

## Ophelia, the Singing Corpse: Pleasure and the Gaze in *Where the Wild Roses Grow*

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### **Abstract:**

This essay deconstructs a very strange reinterpretation of John Millais' *Ophelia* (1852) as found in Rocky Schenck's music video, *Where the Wild Roses Grow* (1997). Drawing from Jan Marsh's 'Pale Ladies of Death', Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body* and Ann Kaplan's revisions of Laura Mulvey's 'gaze' theory, this work explores the compulsion to render or to gaze at a beautiful dead woman. Marsh, Bronfen, and Kaplan provide helpful avenues through which to begin approaching the complex operations of a contemporary Neo-Victorian representation of an eroticised Pre-Raphaelite woman, as in *Where the Wild Roses Grow*. This work demonstrates that the music video is symptomatic of the contemporary Western audience's desire not only to see, but also to interact with, the visual aesthetics and icons (especially the female icons) of the Victorian era.

**Keywords:** Nick Cave, John Millais, Kylie Minogue, music video, neo-Victorian, Ophelia, Pre-Raphaelite, Rocky Schenck, *Where the Wild Roses Grow*.

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**Figure 1:** Still from *Where the Wild Roses Grow* music video, reprinted with kind permission from Rocky Schenck.

Tall reeds blow gently in the wind and colourful wildflowers line a murky stream.<sup>1</sup> A pale-skinned, red-haired woman floats in the water, lips parted,

eyes open; she is beautiful even in death. Such a description, for most art historians, would conjure John Millais's painting *Ophelia* (1852), the much-reproduced Pre-Raphaelite vision of Shakespeare's suicidal heroine; however, this description now also applies to the imagery of a 1996 British music video, *Where the Wild Roses Grow*, created by the writer-director, Rocky Schenck. His strange and highly suggestive visuals accompany a morbid duet sung by the Australian pop star, Kylie Minogue, and the musician, Nick Cave. In the lyrics to this song, Minogue plays the role of a young woman who names herself as "Eliza Day", murdered by an unnamed lover (a role performed by Nick Cave), who believes that "all beauty must die." The killer narrates his version of the events leading up to the murder, while Eliza's ghost tells her side from her watery grave – thus raising questions about the conflict between her seeming passivity as a visual spectacle and her active agency in voicing her own story. For the video, Rocky Schenck used Millais's well-known painting as a template and positioned Eliza in the water like her Victorian predecessor, surrounded by flowers, even as he made her the teller of her own tale.



**Figure 2:** Storyboard for music video. Drawn by Rocky Schenck and reproduced with his permission.

The compulsion to render or to gaze at a beautiful dead woman is by no means a new subject for discussion. For instance, in 'Pale Ladies of Death', Jan Marsh observes that early Pre-Raphaelite depictions of death were "largely sentimental," expressing "the simple griefs of loss and regret" (Marsh 1987: 135). As such an early painting, John Millais's *Ophelia* falls, in Marsh's opinion, into the category of paintings that represent a "sorrowful, pathetic death" (Marsh 1987: 138). However, Marsh also alerts

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us to the notorious sexual associations between the Pre-Raphaelite painters' works and dead or deathly women, noting, for instance, that the images of dead women take a sensual turn with Rossetti's obsessive painting of his model and wife, Elizabeth or 'Lizzie' Siddal, even after her death. In an image like *Beata Beatrix* (1870), which renders Siddal with her eyes closed and lips parted, Marsh claims that the "sense of necrophilic longing is hard to evade" (Marsh 1987: 142).

The psychologically complex attraction of representations of dead women has been explored more fully in Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body*. Bronfen goes beyond the Victorian context, addressing the numerous narrative and visual representations of the dead feminine body in Western culture. She refers to figures such as Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, Edgar Allen Poe's Ligeia and the Grimm Brothers' Snow White, reinforcing her claim that "culture uses art to dream the deaths of beautiful women" (Bronfen 1992: xi). Like Marsh, however, Bronfen specifically calls attention to the association between the Pre-Raphaelite artists and images of dead or deathly women; indeed, she dedicates a chapter of her book to the representations of Siddal. According to Bronfen, the aestheticised and eroticised representations of the dead feminine body have allowed Western culture to "repress and articulate its unconscious knowledge of death [...] by localizing death away from the self, at the body of a beautiful woman" (Bronfen 1992: xi). In other words, she concludes that when artists mask representations of death as sexual fantasy, a spectator can continue to indulge in the morbid fascination of looking at a corpse without having truly to confront the fear of death. Thus, the desire to look at a dead woman's body is, for Bronfen, aligned with denial and with a desire to control the uncontrollable.

What happens, however, when the inanimate spectacles of Victorian art become animated through film, as they do in the Neo-Victorian *Where the Wild Roses Grow*? Are other kinds of viewing strategies involved, and do we need different sorts of theory to account for them? Cinematic theories of the gendered gaze, which were pioneered by Laura Mulvey and later revised by E. Ann Kaplan and other feminist commentators, can provide an important lens through which to explore how the act of watching functions in this video, as well as how it differs from the act of viewing a mid-Victorian painting. Like Mulvey who asserts that "looking" is an actively male role and that that women in film have an "appearance coded for strong

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visual and erotic impact” (Mulvey 1975: 7), Kaplan works with the notion that the male gaze “in patriarchy [...] is viewed as dominating and repressing women through its controlling power over female discourse and female desire” (Kaplan 1983: 2). In *Women and Film*, Kaplan asserts that, in Hollywood films, “women are ultimately refused a voice, a discourse[,] and their desire is subjected to male desire. They live out silently frustrated lives, or, if they resist their placing, sacrifice their lives for their daring” (Kaplan 1983: 7). It is important consider, though, when analysing Schenck’s music video, how Kaplan also reshaped Mulvey’s concept of the gaze, emphasising that women, too, receive pleasure through looking. Kaplan has asserted that the female viewer actively locates herself in erotic fantasies, either by placing herself as a “passive recipient of male desire” or by assuming an observer’s stance “at one remove, as woman who is watching a woman who is passive recipient to male desire” (Kaplan 1983: 26), thereby retaining a degree of agency and power over the process. When watching a film, moreover, spectators of either gender can occupy the viewing “positions we now know as masculine and feminine” (Kaplan 1983: 28); biological gender identity does not limit or determine one’s gaze. Marsh, Bronfen, and Kaplan thus provide helpful avenues through which to begin approaching the complex operations of a contemporary neo-Victorian representation of an eroticised Pre-Raphaelite woman, as in *Where the Wild Roses Grow*.

The music video may at first seem an unlikely adaptation, but it does suggest that Victorianism in general, and Pre-Raphaelite art in particular, has become a profitable commodity in pop culture. As we can infer from Marsh’s discussion of the Pre-Raphaelite representations of death, Millais’s *Ophelia* differs from Rossetti’s *Beata Beatrix* in that Ophelia was not received as an erotic painting. And yet *Where the Wild Roses Grow* capitalises, figuratively and literally, on our awareness both of the increased enshrinement of Victorian painting in museums and in other cultural institutions and of the Pre-Raphaelites’ reputation for rebellious and frequently morbid sexuality. In doing so, it creates a marketable (and internationally marketed) object that combines ‘high art’ and erotic fantasy, while also complicating our responses by giving the usually mute image of the Pre-Raphaelite woman a voice.

Schenck’s video embodies a compelling tension. On the one hand, the spectator is reassured by the distance involved in having this scene of

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drowned loveliness framed through the art of the past and can thus safely enjoy the pleasure of looking, even at something perverse. On the other hand, the spectator may be unsettled to find himself or herself identifying with the perspective of a murderer who is also obsessed with beauty – the condition described by Oscar Wilde, in his poem ‘The Ballad of Reading Gaol’ (1897), of “killing” the “thing” one loves. At the same time, the spectator is also aware that, unlike the silent corpse of Millais’s painting, this figure is animate and speaking/singing for herself – a circumstance that highlights the difference between the Victorian original and its neo-Victorian adaptation into a medium with its own conventions. Drawing upon Bronfen’s work on images of the female corpse, I will demonstrate how the video works to create a dream-like mood, producing the fantasy that keeps “death away from the self.” However, using Kaplan’s revisions of Laura Mulvey’s gaze theory, I will also deconstruct the camera’s perspective, which disrupts the spectator’s sense of security or blamelessness. Finally, I will explore the larger implications of this music video as symptomatic of the contemporary Western audience’s desire not only to see, but also to interact with, the visual aesthetics and icons (especially the female icons) of the Victorian era.

Both J. E. Millais and Rocky Schenck go above and beyond reality in order to create suitably artistic environments with which to surround their respective Ophelias. Millais’s natural setting for Ophelia is known for its ‘hyper-realism’, a technique that renders everything in full focus. Millais deliberately deviates from principles of aesthetics enforced in the nineteenth century by the Royal Academy and depicts even the tiniest of flowers in meticulous detail. In a letter to a friend, Millais referred to his eleven-hour-long days of study for this painting as “martyrdom” and insisted that “the painting of a picture under such circumstances would be a greater punishment to a murderer than hanging” (Millais 1899: 119-120). Ophelia’s dress, “an antique brocade gown,” is rendered with similar attention to the minutest of details (Marsh 1987: 138). According to Jan Marsh, Millais’s Ophelia herself becomes a pathetic and passive element in the natural landscape – tragic, because she is almost unnoticed and because her corpse is “at odds” with “the bright flowers and foliage of spring” (Marsh 1987: 138).

Schenck’s video creates a very stylised and romanticised version of this same landscape in order to establish a world that is both seductive and

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sensual; indeed, the video persuades us that it is safe to gaze at the scene by establishing a dreamlike sensation. Schenck has indicated that one of his primary goals in this film was “to take a real environment and make it look as if we had created the setting in a studio – manipulating a natural setting and making it look as if it was a beautifully executed but artificial set” (Schenck 2009b).<sup>2</sup> In his opinion, the set designs that dominated the film industry from 1920-1950 “were not only duplicating what they saw in nature, but what they saw in the romantic landscape paintings of previous eras” (Schenck 2009b). Schenck wanted to build the entire set for this video, but was prohibited by budget constraints from doing so. Instead, the resourceful director relied on elaborate lighting and manipulation of the camera work to create a liminal world somewhere between painting and film, as well as between art and reality.

Light plays an important role in this illusory spectacle; Schenck has described how he achieved this “other worldly effect”:

For the lighting design, I used backlighting (sometimes referred to as “rim lighting”), which gives the setting and the characters a rather ethereal glow around the edges. I wanted to duplicate the look of early silent films, which occasionally utilized extreme backlighting two to three stops hotter than the key lights. This was a deliberate decision on my part to accentuate and romanticize the dreamy and surreal atmosphere of the storyline. Multiple mirrors reflecting the sunlight were used to create this effect for many of the scenes. (Schenck 2009b)

According to Schenck, on the day the film was shot, “it was sunny all day.” He has noted that such weather is “so unusual for England” that, for the viewer (especially a British one), it conveniently reinforces the notion of the depicted world as constructed, rather than real (Schenck 2009a).

Not only does the music video evoke a romanticised landscape, but it also relies on stylised visual tropes of femininity. Kylie Minogue’s ‘Eliza Day’ combines notions of Pre-Raphaelite and contemporary beauty. Although Pre-Raphaelite stunners often were given copper-red hair, Eliza’s hair is artificially vibrant. Like the landscape, her bottle-red hair reflects the aesthetic tastes of a modern audience, used to the saturated hues of fashion

photography. Her extremely white face and blood-red lips suggest other famously passive women, such as the twentieth-century interpretations of Snow White and Sleeping Beauty in Disney animation. Alluding to notions of Victorian sexual morality, she is clad in white garments and wears a cross around her neck, visually establishing her virginity and echoing the song's lyrics: "He would be my first man." Her attire combines Victorian sensibilities with twenty-first-century flair, for she wears dainty white gloves with a flirtatious sundress.



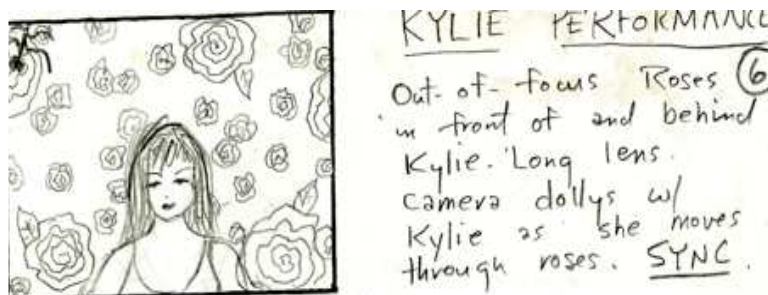
**Figure 3:** Still from *Where the Wild Roses Grow* music video, reprinted with kind permission from Rocky Schenck

However, the audience's awareness of the Pre-Raphaelite *femme fatale* as a potentially powerful figure, as well as Eliza's own ability to assert her identity through song, prevents the spectator from reading this character as entirely passive. Eliza's intense gaze links her with the more aggressive Pre-Raphaelite women painted by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, such as those (often modeled by Jane Morris) who feature in both *Daydream* (1880) and *Proserpine* (1872). Her loose copper hair, flamboyantly red lipstick, and visual associations with roses specifically conjure Rossetti's sexually charged portrayal of *Lady Lilith* (1868).

The image of Eliza Day also echoes other female figures from neo-Victorian adaptations in different media, such as Sarah Woodruff of John

Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), a novel that was filmed in 1981 by the cinematographer, Freddie Francis. Sarah, a red-haired, (presumed) fallen woman, orchestrates the loss of her own virginity by manipulating a man of higher social status – at one point, even turning herself into a supine visual spectacle for him and allowing him to come upon her sleeping on the ground. Her scandalous path eventually leads Sarah to the house and studio of none other than Rossetti himself, where she finally finds a career as model/muse to the brilliant artist. Throughout Fowles's narrative, Sarah's sexuality is associated with water and with natural scenery. The crashing waves and unruly foliage of the Ware Commons at Lyme Regis serve as backdrop and correlative for Sarah's active desires, an environment not unlike the rustling reeds and (albeit more gentle) lapping water surrounding Eliza Day.

In Schenck's video, these connections both to passionate Pre-Raphaelite women and to later neo-Victorian variations upon the type highlight Eliza's sexuality and underscore the significance of the lyrics she sings, especially, "He would be my first man" – a phrase that appears to indicate her willingness to lose her virginity. Schenck also establishes a direct connection between Eliza and nature, which recalls Fowles's sexually charged descriptions of the landscape surrounding Sarah. When we first see Eliza's face, she is walking through a field of roses. The director's notes from Schenck's storyboard read: "Out of focus roses in front of and behind Kylie. Long lens camera dollies w/ Kylie as she moves through roses." This shot is not unlike the famous rose petal image from the film *American Beauty* (1992) and emphasises an otherworldly, yet highly erotic, link between Eliza and the flowers.



**Figure 4:** Music Video Story Boards. Image drawn by Rocky Schenck and reproduced with his permission.





**Figure 5:** Image from Schenck's collection documenting set design for music video, reprinted with kind permission from Rocky Schenck.

The video also underlines an identification of Eliza with water, as well as with the thick, winding snake. Scenes of Eliza vary, with some shots showing her lying perfectly still in the water, while in others her eyes and lips are moving as she sings. This oscillation creates an oddly destabilising sensation, for the spectator can never be completely certain of her 'death'. Instead of merely being a dead woman placed in the water by her killer, she is, at times, also a beautiful woman who has put on a white dress, aware that she is being viewed as the thin, wet fabric clings transparently to her body. Similar ambiguity surrounds the figure of the slithering snake, which can suggest the phallic presence of Nick Cave's character or, indeed, her own sexual desires. Obviously, there are also allusions here to the biblical Eve and the serpent, along with visual tropes found in nineteenth-century art, including images of snakes gliding over women's bodies in paintings such as Franz von Stuck's powerful *Sensuality* (1891) or John Collier's *Lilith* (1892).

Although echoes of the *femme fatale* work to complicate the issue of Eliza's passivity, Schenck's video is primarily interested in exploring and utilising the male gaze – the convention that permits men to look and women to serve as objects for male visual pleasure (as outlined most famously by Laura Mulvey). In the scenario here, Nick Cave's unnamed

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character is dramatically vilified, so that we know who is to blame for the beautiful woman's tragedy and for turning it into a spectacle. The music video genre requires images that are easily identifiable, even simplistic, enabling the audience to understand a story in the compressed time of a few minutes. Thus, Eliza is associated with symbols of purity (a rose, a cross), while the nameless masculine figure is associated with low, traditionally 'evil' creatures. When this figure takes the ribbon from Eliza's hair, a horrific glossy centipede slides past the dyed-red strands. Schenck has remarked that one of his favorite shots shows the sunlight briefly lighting up a spider web in front of Nick Cave, as he is walking through the woods toward the murder site, suggesting that he lures women into his web. Although Eliza can be viewed as a creature with her own desires, aligned with the serpent, the actions of this snake actually seem more threatening to her than empowering. The snake slithers over Eliza's body in the same way that the man's hands caress her without inhibitions. Lingering between her legs, the snake most likely alludes to Cave's character as a sexual predator. Much different from the man she thought he was, the one "who with a careful hand" wiped the tears from her face, he tears the cross from her neck and places a single red rose in her mouth at the end of the video in a gesture of symbolic rape.

As Elisabeth Bronfen makes clear, the fascination with dead or deathly women, such as Schenck's Eliza Day, has been a pervasive element in Western culture and its artifacts, and figures such as that of Ophelia recur as both literary and visual tropes. Like Ophelia, the tragic Lady of Shalott was an icon of the Victorian era. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were over fifty representations in British painting of the Lady of Shalott, exemplifying a fetish for morbid images of femininity (Mariotti 2004: para. 2). Rocky Schenck has reported that, after finishing *Where the Wild Roses Grow*, he received a number of calls from other musicians who wanted him to produce similar work to accompany their songs. Schenck agreed to one other projects, the video for Jerry Cantrell's 'My Song', but finally asserted that he would not do any more "dead people videos" (Schenck 2009b) – an interesting choice of phrasing, on his part, which obscures the gendered component of the imagery.

Although separated by time and genre, Millais's painting and Schenck's video alike remind viewers that immobile female bodies are attractive commodities. Both works, moreover, tacitly ask us to consider

how these images were constructed and how the female models were or were not complicit in their creation. The story of Millais's model, Elizabeth Siddal, becoming ill with pneumonia after posing in cold bathwater for excruciatingly long stretches of time, has become almost as famous as the painting itself. Although Kylie Minogue was actually floating in a special sanitised tank of heated water, the video intentionally hides this apparatus.



**Figure 6:** Image from Schenck's collection, documenting set design for music video, reprinted with kind permission from Rocky Schenck.

Even after learning of the heated tank, those who are familiar with the story of Millais's *Ophelia* cannot help but recall Siddal's masochistic sacrifice, as they watch Minogue submerged in the water, lying still, with a giant snake slithering around her limp body. The spectacle is uncomfortable, even 'squirm-inducing', in its sado-masochism; yet we cannot turn our eyes away.

The video tries, however, to anticipate and assuage our sense of guilt in watching by making some gesture toward anthropomorphism, invoking connections between human spectators and the forest animals represented here: like these animals, we are present observers but helpless and not involved with the crime. Schenck has reported that director Charles

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Laughton's 1955 film classic, *The Night of the Hunter*, also influenced *Where the Wild Roses Grow*. In this melodrama, a man marries a rich widow for her money. When she realises his intent, he murders her and submerges her body in the river. In a particularly chilling scene – one that has shaped Schenck's vision – her children are trying to escape their angry stepfather by boat. Unbeknownst to them, the children pass over the body of their dead mother. The innocence of the children and twinkling stars are at odds with this morbid predicament. Even stranger is the presence of an odd assortment of woodland creatures, such as a frog and a rabbit, which observe the whole scene. Similar creatures are also scattered throughout *Where the Wild Roses Grow*, not only alluding to the fairytale-like quality of the 1955 film, but also alerting the spectator to the act of watching. In one scene, a sweet-looking rabbit sits by the dead girl's foot, while the murderer runs his hands all over Eliza's body. Instead of affirming our 'rabbit-like' innocence, however, these creatures can also serve to remind us that, unlike them, we have chosen to watch her death: we enjoy watching and, most likely, we will watch it again, as the availability of video through Youtube and other Internet sites allows for multiple 'hits'.

Millais's painting *Ophelia* was, of course, the vision of a male artist who was primarily addressing an audience of male consumers – Victorian art critics, potential purchasers, and fellow members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The video of *Where the Wild Roses Grow*, however, relies on the cross-gender contributions by both Nick Cave and Kylie Minogue, while targeting male and female spectators alike. Again, as already noted in the discussion of Kaplan, both genders receive pleasure in looking and the female viewer, too, can take an active part, even when the erotic fantasy involves the sight of a passive woman (Kaplan 1983: 26). But Schenck's video raises ethical questions that go beyond Kaplan's theoretical concerns. Unlike the safe sensation of looking at the painting, the feelings potentially evoked by film are different and more challenging; *Where the Wild Roses Grow* reminds the spectators that we, regardless of gender, are guilty observers.

Looking at Millais's painting, viewers are meant to grieve over the tragic loss of a young and beautiful woman and, simultaneously, to appreciate an image so well executed. The visual meditation is uninterrupted, for there is no one else within the frame; Ophelia is obviously unaware of the viewer's presence, and Hamlet is absent. In the music video,

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however, we cannot avoid an ominous male presence, for Nick Cave's character is everywhere. His presence signals to the audience the moral ambiguity involved in taking pleasure in the spectacle of the dead woman – one who, moreover, is not a suicide, but a victim of murder. Even in the shots that do not include Cave, his baritone voices resonates through the landscape, overpowering Minogue's soprano. And yet, Minogue's character is not as still, quiet or as unaware as Millais's Ophelia. Schenck indicates that shots of her walking through the fields are intended to be seen as shots of her ghost, lingering after death in order to tell her story. Although there are some frames where her eyes are glassy and motionless, there are others where she makes eye contact with the viewer and her gaze follows the camera. Unlike Ophelia, for better or for worse, Eliza knows that we are watching. We cannot retain our innocence, for watching Cave and watching Cave watch Minogue alters how we view the frames that depict Minogue alone.

In the shots of Cave, we are implicated as his willing and trusted witness. He frequently makes eye contact with the camera as he tells/sings his tale, acknowledging our presence and our fascination with seeing and hearing this story. He does not balk at providing us with his morbid philosophy: "all beauty must die." We follow Cave's actions, as he picks up a rock to use as a weapon. The camera closes in to show him washing blood from his palms. Yet, although the video records the male figure raising the weapon and rinsing the blood from his hands, it does not show the actual act of murder. Although Eliza's character claims to see the "rock in his fist", neither character discusses the actual death blow. This omission allows us to remain where Cave wants us to be, immersed in the strange, dreamlike trance. We are not watching events in real time; we are seeing an edited version of events that have already occurred, a narrated memory or re-imagining of the past. In this surreal construction of events, there is no explicit violence, and Eliza Day is always beautiful. Although we assume that she dies from the rock to the back of the head, the only blood ever shown is on the murderer's hands; Eliza's image is untainted, because Cave's character desires us to see her this way, and so does the camera.

The frames that include the figures of both Nick Cave and Kylie Minogue are especially unsettling, for we cannot avoid spectator identification with Cave's nameless lover/murderer. In the scenes that, according to Schenck, made Nick Cave a "nervous wreck" (Schenck

2009b), he runs his hands over her dead body, as he gazes down at her. By watching him watch her, a spectator must confront his or her own eroticised pleasure in looking and its connection here with female victimisation. A female viewer is required to acknowledge what Kaplan says most women are reluctant to admit, namely that “pleasure comes from identification with objectification” (Kaplan 1983: 28).

The majority of the shots of Eliza are from above, looking down at her, so that the camera conflates the spectator’s gaze at the victim with that of the victimizer. In a shot like the one below, this becomes particularly evident, for the male hand is visible within the upper left-hand of the frame. The foliage in the foreground is blurred, mimicking natural human vision; our eyes tend to de-emphasise material closest to us in order to focus on the object we desire to view. This technique, in addition to the sight of the ‘anonymous’ detached hand, suggests that it could be our hand, reinforcing spectator identification.



**Figure 7:** Still from *Where the Wild Roses Grow* music video, reprinted with kind permission from Rocky Schenck.

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This hand becomes even more sinister, as it strokes the female corpse. With a sickening jolt, we recognise that the controlling hand's actions determine the spectator's pleasure in watching the video, and complicity in the disturbing forced identification with the obsessive predator feels strangely like a sexual violation.

Notably, the video appears to respond to our trauma. Near the end of the action, the disembodied hand guiltily reaches down and closes the beautiful corpse's eyes. The last thing we see before our eyes, or the 'eyes' of the camera, also close, or before we avert our eyes, is a beautiful landscape shot. In this lovely scene, the murderer and his pretty victim are barely visible. They become part of the glowing, peaceful riverside. Aside from the gently rustling leaves, the landscape is perfectly still, as though we were looking at a safely remote and aestheticised Victorian painting, such as those described in Elizabeth Prettejohn's *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (2007). The screen goes black, and our distance from the image is reaffirmed.

In her recent study, *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture* (2008), Kimberly Rhodes highlights the "pervasiveness of Ophelia" as a "resonance that exists between our own era and the period of Victoria's reign" (Rhodes 2008: 2). Rhodes points to the current uses of the image in "popular psychology books aimed at teenage girls and their mothers, in the mainstream culture cinema and, of course, in theatres and art galleries" (Rhodes 2008: 2). In 1998, the gift shop at Tate Britain sold 21,700 postcards of Millais's *Ophelia*, a number second only to postcard sales of John William Waterhouse's *Lady of Shalott* (1888) (Grigg 2004: 52). Both Ophelia and the Lady of Shalott have become nostalgic, aesthetic occasions for exploring from afar the desire to look at and to possess young women who remain frozen in time. However, a video such as *Where the Wild Roses Grow* intimates that viewers are not satisfied with such distance. A postcard is not enough; we need to be closer to Ophelia, closer to the Victorian. Or, perhaps, in a very Victorian way, we experience nostalgia for an idealised past that will forever be uncorrupted by change; yet that nostalgia is tempered with a postmodern suspicion of the aesthetic. In our contemporary world of media images of sexual violence, where women's bodies are often the sites upon which we inscribe our own perverse anxieties about meaning, narrative, and beauty, it seems as though we can only connect with the beautiful by reinserting an antiquated aesthetic of violence. (Neo-)

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Victorianism provides a contextually rich and, more importantly, profitable place to negotiate our own attitudes towards eroticism, death, female beauty and visibility. This new 'interactive' Ophelia allows an unsettling intimacy of which the Pre-Raphaelites could only have dreamed – or perhaps had very vicious nightmares about. We are no longer separated by the painting's frame. It is our bodies that submit to the unnerving caresses, or it is our hand that pushes Ophelia beneath the water every time we press 'play'.

### **Notes**

1. The author would like to thank Dr. Margaret Stetz for her time and suggestions in revising this work.
2. The author would like to thank Rocky Schenck most sincerely for his kind cooperation in the writing of this article and for the very generous sharing of his time and information. Schenck permitted a one-hour phone interview and also provided numerous emails detailing the process of making this music video. All of the photo stills and storyboard images in this article are the property of Rocky Schenck and have been reproduced with his permission.

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