing attributed to Elizabeth Siddal titled *A Woman and a Spectre* (fig. 1). It formed part of a bequest made by John Bryson in 1977. Bryson, a Tutor and Fellow in English Literature at Balliol College, Oxford, from 1940 to 1963, was also a collector. His bequest to the Ashmolean Museum comprises journals, letters, paintings, and drawings associated with the Pre-Raphaelites. In the Autumn 1978 issue of *Master Drawings*, David Brown highlights several drawings from the bequest that received less attention than some of those that were often exhibited during Bryson's lifetime: works by Dante Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, William Morris, Holman Hunt, and others. He begins with the "presiding genius" Rossetti, and when mentioning Siddal, he is overly careful to qualify her work. Her watercolour *Madonna and Child*, although "richly toned," is "directly formed" on Rossetti's work; her pen-and-ink drawings executed in 1854 are described as created during an "annus mirabilis" in her "pathetic life" (Brown 289). Brown quotes Rossetti's words to Madox Brown – "Her power of designing ever increases greatly, and her fecundity of invention & facility are quite wonderful, much greater than mine" (Rossetti, *Correspondence* 1:354) – yet he disagrees, claiming the Bryson drawings "show such special pleading to be exaggerated, although they are not without talent of a derivative order" (Brown 289). What Brown omits, and which is clearly outlined in his "checklist" of the Bryson Pre-Raphaelite drawings held in the Ashmolean collection (of which *A Woman and a Spectre* is placed last in the sequence), is that the bequest contains an equal number of Siddal and Rossetti drawings: thirteen each, with the caveat that the verso of one drawing attributed to Siddal has been described as studies for alterations to Rossetti's Chatham Place home, executed