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Victorian Medievalism in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Representations of Gender

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Abstract— *The Middle Ages were looked back by Victorian artists such as the Pre-Raphaelites. The period inspired many authors and artists of the time to embed morality within their works. Pre-Raphaelitism had a direct reference to both art and literature, including poetry and paintings, in the nineteenth-century England. Early literary works highly inspired the Pre-Raphaelite painters and writers who depicted their portraits from medieval sources. This paper focuses on modern medieval literary works and arts by Victorian writers and painters including Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Everett Millais whose fascination with the Middle Ages as a period in history was expressed in their attempts to revive the values that characterized medieval world. Medieval resources were utilized to escape from the chaos and disorder of Victorian industrial society and to preserve the moral ideals of the traditional English values and norms.*

Keywords— ***Medievalism, Victorian Medievalism, Pre Raphaelite, Gender.***

I. VICTORIAN MEDIEVALISM: THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE VICTORIANS' CULTURAL HERITAGE

Although the middle ages were described as harsh and frightening, they were also highly valorized because of its high dependence on conservative ways of life. The medieval life was described as "nasty, brutish and short," a phrase used by the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes who depicted life in a state of nature far from industrial expansion, law, or government (qtd. in Khan 313). This phrase coincided with the life in medieval times, a period in history characterized by the absence of technologies and governmental institutions. However, this portrayal of medieval ages also involved characteristics of conservative and ordered life that acted as opponent to any kind of disorder of diversities, leading people to live under the protection and peaceful control of God. The middle Ages was ruled by the feudal system based on the belief that the land belonged to God and that Kings who ruled Divine Right managed the land according to the wish of God (Mitchell 697). The feudal system as many critics approved made the medieval times seem attractive as it enhanced the belief in communal existence and individuals' duty to support others.

In *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, Sally Mitchell defined the term 'medievalism' as"the system of beliefs and practice characteristic of the middle Ages" and highly reliance on elements of that period, which was expressed in different areas such as architecture, literary works, visual arts, and various vehicles of popular culture (Mitchell 494). This term also referred to the Victorians' "renewed interest in the Middle Ages" and produced a positive image of the medieval heritage (Mitchell 494). It attempts to go back to "the medieval past, with all its imagined folk-richness" through a romanticized quest of a renewed intensity for ordinary existence (McBride 59).In fact, the quest for order was an affirmation of the existence of disorder that threatened a given established system. As far as the Victorian society was concerned, the latter as many critics approved, was endangered by the development of industrialism with its rise of factories, materialism that led many conventional Victorians to look

for a sense of relief from the chaos of the industrial world.This quest for a physical and psychological displacement from the burden of industrialism was the outcome of individuals' incapacity to cope with this social change that brought about their need to look back to the past free from industrial consequences. This quest was named by many critics such as Penty as "post-industrialism". He assumed that the latter connoted Medievalism (14). Penty'suse of the pre-fix 'post' referred to the stage that followed industrialism and accompanied by the need to go back to the conventional life.

The time of Victorian medievalism "ran from the late 1820 to the 1850s," (qtd. in Zlotnick 45) a period in history marked by the rise of industrial revolution and individuals' need to free themselves from its outcomes on their daily lives. They "look refuge in another age, and that age was large enough, various enough, sufficiently unknown and even mythical, that each person could find there what he wanted—a hierarchy, a community, a code of conduct, a form of hero-worship…" (qtd. in Zlotnick 45). This attempt to seek Medievalism refers to Victorians' need to maintain, keep, and celebrate social order through displacing themselves from the ugliness and disorder of their cotemporary world and connecting their lives to the ordered world of the middle Ages. This escape to the past to protect their conventional values and maintain order couldn't be reached without "[d]istance times and places [that] acquire an intoxicating glamour precisely because industrialism has impoverished the richness of ordinary existence" (McBride 59).

II. VICTORIAN MEDIEVALISM AND THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

The term Pre-Raphaelites refers to "a group of writers and artists in the late-Victorian period, who sought a return to creative simplicity and naturalness. The name refers to the inspiration found in art before the fifteenth-century artist Raphael, and Medievalism in general" (Auger 240). The major need for this interest was to escape from the moral corruption and ugliness of the industrial and material world. This view was asserted by many critics who studied Pre-Raphaelites' paintings including Rohan Amanda Maitzen who assumed that this widespread interest in "the Middle Ages as a historical period fuelled rather than dispelled myths about this phase of England's past as a time of social and religious order and harmony that contrasted favorably with the chaos and conflict of the modern period" (66).

Victorians noted the Pre-Raphaelites' attempt to draw their inspiration from the past as they deal with noble themes such as chivalric codes and female purity. The principle explanation for this apparent dependence on the Middle Ages resources was to remind Victorians of their noble pastthat was characterized by order and to recall medieval images that were still in the minds and hearts of many Victorians. The medieval revival in Victorian era was not only a nostalgic revival and glorification of Britain's past but also an attempt to find and preserve the patriarchal order. This concentration on the past was "neither mere escapism nor simply nostalgia because it was closely connected with their active need to find a mythology—or mythologies—to give outward from to inner experience" (Tayler and Brewer 130).

Early on, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was faithful to the religious themes and beliefs of the nineteenth-century, attempting to preserve the moral capacity of their arts. Showing from the beginning their attempts to find a connection between art religion, and Victorian moral virtues, the Pre-Raphaelites were known for their endorsement of the traditional Victorian gender ideology, representing man as ""the gallant knight" or "the valiant soldier"; or "sorceresses" (qtd. inAndres 27). Pre-Raphaelite painters and poets had a great fascination with female archetypes such as the Virgin Mary or other women committing to moral devotion (Marsh 14). The representations of religious female icons such as Mary were due to the religious backgrounds and medieval resources of some Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Looking back to the Middle Ages, the Pre-Raphaelites discovered what Alice Chandler identifies in *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, a "metaphor for a specific social order", including the conventional dimension of the social order related to the patriarchal hierarchies of gender (14). Like many Victorian authors and artists, Pre-Raphaelites endeavored to revive 'a dream of order' and heroic past of England through medieval resources. They attempted to reestablish a sense of order by drawing on resources regarding medieval times such as chivalry and male heroism.

III. THE PRE-RAPHAELITES AND THE REPRESENTATIONS OF IDEAL WOMANHOOD

The Girlhood of Mary Virgin
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rossetti-the-girlhood-of-mary-virgin-n04872

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a poet and a painter, took an interest in the ideal womanhood of Victorian England manifested in celebrating female virginity. The title of his major painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9), emphasized the approved feminine ideal of Victorian society. As the title suggested, Rossetti visually represented the conventional behavior of women and asserted the patriarchal control of their sexuality. Speaking of his artistic work, Rossetti made distinction between stages in a woman's life: "The picture of mine was a symbol of female excellence. The Virgin being taken as its highest type.It was not her *Childhood* but her *Girlhood*" (qtd. in Munich 95).Accordingly, female virginity was not only restricted to women's childhood but had to be continued during their adulthood. His fascination with virginity was based on Victorian interest in women's sexual purity and morality. The image of the virgin girl was familiar to the Victorian contractions of the sexless and pure women as the codes of honorable behavior were strictly affirmed. Rossetti's preoccupation with the life of the Virgin was present both in his paintings and poetry through which he represented the virtue of Mary and her devotion to religious life:

> This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect
> God's Virgin. Gone is a great while, and she
> Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee
> Unto God's will she brought devout respect,
> Profound simplicity of intellect.
> And supreme patience. From the mother's Knee
> Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;
> Strong in grave peace; in pity circumspect. (qtd. in Andres 54)

Rossetti's painting and poetry celebrated female virginity that was considered as the major motif of female purity in medievalism. While dealing with the representations of female purity, chastity, and virginity, Rossetti utilized symbolic colors, "favouring a predominance of white, symbolic of virginity complemented by the vibrant blue that is traditionally associated with Mary and symbolized her nobility as the 'Queen of Heaven', red for Christ's blood, and golden color that represents her divine status"(Rossetti 3).

Rossetti's *Mary*, as Talia Schaffer assumed, coincided with the archetypal Victorian conception of the sexually pure women, a woman who was confined within the private sphere, had a "woman's touch" as she did domestic tasks, was physically fragile, and in a permanent state of self-sacrifice (Schaffer 163). Victorian gender construct was visually represented through demonstrating the kinds of education that Victorian women received. In addition to religious education, Rossetti's model for the education of women, as demonstrated by his poems and paintings, was reflected through Mary's 'embroidery' (Rossetti).In fact, relating women to embroidery reinforced the sexual division of labor by suggesting that woman's appropriate place was the private sphere. The reference to needlework or embroidery in Pre-Raphaelite paintings reflected Victorian women's association with the domestic work and approved femininity (Rossetti).This domestic work attempted to display women's dependency on men and to valorize the patriarchal identification of women.

The reference to embroidery in Pre-Raphaelite paintings and other Victorian paintings had a direct correlation with medievalism. In *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Femininity*, Rozsika Parker evoked that in the nineteenth century, the focus on embroidery is influenced by medieval art. It is used to empower feminine trait (Parker 11). In fact, the Victorian revival of medieval embroidery was meant to stress on the role of needlework in the construction of feminine gender role, a "blueprint for the middle-class Victorian wife: pious, secluded, faithful and dutiful"(Maitzen 66). The Pre-Raphaelite' interest in depicting women who were engaged in the domestic work of embroidery reflected the strict gender roles of the Victorian society. Needle work was largely reflected in the Victorian's representations of women's role in society.

Indeed, Parker revealed the significance of embroidery and its important role in empowering traits of femininity as submissive, angelic, and non-threatening: "Women embroidered because they were naturally feminine, and were feminine because they naturally embroiled" (11). Accordingly, embroidering was considered as a "feminine craft" as it linked women to the private sphere and did not require physical strength. Embroidery referred to the gendered division of labor in which man was divorced from the home, while women were indoors reading books or sewing (Parker 107).

Despite the association of embroidery with women's work, it was not done for the sake of money. However, it was known as a female labor through which she expressed loyalty, affection, and love for their children and husbands. The Victorian middle-class embroiderers, "working by hand, not machine, and for love, not wages, evoked this idealized past in a form perfectly suited for her time and role. In her image, the class stratifications of the Middle Ages shade into the gender divisions of the nineteenth-century class" (Maitzen 67). Accordingly, far from the ugliness and selfishness of the industrial society,women's preoccupation with this domestic work in order to please their families demonstrated the established notion of femininity such as wifely obedience, self-sacrifice, and patience that also characterized medieval women. Embroidery was considered as work made by women simply "for love" (Parker 26).The representation of women sewing for their children within the private sphere served as safeguarding man's domination in the professional field. Women's major duty was to protect the family, rear the child, prepare food, and "make life beautiful". Most Victorians were faithful to the ideal femininity popularized by their paintings and poems. Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem *The Princess* referred to the

> Man for the Field and Women for the Hearth
>
> Man for the Sword and for the Needle She:
>
> Man with the Head and Woman with the Heart
>
> Man to command and woman to obey;
>
> All else confusion. (40)

Accordingly, Tennyson demonstrated a romanticized depiction of the medieval woman whose appearance and behavior corresponded to the patriarchal expectations of femininity. She was depicted as a pious woman confined within the private sphere, showing her deep interest in religious devotion and waiting for her 'absent lord'. This portrayal of a conservative medieval woman coincided with the Victorians' expectations of women. Representations of the sexual division of separate spheres and domestic scenes in Victorian paintings played an important role in visualizing and celebrating the ideology of domesticity based on typical "truths of gender difference that organized life" of the Victorian middle class" (Logan 219). They are primarily concerned with the position of British women in the domestic environment. Paintings of "cozy domestic scenes must have similarly provided the public with patterns of life on which to model and against which to test their own experience" (Logan 219).

The Pre-Raphaelites utilized medieval resources to visually depict the place of women in society which was often associated with the private sphere, highlighting its feminine qualities. In making the association of female bodies with gardens and other kinds of enclosed spaces, many interpreters of arts noted that the female genital is metaphorically represented by female enclosure within rounded spaces capable of being filled by something. This relationship is explained by Freud in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, who described a system of dream symbols that alluded to the female body: "Boxes, cases, chests, cupboards, and ovens represent the uterus, and also hollow objects, shapes, and vessels of all kinds"(14). Freud further added that a dream had number representations for the male genital. In contrast to the rounded spaces that symbolized female genitals and enclosure, he referred to the list of phallic items those which symbolized male genital such as "knives, daggers, lances, sabers…guns, pistols and revolvers…" (Freud 15). The rounded spaces that symbolized women's confinement were different from the vertical elements that symbolized male genitals and phallic authority (Freud 15).

The ideology of enclosure and female confinement were also present in other Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as *The Dryad*(1884-5) painted by Evelyn De Morgan who also linked nature with gender. In this portrait, the female body was chained and swallowed by the wood nymph Dryad. In *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and The Allegorical Body*, Elise Lawton Smith demonstrated how in the classical mythology the health and life of Dyad were highly dependable on the life of the tree to which she was attached (6). Accordingly, women's life and existence were related to men and thus their bodies were considered as men's properties. Indeed, nature itself was used to celebrate the traditional gender ideology through chaining women's bodies. The tree performed the role of male controller of a woman who couldn't free herself from his dominance. Morgan attempted to metaphorically demonstrate the patriarchal female confinement through natural elements through which the tree and the dryad functioned as the male body that sexually consumed the

female body while the latter acted as a passive recipient of his sexuality. This idea was developed and suggested by Elise Lawton Smith, assuming that Morgan's dryad was "far removed from the eroticized wood nymphs so often displayed in late-nineteenth-century paintings, in which the tree operates as both phallus (implicating the woman in the sexual encounter) and container (confining her to a static and passive role in relation to that phallus)" (85).

https://www.demorgan.org.uk/collection/the-dryad/

Much of the visual representations of the ideal womanhood produced in the nineteenth century required the use of natural elements and spaces in order to represent the so-called cult of True Womanhood. The expectations for women expressed in the cult of ideal womanhood "fit in naturally with accepted art styles and subject matter—flowers, portraits, genre scenes, and motherhood were particularly appropriate in the world of Victorian women" (Gover 105). The ideal of true womanhood created "images of nature which in turn led to a tradition of nineteenth century female imagery that enhanced such a connection" (Gover 105). Flowers emerged as a metaphor for women since they are like women "decorative, sweet, fragile, and vulnerable" (Gover 105). Metaphorically, the natural elements such as flowers and female bodies are mutually connected. Associating the female body with natural elements was meant to celebrate the female beauty of innocent and pure women who were similar to religious icons such as the Virgin Mary.

Inevitably, the Pre-Raphaelites as many Victorian authors or artists were influenced by their own background in medieval ages, attempting to represent the established gender hierarchy through a medieval lens. In addition to Rossetti's painting that displayed the traditionally gender bonds of Victorian society, Millais's *Mariana*(1851) visually demonstrated and emphasized the place of Victorian women within the private sphere: how they spent their time, the impact of their imprisonment in the private sphere upon their sexuality, and their relationship to the outside world. In dealing with these themes, Millais chose a heroine from Shakespeare's play, *Measure for Measure*, a play that addressed themes of marriage and sexuality. The painting revealed females' control in the enclosed garden far from the active world of men(Meisel 326). In "John Everett Millais", Paul Barlow depicted Millais's portrait: "stretches before a rigidly geometrically window containing an image of the Virgin Mary. She is making embroidery with leaves from the garden, seen through the decorated window. … Behind her is a mysterious space in which a small devotional image sits on a table, above which hangs a lantern" (138). Accordingly, the Pre-Raphaelites attempted to depict the Victorian approved model of femininity that was characterized by sexual purity and chastity through natural elements. The garden as a natural entity controlled women's body in a natural environment where they were associated with purity far from the threat of sexuality. Like the female body, "the garden was evidently regarded ambivalent. It was a female preserve, a metaphor for purity and the soul, a means of creative expression and tranquility within the apparent rough and tumble of male in the castle" (Gilchrist 142).

https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:John_Everett_Millais_-_Mariana_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

The use of natural elements by the Pre-Raphaelites and their flowers "that flourished throughout the nineteenth-century reflected a more traditional Christian interpretation (Cheney 256). The association of women with nature and flowers were found in Rossetti's poems and paintings, drawing on the traditional association between flowers and the Virgin Mary. For instance, the poet-painter's floral symbolism in *The White Lily* displayed an image of a woman similar to the Virgin Mary. For Victorians, the floral symbolism of the white lily was interpreted as a symbol of values, purity, femininity and beauty.

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The nineteenth-century anxieties over female sexuality, morality, and sexless body inspired many authors and artists of the time to embed morality within their works. The dead female body was represented as the object of moral attraction and is deployed in a direct opposition to the negative images associated with death. The poetic and artistic representations of dead female bodies in nineteenth century visual arts displayed the erotic dimension of the female bodies 'touched' by death. Like many of the Pre-Raphaelite visual arts, the latter are based on literary works and female characters found in literature. Rossetti's paintings and poems, for instance, are wrapped up with the body of a beautiful dead woman with whom he reveals the patriarchal norms of femininity. The position of dead women in male artistic works is significant in enhancing the patriarchal image of women as passive, powerless, and voiceless. Women's dead bodies robbed them of their corporeality and mobility, reducing them to me corpse. The ideal beauty was exemplified by Rossetti's portraits of *Elizabeth Siddall*(1854) as "a languid, aloof, withdrawn woman, with almost translucent pallor, in the weakness and flickering febrile flightiness of the consumptive ill woman, supportive of the conventional notions of transitory nature of feminine beauty, femininity as virginal and vulnerable, ideal, and tainted" (Bronfen 170). Therefore, representations of beautiful dead women in Victorian art such as Millais's *Ophelia* (1851-2) can be seen as a marker of repression and "a triumph of men over women" (Bradbury 122).

https://widowcranky.com/2017/10/24/ophelia-sir-john-everett-millais/

Male domination in Victorian paintings is also enhanced by the nineteenth-century male artists' attempt to avoid the representations of animate female bodies. The motif of beautiful dead women circulated in the Victorian male artistic works. The representations of women in this particular period of time were visualized by images of dead women. The latter refers to women who are in deep sleep known as the sleeping beauty that enforces the image of passive women robbed of her animate body. The relationship between death and women in the Victorian visual art is of a crucial significance. In Victorian artistic works, women were objectified by the male gaze because the "dead body is…passive…while survivor stands erect, imbued with a feeling of superiority" (Bronfen 65).

IV. THE PRE-RAPHAELITES AND IDEAL MASCULINITY

During the mid-nineteenth century, the Victorian society underwent changing social situations that contributed to a crisis in the conceptions of the ideal manhood, the fact that led many authors and painters to revive the conventional ideals of masculinity. Representations of masculinity in Victorian era were shaped by the construction of the medieval ideal of manliness and masculine reputation, resulting in distinct gender hierarchy that reinforced the traditional gender societal structure. The Victorian revival of medieval masculinity was part of a broad cultural movement whereby "idealized versions of "chivalry" were

associated with attempts to improve society, especially in terms of reforming English masculinity" (Machann 37).

Like the Cult of Ideal Womanhood that provided the principles and ideals that define femininity, 'masculine Christianity' identified the various ideals and manifestations that determine masculine reputation. During the Victorian era, "Christian activism in combination with the idea of vigorous masculinity was stressed in Christian church", promoting "both physical strength and masculine lifestyle for Christian men" (Willett 245). Masculinity as an ideal characteristic was provided by this religious doctrine in order to create a static image of how a man should appear and behave. Several attempts were made to equate Victorian masculinity with chivalric warriors and bravery, consistent with the Victorian representations of gender that were affected by medieval sources. One of the most visible examples of medievalism was the revival of medieval ideal of chivalry, as a major component of masculinity.

Among the visual markers that reinforced masculinity was beard as it conjured up images of masculine reputation derived from Victorians' cultural heritage. As far as the medieval context was concerned, the Middle Ages "were a time of long hair and long beards either rounded, ported, or forked, but only for the sake of nobility" (Peterkin 24). Beards were imbued with symbolic values which attempted to link medieval men with masculine qualities of prowess and chivalry and were considered as an integral component of men's autonomy and authority. The idealized male body in medieval period required beard growth as its absence connoted the absence of masculinity. Beards was inherited from ancient times and functioned as visual markers of masculinity. A useful parallel can be made here to the Elizabethan period, "an era during which men chose to define their masculinity by their facial hair" (Middleton 37). Raphaelite painters also represented their powerful men as bearded. The knights are represented as bearded which call to mind the "Victorian/ Tennysonian/ Pre-Raphaelite tradition that usually depicts powerful knights such as Arthur as a middle-aged bearded man" (Dentzien 181).

Gender differences with their emphasis on values of chivalry and nobility that characterized the social order in medieval period appeared not only in relation to beards, but also in other body parts, especially those related to hands. In the medieval period, the distinction between men's and women's hands and arms carried within it various symbolic attributes of medieval gender hierarchies. While women utilized their hands for performing domestic tasks or for greeting others, men's hands were engaged in occupations that were considered masculine such as carrying heavy weapons and defending enemies.

Physical prowess, as a fundamental part of 'masculine Christianity,' was revised by Victorian authors and painters, relying on medieval codes of chivalry. Representations of masculinity in Victorian paintings, particularly in Pre-Raphaelite artistic works, were based on depicting masculine prowess and strength derived from the masculine features that characterized the medieval knight (Munich 16). Sir Edward John Poynter's Andromeda (1836) displayed the equation of classical themes with Victorian cultural heritages and moral standards. His portrait demonstrated a Greek Mythological princess who was chained on the rock on which she was to be sacrificed (Munich 13). The Andromeda myth so popular in English painting and literature was utilized in order to support the dominant patriarchal gender ideology as its "polarized gender roles present a structural paradigm for unequal distribution of power ostensibly favoring men" (Munich 13). The painting depicted a female figure that was represented as a sign of feminine weakness and vulnerability, invoking the traditional feminine behavior by displaying helplessness and reliance on masculine chivalry.

https://www.pinterest.ca/pely123/artsir-edward-john-poynter/

The construction of gender ideology implied not only the mere sexual differences between men and women but also the "eroticization" of male dominance (Betterton 54). This power struggle and male dominance involved chaining and biding the female body, which is weak and fragile. Most importantly in the painting, male dominance was eroticized and emphasized through female nudity, positioning men as superior and women as inferior and subordinate. The valorization of female vulnerability and weakness was displayed through the tradition of the female nude that represented a naked body in natural environment that was not meant to arouse sexuality or to oppose Victorian moral values, but to depict women's dependence on chivalric protection. By the mid nineteenth century, the Victorian artist John Everett Millais ties together these two threads, the patriarchal representation of male dominance

and the signification of women represented by the female nude. *The Knight Errant*(1870) represented "this gendered binary structure very clearly, relying on a contrast between unbound flowing hair and yielding female flesh and an armored, masculinity wielding an outside sword to convey its sexual meaning" (Betterton 54). Obviously, the painting revived medieval chivalric ideals through the juxtaposition of women's soft skin with the armored body of the knight. The association of the knight, a heroic mythic figure of medieval England, with a female nude was meant to revive the rescue-rescued theme (Kern 225).

https://fineartamerica.com/featured/the-knight-errant-john-everett-millais.html?product=art-print

Another meaning derived from the examination of the female nude in Millais's artistic works was to differentiate masculinity from femininity. The sword used by the knight was one among the vertical tools associated with men's power and recalled men's phallic authority and genital, was contrasted with the vulnerable naked female body that was deprived of the phallus (Betterton 54). This desire to differentiate masculine qualities from feminine attributes was evident in the equation of female bodies with weakness through juxtaposing it with medieval tools that emphasized the masculinity and heroic male body: "The female nude is not only physically vulnerable to the sword which cuts through her bonds, she is also represented as the victim of previous sexual assault, her clothing lying scattered at her feet…. The strong vertical of the tree emphasizes the phallic thrust of the sword and angular male body in opposition to sinuous curves of the female nude" (Betterton 54).

The painting clearly maintained a strict distinction between male/masculine and female/feminine attributes as "[t]he gendered opposition is […] reinforced by a series of visual contrasts between soft and hard, cool and warm, naked and clothed, bound and free, passive and active, which structure the symbolic meaning of the work" (Betterton 54). The female body was represented as weak and soft, in opposition to the male body, which was represented as strong and hard.

The representation of the armored body of the knight in a Victorian context strongly enhanced the dominant Victorian gender ideology. In contrast to the Victorian representations of ideal womanhood that was associated with notions of the private sphere, female enclosure, and femininity, the representations of ideal manhood was shaped by notions of chivalric warriors and armored bodies that constantly recalled Victorian viewers or readers of the static image of masculinity and femininity. This juxtaposition was apparent in Victorian art that is "full of sword-bearing, powerful men in suits of armor rescuing vulnerable women, in various states of undress from ferocious monsters or evil knight" (Kern 225). Bearing in mind the knight errant who rescued a maiden shackled to a tree and other instances revolving around themes of male hero and female victim, the juxtaposition between the knight and female figure was meant to put into the foreground certain issues related to Victorian gender ideology.

Generally, differences in male and female life expectancy and behaviors inevitably contributed to differences in their body configurations and the ways in which their bodies were perceived. In fact, these differences were rooted in the context of the medieval period that was characterized by the spread of wars. As noted above, warfare and its chivalric codes required bodily attributes that fulfill male gender expectations. The medieval men's body parts were treated according to gender-related specific manners and expectations.

Most medieval men adhere to gender expectations in which male bodies appeared as powerful, embodying the role of knights. Their active and strong bodies were sharply distinguished from the passive and weak female bodies. Medieval medical resources illustrated man as "a macrocosmic giant, spilling over the bounds of the text, signifying more than physical dimensions, or at least more than the physical dimensions of the individual body" (Smith 6).

The fundamental bond of prowess and masculine bodies was indicated by the war materials that only men were allowed to use. The most apparent and dangerous indicator of material trove was swords, "the instrument on which all masculine accomplishment must turn, and therefore pivotal to conceptions of male identity and personal force" (Heng 284). Because of their relation to prowess and heroic violence, a sword was an indicator of masculine identity as "[a]rms and armor were deployed to construct, define, and signify gendered identities throughout the Middle Ages [and the] shield, sword, and spear were recognizable symbols of men and masculinity, just as spindle and distaff were symbols of women and femininity" (Schaus 36). Men in *The Tale of the King Arthur* had the ability to use swords because they have power. Women, however, couldn't use such materials because they held only minor and low-status roles and

lacked the physical capacity that enabled them to hold such war material.

The use of weapons in battlefields and their associations with masculinity required the physical qualities of a swordsman such as strength and courage. Beowulf, an epic poem, embodied the ideals of medieval chivalry, showing strength and physical prowess in the battle arts. The poet described his physical strength, power, skill in wars and most importantly his strength while using the sword: "When he wielded a sword/ No matter how blooded and hard-edged the blade/ His hand was too strong, the stroke he dealt/ (I have) would ruin it" (qtd. in Roberts 110). The portrayal of Beowulf and his armored male body followed the quality of the strong male body that acted as the model of the representations of masculinity and chivalry in medieval England (Roberts 110). The masculine reputation of medieval knight was highly based on the status of his arms through which he could demonstrate his power.

Scholars and psychoanalysts emphasized a link between masculine identity and weapons and suggested how some materials functioned as symbols of male power. Swords were approved to be as indicators of masculine identity, reassuring phallic inscriptions embedded within their shapes. This idea was suggested by Freud who applied weaponry to genitalia in a manner that could differentiate masculinity from femininity. The sword hanging between the legs suggested the male sexual organ or the penis, which was one characteristic of men. In *The Interpretations of Dreams*, Freud pointed out, "All complicated machines and appliances are very probably the genitals—as a rule the male genitals—in the descriptions in which the symbolism of dreams is as indefatigable as human wit. It is quite unmistakable that all weapons and tools are used as symbols for the male organ: e.g., ploughshare, hammer, gun, revolver, dagger, sword, etc" (Freud 676). Many of the listed elements seen in dreams, especially those related to war materials such as swords, were considered as depictions of phallic authority and male genitals.

During the middle ages, as in all periods of human history, warfare was recognized as a masculine preserver.It was commonly known as a masculine activity through which 'manhood' could be displayed through using war materials and showing off his learned skills. The possession of weapons like swords meant possessing masculine attributes and phallic items. In *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval England Literature*, Dana Oswald demonstrated how Beowulf's failing swords mirrored a deficiency in his masculine identity, referring to his inability to kill Grendel's mother. The sword that was often associated with the phallus signified the Law of the Father. Therefore, as the sword didn't achieve the glory required, Beowulf loses this phallic authority (Oswald 98).

V. CONCLUSION

The Victorian literary works and arts had a strong interest in the medieval ages such as medieval chivalry that became 'the order of the day'. The idealistic view of the Pre-Raphaelites who revived the noble values of the middle ages was highly marked by ideas of chivalry. Women are represented as passive and submissive, yet they are viewed and represented as weaker. Medievalism also played an important role in the construction of Victorian masculinity and notions of gentlemanly behavior, specifically in the behavior of men toward women. It also placed men in a superior position than women. They are stronger and more powerful. Victorians used tales of chivalry of the Middle Ages in order to support and protect the education of patriarchal masculinity. Popular culture in the Victorian era looked back to the 'chivalric heroism' and feminine ideals of the Middle Ages that were considered as the perfect model for Victorian young men and women to follow.

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