

SIMEON SOLOMON'S WORK BEFORE 1873: INTERPRETATION AND IDENTITY

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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The University of Birmingham
September 2009

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ABSTRACT

This thesis has two aims. The first is to demonstrate that commentaries on the work produced by Simeon Solomon (1840-1905) before 1873, an artist who was Jewish and homosexual, have been dominated by critics' perceptions of him as a marginal figure. Solomon's Jewish heritage and homosexuality doubly marginalised him in the Christian, heterosexual culture of Victorian England so it is understandable that commentators have focused on his minority position and read signs of difference in his works. However, my second aim is to challenge this perspective. I will show how much Solomon's art had in common with that of his contemporaries and broaden the discussion by analysing paintings which have been given less critical attention, possibly because they do not present so many opportunities to refer to the artist's marginality. I will suggest alternative interpretations of specific paintings which draw upon other aspects of nineteenth-century English society in order to show how explanations which focus primarily on Solomon's marginalised identities are not the only and, in some cases, not the most useful ways to read his work.

For my Mum (1928-2001)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I wish to thank Dr. Tricia Cusack for her encouragement, patience and invaluable help in the formation of this manuscript. I am grateful to the staff at all the libraries, universities, museums and art galleries which I have visited especially Tina Keevil, Nick Cull and David Pulford at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts. Victoria Osborne, curator with Dr. Colin Cruise of the exhibition, *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites* (2005), has been generous in sharing her knowledge. I am also grateful to Tessa Sidey, Curator of Prints and Drawings, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, for the opportunity to contribute to the cataloguing of Solomon's works there which helped my research. I am grateful to Simeon Solomon experts, Simon Reynolds, Professor Gayle Seymour and Dr. Colin Cruise, and Pam Solomon, a descendant of the family, who have been most kind in answering my queries. I wish to thank my fellow Solomon researchers, Roberto C. Ferrari, webmaster of the Simeon Solomon Research Archive, Carolyn Conroy and Donato Esposito, for formal papers and informal discussions.

My membership of the Pre-Raphaelite Society inspired me to begin this project and continues to add to my knowledge and appreciation of the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers for which I wish to thank the committee and my fellow members. This thesis would not have been completed without the encouragement and support of my lecturers and friends at Birmingham University: Dr. Richard Clay, Dr. Fran Berry, Connie Wan,

Sara Ayres, Ann-Marie Wilson, Marie Considine, Laura MacCulloch, John Lovesey,
Joerg Niehoegen, Dr. Amelia Yeates, Maria Daniel and Dr. Elisa Korb.

Last, but by no means least, I thank my family - Peter, Alice and Philip - for their loving
support and for helping me to keep everything in perspective.

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Chapter One

Introduction and literature review

In this thesis, I will claim that the work produced by the Victorian artist, Simeon Solomon, before 1873 has been interpreted by critics predominantly in terms of his Jewishness and homosexuality and, to counterbalance this perspective, I will suggest alternative readings of a number of his paintings from this period. Having trained at Cary's Academy and the Royal Academy Schools, Solomon became part of the Pre-Raphaelite circle¹ of writers and artists and contributed to projects involving other Pre-Raphaelites in the late 1850s and early 1860s.² By the mid-1860s he was exploring the emerging Aesthetic ideas in his art and exhibiting regularly at the avant-garde Dudley Gallery, London, while maintaining his presence at the Royal Academy.³ Indeed, this decade was the most successful period of Solomon's artistic career. On 11th February 1873 Solomon was arrested for indecent exposure and attempting to commit sodomy⁴

¹ Solomon became a member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle through his older brother and sister, Abraham (1823-62) and Rebecca (1832-86), both artists themselves although not Pre-Raphaelites, and through an introduction to Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) by the Pre-Raphaelite sculptor, Alexander Munro (1825-71). Rebecca was John Everett Millais' (1829-96) studio assistant and Abraham, by the late 1850s at the peak of his career, knew most of the major artists in London: Mr. Holman Hunt to Solomon (Simeon or Abraham), undated letter, National Art Library, London; Simon Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, Stroud, Glos., 1984, 7, 3; Gayle Marie Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, 1986, 28.

² *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* (Solomon's designs were executed in the 1860s, but the volume was not published until 1881); William Burges' 'Great Bookcase' (1859-62); stained-glass window designs for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. (1864).

³ Algernon Graves F.S.A., *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904*, Vol. 7, London, 1906, 208; Algernon Graves F.S.A., *A Dictionary of Artists who have exhibited works in the Principal London Exhibitions From 1760 to 1893*, London and Birmingham, 1901; Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 176.

⁴ Transcript of indictment in curatorial file containing general information on Simeon Solomon at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; Gayle Seymour, 'The Trial and its Aftermath', Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon*

and, although he did not receive a prison sentence and the incident was not reported in the newspapers, his career never fully recovered. Never exhibiting again at the Dudley or Royal Academy from this date, Solomon continued intermittently to execute paintings and drawings which he sold privately, but he descended into alcoholism and poverty and died at St. Giles' Workhouse on 14th August 1905.⁵ In memoirs of the period Solomon was either omitted or referred to with pity or contempt⁶ and a myth grew up about the once successful artist who fell into a wretched life on account of his immorality.⁷ This legend underlined how Solomon became a figure on the margins of established Victorian society and I believe that this has led to his art, work produced both before and after the scandal of the arrest, being interpreted principally as the work of an outsider. As Solomon was an outsider in the heterosexual, Christian culture of Victorian England because of his homosexuality, and also because of his Jewish heritage, it is these two aspects of his identity that have dominated interpretations of his work. The purpose of this thesis is to show how and why this has been so and to demonstrate how Solomon's work may be read differently.

Following this introduction, Chapter Two will focus on *The Mother of Moses* (1860) (fig. 1), an example of Solomon's early work which often depicted Old Testament scenes. I

Solomon (1840-1905), exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 28.

⁵ Seymour, 'Trial and Aftermath', 30.

⁶ Helen Rossetti Angeli, *The Life and Work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, London, 1902; Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 2 vols, London, 1904; Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of my Life*, London, 1914, 37.

⁷ Dr. G. C. Williamson, *Murray Marks and his Friends*, London, 1919; Frances Winwar, *Poor Splendid Wings: The Rossettis and their Circle*, Boston, 1933; Bernard Falk, *Five Years Dead: A Postscript to 'He Laughed in Fleet Street'*, London, 1937.

will explain that *The Mother of Moses* together with Solomon's other Old Testament subjects need not be read exclusively from a Jewish perspective and I will suggest an alternative interpretation of the picture which makes clear its Christian significance. In Chapter Three I will focus on a group of paintings which represent High Anglican and Roman Catholic ceremonies (figs. 2, 3 and 4) showing how they have been explained primarily in terms of perceptions of Solomon's homosexuality. I will argue for reading the works in the broader context of nineteenth-century debates about Christian doctrine and ritual in the Church of England. The last chapter will consider Solomon's representation of women (figs. 5, 6, 7 and 8). This is an aspect of Solomon's work which has not been examined in depth and I will suggest reasons why this might be.

The following understanding of identity will be employed in my argument, drawing on the sociological writings of Kathryn Woodward and others.⁸ Identity is socially constructed and fluid, just as the social structures which affect identity are in a state of flux, constantly changing to constrain some identities and to create the possibility of new ones. Identity is multifaceted, that is, an individual has the potential to occupy several identity positions: at least one of gender, one of class, one of ethnicity and so on. This can be understood in terms of a person having multiple identities which intersect with each other and change over time. Therefore, Solomon will be understood in this study to have had 'multiple identities' that is, as a Jewish man and as a homosexual, as well as

⁸ Kathryn Woodward (ed.), *Identity and Difference*, Milton Keynes, 1997; Kathryn Woodward (ed.), *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation*, London and New York, 2000; Kathryn Woodward (ed.), *Understanding Identity*, London, 2002; Kathryn Woodward (ed.), *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Ethnicity*, London and New York, 2004.

identities related to his various family roles, his status as a professional artist and so on. Identity was generally thought in nineteenth-century England to be rooted in biology and ancestry and fixed through life. This essentialist understanding, which conflicts with the perception used in this study, will be evident in some of the contemporary opinions discussed.

My approach will not be primarily to focus on aspects of Solomon's identity through re-visiting his biography. In art historical criticism, explaining paintings from the point of view of an artist's biography has often resulted in such works being interpreted almost totally in relation to the artist's personal characteristics. Solomon's work has been viewed by critics too exclusively as a sign of his personal identity, particularly, as I am arguing, in terms of the aspects which were marginalised in his contemporary society.

The alternative interpretations of a number of Solomon's paintings which I will be suggesting do not ignore the artist's biography, but they give more prominence to the broader social context in which the works were produced. The thesis will be an interdisciplinary study, drawing on art historical criticism and a range of historical writings including Jewish, religious and cultural history. I will employ a variety of extant sources including publications closely connected to the art world, such as exhibition catalogues and reviews, and also texts extending into the wider social field, for example, memoirs, biographies, scholarly essays, newspapers and periodicals. I will be using Solomon's paintings and those by his contemporaries as primary sources. A key idea in

my interpretations of the paintings will be that spectators may read different meanings from works of art depending on their own histories and preoccupations.⁹

Chapter Two begins by arguing that Solomon's Old Testament pictures were read by some contemporary critics and have continued to be read predominantly as expressions of his Jewish identity. This view is so ingrained that Jewishness is often subsumed into the depictions by calling them alternatively 'Hebrew subjects' or 'Jewish subjects'.¹⁰ Apparently the assumption here is that Solomon as a Jewish man was inspired by the Hebrew Bible. Whether or not this is true, it ignores the fact that these pictures were seen and purchased by a largely Christian audience for whom the Old Testament was recognised as the first part of the Bible which, in Christian doctrine, led to the New Testament. The Christian belief is that the promises which God made to human beings in the Old Testament were fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament. I go on to suggest a

⁹ Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, London, 1981, 136; Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, New York, 1978, 38-39, 46-47.

¹⁰ For example *The Jewish Chronicle and The Hebrew Observer*, January 3rd 1862, 2. The anonymous correspondent writes, 'You copied in your last ... a notice ... which indirectly casts a censure on Jewish artists for selecting but rarely Jewish subjects for their pencils ... we have a young Jewish artist of rapidly rising fame, who has only last year exhibited a picture that may be termed strictly Jewish ... The subject represented ... was a temple singer, and the artist is Mr. Solomon.' The writer is most probably referring to *A Young Musician Employed in the Temple Service During the Feast of Tabernacles* which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1861, a version of which was included in *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*. 'Jewish Ceremonies. By Mr. Simeon Solomon', *The Jewish Chronicle and The Hebrew Observer*, August 1st 1862, AB5, 5622, 8. 'Mr. Solomon has shown with what truth and depth of feeling he can handle Jewish subjects'. Alfred Werner, 'Jewish Artists of the Age of Emancipation', Cecil Roth (ed.), *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History*, London, 1971, 203 (first pub. Tel Aviv, Israel, 1961). 'Some of Solomon's canvases depict Jewish themes ... *Isaac Offered*.' Lionel Lambourne, 'Abraham Solomon, Painter of Fashion, and Simeon Solomon, Decadent Artist', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, London, 21, 1968, 279. 'Rebecca is said to have ... suggested the choice of Hebraic themes for his early works.' Norman L. Kleeblatt, 'Jewish Stereotype and Christian Prototype: The Pre-Raphaelite and Early Renaissance Sources for Simeon Solomon's Hebrew Pictures', Susan P. Casteras and Alicia Craig Faxon (eds), *Pre-Raphaelite Art in its European Context*, Madison, NJ, 1995, 118-119. 'Victorian and Edwardian critics lavished considerable attention on Solomon's Hebrew works'; 'break with his earlier program of Hebrew iconography'; 'examining the Hebrew pictures' and so on.

Christian reading of *The Mother of Moses*, the painting which is the focus of the chapter, after I have substantiated my argument by drawing attention to pertinent contemporary and subsequent criticism.

Some authors and contributors to exhibition catalogues have interpreted Solomon's Old Testament pictures as mainly expressions of his ethnic and religious heritage with little reference to this Christian perspective, for example, Bohm-Duchen (1985), Seymour (1986, 2005) and Jaffa (2001). Intentionally or not, the catalogue of the exhibition which was pivotal in reviving public interest in Solomon as an artist, *Solomon, a Family of Painters* (1985-1986), emphasises his Jewish identity, not through the catalogue entries, but in the accompanying essays by Lionel Lambourne and Monica Bohm-Duchen. This may have transpired because the exhibition included work by all three artists in the family: Abraham, Rebecca and Simeon. Their Jewish parents and up-bringing were the factors which they had in common, hence Lambourne's essay on the Solomon family history and Bohm-Duchen's on the historical context of the Jewish presence in England.¹¹ These essays also introduce the fact that Simeon was one of a family and community of Jewish people which was being assimilated into English society and that his identity was,

¹¹ Lionel Lambourne, 'The Solomon Family', Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 6-7; Monica Bohm-Duchen, 'The Jewish Background', Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 8-11.

therefore, both Jewish and English, but Solomon's Jewishness is emphasised in Bohm-Duchen's analysis of his work.¹²

In 1986, Gayle Seymour wrote the first PhD dissertation on Simeon Solomon, in which she thoroughly surveyed his life and work until the time of his arrest in 1873. Seymour's comments on Solomon's Old Testament images of around 1860, including *The Mother of Moses*, are particularly important to my argument because she again interprets such pictures as chiefly expressions of the artist's ethnic identity. In 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)', Seymour's approach is fundamentally biographical: she understands Solomon's identity in basically the same way as Bohm-Duchen, as Anglo-Jewish, and seeks autobiographical allusions in Solomon's works which lead her to interpret them as expressions of Victorian, Anglo-Jewish identity.¹³ Seymour employs the same method in two later essays in which she emphasises the artist's 'marginal' identity. In her contribution to the *Love Revealed* catalogue (2005), Seymour interprets Solomon's Old Testament works as outlets for an 'identity crisis' in which the artist is struggling with Jewish, Gentile and homosexual identities¹⁴ and, in an earlier essay, she claims that Solomon appropriated certain Biblical subjects to define his homosexuality.¹⁵

¹² Bohm-Duchen, 'The Jewish Background', 10-11. The representations of Jewish 'history' to which Bohm-Duchen refers are Solomon's Old Testament subjects. Also Bohm-Duchen analyses the work of Simeon's two siblings for evidence of Jewishness.

¹³ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 46-75.

¹⁴ Gayle Marie Seymour, 'The Old Testament Paintings and Drawings: The Search for Identity in the Post-Emancipation Era', Colin Cruise (ed.), *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 2005-2006, Munich, Museum Villa Stuck and London, Ben Uri Gallery, 2006, London and New York, 2005, 13-21.

¹⁵ Gayle Marie Seymour, 'Simeon Solomon and the Biblical Construction of Marginal Identity in Victorian England', Raymond-Jean Frontain (ed.), *Reclaiming the Sacred: the Bible in Gay and Lesbian Culture*, New York, 1997, 97-119.

In her opinion, Solomon's images 'open up a path to the thoughts and emotions of their maker.'¹⁶ Seymour does include one line to say that Solomon had to make his work appealing to Christian collectors, which I believe to be a much more significant factor, especially as her footnote details a large number of Solomon's Old Testament works owned by two wealthy Christian collectors.¹⁷

In my argument that Solomon's Old Testament pictures can be read from a Christian as well as a Jewish perspective, I will be explaining how Victorian Christians were accustomed to scriptural typology that is, reading the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New Testament.¹⁸ Scriptural typology and Pre-Raphaelite typological symbolism are closely associated. Pre-Raphaelite typological symbolism has been discussed extensively by George Landow and denotes the practice of Pre-Raphaelite poets and painters of using figures, objects and events (types) to refer to future or past episodes or to different characters, objects and events.¹⁹ The Pre-Raphaelites usually incorporated this practice into New Testament scenes, but they also used it in depictions of Old Testament and secular incidents.²⁰ Seymour considers that two of Solomon's Old Testament pictures

¹⁶ Seymour, 'The Old Testament Paintings and Drawings', 19.

¹⁷ Seymour, 'The Old Testament Paintings and Drawings', 14, footnote 16, 20.

¹⁸ Seymour refers obliquely to this in the abstract to her dissertation when she mentions briefly that Solomon understood Pre-Raphaelite typological symbolism. Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', viii.

¹⁹ George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, New Haven and London, 1979. According to Landow, it was important, particularly to Holman Hunt in mid-career, that all the references should appear as natural in the depicted scenes. Landow, *Typological Symbolism*, 75.

²⁰ Examples of Pre-Raphaelite paintings which employ typological symbolism: William Holman Hunt's *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854-55), *The Scapegoat* (1854) and *The Shadow of Death* (1870-72); John Everett Millais' *Christ in the House of his Parents* (1849-50) and Charles Allston Collins' *The Pedlar or Berengaria's Alarm* (1850).

display typological symbolism,²¹ but by describing it as ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ she limits it to an artistic procedure and diminishes the Christian significance of the works.²² With reference to *The Mother of Moses* (1860), I will show that Solomon’s Old Testament pictures can be read not simply as examples of an artistic practice, but, through scriptural typology, as works of art of Christian as well as Jewish significance.

The only other art historian of whom I am aware who considers in any detail connections between Solomon’s Old Testament pictures and Christianity as well as Judaism is Norman Kleeblatt (1995). However, his method, like Seymour’s, is to relate Solomon’s themes to his ‘psychological and chronological biography.’²³ Kleeblatt argues that Solomon used Pre-Raphaelite and early Italian Renaissance paintings, displaying Christian iconography, as sources for his ‘Hebrew pictures’ and that he converted them into allegories of his religious background and personal characteristics.²⁴ He cites several contemporary critics who read Solomon’s ‘so-called race’ in these works and contends that these comments are examples of Victorian stereotyping.²⁵ However, Kleeblatt also endorses later readings which see the Old Testament images as expressions of ‘marginal’ identities and he himself interprets such works in terms of Solomon’s marginalised identities.²⁶ Kleeblatt speculates that Solomon may have executed Old Testament

²¹ The two works to which she refers are *David Dancing before the Ark* (1860) and *Ruth, Naomi, and the Child Obed* (1861). Seymour, ‘The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon’, viii, 59-62.

²² Apart from Seymour’s comments, I am not aware of any other occasions when Solomon’s Old Testament scenes have been interpreted as examples of Pre-Raphaelite typological symbolism.

²³ Kleeblatt, ‘Jewish Stereotype and Christian Prototype’, 118.

²⁴ Kleeblatt, ‘Jewish Stereotype and Christian Prototype’, 119.

²⁵ Kleeblatt, ‘Jewish Stereotype and Christian Prototype’, 121-122.

²⁶ Kleeblatt, ‘Jewish Stereotype and Christian Prototype’, 117. ‘these Hebrew works affirmed the artist’s understanding and acceptance of his Jewish faith and culture’. Kleeblatt, ‘Jewish Stereotype and Christian

subjects in his early career ‘as an antidote to the latent anti-Semitism within Holman Hunt’s work or as an apologia for Solomon’s own religious beliefs’,²⁷ but dismisses the fact that the subject of *Isaac Offered* was a prefiguration of the crucifixion in Christian doctrine as quickly as he notes it.²⁸

In Chapter Three, I concentrate on examples of Solomon’s paintings of Christian ritual. Some critics have interpreted such paintings in terms of Solomon’s marginalised identities, particularly his homosexuality. I have already alluded to the comments of critics who have also interpreted Solomon’s Old Testament images as expressions of his homosexuality (Seymour, 1997, 2005; Kleeblatt, 1995). Indeed, examples from Solomon’s wide range of depictions of religious ceremonies, including Jewish, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Greek Orthodox rituals, have also been interpreted in this way. Seymour does not read this aspect of Solomon’s identity in the paintings of Christian ritual which she analyses in her dissertation and her later essays focus on Biblical imagery, but other writers have made this link, for example, Davis (1999), Sandberg (2000) and Cruise (1998, 2001, 2005).²⁹ To my knowledge, Henry Sandberg’s ‘The

Prototype’, 126. Kleeblatt interprets Solomon’s *Isaac Offered* (1858) with reference to Michelangelo’s *Dying Slave* (c.1513-21) which Solomon may or may not have seen, in terms of the artist’s homosexuality: Kleeblatt reads Simeon in place of Isaac and his brother, Abraham Solomon, in place of the Biblical Abraham and suggests that Simeon is offering himself in sin while Abraham restrains him.

²⁷ Kleeblatt, ‘Jewish Stereotype and Christian Prototype’, 124.

²⁸ Kleeblatt, ‘Jewish Stereotype and Christian Prototype’, 126.

²⁹ Whitney Davis, ‘The image in the middle: John Addington Symonds and homoerotic art criticism’, Elizabeth Prettejohn (ed.), *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, Manchester, 1999, 199. ‘In the early 1870s, Solomon’s public fame rested largely on his pictures on traditional Jewish, Greek Orthodox and medievalising Catholic themes – though even these often had erotic and homoerotic connotations.’ Henry Arthur Sandberg, ‘The Androgynous Vision of a Victorian Outsider: The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon’, unpublished PhD dissertation, Drew University, U.S.A., 2000. Colin Cruise, ‘Simeon Solomon: A Drama of Desire’, *The Jewish Quarterly*, no. 171, autumn 1998, 62-67. Colin Cruise, “‘A certain effeminacy and morbid mysticism’: ‘Late’ and ‘Later’ Solomon and his

Androgynous Vision of a Victorian Outsider: The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon' (2000) is the only other PhD thesis entirely on Solomon, apart from Seymour's. Sandberg's approach is to examine the artist's life and work mainly from the perspective of his homosexuality. I will show that Sandberg interprets the selected paintings as allegories for personal thoughts and feelings which he attributes to Solomon and consequently reads homoeroticism in these images.

In his article of 1998, Colin Cruise proposes that Dante Gabriel Rossetti's (1828-1882) concentration on the isolated single head in his paintings from the mid-1850s provided the template for Solomon's male, female and androgynous faces, and that 'Solomon's aesthetic is ... focused ... upon a sexual desire for other men'.³⁰ Cruise mentions *Two Acolytes, Censing, Pentecost* (1863) as a work in which 'the seeds of Solomon's interest in combining sex and religion are apparent'.³¹ In Cruise's catalogue essay in *From Prodigy to Outcast* (2001) he concentrates on the five watercolours shown at the Dudley Gallery in 1872, none of which depicts ritual, but his essay in the catalogue, *Love Revealed* (2005), examines what he calls Solomon's ritual paintings. It is here for

Audiences', Rickie Burman (ed.), *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon – Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, exhibition catalogue, London, Jewish Museum, London, 2001, 23. Here Cruise interprets a picture of Jewish ritual from the perspective of Solomon's homosexuality, but in other publications he reads similarly depictions of Christian ritual: 'His pictures speak about ... some personal longing or desire as, for example, in the watercolour version of *Carrying the Scrolls of the Law* where religious and sexual feelings seem mixed.' Colin Cruise, "'Pressing all religions into his service": Solomon's Ritual Paintings and Their Contexts', Colin Cruise (ed.), *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 2005-2006, Munich, Museum Villa Stuck and London, Ben Uri Gallery, 2006, London and New York, 2005, 57-63.

³⁰ Cruise, 'A Drama of Desire', 65. 'The ambiguity of the figures is not a pictorial code for bisexuality, but a sign for homosexual desire. The languid, long-necked beauties of Rossetti are borrowed by Solomon and modified to depict his own sexual choices. Androgyny allows him to depict sexual longing.'

³¹ Cruise, 'A Drama of Desire', 65. Cruise also mentions the watercolour, *Carrying the Scrolls of the Law* (1867), in this regard which he refers to again in an essay in the *From Prodigy to Outcast* exhibition catalogue (see above footnote 29).

perhaps the first time that Cruise relates Solomon's paintings of Christian ritual to contemporary debates in the Church of England on ceremony in religious practice.³² Ultimately, however, Cruise suggests that Solomon's religious paintings might indicate that religion 'can illuminate areas of personal life, like sexuality, and, rather than conceal them, celebrate them.'³³ My view is that the contemporary contextual issues to which Cruise refers should be accorded greater significance. Finally, in this chapter, I associate the spiritual fervour and ritual trappings depicted in the selected paintings to two movements which were taking place in the nineteenth-century Church of England: Tractarianism and Ritualism.

Chapter Four considers Solomon's representation of women, concentrating on four paintings of single female figures. There do not appear to be any publications or unpublished dissertations or theses which are concerned exclusively with how Solomon depicted women and I suggest reasons for the absence of such material. Reproductions of the four selected paintings have appeared in sales and exhibition catalogues with accompanying notes. The sales catalogue entry for *Reading* is one line speculating on the model for the 'portrait'.³⁴ Similar entries for *The Japanese Fan* provide some biographical information on Solomon and his sister, Rebecca, and suggest that the picture

³² Cruise, 'Pressing all religions into his service', 58, 60-61. It is clear from the title of the essay that Cruise intends to discuss the context of the paintings: "'Pressing all religions into his service": Solomon's Ritual Paintings and Their Contexts'.

³³ Cruise, 'Pressing all religions into his service', 63.

³⁴ Sotheby's, London, *Highly Important Nineteenth Century European Paintings and Drawings*, sales catalogue, Tuesday 15th June, 1982, lot 60.

is an example of *Japonisme*.³⁵ *Lady in a Chinese Dress* and *Poetry* are mentioned in exhibition catalogues, although it would appear that the latter has only been exhibited twice.³⁶ The exhibition catalogue entries up to 1906 give, at most, brief descriptions of the works.³⁷ *Lady in a Chinese Dress* is the most exhibited and interpreted of the four paintings. The watercolour appears with notes in catalogues to exhibitions on the connections between Japanese and Western art as well as in exhibitions of Solomon's work.³⁸ In addition, *Lady in a Chinese Dress* has been reproduced and discussed in books on *Japonisme* in Victorian Britain.³⁹ *The Japanese Fan* is illustrated in Simon Reynolds' *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, erroneously titled *Lady in a Chinese Dress*, but there is no discussion of the picture except to mention that the model may be Rebecca Solomon.⁴⁰ The brief comments on the paintings, itemised above, touch upon the

³⁵ Sotheby's Belgravia, London, *Highly Important Victorian Paintings and Drawings*, sales catalogue, 6th October 1980, lot 26; Christie's, London, *English Drawings and Watercolours*, sales catalogue, Tuesday 1st March, 1983, lot 98.

³⁶ *Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters and Deceased Masters of the British School*, exhibition catalogue, London, Royal Academy, winter 1906, London, 1906, no. 189, 42; Colin Cruise (ed.), *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 2005-2006, Munich, Museum Villa Stuck and London, Ben Uri Gallery, 2006, London and New York, 2005, no. 60, 108-109.

³⁷ *Lady in a Chinese Dress: Official Guide to the Royal Jubilee Exhibition Manchester 1887*, picture catalogue, Manchester, 1887, no. 1352, 95; Royal Academy Winter Exhibition Catalogue, 1906, no. 186, 42. *Poetry*: Royal Academy Winter Exhibition Catalogue, 1906, no. 189, 42.

³⁸ Shûji Takashina *et al*, *Japonisme*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1988 and Tokyo, Musée National d'Art Occidental, 1988, Japan, 1988, no. 72, 130; Tomoko Sato and Toshio Watanabe (eds), *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930*, exhibition catalogue, London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1991-92 and Tokyo, Setagaya Art Museum, 1992, London, 1991, no. 82, 109; Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, no. 49, 49, 69; Cruise, *Love Revealed*, no. 61, 109.

³⁹ Toshio Watanabe, *High Victorian Japonisme*, Bern, 1991, 206 (Watanabe also includes *The Japanese Fan*); Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel and Nineteenth-Century Japan*, London and New York, 2003, 16-19.

⁴⁰ Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, plate 33, and 3. A loose errata slip is included with the book correcting the title to *The Japanese Fan*. Cruise does not mention this in his catalogue entry for *Lady in a Chinese Dress* in *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, 'A work with the same title appears as Plate 33 in Reynolds (1985)', no.61, 109.

influence of the arrival of Japanese artefacts in Britain and of the burgeoning Aesthetic Movement on Solomon's work at this time.

Seymour includes illustrations of all the selected paintings in her dissertation and discusses each one in more detail than in any of the commentaries referred to above.⁴¹ For *Reading* Seymour's remarks are restricted to attempting to identify the model. As regards the other three pictures, she analyses the structures of the compositions and suggests that they were executed under the strong influence of Far Eastern art and of Whistler's paintings, which she argues were inspired by earlier French art such as paintings by Ingres, Manet and Degas.⁴² Seymour also makes some brief comments on the similarity of the works to one or two of Rossetti's paintings and describes the craze for collecting Far Eastern art, particularly blue-and-white china, among Solomon's Pre-Raphaelite friends.⁴³ In Chapter Four, I discuss more fully how certain Aesthetic ideas about the arts and painting practices, which were shared by Solomon's friends and associates, may be distinguished in these works. This further develops my argument that readings of Solomon's work as expressions of his marginalised identities need not predominate. I conclude by considering what specific types of Victorian female identity might be presented in the images, taking into account a variety of contemporary sources about women's physical features, dress and demeanour. Cruise's article, 'Reading *Poetry: An Overlooked Painting by Simeon Solomon*', is the only one of which I am

⁴¹ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', *Poetry*: fig. 100, 323, 101-102; *Reading*: fig. 112, 335, 108-109; *Lady in a Chinese Dress*: fig. 116, 339, 113-116; *The Japanese Fan*: fig. 120, 343, 116-117.

⁴² Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867); Édouard Manet (1832-1883); Edgar Degas (1834-1917).

⁴³ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 117-119.

aware which examines one of the selected paintings in terms of how the figure has been presented with reference to contemporary women.⁴⁴ However, Cruise does not consistently interpret the work in this way. He also compares *Poetry* to other paintings by Rossetti and connects it to the Aesthetic Movement. Furthermore Cruise relates the watercolour to Solomon's later 'drawings of disembodied heads' and to his homosexuality, the kind of interpretation which I am arguing has been overworked.⁴⁵ My interpretation of the group of paintings is entirely concerned with the representation of the female figures in them.

I hope, in this thesis, to draw attention to the diversity of Solomon's work in this period and to the variety of possible interpretations of individual pictures. I agree that Solomon's Jewish and homosexual identities were important factors in the production of his work, but Solomon also had other identities and his art was shaped by the broader social and cultural contexts in which he worked.

⁴⁴ Colin Cruise, 'Reading *Poetry*: An Overlooked Painting by Simeon Solomon', *The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society*, vol. XI, no. 1, summer 2003, 1-13.

⁴⁵ Cruise, 'Reading *Poetry*', 3, 10.

Chapter Two

An alternative interpretation of *The Mother of Moses* (1860): how Solomon's painting can be read from both a Jewish and Christian perspective

Introduction

This chapter will focus on Simeon Solomon's oil painting, *The Mother of Moses* (1860) (fig. 1). In the early stages of his career Solomon was known for his drawings and paintings of Old Testament subjects and *The Mother of Moses* is an example of his work in this genre. At the time of its exhibition and in subsequent years a particular meaning has been attributed to this painting: it has been seen as a visual expression of Solomon's ethnic identity as a Jewish man born and raised in Victorian England. Additionally, viewers have extrapolated a general notion of Jewishness from the picture because they have assumed that Solomon represents the Jewish people and that the Old Testament is primarily a Jewish text. Such interpretations emphasize the significance of the painting in terms of a marginalized, Jewish identity, but neglect other possible readings of the work. In this chapter I will elucidate and expand on these interpretations which concentrate on the biography and psychology of the artist. However, my own approach will be to view *The Mother of Moses* more broadly as a product of the culture and period in which it was made. Therefore I will be bringing out the similarities between Solomon's picture and the work of other artists at the time. Although observers have

touched upon other readings of this work, it is generally its ‘otherness’⁴⁶ as ‘Jewish’ that has been highlighted. Using *The Mother of Moses*, I will be arguing that Solomon’s Old Testament works can also be read from a Christian perspective, the religion of the majority in Victorian England. This argument will be based on the fact that, although the Old Testament presents a version of the origins of the Jewish nation and is the text on which Judaism is founded, it is also the first section of the Bible, the Holy Book of comparable significance to Christians. I will suggest that depictions of episodes from the Old Testament, such as *The Mother of Moses*, can be interpreted as signifying mainstream, Christian identity as well as marginalized, Jewish identity.

Solomon’s religious allegiances

In light of interpretations of Solomon’s Old Testament pictures as expressions of his Jewish identity, it is relevant to establish first what is known about his religious beliefs and practice, and how far he observed the Jewish faith. Solomon’s parents, Michael (Meyer) Solomon and Catherine (Kate) née Levy, were both orthodox Jews,⁴⁷ but it is difficult to assess how strictly they followed their religion or expected their children to adhere to it. Although evidence is not cited for these claims, Rebecca is often ascribed the role of overseeing Simeon’s early religious education.⁴⁸ Pamela Gerrish-Nunn cites

⁴⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1995, 1, 332.

⁴⁷ Simon Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, Stroud, Glos., 1984, 3; Lionel Lambourne, ‘The Solomon Family’, Jeffrey Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 6.

⁴⁸ Teaching Simeon to know and love the *Talmud*, Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 4, and supervising his regular attendance at synagogue, Bernard Falk, *Five Years Dead: A Postscript to ‘He Laughed in Fleet*

the correspondence in the 1860s of one of Rebecca's friends, Aggie Macdonald, who reported that she kept the Jewish calendar and orthodox eating habits, but this only helps to substantiate Rebecca's own piety, not Simeon's.⁴⁹ Nunn interprets the absence of Jewish references in Rebecca's art as evidence of devotion to her religion, suggesting that Rebecca's faith might have been so dear to her that she refrained from using it in her work.⁵⁰ However, Nunn describes Solomon's inclusion of allusions to their shared heritage in his art as 'exploitation of their racial culture'.⁵¹ This reading is in opposition to those critics who have viewed Simeon's 'Jewish subjects' as affirmations of his Jewish background. Again it is difficult to confirm how long Solomon was committed to the religion of his birth after his introduction to it as a boy. There are indications that Solomon abandoned some Jewish religious practices and customs such as abstaining from eating pork⁵² and wearing a beard.⁵³

Street, London, 1937, 319 and Lionel Lambourne, 'Abraham Solomon, Painter of Fashion, and Simeon Solomon, Decadent Artist', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, London, 21, 1968, 279. Also Rebecca is recorded to have taught Simeon Hebrew history and traditions in Thomas Earle Welby, *The Victorian Romantics 1850-70: The Early Work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, Burne-Jones, Swinburne, Simeon Solomon and their Associates*, London, 1929, 58 and Alfred Werner, 'Simeon Solomon: A Rediscovery', *Art and Artists*, 9, January 1975, 7 (a revision of an article which he wrote in 1960).

⁴⁹ Arthur Lord Baldwin, *The Macdonald Sisters*, London, 1960, 97, 101, 103. Quoted in Pamela Gerrish Nunn, 'Rebecca Solomon', Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 22. Also Lionel Lambourne, 'Simeon Solomon: Artist and Myth', Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 24 refers to Rebecca's 'own known devotion to religious observances'.

⁵⁰ Nunn, 'Rebecca Solomon', 23.

⁵¹ Nunn, 'Rebecca Solomon', 22.

⁵² Elihu Vedder, *The Digressions of 'V'*, Boston and New York, 1910, 374. Quoted in Gayle Marie Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, 1986, 140. Also see Henry Arthur Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision of a Victorian Outsider: The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', unpublished PhD dissertation, Drew University, U.S.A., 2000, 71. There is a thunder clap as Solomon eats pork upon which he jokes, 'By Jove, what a fearful pothor about a little pork', and Sandberg interprets this as the artist's rejection of Jewish values and awareness of his difference from his companions.

Many writers on Solomon assert that in the 1860s he became fascinated by the movement of a group within the Church of England towards Roman Catholicism⁵⁴ and some allege that he actually became a Roman Catholic, although no evidence of this has come to light.⁵⁵ In Solomon's later years as an outcast, he is said to have sought physical and spiritual comfort at the Carmelite Church at Kensington, London.⁵⁶ It has also been reported that several of Solomon's supporters and friends at this time were Catholics: Francis Thompson (1859-1907) and Alice Meynell (1847-1922), both Catholic poets, and Alice's husband, Wilfrid Meynell (1852-1948), who edited Catholic magazines.⁵⁷ Enclosed in the copy of Julia Ellsworth Ford's book (1908) on Solomon held at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery there is one of the author's visiting cards on which she has written a short message to a Francis Meynell possibly the youngest of the Meynells' seven children.⁵⁸ Ford actually interviewed Solomon towards the end of his

⁵³ Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 22.

⁵⁴ Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 10-11; Lionel Lambourne, 'A Simeon Solomon Sketch-book', *Apollo*, 85, 1967, 61; Lambourne, 'Simeon Solomon, Decadent Artist', 282.

⁵⁵ Julia Ellsworth Ford, *Simeon Solomon: An Appreciation*, New York, 1908, 19, 38; Frances Winwar, *Poor Splendid Wings: the Rossettis and their circle*, Boston, 1933, 327; Alfred Werner, 'Jewish Artists of the Age of Emancipation', Cecil Roth (ed.), *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History*, London, 1971, 203 (first pub. Tel Aviv, Israel, 1961). In the following two articles, Werner states that Solomon never formally joined the Roman Catholic Church: Alfred Werner, 'The Sad Ballad of Simeon Solomon', *Kenyon Review*, 22, summer 1960, 407, and Werner, 'Solomon: A Rediscovery', 10. Falk states that Solomon did not believe in the creed of the Roman Catholic Church: Falk, *Five Years Dead*, 317.

⁵⁶ Falk, *Five Years Dead*, 317; Werner, 'The Sad Ballad of Solomon', 407; Werner, 'Solomon: A Rediscovery', 10; Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 90.

⁵⁷ Dr. G. C. Williamson, *Murray Marks and his Friends*, London, 1919, 161-162; Falk, *Five Years Dead*, 317; Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 90. Also Solomon might have known Lionel Johnson (1867-1902), a poet who converted to Roman Catholicism, through Herbert Horne (1864-1916), a collector of Solomon's work, who shared his house with the poet. Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 92-93 and Gayle Seymour, 'The Trial and its Aftermath', Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 30.

⁵⁸ On the visiting card 'Mrs Simeon Ford' (Simeon was the first name of Julia Ford's husband) is printed in the centre and '43 West 74th Street' in the bottom right. On the other side of the card this message is

life and this handwritten message may point to a connection between Solomon, the Meynells and Ford.

After becoming ill from bronchitis and alcoholism, Solomon died of heart failure on 14 August 1905⁵⁹ and his family buried him in Willesden Jewish Cemetery.⁶⁰ We do not know whether Solomon explicitly requested that he should be buried there or if his relatives made the decision. In attempting to clarify Solomon's religious inclinations, the comments which he made himself in the interview with Ford may be significant. Solomon wondered why the world had stigmatized Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), the Romantic poet, for his atheism because he thought that Shelley had the 'sublimest faith'.⁶¹ Solomon then quoted Shelley's lines:

But the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow
Through time and change, unquenchably the same.⁶²

handwritten: 'To Francis Meynell, With thanks for his very beautiful poem on ? Ireland and with hopes of welcoming him to America in the Spring. Julia Ellsworth Ford.'

⁵⁹ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 222; Colin Cruise (ed.), *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 2005-2006, Munich, Museum Villa Stuck and London, Ben Uri Gallery, 2006, London and New York, 2005, 185.

⁶⁰ Falk, *Five Years Dead*, 330; Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 95; Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 222.

⁶¹ Ford, *An Appreciation*, 22.

⁶² Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats*, XXXVIII, (1821). Quoted in Ford, *An Appreciation*, 22.

Solomon sympathised with Shelley, who had declared that he did not believe in a God or a particular religious system, but nevertheless had spiritual beliefs.

The Jewish Community in Victorian England

Taking into account the long history of persecution which the Jewish people had suffered, the mid-1800s in England was a period of relative tolerance. In 1830, through a recommendation of the Common Council, Jews had been enabled to carry on trade in the City of London.⁶³ Simeon Solomon's father, Michael Solomon (1779-1854), who owned a hat business with other family members, was directly affected by this legal change as he became the first Jew entitled to engage in retail within the City.⁶⁴

In 1858 Baron Lionel de Rothschild became the first Jew to enter Parliament. Opposition to emancipation had centred on the need to preserve the status quo that every person who participated in government was also a Christian.⁶⁵ This point is exemplified in these words by the Earl of Clancarty speaking against the so-called 'Jews' Bill' in 1858:

Interwoven as Christianity is with the whole system of our Government both in Church and State, I see no way by which, without offence to the cause of truth,

⁶³ Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, Oxford, 1964, 253-254.

⁶⁴ Gayle M. Seymour, 'The Old Testament Paintings and Drawings: The Search for Identity in the Post-Emancipation Era', Colin Cruise (ed.), *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 2005-2006, Munich, Museum Villa Stuck and London, Ben Uri Gallery, 2006, London and New York, 2005, 13.

⁶⁵ Roth, *Jews in England*, 251-256, 259-268. Roth gives a detailed account of the political battle (1829-1871) to attain the complete emancipation of Jewish citizens in England.

you could commit the interests of the Church and the framing of our laws to any who deny Christ and reject the divine laws.⁶⁶

There were objections that Jews were anti-Christian and detached from the 'host' or English nation which had their roots in medieval history and had been perpetuated through English culture. Despite Jewish citizens gaining equal rights, a popular assessment of them as non-Christian and therefore un-English persisted in Victorian England.⁶⁷ Even within Solomon's group of friends and colleagues, images such as *The Prioress's Tale* (1869-1898) (fig. 9) were being produced and exhibited that depicted Jewish people in a negative light.

The Mother of Moses (1860)

The Mother of Moses was Simeon Solomon's second major oil painting and was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1860.⁶⁸ He had made his debut there with *Isaac Offered*⁶⁹ in 1858 and *A Young Musician Employed in the Temple Service During the*

⁶⁶ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*. Third Series. 151. 18, June, 1858 to 2, August, 1858. Fourth and last Volume of Session 1857-58., London, 1858, 709.

⁶⁷ Vivian D. Lipman, *The History of the Jews in Britain since 1858*, London, 1990, 11-12. Lipman suggests these reasons for opposition to Jewish emancipation. Tony Kushner, 'Heritage and Ethnicity: An Introduction', 15-16 and Colin Richmond, 'Englishness and Medieval Anglo-Jewry', 56 in Tony Kushner (ed.), *The Jewish Heritage in British History: Englishness and Jewishness*, London and Portland, 1992. Kushner and Richmond suggest that in the medieval period Englishness was equated with non-Jewishness and that therefore the Jews were vital to the formation of an English national identity. They describe the persecution and eventual expulsion of the Jews from England (1290), and how negative perceptions of Jews persisted into the twentieth century.

⁶⁸ *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. MDCCCLX. The Ninety-Second*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1860, no. 346, 18. It was exhibited under the title, *Moses*.

⁶⁹ *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. MDCCCLVIII. The Ninetieth*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1858, no. 1066, 42. In fact the catalogue does not give the title, *Isaac Offered*, but the lot number

Feast of Tabernacles (fig. 10) and *The Child Jeremiah* (fig. 11) followed in 1861 and 1862 respectively.⁷⁰ These were all oil paintings depicting Old Testament themes.⁷¹ It has been suggested that the subject matter which Solomon explored in his juvenilia, was developed later in his public works.⁷² For example, the Jewish Museum, London, has a drawing entitled *Pharaoh's Daughter and the Infant Moses* (fig. 12), undated, but probably executed in Solomon's youth, which shows that he had been experimenting with representing the story of Moses' early life before painting *The Mother of Moses*.⁷³ Drawings now at the Jewish Museum and a sketchbook now at the Mishkan Le'Omanut Museum, Ein Harod, Israel, are the earliest examples of Solomon's work.⁷⁴ It is true that many of the subjects are taken from the Old Testament and Jewish ceremonies contemporary to the artist, and that they, therefore, could refer to Jewish identity. However, in the sketchbook at Ein Harod, there are drawings with different themes inspired by the New Testament, English literature, English history, Pre-Raphaelite sources, contemporary novels and Solomon's own novel, entitled *My Novel*.⁷⁵ This wide

appears with this quotation: 'And the Lord said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains I will tell thee of.' The whereabouts of *Isaac Offered* is unknown. Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 36 and Gayle Seymour's catalogue entry in Stephen Wildman, *Waking Dreams: The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites from the Delaware Art Museum*, exhibition catalogue, Nottingham, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, China, 2004, 255.

⁷⁰ *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. MDCCCLXI. The Ninety-Third*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1861, no. 493, 25. *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. MDCCCLXII. The Ninety-Fourth*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1862, no. 487, 23.

⁷¹ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 87. It should be noted that Colin Cruise distinguishes *A Young Musician Employed in the Temple Service During the Feast of Tabernacles* from the other paintings because the title and picture do not refer to a particular biblical character or narrative. However, the artist is reconstructing an incident from biblical times and a similar version was used in *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* which contained illustrations exclusively from the Old Testament.

⁷² Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 65.

⁷³ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 70.

⁷⁴ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 65.

⁷⁵ Lambourne, 'A Simeon Solomon Sketch-book', 59-61. Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 19-22. Seymour gives detailed accounts of some of the drawings from the 'Ein Harod Sketchbook' which she viewed as photographs owned by Lionel Lambourne.

range of topics indicates that Solomon's own cultural interests were forming through exposure to a variety of sources, not exclusively Jewish.

The Mother of Moses was originally exhibited with the title *Moses*. It is probable that it was not displayed again until 1905, after Solomon's death, when it was exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, with the new title, *The Mother of Moses Sending Him Away*.⁷⁶ In her commentary on the work in 2004, Gayle Seymour omits the second half of this title, 'Sending Him Away', and suggests that the painting may have been retitled to avoid confusion with two other works by Solomon, *The Finding of Moses* (1862) (fig. 13) and *Moses* (1876) which depicts a mature, bearded figure, although neither of these works was actually displayed in the Whitechapel exhibition.⁷⁷ Since the painting's exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1906 as *The Mother of Moses* it has usually been known by this title.⁷⁸ Despite the changes in the title, the word, 'Moses', has been included consistently, thus relating the picture to the character of Moses from the Old Testament. The basket held by the younger, female figure is a sign that points towards

⁷⁶ *British Art Fifty Years Ago*, exhibition catalogue, London, Whitechapel Art Gallery, March 23rd to May 3rd, 1905, London, 1905, no. 430, 61 (as *The Mother of Moses Sending Him Away*). Whitechapel Art Gallery, *British Art Fifty Years Ago: Thirty Reproductions of Famous Pictures, with Descriptive Letterpress, Being a selection of the Pictures exhibited at The Whitechapel Art Gallery, Spring Exhibition, 1905*, London, 1905, 56-57 (as *The Mother of Moses*). It was then exhibited at the Royal Academy: *Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters and Deceased Masters of the British School*, exhibition catalogue, London, Royal Academy, winter 1906, London, 1906, no. 114, 29 (as *The Mother of Moses*). For further exhibition history see Gayle Seymour's catalogue entry in Wildman, *Waking Dreams*, 252.

⁷⁷ Seymour in Wildman, *Waking Dreams*, 255.

⁷⁸ Apart from reverting to its original name for the *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Victorian Artists in England* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (1965) and being called *Moses in His Mother's Arms* at the Jewish Museum, New York, in *The Emergence of Jewish Artists in Nineteenth-Century Europe* exhibition (2001). Seymour in Wildman, *Waking Dreams*, 252. It was also exhibited as *Moses in his Mother's Arms* at the Durlacher Gallery, New York, in 1966. Lionel Lambourne, *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Simeon Solomon*, pamphlet to exhibition, New York, Durlacher Gallery, New York, 1966, no page numbers.

the incident in the Bible when the infant, Moses, is left by his mother (Jochebed) in a cradle among the reeds by a riverbank because the Pharaoh has decreed that every son born to the Hebrews must be drowned. The baby is discovered by the Pharaoh's daughter at which point Moses' sister (Miriam) who has been watching her brother from a distance, offers Moses' mother as a wet nurse. Moses becomes the Egyptian princess's adoptive son.⁷⁹ It is ambiguous whether the painting shows Moses' mother and sister tending to him before putting him in the basket on the river or whether it depicts the moment when the family returns home, Miriam having secured her mother's services as a wet nurse. A drawing by Solomon (c. 1857) at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, seems to validate the former interpretation. Entitled *The Mother of Moses About to Leave Her Child in the Bulrushes*, the drawing also bears the inscription: 'First sketch for the picture of the Mother and Sister of Moses.'⁸⁰

The contemporary reception of the painting

The Mother of Moses was understood by a number of Solomon's contemporaries to signify his Jewish identity and by extension 'Jewishness', and similar notions were perpetuated by later art historians as we shall see. Contemporary responses to Solomon himself were often anti-Semitic. For example, Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), whom Solomon met through their mutual association with Rossetti in 1858 and with whom he worked on a number of artistic projects, called Solomon the 'Jewjube' in a letter to

⁷⁹ *The Holy Bible. Revised Standard Version*, Exodus, 2, 1-10, U.S.A., 1952, 49.

⁸⁰ Seymour in Wildman, *Waking Dreams*, 255.

Swinburne⁸¹ and drew caricatures of Jewish figures.⁸² Emily Ernestine Bell, wife of Major Thomas Bell, described the artist as ‘very young, ugly and Jewish looking, with strange eyes and a gentle soft voice’ in her diary on 30th December 1866, having just met him at a social evening in Rome while on her honeymoon.⁸³ However, George Du Maurier wrote in a letter to his sister Isobel in July, 1861, that ‘the *very kindest* people of my acquaintance are Jews ... the Solomons for instance.’⁸⁴ Sir William Blake Richmond who met Solomon at the Royal Academy School in 1858 commented:

Simeon Solomon was a fair little Hebrew, a Jew of the Jews, who seemed to have inherited a great spirit, an Eastern of the Easterns ... proud of his race, but with something of the mystic about him which was Pagan, not Christian.⁸⁵

It is significant that in this portrayal Richmond describes Solomon as the epitome of his Jewish ancestry and applies the epithets ‘Eastern’ and ‘not Christian’ to him. The assumption is that Solomon’s ‘race’ is distinct from the English nation, which is Western and Christian. In addition, Solomon, as the embodiment of Jewish heritage, is seen as an exotic character. It seems that Solomon on occasion drew attention to his ‘otherness’. When he appeared in fancy dress while staying with the patron of the arts, Richard Monckton Miles, Lord Houghton, on his Yorkshire estate, Fryston Hall, in 1868,

⁸¹ Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 7, 13.

⁸² Elisa Korb and Tessa Sidey, *Hidden Burne-Jones: Works on Paper by Edward Burne-Jones from Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 2007 and London, Leighton House Museum, 2007-2008, London, 2007, 53, 58, 64.

⁸³ Lambourne, ‘Simeon Solomon: Artist and Myth’, 24.

⁸⁴ Lambourne, ‘The Solomon Family’, 7.

⁸⁵ Anna Maria Wilhelmina Stirling, *The Richmond Papers, from the Correspondence and Manuscripts of George Richmond R. A., and his son Sir William Richmond R. A., K. C. B.*, London, 1926, 160.

Solomon wore the costume of a Jewish prophet and recited long passages of Hebrew ritual in resonant tones (fig. 14).⁸⁶

Solomon's Jewish identity was therefore clearly registered by those non-Jews with whom he came into contact and Solomon sometimes colluded in this perception. The artist's work on Old Testament themes was also perceived by his contemporary audience as evincing the Jewishness of its creator and, in a collective sense, of the Jewish people. This is exemplified by returning to Richmond's comments in *The Richmond Papers*:

When I first knew Simeon Solomon in 1858 his art was at its zenith. It was about this time that he made a noble series of designs wholly inspired by the Hebrew Bible, which were indescribably ancient-looking and strangely imbued with the semi-barbaric life it tells of in the Book of Kings and in the Psalter of David. So strongly was this the case that they seemed to be written in Hebrew characters; no one but a Jew could have conceived or expressed the depth of national feeling which lay under the strange, remote forms of the archaic people whom he depicted and whose passions he told with a genius entirely unique.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 15. Also see Alison Jaffa, 'From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon 1840-1905', Rickie Burman (ed.), *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon – Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, exhibition catalogue, London, Jewish Museum, London, 2001, 11. Alison Jaffa regards this type of incident as Solomon flaunting his Jewish identity 'in defiance of the prevailing anti-Semitism of the time.' Fig. 12 shows one of a series of photographic portraits of contemporary artists taken by David Wilkie Wynfield (1837-1887).

⁸⁷ Stirling, *The Richmond Papers*, 161.

Richmond's impression is that these drawings, produced when Solomon was preparing designs for *Isaac Offered* (1858) and his later Old Testament paintings, displayed his insight into the consciousness of the entire Jewish nation. According to Richmond, Solomon, as a Jewish artist, was better placed than an artist of any other nationality to depict accurately the 'semi-barbaric life' of the Biblical characters. Richmond assumes that there is some instinctive connection between the artist and the Jews of the Bible that enables him to convey some intangible spirit of the Jewish nation in his work. He uses the metaphor of language to compare Solomon's style of painting to writing in Hebrew lettering. His assumption that a work of art naturally reflects the identity of its maker is continued in the following excerpt also from *The Richmond Papers*:

Unfortunately Solomon departed from his simple genius to accept an artificial and neurotic vein of late and debased Roman Art; the result was, he was no longer sincere, whereas when he consented to be a Jew, to think out designs and dream as a Jew, no more highly interesting personal work has ever been done.⁸⁸

Here Richmond asserts that as a Jewish man Solomon should think and work in a particular way which Richmond considers 'true' to the artist's racial heritage.

How were Solomon's Old Testament works received in the Jewish community? A letter in the *Jewish Chronicle*, January 1862, took issue with an article which reproached

⁸⁸ Stirling, *The Richmond Papers*, 161.

Jewish artists for ‘selecting but rarely Jewish subjects for their pencils.’⁸⁹ The anonymous correspondent was confident that, in Britain, this criticism was undeserved and went on to name ‘Professor Hart’⁹⁰ and a ‘young Jewish artist of rapidly rising fame ... Mr. Solomon’ as artists who painted accomplished and successful ‘Jewish’ pictures.⁹¹ In the August edition of the same year Solomon was praised as an artist of ‘strong Jewish feeling ... most successful as a delineator of Jewish subjects. The press delights in noticing him, and the Jewish community in hailing him as such.’⁹² It seems that there was some pressure on Jewish artists from the community of their birth to represent the Jews and Judaism in their work. As an artist who had met with some recognition and success, Solomon may have felt the burden of these expectations. His later work in which he turned to pagan and Christian subjects was not so favourably received by the Jewish press.⁹³ When the *Jewish Chronicle* reviewed Solomon’s prose poem, *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1871),⁹⁴ Solomon was praised for his linguistic and artistic skills, but it was hoped that he would use his gifts for ‘that highest purpose which sanctifies literature and art – not the vision of Love, but the real Love which men call Religion!’⁹⁵ The *Jewish Chronicle* was mainly concerned with the role that art could play in

⁸⁹ Anon., ‘Jewish Artists and Jewish Subjects’, ‘Our Communal Weekly Gossip’, *The Jewish Chronicle and The Hebrew Observer*, January 3rd 1862, Shebat 2, 5622, 2.

⁹⁰ It is most probable that ‘Professor Hart’ refers to Solomon Alexander Hart (1806-1881) R. A. who successively held the posts of Professor of Painting and Librarian at the Royal Academy.

⁹¹ *The Jewish Chronicle and The Hebrew Observer*, January 3rd 1862, 2.

⁹² ‘Jewish Ceremonies. By Mr. Simeon Solomon’, *The Jewish Chronicle and The Hebrew Observer*, August 1st 1862, AB5, 5622, 8.

⁹³ Monica Bohm-Duchen, ‘The Jewish Background’, Jeffrey Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 10-11. Julia Weiner, ‘“An Artist of Strong Jewish Feeling”: Simeon Solomon’s Depictions of Jewish Ceremonies’, Rickie Burman (ed.), *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon – Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, exhibition catalogue, London, Jewish Museum, London, 2001, 21.

⁹⁴ First published privately as *A Mystery of Love in Sleep: An Allegory* (1871).

⁹⁵ ‘Simeon Solomon’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, New Series, no. 123, August 4th 1871, AB17, 5631, 11.

encouraging the practice of the Jewish religion and in educating non-Jews about Jewish life.⁹⁶ After Solomon's death, the Jewish community was swift in claiming him as a Jewish artist by including 'about sixty' of his works in the *Exhibition of Jewish Art and Antiquities* held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1906 and, in a supplement to the *Jewish Chronicle* on the exhibition, he was described as one of 'the most eminent artists that Anglo-Jewry has produced.'⁹⁷

The question of ethnic identity dominated the commentaries of art critics who saw *The Mother of Moses* at the 1860 Royal Academy exhibition. Both approval and criticism centred on Solomon's efforts to present the figures authentically. When an anonymous critic in the *Westminster Gazette* described the picture as 'two ludicrously ugly women, looking at a dingy baby',⁹⁸ William Thackeray (1811-1863), the novelist, famous in the Victorian era, rebuffed this condemnation with these remarks in the *Cornhill Magazine*:

One of the pictures I admired most at the Royal Academy is by a gentleman on whom I never, to my knowledge, set eyes. This picture is No. 346, *Moses*, by Mr. S. Solomon. ... It nobly represented, to my mind, the dark children of the Egyptian bondage, and suggested the touching story.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Weiner, 'An Artist of Strong Jewish Feeling', 16, 21. After Solomon's arrest for indecency in 1873, his work was no longer exhibited at the Royal Academy and, the same year, the absence of the artist's paintings was noted by the *Jewish Chronicle*. Its art critic regretted that no pictures by Solomon were displayed, but also lamented the cause, which he did not explain, of their absence. Weiner, 'An Artist of Strong Jewish Feeling', 20.

⁹⁷ 'Exhibition of Jewish Art and Antiquities', *Supplement to the Jewish Chronicle*, November 9th 1906, v.

⁹⁸ Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 9.

⁹⁹ William M. Thackeray, 'Roundabout Papers No. V: Thorns in the Cushion', *The Cornhill Magazine*, July 1860, 123-124.

Thackeray refers appreciatively to Solomon's portrayal of the 'dark children of the Egyptian bondage'. However, in the June, 1860 issue of *Macmillan's Magazine* the reviewer of the exhibition wrote: 'Their faces, although, it appears to us, a little too dark, are full of expression and characteristic tenderness.'¹⁰⁰ While complimentary, the writer would have preferred the skin of the female figures a little lighter. Another critic writing in the *Athenaeum* thought the face of Jochebed was of 'an exaggerated Jewish type.'¹⁰¹ One can only conjecture as to the thinking which lay behind these comments. Seymour states that the Victorian public must have found Solomon's attempt at ethnographic accuracy unpalatable and, consequently, infers racialism from the negative remarks.¹⁰² For Thackeray, the dark skin of the figures accorded with his own imagined image of the appearance of these Biblical characters. The reviewer in *Macmillan's Magazine* might have thought that Jochebed and Miriam's skin would not have been so dark and the anonymous critic in the *Athenaeum* might have genuinely found their features 'exaggerated'. In fact, the remarks of the reviewer of the exhibition in *The Art Journal* appear to support these suppositions.¹⁰³ Seymour includes in her dissertation this critic's theory that both faces were painted from the same model¹⁰⁴, but omits his point that 'the heads are rather Egyptian than Jewish.'¹⁰⁵ The reviewer is clearly criticising the artist for failing to present the Jewish figures accurately and for giving them an Egyptian look. Certainly the ethnic identity of the central figures was of great importance to

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, 'The Royal Academy', *Macmillan's Magazine*, June 1860, 163.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous, 'Fine Arts: Royal Academy', *The Athenaeum*, 19 May 1860, 688.

¹⁰² Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 56.

¹⁰³ Anonymous, *The Art Journal*, 1 June, 1860, 169.

¹⁰⁴ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 56.

¹⁰⁵ Anonymous, *The Art Journal*, 1 June, 1860, 169.

contemporary critics of the painting, some approving and some disapproving of Solomon's visualisation of Jewish identity.

Art historians and the perception of Jewish identity in *The Mother of Moses*

Later art historians sustained the idea, first expressed by Solomon's contemporaries, that Jewish identity is signified in the artist's Old Testament pictures like *The Mother of Moses* primarily because Solomon was Jewish. For example in a pamphlet for an exhibition of Solomon's paintings and drawings held at the Durlacher Gallery, New York, in 1966, Lionel Lambourne mentions the 'Hebraic quality' of Solomon's early Old Testament pictures.¹⁰⁶ Lambourne links the Jewishness that he perceives in the artist's work to 'the admixture of ... divergent factors' including Solomon's upbringing as an Orthodox Jew and the influence of his siblings, Abraham and Rebecca.¹⁰⁷ Reynolds in *The Vision of Simeon Solomon* remarks how 'the sincerity and remoteness to be found in his Hebrew paintings stems directly from a profound understanding of his racial heritage.'¹⁰⁸ In recent exhibition catalogues, contributors stress that Solomon's Jewish identity was marginal in nineteenth-century English society and that the artist's work constitutes an attempt to assert that identity. For example, the author of the short biography in *Waking Dreams: The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites from the Delaware Art Museum* states that 'Simeon Solomon is unique among Victorian artists for his comfort in avowing his strong Jewish heritage and beliefs at a time when anti-Semitism was

¹⁰⁶ Lambourne, *Paintings and Drawings by Solomon*, no page nos.

¹⁰⁷ Lambourne, *Paintings and Drawings by Solomon*, no page nos.

¹⁰⁸ Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 11.

prevalent' and goes on to connect the artist's choice of Old Testament subjects to the influence of his sister's spirituality.¹⁰⁹ Alison Jaffa writes similarly in *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon – Pre-Raphaelite Artist*:

From the age of seventeen to twenty-three Simeon was obsessed with Biblical subjects, often giving them captions in Hebrew lettering. His open affirmation of his Jewish origins was quite unusual in the world of art at the time, and was his way of expressing his separate cultural identity.¹¹⁰

However, in the catalogue to an earlier exhibition, *Solomon, a Family of Painters* (1985-86), the fact that Solomon's identity would have been shaped by both his Jewish family and the English environment in which he lived is brought to attention. Bohm-Duchen explains that the Solomon family, including Simeon, would have been attached both to its Jewish roots and to the English, Gentile society in which it was located.¹¹¹

The notion that Solomon's identity was not one-dimensional is explored by Gayle Seymour in her dissertation, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', and in her contribution to the *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites* exhibition catalogue in which she refers to the artist as Anglo-Jewish.¹¹² Initially, Seymour associates Solomon's attraction to Old Testament subjects during the years 1859-1863

¹⁰⁹ Unclear author, probably Wildman or Seymour, in Wildman, *Waking Dreams*, 371.

¹¹⁰ Jaffa, 'From Prodigy to Outcast', 9.

¹¹¹ Bohm-Duchen, 'The Jewish Background', 9.

¹¹² Seymour, 'The Old Testament Paintings and Drawings', 14.

with ‘a new awareness of his faith and his racial origin’ and states that he looked for subjects ‘open to symbolic interpretations, including autobiographical allusions.’¹¹³ Later, when Seymour discusses *The Mother of Moses* she links the subject to Solomon’s Anglo-Jewish position. According to Seymour, Solomon’s depiction of the baby in the bosom of his family emphasises Moses’ connection to his ethnic and religious origins despite his future adoption by the Egyptians. This connotation, she claims, would have been particularly significant to Solomon as a Jew living among Gentiles. Seymour points out that, at the time, it would have been generally accepted that Moses gained from his association with the Egyptians and substantiates this opinion by quoting from *The Typology of the Scriptures* (1845-47) by the famous Victorian religious scholar, Patrick Fairburn.¹¹⁴ I do not dispute that it is possible to draw a general parallel between Moses’ and Solomon’s situations in spite of the enormous historical differences and the fact that Egyptian society, as described in the Bible, was pagan while Victorian society was predominantly Christian. Indeed, Solomon may have noticed the analogy, but no documentary evidence has been cited to confirm that the artist intended his Old Testament pictures to be read ‘autobiographically’ as Seymour suggests. Later, in her essay, ‘The Old Testament Paintings and Drawings: The Search for Identity in the Post-Emancipation Era’, for the *Love Revealed* exhibition catalogue, Seymour proposes that there was some instructive purpose to Solomon’s Old Testament works and that *The Mother of Moses* addressed the problem that Anglo-Jewish people, including Solomon, confronted in wanting to be both Jewish and English: ‘the ambivalence felt by many

¹¹³ Seymour, ‘The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon’, 46.

¹¹⁴ Seymour, ‘The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon’, 58.

middle-class Jews as they struggled to retain elements of their traditional heritage while enjoying a measure of freedom and equality in the secular and Christian culture of Victorian London.’¹¹⁵

Seymour understands Solomon’s ethnic identity as a combination of Jewishness and Englishness which is a nuanced understanding, distinct from most nineteenth-century and some later perceptions. However, her approach to interpreting *The Mother of Moses* is fundamentally the same as the method used to read Solomon’s Old Testament images by some of his contemporaries and some subsequent art historians. Namely, Seymour ascribes a particular ethnic identity to Solomon and interprets the painting according to this attribution. Furthermore, Seymour sees Solomon as representative of a section of Victorian society in which Jewish and English identities intersect. However, Seymour concentrates on marginalised, Jewish identity and overlooks mainstream, English identity. Therefore, she reads *The Mother of Moses* primarily from the Jewish angle, highlighting the similarities between the artist, Solomon, and Moses. Through placing more emphasis on contemporary majority culture, the painting can also be interpreted from a Christian perspective. If the work is read as a social product as I will do, taking into account the art world and the dominant cultural context, the Christian significance of the painting, will I think become more apparent.

¹¹⁵ Seymour, ‘The Old Testament Paintings and Drawings’, 16.

Old Testament paintings in mid-nineteenth century England

In the mid-1800s in England, depictions of Old Testament figures and episodes were not uncommon. However, critics have read signs of Jewishness in those by Solomon, because of his background, which they have not found in similar works by non-Jewish artists. Additionally, Solomon might have painted these subjects for other reasons apart from a desire to express his Jewish identity.

Lambourne and Seymour both find Solomon's Old Testament paintings exceptional. Lambourne states that the artist's themes had 'virtually no precedents in English art'¹¹⁶ and Seymour maintains that 'he selected episodes which are nearly unique in the history of British art.'¹¹⁷ However, paintings of Old Testament figures and stories had been produced and exhibited long before Solomon made his debut at the Royal Academy with *Isaac Offered* in 1858. Michaela Giebelhausen has gathered statistics from Royal Academy exhibition catalogues (1825-70) which show that there was a surge in Old Testament subjects displayed in the first half of the 1840s.¹¹⁸ Charles Lock Eastlake's *Hagar and Ishmael* (1843) (fig. 15), Henry Nelson O'Neil's *Esther* (1850) (fig. 16) and F. R. Pickersgill's *Samson Betrayed* (1850) (fig. 17) are just a few examples of depictions of Old Testament topics from the 1840s.¹¹⁹ William Dyce (1806-64), the artist whose early work was affected by his contact with the Nazarenes and some of whose later

¹¹⁶ Lambourne, 'Simeon Solomon: Artist and Myth', 24.

¹¹⁷ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 47.

¹¹⁸ Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible: Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain*, Aldershot, U.K. and Burlington, U.S.A., 2006, 31.

¹¹⁹ Charles Lock Eastlake (1793-1865), Henry Nelson O'Neil (1817-1880) and Frederick Richard Pickersgill (1820-1900).

paintings were derived from Pre-Raphaelite examples,¹²⁰ produced a number of Old Testament pictures: for example, *Joash shooting the Arrow of Deliverance* (1844) (fig. 18) and *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* (1850) (fig. 19).¹²¹

Giebelhausen suggests that in the 1840s art critics promoted religious painting as a means of encouraging moral values, improving the taste of the new middle-class consumers and raising the standard of contemporary British art.¹²² This artistic climate saw the arrival of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848 whose original aims were to have genuine ideas, to study nature attentively and to sympathise with what was direct, serious and heartfelt in previous art.¹²³ Their paintings more frequently depicted New Testament scenes, but also included Old Testament subjects, for example, John Everett Millais' (1829-96) *The Return of the Dove to the Ark* (1851) (fig. 20). *The Scapegoat* (1854) (fig. 21) by William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), despite being intended to teach a Christian message, is based on an ancient Jewish ritual. The Pre-Raphaelites invigorated religious painting despite enduring early criticism for what was seen to be irreverence in their treatment of sacred subjects.¹²⁴ Solomon had been inspired by Pre-Raphaelitism as a young artist: perhaps he simply followed their lead in his early public works, but concentrated on the Old Testament with which he was obviously more familiar. Solomon's first Royal Academy exhibits certainly echo some of the preoccupations of his artistic heroes both in

¹²⁰ Timothy Hilton, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, London, U.K., 1970, 126, 128.

¹²¹ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 55. Dyce painted four versions of *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* (1850) and turned down requests for further versions.

¹²² Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 66.

¹²³ Alan Bowness, 'Introduction', *The Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, London, Tate Gallery, 1984, London, 1984, 11.

¹²⁴ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 1.

his choice of subjects and his attention to authenticity. In addition, at the Royal Academy in the mid-nineteenth century a hierarchy of genres of painting continued to operate, with historical subjects promoted as the highest form of art. Religious painting, which included illustrating the Bible, was a sub-genre of historical painting.¹²⁵ For an aspiring artist such as Solomon, concentrating his skills on this most celebrated form of art would be a good tactical move. Once he had gained a reputation and commercial success, then he would have more freedom to choose different subjects.¹²⁶

When *The Mother of Moses* was shown at the Royal Academy in 1860, there were at least five other paintings of Old Testament subjects in the exhibition, two of which depicted almost exactly the same incident from Moses' story as Solomon's work. In fact Solomon's painting may have been originally entitled *Moses* to differentiate it from *The Mother of Moses* by M. Claxton,¹²⁷ *The mother of Moses hiding, after having exposed her child on the river's brink* by E. Armitage¹²⁸ and *Moses, in the house of Pharaoh* by J. D. Marshall.¹²⁹ Apart from these there were at least two other Old Testament paintings

¹²⁵ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 21.

¹²⁶ Reading comments in Donato Esposito's essay led me to this point. Donato Esposito, 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery (1881): Assyria and the Biblical Illustration in Nineteenth-Century Britain', Steven Holloway (ed.), *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible*, Sheffield, 2006, 286.

¹²⁷ Catalogue, *Royal Academy*, 1860, no. 498, 23. The title of Claxton's painting is accompanied by this quotation, 'And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein, and she laid it in the flags on the river's brink.' (Exodus ii, 3), which links it to the episode depicted by Solomon. Christopher Wood, *Dictionary of British Art: Volume IV, Victorian Painters: 1, The Text*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1995, 103. The artist is probably Marshall Claxton (1812-1881) who visited the Holy Land in the 1850s.

¹²⁸ Catalogue, *Royal Academy*, 1860, no. 527, 24. The artist is probably Edward Armitage (1817-1896) who contributed two drawings to *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* (1881), one of which depicted Moses destroying the tablets with the Ten Commandments. Dalziel Brothers, *Dalziels' Bible Gallery: illustrations from the Old Testament engraved by the Brothers Dalziel*, London, 1881, contents page.

¹²⁹ Catalogue, *Royal Academy*, 1860, no. 491, 23. The title of this painting appears with this text: 'And she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son'.

including one entitled *Hagar and Ishmael* by J.Clark,¹³⁰ a subject also drawn by Solomon for *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*.¹³¹ Old Testament subjects had also been present at the previous year's Royal Academy exhibition including another rendition of the preparations to place Moses in a cradle on the Nile, *Preparing the ark for the infant Moses* by J.Gow.¹³² Thus the story of Moses, which would have had resonance for Solomon as a Jew, was also a fashionable subject with which the Royal Academy audience would identify and purchase for their homes. Thus an alternative interpretation of *The Mother of Moses* would be to see the painting as a product of the collective practices and expectations of the art world at this time.

Solomon won a medal in the category of history painting for *The Mother of Moses* (1860) from the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts.¹³³ As mentioned previously, the critical reception of the painting was mixed, but this seal of approval must have encouraged Solomon to continue with similar subjects. *The Mother of Moses* was soon bought by the Pre-Raphaelite collector Thomas Edward Plint (1823-61), a stockbroker from Leeds.¹³⁴ Plint could be described as one of the new middle-class investors in art and a number of pieces in his collection perhaps reflect his evangelical Christian faith: Ford Madox Brown's (1821-93) *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* (1851-6) (fig. 22), Millais'

¹³⁰ Catalogue, *Royal Academy*, 1860, no. 314, 17. This quotation follows the title: 'And the water was spent in the bottle'. Gen. xxi, 15.

¹³¹ Dalziels, *Bible Gallery*, contents page.

¹³² *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. MDCCCLIX. The Ninety-First.*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1859, no. 920, 35. The title of the painting is followed by this quotation: 'And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes' etc... Exodus ii, 3.

¹³³ 'Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts', *Illustrated London News*, 19 January 1861, 53. Quoted in Esposito, 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery', 286. The Society was founded in 1858.

¹³⁴ Roberto C. Ferrari, 'The Unexplored Correspondence of Simeon Solomon', *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, New Series, 12, spring 2003, 26.

Christ in the House of His Parents (1849-50) (fig. 23) and Holman Hunt's *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854-55) (fig. 24).¹³⁵ The possibility of sharing patrons with his Pre-Raphaelite colleagues could have been another motive behind Solomon's choice of Biblical subjects. It seems probable that Plint bought Solomon's painting because he interpreted it in terms of his own Christian faith and this would support the argument that Old Testament pictures may be read from both a Jewish and Christian perspective.

While Solomon's early Old Testament paintings were being exhibited at the Royal Academy he was also working as an illustrator. The majority of his illustrations around this time depicted Old Testament scenes and Jewish rituals and customs. For example, Solomon contributed depictions of Old Testament incidents to *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*,¹³⁶ which he executed in the 1860s although the volume was not published until 1881, and pictures of Jewish ceremonies, mainly in contemporary settings, to the periodicals *Once a Week* in 1862 (fig. 25) and *The Leisure Hour* in 1866 (fig. 26).¹³⁷ Often such illustrations have been cited by art historians as further examples of Solomon's articulation of his Jewish identity.¹³⁸ However, the subjects of Solomon's illustrations would normally have been prescribed for him by the editors of the books and magazines who employed his

¹³⁵ Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Plint, Thomas Edward (1823-1861)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/62851>, accessed 9 Feb 2009.

¹³⁶ Dalziels, *Bible Gallery*. This volume will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

¹³⁷ Paul Goldman, *Victorian Illustration: The Pre-Raphaelites, the Idyllic School and the High Victorians*, Aldershot, England and Vermont, U.S.A., 1996, 311; "'That wayward genius": Simeon Solomon – The Jewish Pre-Raphaelite as Illustrator', lecture given by Paul Goldman at the Study Day, Simeon Solomon: A 'Half-Forgotten Genius', 19th November, 2005, Gas Hall, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. For Solomon as an illustrator see Gleeson White, *English Illustration: 'The Sixties': 1855-70*, London, 1897; Forrest Reid, *Illustrators of the Sixties*, London, 1928, 103-104; Gregory R. Suriano, *The British Pre-Raphaelite Illustrators: A History of their Published Prints*, London and U.S.A., 2005, 228-237, 330.

¹³⁸ For example Goldman endorses Sir William Richmond's assessment that when Solomon 'remained true to his background he was a great artist' in Goldman, *Victorian Illustration*, 56.

services. Given the necessity of making a living from his artistic skills, Solomon would have had to accept such commissions. There is some evidence that Solomon's initial Royal Academy paintings gave rise to these assignments.¹³⁹ As Solomon gained a reputation as an artist of 'Jewish subjects', so he was offered this kind of work.

The model for *The Mother of Moses*

Solomon's use of models closely resembled that of a number of other artists, offering further evidence that *The Mother of Moses* was produced out of a shared contemporary artistic culture. Speculation has surrounded the identity of the models or model used for *The Mother of Moses*. Seymour asserts that the two female figures were drawn from the same model because of two preparatory drawings for the heads (figs. 27 and 28), now at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, which look remarkably alike.¹⁴⁰ In addition Seymour suggests that the model used by Solomon for this painting could be the same woman, often identified as the gypsy girl Keomi, who sat for Frederick Sandys' (1829-1904) *Morgan Le Fay* (1864) (fig. 29) and his study of a woman's head (c.1859) (fig. 30) or the model chosen by Rossetti for his *Head of a Woman* (c.1865) (fig. 31) and by Albert Moore (1841-93) for his *The Mother of Sisera Looked out at a Window* of 1861 (fig. 32).¹⁴¹ Jan Marsh in the catalogue to the exhibition, *Black Victorians*, indicates that the model is most likely to be Fanny Eaton (1835-?). According to Marsh, Eaton worked as

¹³⁹ Certainly the Dalziel Brothers appear to have asked for Solomon's services after seeing his paintings, *The Mother of Moses* and *A Young Musician Employed in the Temple Service During the Feast of Tabernacles*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1860 and 1861 respectively. Letter in possession of Steven Kolsteren <http://www.ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/skolsteren>, accessed 16 March 2009.

¹⁴⁰ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 56.

¹⁴¹ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 56-7.

a model for Frederick Sandys, Rebecca and Simeon Solomon, and Albert Moore in 1859-60, for Joanna Wells (1831-61) in 1860-61 (fig. 33), for Rossetti in 1865 and for Millais in 1864 and 1867, among other artists. Marsh provides a brief biography of Fanny Eaton, explaining that she was born Fanny Antwistle in Jamaica and described as ‘mixed race’.¹⁴² Marsh asserts that Eaton was in demand for figure subjects of diverse origin.¹⁴³ Perhaps Eaton’s ethnic origin was unclear to the beholder so the painter could use her as a model to represent many different ethnic identities. If Keomi or Fanny Eaton,¹⁴⁴ which now seems more probable, was Solomon’s model, then he was clearly employing similar working practices to other artists in sharing the same model for different artistic purposes.

However, there is another explanation of the identity of the model for *The Mother of Moses*. A third drawing is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, of what appears to be the same model (fig. 34) executed by Solomon at the same time as the other two head studies. This study of a woman’s head is inscribed by the artist underneath: ‘Mrs. F___y C___n’, perhaps Fanny Cohen.¹⁴⁵ Solomon once recorded that his relatives included ‘the Nathans, Solomons, Moses, Cohens, etc.’ so it is possible that the model for Jochebed and Miriam may have been one of Solomon’s relatives.¹⁴⁶ It is implied in Seymour’s

¹⁴² Jan Marsh, *Black Victorians: Black People in British Art: 1800-1900.*, exhibition catalogue, Manchester, Manchester Art Gallery, 2005-6 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 2006, Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, U.S.A., 2005, 192. In the mid-1850s and early 1860s it is known that Fanny was married to James Eaton, with children, and worked mainly as a ‘charwoman’, but also modelled to increase her earnings.

¹⁴³ Marsh, *Black Victorians*, 192.

¹⁴⁴ A pencil study of a woman’s head which is very similar to the two head studies described above at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, was offered for sale at Sotheby’s in 2007 and entitled *Portrait of Fanny Eaton*. Sotheby’s, London, *Victorian and Edwardian Art*, sales catalogue, Thursday 12th July 2007, lot 13.

¹⁴⁵ Seymour in Wildman, *Waking Dreams*, 255.

¹⁴⁶ Ford, *An Appreciation*, 25.

discussions of the three drawings referred to above that she considers the heads to have a Jewish appearance.¹⁴⁷ However, the ethnicity of the faces in the drawings is ambiguous. To some they might have an ‘Egyptian look’ as was suggested by a contemporary critic about the figures in the finished painting.¹⁴⁸ Seymour seems to suggest from the evidence that the model might have been Mrs. Fanny Cohen that Solomon had an ethnic advantage in this struggle for ‘realism’ over Holman Hunt and other English artists. Holman Hunt travelled to the Holy Land in order to sketch Jewish people from life for his Old Testament paintings whereas Solomon could stay in England and use his relations as models. However, Holman Hunt could have hired Jewish models in England should he have wished to do so and he went to the Middle East on a pilgrimage and to paint the landscape as well as the people. I would suggest that Solomon’s possible use of his relations as models displays another practice which he had in common with other, particularly Pre-Raphaelite, artists of that time who regularly asked relatives and friends to sit for them.

A Christian interpretation of *The Mother of Moses*

In this section, I will propose a reading of *The Mother of Moses* from a Christian perspective. The basis of this interpretation is that the Old Testament is a Christian text as well as a Jewish one, a fact which has been overlooked in the main by the art historians

¹⁴⁷ Seymour describes the drawings as depicting ‘a striking creature with a chiselled semitic profile’. Seymour, ‘The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon’, 56. Seymour maintains that, if the model was one of Solomon’s relatives, the artist would have been able ‘to study the Jewish types around him in his own family.’ Seymour, ‘The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon’, 57.

¹⁴⁸ Anonymous, *The Art Journal*, June 1, 1860, 169.

discussed earlier. Therefore, both Jews and Christians could identify with representations of Old Testament stories. The majority of the population in nineteenth-century England were Protestants so Solomon's Old Testament works would have appealed to most people. I will go on to explain how Protestants at this time were perhaps as influenced by the Old Testament as the New Testament because of an idea prevalent in divinity called scriptural typology. To begin with, I would like to draw attention to the similarity between *The Mother of Moses* and Christian images which would have been known in Victorian England.

The subject of a mother holding her child was one with which nineteenth-century audiences would have been familiar in art from the many depictions of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child. In the National Gallery, London, which was established in 1824¹⁴⁹ there were numerous paintings of the Madonna and Child acquired before 1860.¹⁵⁰ The National Gallery shared its premises at Trafalgar Square with the Royal Academy of Arts where Solomon became a student in 1856¹⁵¹ until the Academy moved to Burlington House, Piccadilly, holding its first exhibition there in 1869.¹⁵² In these paintings it was not unusual for the Madonna and Child to be joined by a third figure, perhaps, an infant John the Baptist, St. Joseph, another male saint or a female saint, for example, St. Anne, Mary's mother, or St. Catherine. This would make the group of figures almost identical to Solomon's in his *The Mother of Moses*. In other works, the

¹⁴⁹ Homan Potterton, *The National Gallery London*, London, 1988, 9.

¹⁵⁰ Christopher Baker and Tom Henry, *The National Gallery Complete Illustrated Catalogue*, London, 1995.

¹⁵¹ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 184.

¹⁵² Eric Shanes, *The Genius of the Royal Academy*, London, 1981, 16-17.

Virgin and Child were presented alone or they were joined by more than one other figure. In Titian's (d.1576) *The Aldobrandini Madonna* (1532) (fig. 35), bought by the National Gallery in 1860, the Virgin, infant Christ and kneeling woman, probably St Catherine,¹⁵³ form a similar group to Jochebed, Miriam and Moses especially as the Christ child is presented with the back of his head towards the viewer. However, it does not completely match Solomon's group as the infant St John is included to the left of the other figures. *The Madonna of the Basket* (c.1524) (fig. 36) by Correggio (d.1534), bought in 1825 by the National Gallery,¹⁵⁴ is comparable to Solomon's painting as it shows the Virgin and Child with St Joseph in the background and a basket not unlike the one Miriam is carrying in the foreground. The purpose of citing these examples and of pointing out the similarities between *The Mother of Moses* and depictions of the Madonna and Child is to demonstrate that it is possible to 'read' other meanings in the painting apart from the one relating to Solomon's biography and ethnic identity. For example, the family group may be 'read' purely in artistic terms as a different version of a traditional subject or it may be interpreted from a Christian point of view, the figures resembling the Holy Family and therefore prefiguring representations of Christ as an infant.

It is pertinent to a Christian reading of *The Mother of Moses* that Solomon made a version of it to be engraved for *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* entitled *The Infant Moses* (fig. 37). Many artists, including Sir Frederick Leighton (1830-96), Holman Hunt, Ford Madox Brown and Edward John Poynter (1839-1919), were commissioned to produce designs for the

¹⁵³ Baker and Henry, *National Gallery*, 669.

¹⁵⁴ Baker and Henry, *National Gallery*, 146.

book.¹⁵⁵ Critics who have read Jewishness in Solomon's Old Testament works have not interpreted the illustrations in *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* by the other non-Jewish artists in terms of Jewish identity. Is there then something unique about Solomon's drawings in the volume; something which makes them signify Jewishness? I would argue that there is nothing in Solomon's pictures which distinguishes them from all the rest. There are differences in composition and style among all the engravings, but no specific unique difference between Solomon's and the others' drawings. Solomon, according to the Pre-Raphaelite principle, appears to be aiming for authenticity in the presentation of his figures and settings. However, he is not the only artist in the *Bible Gallery* who appears to approach his subjects with the intention of representing them 'truthfully'. For example, Holman Hunt's *Eliezer and Rebekah at the Well* (fig. 38), Ford Madox Brown's *Joseph's Coat* and *Elijah and the Widow's Son* (figs. 39 and 40) and several illustrations by Poynter (fig. 41), though not a Pre-Raphaelite, are attempts at recreating Biblical scenes authentically.

Of course, *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*, which was comprised entirely of illustrations of Old Testament stories, showed a version of the earliest history of the Jewish people and the origins of Judaism and, in that sense, the book could be said to represent Jewish identity. However, as Judaism was the religion from which Christianity emerged and the Old Testament and the New Testament together form the Bible, on which Christians base

¹⁵⁵ Dalziels, *Bible Gallery*, contents page. The artists produced designs for the volume during the 1860s, but its publication was delayed until 1881. Six engravings after Solomon appeared in the 1881 edition, but more of his drawings were included in a later extended edition of the project entitled *Art Pictures from the Old Testament and Our Lord's Parables* (1894). Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 85.

their beliefs, *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* and, in fact, any Old Testament picture, could be considered representative of Christian identity as well. Considering that the majority of the population of nineteenth-century England was Protestant, it is likely that the Dalziel Brothers had them in mind when conceiving and producing their *Bible Gallery*. According to George and Edward Dalziel, their original intention was to produce an 'Illustrated Bible', but the combination of the refusal of Sir George Grove to edit the volume and 'other insurmountable difficulties' caused them to abandon this plan in favour of the format which was finally published.¹⁵⁶ The Bible was of singular importance to Protestants because individuals were expected to form a personal relationship with God through reading and studying it. One of the issues which had led to the break with the Roman Catholic Church in England centuries before had been the Church's refusal to allow the Bible to be translated into English. This had meant people were reliant on the Church hierarchy and priests for their understanding of the Bible. The images in *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* and in Victorian illustrated Bibles might be regarded as visual aids to support individuals' interpretation of scripture.

In the nineteenth century, sermons, tracts and hymns taught Victorian worshippers to search for types, that is, anticipations of Christ, in their Bible readings.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the Old Testament became almost as significant as the New Testament because Christ's life and

¹⁵⁶ George and Edward Dalziel, *The Brothers Dalziel: A Record of Fifty Years' Work in Conjunction with many of the most Distinguished Artists of the Period 1840-1890*, London, 1901, 258-260. The Dalziel Brothers were awarded a Diploma for a Silver Medal for their contributions, including examples from *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*, to the Fine Art Section of the Victorian Era Exhibition at Earl's Court (1897). Dalziels, *A Record*, 260-262.

¹⁵⁷ George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, New Haven and London, 1979, 7.

teachings could be interpreted as being prefigured there. Thomas Hartwell Horne (1780-1862) explained in a standard text for English divinity students:

A type, in its primary and literal meaning, simply denotes a rough draught (sic), or less accurate model, from which a more perfect image is made: but, in the sacred or theological sense of the term, a type may be defined to be a symbol of something future and distant, or an example prepared and evidently designed by God to prefigure that future thing. What is thus prefigured is called the *antitype*.¹⁵⁸

Horne explained that there were three kinds of types. Only one of them is relevant here: the historical type. The historical types 'are the characters, actions, and fortunes of some eminent persons recorded in the Old Testament, so ordered by Divine Providence as to be exact prefigurations of the characters, actions, and fortunes of future persons who should arise under the Gospel dispensation.'¹⁵⁹ In *The Typology of the Scriptures* (1845-47), which went through five nineteenth-century editions, the famous Victorian religious scholar, Patrick Fairburn explained that typology and allegory were different because in typology both the type and its fulfilment are real whereas in allegory one figure exists simply to represent the other.¹⁶⁰ Landow, in *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, summarises the idea by stating 'in typology both the signifier and the

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Hartwell Horne, *A Compendious Introduction to the Study of the Bible*, 9th ed., London, 1852, 184. Quoted in Landow, *Typological Symbolism*, 7-8.

¹⁵⁹ Horne, *Introduction to the Study of the Bible*, 184. Quoted in Landow, *Typological Symbolism*, 8-9.

¹⁶⁰ Patrick Fairburn, *The Typology of the Scriptures*, 5th ed., 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1870, I, 18-19. Quoted in Landow, *Typological Symbolism*, 9-10.

signified are equally real.’¹⁶¹ Furthermore, in typology there has to be a situational equivalence so, for example, Moses is not a type for Christ, but ‘Moses leading the Children of God from Egyptian slavery into the promised land’ acts as a type for ‘Christ leading all men from slavery, sin, and ignorance into the heavenly kingdom.’¹⁶² However, this was not necessarily adhered to rigidly by nineteenth-century readers of scripture¹⁶³ so Moses could well have been accepted simply as a type for Christ. Consequently, in Solomon’s *The Mother of Moses*, the figure of the baby Moses in his Mother’s arms could be seen as prefiguring the infant Jesus in the Virgin’s arms and, therefore, the painting could be described as significant in terms of Christian identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that some contemporary art critics found evidence of Solomon’s Jewish identity in *The Mother of Moses*. They also thought that the work was imbued with an intangible spirit of Jewishness because of the artist’s background. Reading this work through the medium of Solomon’s ethnic identity was an approach taken up by later art historians, particularly by Seymour, although she noted a tension between Solomon’s Jewish heritage and the English culture into which he was born. I have argued that commentators on the painting, both in the nineteenth century and subsequently, have focused too much on the personal attributes and ‘otherness’ of the artist and therefore have read signs of marginality in the painting.

¹⁶¹ Landow, *Typological Symbolism*, 10.

¹⁶² Landow, *Typological Symbolism*, 10.

¹⁶³ Landow, *Typological Symbolism*, 10-11.

I have made the case that this work has much in common with paintings by Victorian artists of different backgrounds, the majority English Christians, and that *The Mother of Moses* can be seen as a product of a shared, artistic culture existing in England in the 1860s. A Christian interpretation of the painting has been advanced which is built on the significance of the Old Testament for Jews and Christians alike. The willingness of many artists to contribute Old Testament designs to *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* and the publication of the volume by the Dalziel brothers shows that such illustrations were expected to appeal to a larger section of Victorian society than solely the Jewish community. *The Mother of Moses* is similar to images of the Madonna and Child and, through the application of Victorian scriptural typology, Moses can be understood as a forerunner of Christ. Pictures are polysemous; they have the potential to convey many different meanings. Viewers interpret what they see in relation to their own cultural experiences and preconceptions. I have argued that some contemporary critics who were struck principally by Solomon's Jewish background, consequently read Jewishness, or even exotic 'foreignness', in his Old Testament works and that some later art historians, interested in his marginalised status, interpreted these pictures from this angle. Solomon's images were contemporarily and are today open to multiple readings. I have demonstrated that *The Mother of Moses* can be interpreted from both a Jewish and Christian perspective.

Chapter Three

A Deacon (1863), *Two Acolytes*, *Censing*, *Pentecost* (1863) and *The Mystery of Faith* (1870): interpreting Solomon's paintings of Christian ritual

Introduction

In this chapter I will consider a number of paintings of Christian ritual, namely, *A Deacon* (1863) (fig. 2), *Two Acolytes*, *Censing*, *Pentecost* (1863) (fig. 3) and *The Mystery of Faith* (1870) (fig. 4) in order to challenge how Solomon's work has been interpreted not only in terms of his Jewish but also his homosexual identity. In Solomon's lifetime, sexual desire between men was considered unnatural and sexual activity between men was a criminal offence.

I will focus on Henry Sandberg's interpretations of the paintings in his PhD dissertation, 'The Androgynous Vision of a Victorian Outsider: The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', because he reads Solomon's work mainly in terms of his homosexuality as a number of other critics have done¹⁶⁴ and because he explains the paintings the most explicitly as allegories of his own impressions of what a Victorian homosexual man would have thought and felt. I will show how Sandberg interprets the selected works as primarily expressions of Solomon's sexual attraction to men and his rejection of his Jewish background. I will go on to argue that these works also reflect the broader social

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter One, 7-12, for art critics who have read examples of Solomon's work primarily in terms of his homosexual identity.

context in which they were produced and to suggest that they can be connected to the ideological debates of which Solomon would have been aware within the Church of England in the mid-nineteenth century. At this time different groups were seeking to define the Church's identity in the light of contemporary developments, such as scientific discoveries and certain political changes.

Sandberg's interpretations of Solomon's paintings of Christian ritual

Sandberg focuses on Solomon's marginalisation as a Jew, but more particularly as a homosexual, and his thesis is that the artist over his career developed ideal androgynous figures through which to express the feelings and desires of the homosexuals of his day.¹⁶⁵ Sandberg maintains that Solomon explored the depiction of male figures,¹⁶⁶ such as those selected, in different settings and endowed these figures with varying degrees of 'femininity' and 'masculinity', thereby questioning Victorian gender stereotypes.¹⁶⁷ He reads these paintings primarily as expressions of marginality and passes over other possible interpretations which draw on the wider cultural context in which they were produced.

¹⁶⁵ Henry Arthur Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision of a Victorian Outsider: The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', unpublished PhD dissertation, Drew University, U.S.A., 2000, abstract, no page number, 27-28.

¹⁶⁶ Sandberg for the most part ignores Solomon's female figures and in footnote 34, p. 17, states that the artist tried to exclude women from his paintings which was not the case as shall be argued in Chapter Four.

¹⁶⁷ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', abstract, no page number.

Sandberg claims that Solomon's depictions of Christian rituals display his rejection of Judaism and his efforts to integrate into the majority culture.¹⁶⁸ Although there is some evidence that Solomon gave up the practice of his parents' religion,¹⁶⁹ the word 'rejection' implies a stronger negative response than this. Why would Solomon continue to depict Jewish figures and traditions positively throughout his life if he had rejected Judaism completely?¹⁷⁰ Also Christian images were evident in Solomon's work from an early age which indicates that an attraction to Christian iconography and a process of assimilation into English culture had already begun.¹⁷¹

Most of Solomon's paintings of Christian ritual, including those selected, portray well-dressed young men engaged in exotic ceremonies in beautiful churches. According to Sandberg such works demonstrate Solomon's attraction towards handsome young men and his fascination with androgyny.¹⁷² For example, in *Two Acolytes*, *Censing*,

¹⁶⁸ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 27, 70.

¹⁶⁹ See Chapter Two, 3.

¹⁷⁰ For example in the years just before his arrest Solomon exhibited at the Royal Academy a painting of a Jewish ritual in 1871, *Carrying the Scroll of the Law*, and a Jewish female figure from the Old Testament in 1872, *Judith and her Attendant going to the Assyrian Camp*. Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 175. Solomon's later works include a crayon drawing, *Man in Turban Holding Lulav and Etrog* (1886), which are items used in the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, and an undated watercolour of David from the Old Testament. Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 164-165.

¹⁷¹ The Mishkan Le'Omanut, the Museum of Art at the Ein Harod Kibbutz in Israel, possesses a sketchbook of some of Solomon's earliest drawings including scenes from the New Testament, for example *The Adoration of the Magi*, *The Child Immanuel*, *The Favourite Apostle* and *Christ*, and pictures of Christian ritual, for example *Woman Kneeling Inside St. Barnabas*, *Plimlico* and *The Ancient Ceremony of Casting a Devil*. The sketchbook also contains illustrations based on Anna Jameson's volumes on Christian art, *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1848-1864). Lionel Lambourne, 'A Simeon Solomon Sketch-book', *Apollo*, 85, 1967, 60-61 and Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 21-23.

¹⁷² Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 18.

Pentecost, Sandberg finds several feminine aspects to the male figures¹⁷³ and he transfers his assumptions about Solomon's homoerotic desires to the figures within the painting.

The left figure is rubbing his arm against the right figure ... The slight look of amusement on the older boy's face suggests that he is excited about being this physically close to his friend ... The youth on the right ... has a sheer vest ... The vest is already partially open at the top, and it is positioned relatively close to the other acolyte's hand, perhaps suggesting that the clothing can easily be removed.¹⁷⁴

Sandberg mentions that these paintings demonstrate Solomon's new interest in gentile religions, 'aestheticism' and 'spiritualism', but he only elaborates on 'spiritualism'.¹⁷⁵ I believe that he expands on 'spiritualism' because he links this to Solomon's homosexuality. Sandberg argues that through Solomon's male figures' absorption in their own thoughts and visions the artist expressed the isolation experienced by Victorian homosexuals and a possible escape into dream worlds.¹⁷⁶ The mood of *Two Acolytes*, *Censing*, *Pentecost*, Sandberg explains, is one of spiritual longing created by the church

¹⁷³ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 44, 45-46. The figures are described as masculine, but with slight indications of femininity, for example, the left figure's long thin neck and both acolytes' gentle demeanours and decorative garments. Sandberg claims that Solomon has used 'feminine' details in the setting – candles in ornate candle holders, muted light through stained-glass windows, flowers and wafting incense – to make his male figures more womanly. Sandberg is assuming here that an appreciation of sensual experience and the style of beauty depicted are 'feminine'.

¹⁷⁴ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 45-46.

¹⁷⁵ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 44, 62-63.

¹⁷⁶ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 62.

setting and the figures' intense gazes into unseen worlds.¹⁷⁷ Sandberg also sees *The Mystery of Faith* as an example of Solomon's fascination with the supernatural elements of Christianity: the priest, who according to Sandberg is exceptional among Solomon's male figures for his traditional masculinity, appears to be in communication with 'unseen spiritual forces'.¹⁷⁸ Sandberg refers to an attraction which Solomon shared with many Protestant artists to the beauty of Catholic rituals and he suggests that Solomon made a connection in *The Mystery of Faith* between personal spirituality and the age-old ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁷⁹ However, these are minor points to him compared to his argument that the male figures express the ostracism suffered by Victorian homosexuals. My argument, however, is that these works reflect the appeal which Roman Catholic ritual had for not only 'Protestant artists', but many Victorians and which may be seen in the context of the Oxford Movement, also known as Tractarianism, and Anglican Ritualism. In the next section I will interpret the paintings in the light of these two movements within the Victorian Church of England.

Interpreting *A Deacon* (1863), *Two Acolytes*, *Censing*, *Pentecost* (1863) and *The Mystery of Faith* (1870) in the context of the Oxford Movement and Anglican Ritualism

This section will focus on the wider social context of the selected paintings, as opposed to the artist's homosexual and Jewish identities. Although the exact ritual, location and moment in time represented in each individual picture cannot be identified, several

¹⁷⁷ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 46, 63.

¹⁷⁸ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 70, 72-73.

¹⁷⁹ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 71, 73.

elements indicate that the ceremonies are taking place in Roman Catholic or High Anglican Churches. As stated in Chapter Two, several writers have claimed that Solomon was attracted to the movement of a group within the Church of England towards Roman Catholicism and even that he eventually converted to Catholicism.¹⁸⁰ Certainly Solomon would have been aware of Catholicism and the Oxford Movement through art, newspapers and periodicals as well as through friends and acquaintances.¹⁸¹ I am arguing that because of the emphasis on the ritual clothing and objects together with the deep spiritual concentration implied in the figures' gazes, the relationship between these paintings and the Oxford Movement and Anglican Ritualism should be given more prominence than it has previously.

The selected paintings have not been executed in the original Pre-Raphaelite manner of attempting to record a scene faithfully either by painting *in situ* or by painstaking research, which makes identification of their precise subjects difficult.¹⁸² The title, A

¹⁸⁰ See Chapter Two, 3-4. Also in an undated letter from S. Solomon to Mr. Howell held by Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery Solomon indicates that he may have attended a Roman Catholic service: 'I went to hear Father ? J. --- preach on Sunday.'

¹⁸¹ The Pre-Raphaelite circle to which Solomon belonged has been associated with High Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, for example, early Pre-Raphaelite religious paintings were criticized by contemporaries for their inclination towards Catholic images. Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, London and Princeton, 2000, 243. Lambourne implies that Solomon attended Mass in High Anglican churches with his friend, Walter Pater. Lionel Lambourne's catalogue entry in Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, no. 62, 73. Solomon made two trips to Italy with his friend, Oscar Browning, and during the last visit in 1870 they were in Rome for the First Vatican Council. Lionel Lambourne, 'Simeon Solomon: Artist and Myth', Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 27.

¹⁸² This may be contrasted with some of Solomon's slightly earlier drawings and paintings of Old Testament subjects where the artist drew on artefacts in the British Museum to help him reproduce

Deacon, and the richly embellished outer vestment or dalmatic which the figure is wearing, probably place the depicted scene in a Roman Catholic or Anglican Church.¹⁸³ The metallic vessel that the Deacon is holding is possibly a ciborium and implies that Mass is just about to start.¹⁸⁴ The title, *Two Acolytes, Censing, Pentecost*, and setting inform the viewer that the ritual in this painting is taking place at the festival celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.¹⁸⁵ Possibly the left acolyte is censing the altar in preparation for Mass. The use of incense, candlesticks and flowers is traditional in Catholic churches, but in the mid-nineteenth century although some Anglican parishes included such items in their services, their use in the Church in England was a strongly debated public issue. In *The Mystery of Faith* the ritual depicted is most probably Benediction, customary in the Catholic Church, but also practised in some Anglican churches, and shows the priest elevating the Eucharistic wafer in a monstrance.¹⁸⁶ It is unclear in these paintings whether the rites are taking place

historically accurate representations. See for example *Queen Esther Hearing the News of the Intended Massacre of the Jews* (1860). Cruise, *Love Revealed*, no. 47, 97.

¹⁸³ A deacon is a minister of the third order, below a bishop and priest, in episcopal churches i.e. churches constituted on the principle of government by bishops. The dalmatic which dates back to the fourth century is the outer liturgical vestment of a deacon. Catholic Encyclopedia <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04608a.htm> accessed 3/10/2007.

¹⁸⁴ A ciborium is a covered container for Eucharistic wafers. The Mass is the celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrament commemorating the Last Supper in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed.

¹⁸⁵ According to the Bible at Pentecost the Apostles began preaching the Gospel throughout the world. It is an important day in the Christian calendar marking the inauguration of the Church.

¹⁸⁶ The phrase, 'The Mystery of Faith', is found in Christian theology and means a belief which is beyond mankind's comprehension or which can be understood more profoundly by contemplating it. One of the mysteries of faith is the presence of Christ during the celebration of the Mass and the phrase is said by the priest at the consecration when Catholics and some Anglicans believe bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. The figure of the priest in *The Mystery of Faith* is not elevating the Eucharistic Wafer or Host in his hands at the consecration of the Mass, but in a monstrance used in a Benediction service when Christ's presence in the consecrated host is venerated. At the end of the rite the priest blesses the congregation by holding up and making the sign of the cross with the host displayed in the monstrance. The use of the humeral veil, a rectangular cloth, to hold the monstrance was probably adopted in Rome towards the close of the Middle Ages. Catholic Encyclopedia <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07542b.htm> accessed 3/10/2007.

contemporarily, historically, in England or another country. However, they all have an atmosphere of Christian fervour and an emphasis on ritual clothing and objects.¹⁸⁷ It is usually by repeating the same ceremonies and using traditional symbolic garments and accessories that religious institutions attempt to represent and uphold their original purposes. Furthermore, it was during the nineteenth century that some members of the Church of England looked back to the origins of Christianity in response to the rapid and multiple social changes taking place in English society. Tractarians and Anglican Ritualists as I will go on to explain looked to the past for inspiration and therefore I am arguing that these paintings may be associated with these movements.

The Oxford Movement arose from debates between two factions at Oriel College, Oxford, during the 1820s and 1830s before Solomon was born. Liberals or latitudinarians claimed that Christianity needed to adapt itself to modern thought otherwise intelligent people would reject it. The other faction whose guide was John Keble (1792-1866) and included John Henry Newman (1801-90)¹⁸⁸ argued that Christian doctrine should not change to suit new thinking as the Church should uphold Christ's original purpose. Its views were published in a series of *Tracts for the Times* for which its authors and supporters became known as Tractarians.¹⁸⁹ By examining the early

¹⁸⁷ In *A Deacon*, the muted colours and emptiness of the background highlight the figure with his richly embroidered dalmatic and gleaming ciborium. In *Two Acolytes*, *Censing*, *Pentecost*, the background is dark and indistinct while the ritual clothing, candlestick, flowers and particularly the incense-holder are rendered in more detail. In *The Mystery of Faith*, the intricately designed monstrance containing the Host is clearly the focus of the painting with light coming from a window outside the picture to the left shining upon it.

¹⁸⁸ This faction also included Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-82) and Hurrell Froude (1803-36). A. N. Wilson, *Eminent Victorians*, London, 1989, 140.

¹⁸⁹ Wilson, *Eminent Victorians*, 138-141.

history of Christianity, Tractarians found that their beliefs often coincided with those of Roman Catholics so much so that Newman declared in the Ninetieth Tract (1841) that there was nothing in the Thirty-Nine Articles, statements defining Anglican doctrine, which could not be believed by a Catholic.¹⁹⁰ In 1845 Newman left the Church of England to become a Roman Catholic and thousands including several Oxford University men followed his lead.¹⁹¹ Tractarians who did not leave the Anglican Church brought to it a revived awareness of the traditions passed down from the primitive Church. The sacraments, Holy Communion for example, were seen as important outward symbols of spiritual phenomena. Consequently the priest's garments and movements, and all the accoutrements of a ritual had specific meanings and were the conduits through which Christ became present in his Church.¹⁹² Anglican Ritualism, the revival of ceremonial similar to that practised in the Roman Catholic Church, was a logical extension of the theological Oxford Movement, but it could also have been a reaction to the growing industrial and commercial society of Victorian England.¹⁹³ Through mystical and sensuous church services the materialism and dullness of an increasingly mechanised environment could be resisted. Ritualism might also be connected to the Victorian attraction to medievalism in the arts and the Gothic in architecture.¹⁹⁴ However, both Ritualism and Tractarianism were vehemently opposed by Evangelicals and Broad

¹⁹⁰ Wilson, *Eminent Victorians*, 146.

¹⁹¹ Wilson, *Eminent Victorians*, 149-150. For example Henry Edward Manning (1808-92) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) became Catholics. James Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Attempt to Legislate for Belief*, Oxford, 1978, 2 and Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*, Chapel Hill, U.S.A. and London, 1990, 17.

¹⁹² Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics*, 3. Also see John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, London, 1864, Chapter 1.

¹⁹³ Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910*, Oxford and New York, 1999, 2-3.

¹⁹⁴ Yates, *Anglican Ritualism*, 3.

Churchmen.¹⁹⁵ I have shown that aspects of the selected paintings may be understood to display some of the preoccupations of Victorian Tractarians and Ritualists described above. I believe that this connection has been given less attention formerly by critics than the link between the paintings and Solomon's marginalised identities.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have strengthened the assertion that Solomon's work has been interpreted predominantly in terms of his marginalised identities by showing how Sandberg has read some examples of Solomon's paintings of Christian ritual chiefly as expressions of his homosexuality. Sandberg's focus on Solomon's sexuality neglects other aspects of his identity, in this case particularly his fluctuating religious convictions and allegiances, and the broader social context of the works. In this chapter, I have reasoned that Solomon would have been aware through newspapers and periodicals of the shift towards Catholicism by some Anglicans and previously I have referred to writers who have claimed that Solomon was attracted to High Anglicanism and that he became a Catholic. I have argued that the selected works may be interpreted in the broader social context of contemporary concerns with Tractarianism and Ritualism.

¹⁹⁵ Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics*, 2.

Chapter Four

Simeon Solomon's paintings of solitary women in the 1860s

Introduction

This chapter will shift from the analysis of Solomon's paintings with religious subjects to a number of his pictures of solitary female figures from the 1860s (figs. 5-8) because his representation of women is a relatively neglected aspect of his work.¹⁹⁶ The argument that his work need not be interpreted predominantly from the viewpoint of either attributed Jewish or homosexual identities, as has been the case in previous criticism, will be further developed. I have chosen some of Solomon's works which are less susceptible to this kind of interpretation: paintings which do not have any obvious religious connections and do not depict male figures. I have selected images of solitary women in preference to female groups because art historians have linked Solomon's pictures of groups of women to his homosexuality by reading signs of lesbianism in them.¹⁹⁷ I have

¹⁹⁶ For example see Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision'. The illustrations to the dissertation include none of Solomon's pictures of single, female figures and very few images of women at all. Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Rossetti and his Circle*, London, 1997. Out of four of Solomon's paintings reproduced only one depicts women (*The Toilette of a Roman Lady*, 1869) and only a few lines are dedicated to it. Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*, New Haven and London, 2007, 71-99. In exploring the relationship between Solomon's 'aestheticizing and homoerotic' artistic project in the ten years before his arrest and Victorian Aestheticism, Prettejohn concentrates on the male figures. Only four of the fourteen works reproduced include female figures and the presentation of these figures is only mentioned in connection with one of them, *A Prelude by Bach* (1868), 75.

¹⁹⁷ For example see Cruise, *Love Revealed*, cat. 34, 86-87 and cat. 146, 178. Cruise claims that in 'histories of the representation of lesbianism' the relationship between Ruth and Naomi has been seen as 'an important example of a same-sex union' and so links *Ruth, Naomi and the Child Obed* (1860) to homosexual attraction presumably because of Solomon's homosexuality. Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 111. The female figures in Solomon's *A Youth Relating Tales to Ladies* (1870) are described as 'a sapphic group'. Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 115. Cruise alleges that *A Prelude by Bach* (1868) publicizes 'the existence of

chosen depictions of females dressed in the fashion¹⁹⁸ and positioned in the interiors of the mid-nineteenth century because I want to examine how contemporary women were represented. I will focus on the physical characteristics, posture and clothing of the female figures and discuss these features in the context of Victorian attitudes towards women's dress and behaviour. Therefore, in this chapter, I will not only be bringing into focus relatively neglected works from Solomon's oeuvre, but also demonstrating a fresh interpretation of them which is concerned with Victorian feminine identities.

A significant proportion of Solomon's works include female figures and of these a considerable number depict lone women. It is impossible to demonstrate precisely the importance of this subject in Solomon's oeuvre as no catalogue raisonné exists of the artist's complete works, but, during the 1860s, he produced paintings and studies of single females regularly.¹⁹⁹ I have selected four of these paintings to examine in this chapter: *Poetry* (1864) (fig. 5), *Reading* (1865) (fig. 6), *Lady in a Chinese Dress* (1865) (fig. 7) and *The Japanese Fan* (1865) (fig. 8). Art historians have discerned aspects of British Aestheticism in these works.²⁰⁰ Broadly this term has been applied to ideas on the

lesbian desire in its depiction of embracing female couples' (in fact only one couple) and suggests that 'these figures might symbolize, or stand in for, male same-sex desire for Solomon and his circle of friends.'

¹⁹⁸ Arguably except *Lady in a Chinese Dress* (1865).

¹⁹⁹ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 108-110, 113 and 118-119. Also out of approximately 160 works by Solomon illustrated in Seymour's, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', roughly a half include female figures and of that half at least a quarter depict solitary women.

²⁰⁰ Sotheby's Belgravia, London, *Highly Important Victorian Paintings and Drawings*, sales catalogue, 6th October 1980, lot 26; Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 69; Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 101-102, 113-117; Toshio Watanabe, *High Victorian Japonisme*, Bern, 1991, 206; Tomoko Sato and Toshio Watanabe (eds), *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930*, exhibition catalogue, London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1991-92 and Tokyo, Setagaya Art Museum, 1992, London, 1991, 109; Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel*

arts circulating in the mid-nineteenth century onwards that advocated ‘art for art’s sake’ and to art practice that favoured form and decorative qualities over content.²⁰¹ A wide variety of fine and decorative art has been placed in this category. I agree that certain features of these paintings, such as the absence of any moral message or narrative and the inclusion of artefacts from the Far East, can be interpreted as Aesthetic. Moreover, I will show how Solomon was closely associated with both the writers and the artists who were at the forefront of Aestheticism and how aspects of Aesthetic theory and practice can be read in these works. However, I will go on to argue that these female figures are not only signs of Aestheticism but also represent types of contemporary women. I will show that they can be understood as specific constructions of Victorian, feminine identities.

Why have Solomon’s paintings of solitary women been neglected?

When the question is posed, ‘Why have Solomon’s paintings of solitary women been neglected?’, it must be remembered that, following a period of artistic success mainly in the 1860s, Solomon’s professional career was ruined by his arrest for indecent behaviour in 1873 and that therefore, despite becoming a cult-figure among undergraduates and

and *Nineteenth-Century Japan*, London and New York, 2003, 16-19; Colin Cruise, ‘Reading Poetry: An Overlooked Painting by Simeon Solomon’, *The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society*, vol. XI, no. 1, summer 2003, 3, 6-10 and Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 107-109.

²⁰¹ For discussions of the term ‘Aesthetic’: Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England*, London, 1882, vi-vii, 24; R. V. Johnson, *Aestheticism*, London, 1969, 1-7; Ian Small, *The Aesthetes: A Sourcebook*, London, Henley and Boston, Mass., 1979, xi-xiii; ‘The Aesthetic Movement’, *The Grove Dictionary of Art*, Jane Turner (ed.), London and New York, 1996, vol. 1, 170-171; Elizabeth Prettejohn, ‘Introduction’, Elizabeth Prettejohn (ed.), *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, Manchester, 1999, 2-6 and Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake*, 1-7.

bohemians in the 1880s and 1890s,²⁰² his art was relatively overlooked by the general public and art critics for the rest of his life and in subsequent decades. The lack of critical interest in Solomon in the early twentieth century may also be ascribed to a common disregard in artistic circles for Victorian art in the light of Modernism. Solomon's paintings of lone women shared the same fate as the rest of his work. However, as interest in the artist gradually revived, art historians did not appear to be as attracted to these subjects as they were to his other themes.

When I propose that Solomon's paintings of solitary women have been neglected, that is not to say that they have been exhibited less often than his other works, although that is true in individual cases.²⁰³ None of the works under discussion was shown at the

²⁰² Colin Cruise, 'Simeon Solomon: A Drama of Desire', *The Jewish Quarterly*, no. 171, autumn 1998, 62. Also *The Times*, August 19, 1905: 'Obituary [...] A correspondent writes:- [...] "His picture 'Habet!' - the balcony of hard and handsome Roman women at a gladiatorial show - had been one of the 'pictures of the year'; and in the rooms of every Oxford undergraduate with pretensions to 'culture' one was sure to see photographs of his 'Love talking to Girls' and 'Love talking to Boys'" [...].'

²⁰³ *Lady in a Chinese Dress* (1865) has been exhibited frequently both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1866; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1886 (information kindly provided by Peter Boughton F.S.A., Keeper of Art and Creative Development, Grosvenor Museum, Chester, which has the painting in its permanent collection); *Official Guide to the Royal Jubilee Exhibition Manchester 1887*, picture catalogue, Manchester, 1887, No. 1352, 95; *Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters and Deceased Masters of the British School*, exhibition catalogue, London, Royal Academy, Winter 1906, London, 1906, No. 186, 42; Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters*, No. 49, 69; Shûji Takashina *et al*, *Japonisme*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1988 and Tokyo, Musée National d'Art Occidental, 1988, Japan, 1988, No. 72, 130; Sato and Watanabe, *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue*, No. 82, 109 and Cruise, *Love Revealed*, No. 61, 109. It is probable that *Poetry* (1864) has been exhibited only in 1906 and 2005: Royal Academy Winter Exhibition Catalogue, 1906, No. 189, 42 and Cruise, *Love Revealed*, No. 60, 109 (the exhibition history at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, states that the painting possibly may have been shown at Manchester in 1887, but I have found no evidence of this in several different Royal Jubilee Exhibition Manchester 1887 catalogues). Apart from *Lady in a Chinese Dress* and *Poetry*, the Royal Academy Winter Exhibition of 1906 included three other paintings of solitary women by Solomon, *Night after the Ball* (1863) No. 129, 32, *The Bride* (1873) No. 181, 41 and *Girl at a Fountain* (1865) No. 183, 41, as well as other works containing female figures. According to Seymour *Night after the Ball* (1863) was exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 1863 as *Juliette: The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. MDCCCLXIII. The Ninety-Fifth*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1863, No. 508, 24. This was the only painting of a solitary woman by Solomon shown at the Royal Academy during his lifetime, although many of his other works exhibited there included

exhibition at the Baillie Gallery following the artist's death in 1905.²⁰⁴ However, other works which may have depicted single, female figures were shown, for example, *Helen* (1883, no. 49), *Beatrice* (no. 73), *Ophelia* (1887, no. 80), *Isabella* (1897, no. 104), *Portrait of an Englishwoman* (no. 65) and *The Artist's Mother* (no. 66).²⁰⁵ It is not so much that these subjects have not been exhibited, but rather that less attention has been paid to them in essays in accompanying catalogues, as well as in academic journals and books. However, it must be borne in mind that there are a number of factors affecting exhibitions and their catalogues which might have resulted in less notice being given to Solomon's portrayal of women. Institutions have their own histories and permanent collections, and people working in or associated with them have specific perceptions of the roles of their organisations which influence the type of exhibitions arranged and catalogues produced. In addition, the final exhibits and contents of catalogues depend on numerous factors such as the particular strengths of permanent collections, accessibility of works from other institutions, availability of funds and projected audiences. The exhibition dedicated exclusively to Solomon's work at the Jewish Museum in 2001 is a good example of these points. 'London's Museum of Jewish Life'²⁰⁶ showcased its collection of his works, almost all depicting Old Testament scenes or Jewish rituals, augmented by loans, most associated with Solomon's background or Judaism, and two of

female figures. A number of Solomon's paintings were exhibited at the Dudley Gallery, London, between 1866 and 1872 and several contained images of women. The following were of single female figures: *Rosa Mystica* (1867), *A Roman Lady with a Votive Urn* (1867) and *Marguerite* (1866). See Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 176.

²⁰⁴ *An exhibition of paintings and drawings by the late Simeon Solomon*, exhibition catalogue, London, Baillie Gallery, Dec. 9th, 1905, to Jan. 13th, 1906, London, 1905.

²⁰⁵ Baillie Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, 1905, iv – vi.

²⁰⁶ Rickie Burman (ed.), *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon – Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, exhibition catalogue, London, Jewish Museum, London, 2001, back cover.

the four essays in the catalogue focused on the artist's life and Jewish identity.²⁰⁷ The exhibition and catalogue, *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon – Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, was almost certainly considered to fulfil in many respects the mission statement of the Jewish Museum to open 'a window onto the history and religious life of the Jewish community in Britain' and 'to increase knowledge and understanding about Jewish life and history.'²⁰⁸ The paintings of solitary women under discussion probably did not seem to the curators to satisfy the aims of the Museum as effectively as the works which were chosen.

It is understandable that exhibitions with a broad theme would display the most representative of Solomon's works and so would not necessarily include the paintings being discussed. For example in 1989 when John Christian selected a small number of Solomon's works for *The Last Romantics* at the Barbican Art Gallery, he chose pictures which conformed to his guidelines. These were to use Burne-Jones as a starting point and to incorporate images which embodied his definition of 'romantic' as both poetic and inspired by the Romantic Movement.²⁰⁹ 'Romantic' would also encompass the meaning

²⁰⁷ Alison Jaffa, 'From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon 1840-1905', 8-13, and Julia Weiner, "'An Artist of Strong Jewish Feeling': Simeon Solomon's Depictions of Jewish Ceremonies', 15-22, in Rickie Burman (ed.), *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon – Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, exhibition catalogue, London, Jewish Museum, London, 2001. Interestingly one of the other essays in the catalogue focuses on how Solomon's other marginalised identity, his homosexuality, may be indicated in his later work (work, which according to Jaffa (p. 8), was deliberately limited in the exhibition due to previous exposure): Colin Cruise, "'A certain effeminacy and morbid mysticism": 'Late' and 'Later' Solomon and his Audiences', Rickie Burman (ed.), *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon – Pre-Raphaelite Artist*, exhibition catalogue, London, Jewish Museum, London, 2001, 23-29.

²⁰⁸ Burman, *From Prodigy to Outcast*, 55.

²⁰⁹ John Christian, 'Introduction', John Christian (ed.), *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art*, exhibition catalogue, London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1989, London, 1989, 11.

expressed by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) in the lines which supplied the title of the exhibition:

We were the last romantics – chose for theme

Traditional sanctity and loveliness²¹⁰

It could be argued that the paintings of single, female figures in question do not inevitably fall outside this remit. However, the limited selection of Solomon's works did not contain these images or any similar ones. The chosen exhibits appeared under the title, 'Burne-Jones and his Followers',²¹¹ and, apart from *Love in Autumn* (1866) (fig. 42), an allegorical oil painting of Love as a vulnerable young man, all the other pictures were drawings executed between 1892 and 1894.²¹² Thus, the association with the Romantic Movement was achieved by including works, the majority of which Solomon executed while he was ostracised by respectable society, mirroring the Romantic vision of the artist as an outsider, misunderstood by the general public.²¹³ In some ways the works which

²¹⁰ William Butler Yeats, 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931' in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, London, 1933. Quoted in *The Last Romantics*, exhibition catalogue, 11.

²¹¹ In the catalogue, the connection to Burne-Jones is made in several ways. The mutual influence between the two painters is noted in the short biography of Solomon. *The Last Romantics*, exhibition catalogue, 82. Androgynous male figures (See Burne-Jones' *The Prioress's Tale* (1865-98) no. 9. The face and figure of the boy share some of the same feminine characteristics of Solomon's youth in *Love in Autumn* no. 20.), pencil and chalk drawings (nos. 11, 12, 21, 22, 23 and 24) and pictures with the Medusa myth as a source (nos. 3 and 24) are included by both Burne-Jones and Solomon.

²¹² *The Last Romantics*, exhibition catalogue, 82-83. The other pictures by Solomon in the exhibition were no. 21, *The Strawberry Flower* (1892), an androgynous, possibly, female head; no. 22, *For the Night must Pass before the Coming Day* (1893); no. 23, *Orestes and Hypatia* (1894) and no. 24, *The Tormented Soul* (1894), an androgynous Medusa's head.

²¹³ This association is not referred to directly, but obliquely, when John Hoole alludes to 'tormented souls' in the forward and when John Christian refers to the 'persecution that refinement and intellect receive at the hands of the philistine' in his commentary on Solomon's drawing, *Orestes and Hypatia* (1894). *The Last Romantics*, exhibition catalogue, 7, 83.

the curator selected, fitted the theme of the exhibition well, but I suggest that the artist's notoriety and divergence from Victorian moral standards were emphasised yet again.²¹⁴ By focusing on Solomon's sketchy late drawings with sombre themes, executed after his 'disgrace', as opposed to his earlier, less melancholy, finished paintings, Christian highlighted the artist's arrest, its aftermath and, in effect, his 'tragic' life over his art.

Here the discussion will leave issues connected to exhibitions which have included Solomon's work and return to the level of attention paid to his single female subjects as interest in the artist recovered. A reappraisal of Solomon's contribution to art began in the 1960s with articles published by Alfred Werner²¹⁵ and Lionel Lambourne.²¹⁶ Coincidentally the second wave of the Feminist Movement emerged in the 1960s and broke into the art establishment in the form of feminist art history. Women involved in art history, including Linda Nochlin in her landmark article of 1971, asked this question

²¹⁴ For another example of an exhibition with a broad theme including Solomon's work see Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone (eds), *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain: 1860-1910*, exhibition catalogue, London, Tate Gallery, 1997-1998, Munich, Haus der Kunst, 1998 and Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 1998, London, 1997. For this exhibition the curators chose four of Solomon's works which seemed to them to be representative of Symbolism in Britain. None of the paintings of female figures under discussion in this chapter was included. The commentaries on Solomon's works rely heavily on the artist's life. Particularly *The Sleepers, and the One that Watcheth* (1870) (No. 36, 141-2) is seen as expressing the artist's social exclusion on account of his Jewishness and homosexuality.

²¹⁵ Alfred Werner, 'The Sad Ballad of Simeon Solomon', *Kenyon Review*, 22, summer 1960, 392-407. Also Alfred Werner, 'Jewish Artists of the Age of Emancipation', Cecil Roth (ed.), *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History*, London, 1971, 191-205 (first pub. Tel Aviv, Israel, 1961). Alfred Werner, 'Simeon Solomon: A Rediscovery', *Art and Artists*, 9, January 1975, 6-11 (a revision of his 1960 article).

²¹⁶ Lionel Lambourne, *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Simeon Solomon*, pamphlet to exhibition, New York, Durlacher Gallery, New York, 1966, no page numbers; Lionel Lambourne, 'A Simeon Solomon Sketch-book', *Apollo*, 85, 1967, 59-61; Lionel Lambourne, 'Abraham Solomon, Painter of Fashion, and Simeon Solomon, Decadent Artist', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, London, 21, 1968, 274-286. Also William E. Fredeman, *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965, 212-15.

among others, ‘Why have there been no great women artists?’²¹⁷ As one of the responses to this question art historians set about finding, researching and making known ‘examples of worthy or insufficiently appreciated women artists throughout history.’²¹⁸ It immediately became apparent that other artists besides women had been ignored, such as male artists like Solomon who had been marginalised in his lifetime because of his Jewish background and even more because of his homosexuality. Solomon’s life and work were ripe for re-evaluation in this climate of revisionism. Increased interest in Solomon was indicated by a rise in the number of articles appearing in journals²¹⁹ culminating in the exhibition, *Solomon, a Family of Painters* (1985) and Seymour’s PhD dissertation (1986) on Solomon’s life and work. Of course, feminist art history involved more than just another look at neglected artists, worthwhile though that activity might be.²²⁰ A re-conceptualisation of the field of art history was generated.²²¹ In *Differencing the Canon* Pollock writes:

Differences can co-exist, cross-fertilise and challenge, be acknowledged, confronted, celebrated and not remain destructive of the other in an expanded but

²¹⁷ Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, New York, 1988, 145-176 (first pub. ‘Why have there been no great women artists?’, *Art News*, 69, January 1971).

²¹⁸ Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power*, 147.

²¹⁹ For example John Y. LeBourgeois, ‘Swinburne and Simeon Solomon’, *Notes and Queries*, no. 20, March 1973, 91-95; Werner, ‘Solomon: A Rediscovery’, 6-11; Steven Kolsteren, ‘Simeon Solomon and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’, *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 2, 1982, 35-48; Steven Kolsteren, ‘Simeon Solomon and the Romantic Poets’, *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 4, 1984, 62-69.

²²⁰ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, London and New York, 1988, 1-2. Here Pollock agrees with Nochlin in calling for a paradigm shift, that is, a change in the model which is accepted as defining the academic discipline of art history.

²²¹ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 5. At the same time, many educational institutions created special studies departments and courses in order to make their organizations and curriculum more inclusive: Women’s Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies, African American and Black Studies and so forth. Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories*, London and New York, 1999, 6.

shared cultural space. Instead of the exclusivity of the cultural canon contested by fragmented special studies all premised on the binary oppositions of identity politics, insiders/outside, margins/centres, high/low and so forth, the cultural field may be re-imagined as a space for multiple occupancy ...²²²

I believe that in Solomon's case a failure of re-imagination did happen on occasion and although his work was brought back into the mainstream of artistic discussion, commentators persisted in seeing him as an outsider, a kind of cause célèbre or special case. It was Solomon's differences from the typical English, nineteenth-century artist which were seen to make him worthy of study and so his art was interpreted too narrowly from the perspective of these differences.

While Seymour, in her PhD dissertation (1986), clearly aimed to provide a comprehensive survey of Solomon's life and work up to the time of his arrest, subsequent academic treatises usually constructed arguments around one of Solomon's marginalised identities, most often his homosexuality, for example, Sandberg's PhD dissertation discussed above.²²³ They would appear to confirm Roberto Ferrari's assertion that 'since

²²² Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 11. Pollock's vision of art history as a shared cultural space of multiple occupancy could be considered utopian as it is generally thought today that identity formation requires the 'other', that is, an individual needs to know what he or she is not in order to know what he or she is.

²²³ Also the following dissertations concentrate on Solomon's homosexuality: Mark Rappolt, 'Victorian Discourses on Art and Sexuality and the work of Simeon Solomon', unpublished BA dissertation, University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1997; Rachel Lawe, 'The Physical and Spiritual Realms of Simeon Solomon: unconventional visualisations of the 'ideal' male', unpublished BA Dissertation, University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2004; Fiona Tomlinson, 'Simeon Solomon: alternative masculinities and religious identity', unpublished MA dissertation, University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1996. Currently, at the University of York, Carolyn Conroy is working on a PhD thesis entitled 'The Life of Simeon Solomon after 1873'. The focus is on the life of the artist rather than his work

the inception of gay studies in the 1970s, interest in Solomon's homosexuality has come to the foreground.'²²⁴ The problem with constructing an argument about Solomon's work from the viewpoint of one aspect of his identity, in this case his homosexuality, is that paintings and drawings which do not support a prescribed line of reasoning tend to be rejected. Perhaps this accounts to some extent for the lack of academic enquiry into Solomon's paintings of solitary women. Sandberg's illustrations to his dissertation do not include one picture of a single, female figure and very few images of women at all. Sandberg ignores the pictures of women which Solomon produced in the 1860s²²⁵ and concentrates on those which he finds 'most memorable,' that is, paintings and drawings exploring 'both homoerotic and platonic relationships between men.'²²⁶

Sandberg's selection of works for his study does not justify his allegation that Solomon tried to 'exclude women from his paintings' or that he shared in a 'late Victorian distrust and fear of women' by homosexual men.²²⁷ In fact, as I established in the introduction to this chapter, images of women feature prominently in Solomon's work. Sandberg presents no evidence of Solomon being suspicious or afraid of women, but assumes that this is the case on the basis of an argument put forward by Joseph Bristow that some

and Conroy states on her website that the revelation of details of Solomon's life after 1873 will be 'valuable for scholars working in fields such as the history of sexuality and gender, queer studies, and British social history as well as the history of art.' <http://carolynconroy.co.uk/arthistory.aspx> accessed 17 May 2008.

²²⁴ Roberto C. Ferrari, 'Simeon Solomon: A Bibliographic Study', *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 8, spring 1999, 69.

²²⁵ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 18-20.

²²⁶ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', 58.

²²⁷ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', footnote 34, 17. Sandberg may be commenting on Solomon's later work here. However, he goes on immediately to discuss the artist's work in the 1860s and does not refer to Solomon producing one female likeness.

homosexual men towards the end of the nineteenth century were strongly misogynistic.²²⁸ I have not found anything to substantiate the notion that Solomon was a misogynist. His working and social life was mainly conducted in the company of other men, but that was not unusual in Victorian England. Solomon was born the youngest of eight siblings, three of whom were sisters,²²⁹ including Rebecca who became a professional artist herself and with whom Solomon is said to have had a close relationship.²³⁰ In the 1860s Simeon and Rebecca sometimes shared the same props and artistic themes.²³¹ They lived together and worked in the same studio from 1866 when they moved to 106 Gower Street and later to 12 John Street.²³² Rebecca helped her younger brother with the correspondence involved in selling his work²³³ and it has been suggested that she modelled for him too.²³⁴ The Solomons were a hospitable family who entertained a large, social circle of both men and women inside and outside their home.²³⁵ As a young man Solomon socialised with the families of his student friends, Henry Holiday and Marcus Stone, including Holiday's sister, Climène and Stone's sisters, Ellen and Bertha.²³⁶ After

²²⁸ Sandberg, 'The Androgynous Vision', footnote 34, 17. Also Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885*, New York, 1995, 9.

²²⁹ Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters*, exhibition catalogue, 83. As well as his brother, Abraham, and sister, Rebecca, who were artists and known to Victorian society, Solomon had five other siblings, Aaron, Betsy, Isaac, Ellen and Sylvester who were relatively unknown.

²³⁰ Rebecca is believed to have supervised Simeon's early religious education. See Chapter Two, 2.

²³¹ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 124. Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, exhibition catalogue, Manchester, City Art Gallery, 1997-98, Birmingham, Museum and Art Gallery, 1998, and Southampton, City Art Gallery, 1998, London, 1998, 118.

²³² Cruise, 'Reading *Poetry*', footnote 13, 12.

²³³ Roberto C. Ferrari, 'Sibling Love or Rivalry?: Rebecca and Simeon Solomon', paper given at Simeon Solomon Symposium, University of York, 23 May 2007. Ferrari referred to a letter which Rebecca wrote to one of Simeon's patrons, the Welsh squire, George Powell, and a letter from Simeon to another of his patrons, Frederick Leyland, mentioning that Rebecca was his agent.

²³⁴ For example, Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, Plate 33.

²³⁵ Lionel Lambourne, 'The Solomon Family', Jeffery Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon (1823-1862), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886), Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)*, exhibition catalogue, London, Geffrye Museum, 1985 and Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 1986, London, 1985, 7.

²³⁶ Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of my Life*, London, 1914, 3, 35, 38.

his arrest in 1873 it is probable that Solomon escaped the scandal in London by visiting one of his old female friends, Miss Annie Thomas, a popular novelist.²³⁷ These examples all indicate that Solomon neither avoided nor feared women, as Sandberg claims, but mixed with and collaborated with them.

Lady in a Chinese Dress, The Japanese Fan, Poetry and Reading as Aesthetic paintings

Solomon was one of a group of thinkers, writers and artists who were disseminating Aesthetic theory and practice in England in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Associations were made at the time and subsequently between Aestheticism, femininity, effeminacy and homosexuality.²³⁸ Consequently, some art historians have interpreted Solomon's Aesthetic paintings, such as those under discussion, in relation to his homosexuality and I will dispute that they can be read primarily in this way.

The main thrust of Aestheticism is that art exists for its own sake and has validity without recourse to any other concerns, for example, moral, political and social purposes. A key idea is that art need only be beautiful and, in expressing that beauty, form is more important than content. Line and colour should produce a work of art in the same way that rhythm and melody make music. In England, the two first and most influential theorists of Aestheticism were the poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909), and

²³⁷ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 207.

²³⁸ For example see Robert Buchanan, *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day*, London, 1872. George Du Maurier's cartoons for *Punch* in the 1870s. Also Vernon Lee's (pseudonym for Violet Paget) *Miss Brown*, Edinburgh and London, 1884. Lee's novel contains characters representing Rossetti, Swinburne, Burne-Jones and Oscar Wilde. These figures are presented in a corrupt world of prostitution, effeminacy and alcohol and drug abuse. Small, *The Aesthetes*, xxvii.

the art critic, historian and Oxford don, Walter Pater (1839-94). Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when Solomon met Swinburne there is no doubt that they were good friends from early in the 1860s until Solomon's arrest.²³⁹ Swinburne was probably the first to use the phrase 'art for art's sake' in an English publication in his *William Blake* of 1868,²⁴⁰ but he had promoted the autonomy of the arts in earlier essays, for example, *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866)²⁴¹ in which he defended his negatively-reviewed *Poems and Ballads* (1866) and 'Charles Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal*' (1862).²⁴² Solomon and Walter Pater were friends enough by June 1868 for the artist to inscribe his drawing, *The Bride, the Bridegroom, and the Friend of the Bridegroom*, from 'SS to WP' (fig. 43).²⁴³ Pater's belief that the highest wisdom in life is the openness and capacity to appreciate beauty in nature and in the arts was first published in 1868:

²³⁹ Seymour implies that Solomon may have met Swinburne in 1857. Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', footnote 186, 78-9. Seymour states that they were definitely good friends by 1863 because Solomon corresponded with Swinburne while he was on holiday in Wales. Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 78. However, the letter, headed Saracen's Head, Beddgelert, Carnavonshire, which Seymour cites in Lang's edited collection of Swinburne's letters was left undated by Solomon and the date which Lang provides is 'late September 1869' and is, according to him, the merest guess. A. C. Swinburne, *The Swinburne Letters*, Cecil Y. Lang (ed.), 6 vols., New Haven, 1959-62, vol. 2, 32 and footnote 1, 32. Later in her dissertation (p. 90) Seymour records that Lang dated the letter to 1869, but asserts that it can be more securely dated to the summer of 1863 when Solomon went to Wales with the artist, Henry Holiday (1839-1927), and his brother whose presence there is referred to in the letter (Swinburne, *Swinburne Letters*, 34). See Holiday, *Reminiscences*, 98. Seymour states that a small sketch at the bottom of the letter was inscribed "MDCCCLXIII", citing Jean Overton Fuller, *Swinburne: A Critical Biography*, London, 1968, 177. See Fuller, *Swinburne*, 176-177. There is convincing evidence that the two men were close in the 1860s: for example principally A. C. Swinburne, *Swinburne Letters*, 31-35; also Bernard Falk, *Five Years Dead: A Postscript to 'He Laughed in Fleet Street'*, London, 1937, 312-313, 320-322, 327-330.

²⁴⁰ A. C. Swinburne, *William Blake*, 1868, reprinted in A. C. Swinburne, *William Blake: A Critical Essay*, London, 1906, 100.

²⁴¹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, London, 1866.

²⁴² Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Charles Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal*', *Spectator*, 6 Sept 1862, reprinted in Clyde K. Hyder (ed.), *Swinburne as Critic*, London and Boston, 1972, 27-36.

²⁴³ Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 155. Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 21. Reminiscing about his friendship with Solomon Oscar Browning remarks that Solomon's 'only true friends apart from artists were Pater and myself whom he really loved and we loved him.' Ian Anstruther, *Oscar Browning: A Biography*, London, 1983, 58.

While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange flowers and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend.²⁴⁴

In Walter Pater's 'School of Giorgione' (1877) he articulated theories about the arts which some painters had already been implementing in the 1860s. Pater emphasised that the arts were experienced through the senses in unison with the intellect and that therefore the form of the different arts was highly significant.²⁴⁵ To Pater, music was the ideal art because in music 'form and matter, in their union or identity, present one single effect to the imaginative reason' and he stated that the other arts should strive to achieve this unity.²⁴⁶

The most influential among the painters with Aesthetic leanings was Dante Gabriel Rossetti, into whose circle Solomon had been admitted by 1858.²⁴⁷ Shortly afterwards Rossetti began working on a theme which would occupy him until the end of his career, the representation of beautiful women, most frequently depicted alone, in luxurious clothes and jewellery within enclosed, exotically decorated settings (figs. 44-46). The

²⁴⁴ Anonymous, concluding paragraphs to 'Poems of William Morris', *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1 October, 1868, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, July and October, 1868, London, 1868, 311; published with slight alterations as the conclusion to Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, London, 1873.

²⁴⁵ Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', *The Fortnightly Review*, New Series, No. CXXX, 1 October, 1877, New Series, Vol. XXII, 1 July to 1 December, 1877, London, 1877, 526-538.

²⁴⁶ Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', 530.

²⁴⁷ Arthur E. Street, 'George Price Boyce, with extracts from G. P. Boyce's Diaries, 1851-1875', *The Old Water-Colour Society's Club: 19th Annual Volume*, London, 1941, 1-72. George Price Boyce, *The Diaries of George Price Boyce*, Virginia Surtees (ed.), Norwich, 1980.

lack of narrative or didactic elements, the sensuousness, sexualisation of the female figures and evidence of the influence of the Far East²⁴⁸ in these works may be read as Aesthetic. Rossetti was a collector of all kinds of exotic objects and became more focused on Japanese art and artefacts when he met James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) in about 1863.²⁴⁹ Both artists incorporated objects from Japan and other Eastern countries into their work and also drew upon some aspects of the design of Japanese prints, such as, flatness and ornamentation. Through Rossetti and Swinburne it is likely that Solomon was friends with Whistler in the early 1860s,²⁵⁰ but he would almost certainly have been aware of Whistler's work by 1864 when his *Purple and Rose: Lange Leizen of the Six Marks* (1864) (fig. 47) caused a sensation at the Royal Academy. Years later Whistler would expound his own Aesthetic theories when he defended his paintings in the libel case which he brought against Ruskin (1878). The trial was followed in detail in the daily newspapers.²⁵¹ During cross-examination Whistler maintained that as an artist he was concerned with 'line, form and colour first' and did not want 'any outside sort of interest' to be attached to his pictures.²⁵² The artist and

²⁴⁸ In 1858 Japan signed commercial treaties with Britain, France, Holland, Russia, and America which opened up three of Japan's ports for trade from 1 July 1859. At the 1862 International Exhibition in London, Japanese art and artefacts were shown to large numbers of Westerners for the first time. Watanabe, *High Victorian Japonisme*, 73, 89.

²⁴⁹ 'It was Mr. Whistler who first called my brother's attention to Japanese art.' William Michael Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences of William Michael Rossetti*, vol. 1, London, 1906, 276.

²⁵⁰ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 113.

²⁵¹ For example *Daily News*, London, 26 Nov 1878, reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory, 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford and Malden, Mass., 1998, 834-838. Later Whistler published his own account of the trial in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, London, 1890. Also Whistler's 'Ten O'Clock Lecture', first delivered in St James' Hall, Piccadilly, London on 20 Feb 1885 was a powerful declaration of Aesthetic views. The lecture was first published as *Mr Whistler's 'Ten O'Clock'*, London, 1885. The complete text is reprinted in James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Mr. Whistler's "Ten O'Clock" together with Mr. Swinburne's Comment and Mr. Whistler's Reply*, Chicago, 1904.

²⁵² *Daily News*, London, 26 Nov 1878, reprinted in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 835.

friend of Solomon, Albert Moore,²⁵³ spoke on Whistler's behalf in court.²⁵⁴ By that time Moore was well-known as an Aesthetic artist of the classical, female figure. Solomon, therefore, was well acquainted with the artists and art recognised as Aesthetic. *Lady in a Chinese Dress*, *The Japanese Fan*, *Poetry* and *Reading* display similar Aesthetic qualities to the art considered above.

Just as Whistler's titles - symphonies, nocturnes, variations - distance his paintings from the represented images, so Solomon's designations accentuate the anonymity of his figures. Two of the paintings are named after objects in them: the Japanese fan and the poetry written in the book on the table. Alternatively by using the title, *Poetry*, Solomon may have been making a comparison between his painting and poetry in the same way that Whistler drew a parallel between his works and musical arrangements.²⁵⁵ The figures in the other two works are also unidentified: the woman wearing a Chinese dress is described only as 'a lady' and, in *Reading*, the depicted activity is the title. Solomon may have used this device for the same reason as Whistler to emphasise the formal aspects of the paintings over their subject matter. There are no moral, social or other messages to be gleaned from these pictures and no clear narratives to follow, in contrast

²⁵³ Moore and Solomon had been friends from the late 1850s when Moore, possibly together with William Richmond and Frederick Walker, joined the sketching club set up by Solomon, Holiday and Stone. Moore joining the club is mentioned in Holiday, *Reminiscences*, 40. Also see Robyn Asleson, *Albert Moore*, London and New York, 2000, 22.

²⁵⁴ *Daily News*, London, 26 Nov 1878, reprinted in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 837-838.

²⁵⁵ This is in keeping with Pater's ideas: 'yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art.' Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', 527.

to much Victorian art of that time.²⁵⁶ Moreover, the anonymity of the figures inhibits connections being made between the women depicted and historical or literary characters with roles in familiar storylines. While viewers may attach meanings to certain objects and colours in each of these paintings, it is difficult to connect these meanings to give each work a complete, unified signification. This is unlike the early Pre-Raphaelite pictures where their meanings were made clear in their titles or even in accompanying poems or passages; within each painting, usually each symbol had its one signified concept and all the symbols contributed to the total, consistent meaning of the work.²⁵⁷ *Lady in a Chinese Dress*, for example, does not lend itself to such an analytical, literary reading. In the vase to the left of the figure in a Chinese dress is a single white lily. In Western iconography the *lilium candidum* was associated with the Virgin Mary and symbolised majesty and purity.²⁵⁸ Perhaps the sprig of foliage in the container in the top left of the picture is myrtle as Solomon often included this plant in his paintings. Myrtle could be significant in a number of different ways: it is connected to the classical goddesses of love, Aphrodite and Venus; it is used symbolically in the Jewish Feast of the Tabernacles and its flowers have a pleasant scent.²⁵⁹ However, it is unclear which meaning should be attributed to the plant to make it correspond with the significance of

²⁵⁶ For examples of Victorian paintings which can be read for moral and social messages see George Elgar Hicks' triptych, *Woman's Mission: Guide of Childhood, Companion of Manhood and Comfort of Old Age* (1863), Alfred Elmore, *On the Brink* (1865) and Robert Braithwaite Martineau, *The Last Day in the Old Home* (1862). For examples of Victorian paintings with narrative elements see Abraham Solomon, *Waiting for the Verdict* (1857) and *The Acquittal (Not Guilty)* (1859), William Powell Frith, *The Railway Station* (1862) and John Everett Millais, *The Black Brunswicker* (1859-60).

²⁵⁷ For the contrast between precise Pre-Raphaelite symbolism and the emerging freer use of symbols in Aestheticism see Prettejohn, *Rossetti and his Circle*, 12-15.

²⁵⁸ Debra N. Mancoff, *Flora Symbolica: Flowers in Pre-Raphaelite Art*, Munich, Berlin, London and New York, 2003, 8, 30-38.

²⁵⁹ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 161.

the lily and the Far Eastern objects in the painting. Since the symbolism is indefinite, observers are led to appreciate the work more powerfully through their senses rather than chiefly through their intellects. This corresponds with Pater's key idea that art should not be addressed to pure intelligence, but to 'imaginative reason through the senses.'²⁶⁰

Three of the paintings by Solomon being discussed here indicate a similar interest in Japanese and Chinese artefacts to that shown by Rossetti and Whistler. In *Poetry*, on the table by the book there is a blue-and-white vase containing a branch of myrtle. In *Lady in a Chinese Dress* there is Chinese porcelain on the shelf behind the woman wearing a Chinese dress and holding a Japanese fan, and in *The Japanese Fan* the woman holds the Japanese fan while on the wall behind her there are two Japanese prints. The lines and right angles of the furniture and other items are placed in pleasing correspondence with the curves of the figures' bodies and round objects and achieve a flat, decorative appearance. As explained earlier, two-dimensional design and ornamentation were features of Japanese prints which were integrated into their pictures by some Western artists. Two of these paintings by Solomon demonstrate another design technique evident in Japanese prints, that is, using the picture frame to cut off figures and objects. For example, in *The Japanese Fan*, the two Japanese prints are cut off at the top by the picture frame and, in *Poetry*, the same happens to the vase on the top of the dresser. In all of the paintings attention has been paid to the harmonious arrangement of line and colour, in keeping with the Aesthetic goal of making art emulate the rhythm and melody of music. A limited palette of subdued colours is used in *Poetry* and in *Lady in a Chinese*

²⁶⁰ Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', 526.

Dress dark greens and blues are contrasted with red, orange and gold. Therefore the techniques evident in these paintings indicate that Solomon was at the forefront of artistic innovations being pioneered in the 1860s and that he was working with similar ideas and methods to those observed by particularly Rossetti and Whistler.

Aestheticism in the arts has been related contemporaneously and subsequently to homosexuality. Cruise makes this point: ‘But there were popular perceptions of links between Aestheticism as an art practice ... and sexual preference.’²⁶¹ Richard Dellamora in *The Sexual Politics of Aestheticism* examines the construction of masculinity in nineteenth-century literature and, in doing so, shows that writers, for example, Swinburne and Pater, were advocating the possibility of desire between men alongside their Aesthetic theories.²⁶² In discussing *Poetry* Cruise appears to draw on this connection. After suggesting that Solomon may have stopped portraying poetry-reading women to follow up themes relating to his own sexuality, Cruise concludes: ‘While it plays with the new, ‘feminine sensibility’ of an emerging Aestheticism – indeed, helping to formulate it – beneath the surface is a painting about desire, as unseen and undepictable as the female sitter’s poetic imaginings.’²⁶³ Thus Cruise states that essentially *Poetry* is about Solomon’s ‘unseen and undepictable’ (in the nineteenth-century) desire, that is, his sexual attraction to other men. He appears to read the painting in this way through a conflation

²⁶¹ Colin Cruise, “‘Pressing all religions into his service’: Solomon’s Ritual Paintings and Their Contexts”, Colin Cruise (ed.), *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, City Museum and Art Gallery, 2005-2006, Munich, Museum Villa Stuck and London, Ben Uri Gallery, 2006, London and New York, 2005, 62.

²⁶² Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*, Chapel Hill and London, 1990.

²⁶³ Cruise, ‘Reading *Poetry*’, 10.

of Aestheticism and homosexuality. Despite examining a number of issues raised by the painting, including how it demonstrates Aesthetic art practice, Cruise finishes by claiming that *Poetry* is ultimately about what the viewer cannot see, 'beneath the surface', Solomon's sexual desires. While I would agree that a link can be made between Aestheticism and homosexuality, I would take issue with Cruise's conclusions about this particular painting and, in fact, disagree that any of the works under discussion should be read in this way. The link between Aestheticism and male same-sex desire was closely associated with discourses on Ancient Greek history, literature and art. In the 1860s and increasingly later Solomon produced male nudes in classical settings which it is more logical to read as signifying homosexuality than these paintings of female figures.

Lady in a Chinese Dress, The Japanese Fan, Poetry and Reading as constructions of Victorian female identities

By showing that the selected paintings have been and may be viewed through the lens of Aestheticism, I have reinforced the argument that Solomon's work is not always most helpfully read as an expression of his marginalised identities. However, while Solomon was concerned with form and colour in these works, he was also visualising women and it is how he did this with which I am now concerned. Having brought out the similarities between Rossetti's works of the 1860s and these paintings by Solomon to demonstrate how they may be interpreted as Aesthetic, I will now contrast the women depicted by the two artists in order to show that Solomon's female figures bear more relation than Rossetti's to typical middle-class Victorian women. At the same time I will link these

figures to other contemporary sources relevant to women's appearance, behaviour and clothing, and suggest what particular versions of Victorian femininity have been represented in Solomon's images.

Looking at the figures in the selected paintings, there are noticeable similarities in their physical features: they all have typical Pre-Raphaelite auburn hair; their noses are straight and quite small at the tip; they have round chins; their upper lips are usually bowed and their skin is fair. It is possible that they were all painted from the same model, but no conclusive evidence has been found to establish exactly who the model was or if there was, in fact, only one. Solomon's sister, Rebecca, is usually proposed as the sitter on the infrequent occasions that the works are discussed.²⁶⁴ Seymour has suggested Agnes Poynter as a probable model for *Reading*.²⁶⁵ In 1865 Solomon painted *Habet!* (fig. 48), in which female spectators are depicted at an Ancient Roman gladiatorial contest, and the two women shown condemning a fallen gladiator to death by turning their thumbs down resemble the figures in these paintings. Unfortunately, the models for these particular Roman women are also unknown.²⁶⁶ Notwithstanding the similarities, differences can be observed between the heads of the figures in the works under discussion. For example the eyebrows, eyes and mouth of the woman in *The Japanese Fan* are much smaller than

²⁶⁴ Sato and Watanabe, *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue*, 109; Ono, *Japonisme in Britain*, 19; Sotheby's sales catalogue, 6th October 1980, lot 26; Christie's, London, *English Drawings and Watercolours*, sales catalogue, Tuesday 1st March, 1983, lot 98; Sotheby's, London, *Highly Important Nineteenth Century European Paintings and Drawings*, sales catalogue, Tuesday 15th June, 1982, lot 60; Reynolds, *Vision of Simeon Solomon*, pl. 33.

²⁶⁵ Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Solomon', 108-109.

²⁶⁶ Also it has been suggested that the servant waving a large fan, in the background of *Habet!*, was painted from Fanny Eaton (Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 104), the model who sat for Albert Moore and other artists around this time, and who was discussed in Chapter Two, but no conclusive evidence has been cited that she sat for this particular figure.

those of the women in the other pictures and the upper lip of the woman in *Poetry* is straighter than the curvy lips of the other represented women.

In the 1860s, Rossetti's female figures nearly all have large, almond-shaped eyes, full, cupid's-bow lips and thick, columnar necks, even though different models sat for him, for example, Fanny Cornforth, Alexa Wilding and Jane Morris. Often only the head and shoulders are depicted in a confined space caught between some barrier in the foreground, such as a window sill or bank of flowers, and a flat decorative background.²⁶⁷

As a result indications of the figure's location are extremely limited. In addition, the figure is rarely shown engaged in any activity beyond looking in a mirror or desultorily plucking at the strings of a musical instrument. The face, with wide eyes and luscious lips, appears to float amid sensuous decoration and, consequently, the viewer is led to see the represented woman as an object of sexual desire.²⁶⁸ This is clearly how Rossetti's male contemporaries viewed such paintings. For example the painter, Arthur Hughes (1832-1915), wrote the following comment about Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* (1859) (fig. 44) to the poet, William Allingham (1824-1889) in February 1860: 'Boyce has bought it and will I expect kiss the dear thing's lips away before you come to see it.'²⁶⁹ In contrast, apart from *Reading* which has an entirely dark background, Solomon's female figures are depicted in what are indeterminate, but most likely contemporary interiors. Their

²⁶⁷ For example *Bocca Baciata* (1859), *Fair Rosamund* (1861), *Woman combing her Hair* (1864), *Regina Cordium* (1866), *Venus Verticordia* (1863), *Venus Verticordia* (1864-8) and *The Blue Bower* (1865).

²⁶⁸ This comment was inspired by Griselda Pollock's psychoanalytic reading of *Bocca Baciata* in *Vision and Difference*, 128. However, none of the interpretations in this thesis is based on psychoanalysis.

²⁶⁹ G. H. Fleming, *That Ne'er Shall Meet Again, Rossetti, Hunt, Millais*, London, 1971, 161. Quoted in Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 129. For Swinburne's comment on *Bocca Baciata*, 'more stunning than can decently be expressed', see Surtees, *The Diaries of George Price Boyce*, 89.

representation in particular settings and, in most cases, as three-quarter length figures encourages the viewer to perceive them as whole women rather than body parts. Mental exertion was not expected or encouraged in Victorian women,²⁷⁰ but the introspection of these figures, suggested by their downcast eyes and serious expressions, emphasises the thoughts of the women over their physical features. The averted eyes of Solomon's represented women may signify their modesty which was generally admired at the time while the direct gazes of Rossetti's figures almost certainly indicate their sexual availability as do their full red lips. The smaller mouths of Solomon's figures are closer to the Victorian ideal. A small mouth was thought to denote "refinement and freedom from strong passions."²⁷¹

Rossetti and Solomon present their figures' hair in a different way and the appearance of women's hair had considerable sexual significance in the nineteenth century. For example in Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) (fig. 49) the female figure's loose, dishevelled hair indicates that she is a kept woman in contrast to his depiction of Mrs. Fairbairn, the wife of his patron, Thomas Fairbairn, with neatly braided, drawn back hair in *The Children's Holiday* (1865) (fig. 50).²⁷² Whistler's *The White Girl* (fig. 51) attained notoriety at the Salon des Refusés in Paris in 1863 when the realist critic Jules Castagnary (1830-1888) interpreted the painting as an allegory of the loss of

²⁷⁰ For example John Ruskin, 'Sesame and Lilies', E.T.Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds), *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. 18, London, 1905.

²⁷¹ Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age*, Oxford and New York, 1985, 118.

²⁷² Caroline Arscott, 'Employer, husband, spectator: Thomas Fairbairn's commission of *The Awakening Conscience*', Janet Wolff and John Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class*, Manchester and New York, 1988, 169.

virginity.²⁷³ Castagnary wrote that the picture intimated the morning after the wedding night when the bride wondered if she would ever again recognise her former self.²⁷⁴ One of the signs which led the reviewer to this conclusion was the girl's long, red hair, unpinned and flowing over her shoulders. Rossetti's women of the 1860s were often painted arranging or combing luxuriant, wavy tresses. For the Victorians this would have signified sexual availability as well as vain, self-absorption in their own beauty. In 1877 Charlotte Yonge wrote: 'The associations of the loose, unkempt locks ... are not those of pure and dignified maidens or matrons ... Certain fashions which seem to revel in untidy arrangement ... scarcely are consistent with the dainty niceness of true womanhood.'²⁷⁵ Long, beautiful hair was considered to be a woman's crowning glory and short hair manly, but in public women's hair was expected to be tamed into a neat hairstyle. The coiffures of the women in Solomon's pictures conform to the usual styles of the 1860s. In all but one of these paintings the women's hair is drawn away from their faces and pinned at the back. Only in *Poetry* is the woman's hair unpinned at the back, but it is brought forward, one tress each side of her neck, and laid almost protectively over her breast.²⁷⁶ The middle parting in the hair depicted in *Poetry* and *Lady in a Chinese Dress*

²⁷³ Jules-Antoine Castagnary, 'Salon de 1863: Les Refusés,' *Le Courier du Dimanche*, June 14 1863, 4-5. Quoted in Kenneth Bendiner, *An Introduction to Victorian Painting*, New Haven and London, 1985, 89.

²⁷⁴ Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America*, Texas, 1996, 93.

²⁷⁵ Charlotte Yonge, *Womankind*, London, 1877, 112. Quoted in Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, 119.

²⁷⁶ An almost identical hairstyle is depicted in *For the Last Time*, Emily Mary Osborn (fl. 1851-1893) reproduced in Christopher Wood, *Victorian Panorama: Paintings of Victorian Life*, London, 1976, 104.

was used regularly by Victorian women²⁷⁷ and the fringe covering the forehead portrayed in *Reading* and *The Japanese Fan* was becoming more popular by the later 1860s.²⁷⁸

During the 1860s Rossetti painted his female figures in a variety of different costumes, for example, Japanese robes²⁷⁹ and sixteenth-century Venetian dresses.²⁸⁰ The purpose of these sumptuous garments appears to be to complement the beauty of the female figure and to reveal flesh around the neck, shoulders and breast. In contrast, apart from *Lady in a Chinese Dress*, Solomon's pictures represent women in contemporary clothing.²⁸¹ At this time, it would only have been acceptable for a woman to have bare shoulders and décolletage for an evening occasion. Such *déshabillé* would have been considered unseemly during the day. In Solomon's paintings, the dresses are severely modest, just exposing the neck, head and hands. Only an arm is uncovered in *Lady in a Chinese Dress* where the sleeve of the robe falls back as the figure has her hand resting on the side of her head. Seymour has suggested that the dress in *Poetry* is Venetian style like some

²⁷⁷ See photographs in Peter Quennell, *Victorian Panorama: A Survey of Life and Fashion from Contemporary Photographs*, London, 1937. Also see paintings, for example, *A Pleasant Corner*, 1865, John Callcott Horsley (1817-1903), Royal Academy of Arts.

²⁷⁸ Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, 119.

²⁷⁹ The costume of the central figure in Rossetti's *The Beloved* (1865-66) is generally believed to be a kimono. It has been described as a 'kimono' (Marsh, *Black Victorians*, 160), a 'kimono, but worn in a most un-Japanese way' (Spencer-Longhurst, *The Blue Bower*, 30) and a 'Japanese kimono' (Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 109).

²⁸⁰ Rossetti described the figure in his *Monna Vanna* (1866) as 'a Venetian lady in a rich dress of white and gold' in a letter to John Mitchell, 27 September 1866, Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, (eds), *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 4 vols., Oxford, 1965-7, II, 606. Quoted in Paul Spencer-Longhurst, *The Blue Bower: Rossetti in the 1860s*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, Barber Institute of Fine Arts, 2000-01, and Williamstown, Massachusetts, The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2001, London, 2000, 52.

²⁸¹ The dress in *Reading* could possibly be from a different country and/or period. The large sleeves look like gigot sleeves which were more popular in Britain in the 1830s. Large sleeves are also indicative of the sixteenth-century Venetian style of dress, although here the thin, white material (muslin or cambric often with broderie anglaise) covering the breast and shoulders up to the neck is more likely to be a Victorian chemisette. www.victorianweb.org/art/costume/nunn8.html accessed 30 May 2008.

of the costumes of Rossetti's figures.²⁸² However, I think that it is far more likely that the model here is wearing a contemporary dress.²⁸³ By the 1830s in England the Empire line style had gone and had been replaced by dresses with lower small waists, achieved by corsets, from which billowed massive skirts. During the forties the voluminous shape of the skirt was attained by a stiff horsehair underskirt and innumerable petticoats, but by the 1850s the crinoline had been developed to perform the same function. Originally crinolines were underskirts held out on whalebone hoops. They became lighter and more flexible as the whalebone was replaced by steel hoops and then by fine watch-spring steels.²⁸⁴ While these crinolines were domed at first, they then became flat in the front and, before they went out of fashion in the late 1860s, they swelled at the back and sides.²⁸⁵ The large skirt hid the woman's body from the waist down so that she appeared to float or glide, not walk on two legs.²⁸⁶ In *Poetry* Solomon eschews this ethereal quality of contemporary dress by painting the woman in a seated position. In addition, the artist depicts the woman's dress realistically by including the mundane detail of the crinoline riding up and buckling behind her.²⁸⁷ A crinoline was normally worn with a corset to reduce the size of the waist and the figures in *Poetry* and *The Japanese Fan* appear to be wearing both of these undergarments.

²⁸² Seymour, 'The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon', 101.

²⁸³ Cruise also shares the opinion that the figure is wearing a contemporary dress. Cruise, 'Reading *Poetry*', 5, 7.

²⁸⁴ Nancy Bradfield, *Costume in Detail: Women's Dress 1730-1930*, Orpington, Kent, 1968, 162.

²⁸⁵ Bradfield, *Costume in Detail*, 162.

²⁸⁶ Bradfield, *Costume in Detail*, 162. Quennell, *Victorian Panorama*, 92-93.

²⁸⁷ This has also been noted by Cruise, 'Reading *Poetry*', 7.

In the mid-nineteenth century in Britain, the corset was widely perceived as an aid to achieving the ideal feminine figure and was therefore erotic, but, at the same time, not wearing this stiff undergarment signified that a woman was not decently dressed and, for that reason, not respectable.²⁸⁸ A discourse surrounded the corset and how tightly it should be laced. This debate took place in a variety of publications from women's magazines to medical treatises and continued into the late nineteenth century. The argument against tight-lacing focused on the restrictions it imposed on women's activities and the damage which it could do to their health. In 1889 a Birmingham surgeon, John Taylor, wrote a pamphlet explaining his conviction that corsets were at least partly responsible for such diseases in women as anaemia, stomach ulcers, gall-stones and movable kidneys. Taylor claimed, 'My experience is that the compression of stays and other articles of clothing is one of the most common and important factors in the production and maintenance of the anaemia which may be termed 'relapsing' from the evanescence of the improvement obtained by iron'²⁸⁹ and 'the one thing that is most objectionable is the formation of an artificial waist, and especially the linear constriction "at the level of the distal end of the ninth rib" which is involved by this.'²⁹⁰ Well-known artists took part in the debate. For example, George Frederick Watts (1817-1904) wrote against both corsets and crinolines: 'but every stiff unyielding machine, crushing the ribs and destroying the fibre of muscle, will be fatal to health, to freedom of movement, and

²⁸⁸ Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, 161.

²⁸⁹ John W. Taylor F. R. C. S. ENG., 'Dress in its Relation to Certain Diseases of Women', Bristol, 1889, 2. Reprinted from the *Medical Annual* 1889.

²⁹⁰ Taylor, 'Dress of Women', 8.

to beauty'²⁹¹ and the 'crinoline is not only extravagant in form, but selfish in disregard of the convenience and comfort of others; and selfishness cannot be in good taste.'²⁹² Here Watts is referring to the amount of space which a woman wearing a crinoline would take up in a room. The case for the defence of stays concentrated on how the corset supported the body and how the woman enjoyed the improvement that she perceived in her appearance. For example this correspondent to *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* in 1867 stressed these points:

To me the sensation of being tightly laced in a pair of elegant, well-made, tightly fitting corsets is superb ... I ... never feel prouder or happier ... than when I survey in myself the fascinating undulations of outline that art in this respect affords nature.²⁹³

The contemporary debate around the wearing of corsets was culturally significant as it became increasingly bound up with changing ideas about feminine beauty and women's social and political position in Victorian society.

It is noteworthy that Solomon does not portray his female figures attired in the style adopted by Jane Morris, Georgiana Burne-Jones and some other women in the Pre-Raphaelite circle: flowing, loose-waisted, simple dresses without corsets or crinolines

²⁹¹ George Frederick Watts, 'On Taste in Dress', *Magazine of Art*, London, 1883, reprinted in Mary Seton Watts, *George Frederick Watts*, vol. III, *His Writings*, London, 1912, 220.

²⁹² Watts, 'On Taste in Dress', 212-213.

²⁹³ Staylace, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, June 1867, 224. Quoted in Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, 183.

underneath (fig. 52). However, the colours of his figures' dresses are similar to the shades of the fabrics worn by some of these Pre-Raphaelite women and I will discuss this aspect later. After meeting Jane Morris in 1869, the novelist, Henry James, wrote in a letter to his sister: 'Imagine a tall lean woman in a long dress of some dead purple stuff, guiltless of hoops (or anything else, I should say).'²⁹⁴ Rossetti often depicted Jane Morris wearing what became known as 'Artistic' or 'Aesthetic' dresses many of which she made herself.²⁹⁵ Female figures in Aesthetic dresses were represented by other artists in the 1860s, for example, in Whistler's *Symphony in White Nos. I* (1862) (fig. 51), *II* (1864) and *III* (1865-7), and Rebecca Solomon's *The Wounded Dove* (1866) (fig. 53). However, Solomon's figures are not attired in the Aesthetic style which was never accepted as conventional dress by the majority of women, although some features were assimilated into mainstream fashion. In the 1870s, a section of society adopted semi-Aesthetic dress. The main aspects of Aesthetic dress which were incorporated into this style were muted colours and silks and cashmere as dress fabrics. In the late 1870s, normal clothing and Aesthetic dress converged to a certain extent when the bustle was not fashionable and the straight 'princess' line was in style, although the corset was not abandoned.²⁹⁶

Apart from in *Lady in a Chinese Dress*, Solomon's female figures are wearing the usual dresses of the 1860s with corsets and crinolines underneath, but the colours that he has chosen are not the fashionable shades. At the time, some popular colours were 'peacock blue, canary, pink coral, and mandarine (orange)' and garish combinations of hues were

²⁹⁴ Debra N. Mancoff, *Jane Morris: The Pre-Raphaelite Model of Beauty*, California, 2000, 61-62.

²⁹⁵ Mancoff, *Jane Morris*, 35, 53.

²⁹⁶ Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, 153. Quennell, *Victorian Panorama*, 98.

admired.²⁹⁷ The popularity of bright colours was mainly due to the adoption of aniline dyes by the highly successful English textile industry.²⁹⁸ These synthetic dyes were particularly vivid and inexpensive to produce.²⁹⁹ Followers of Aestheticism preferred the more subdued colours generated by vegetable dyes which were more expensive to make. In the previous decade, Mrs Merrifield, citing the scientific research of Sir David Brewster,³⁰⁰ had advocated to readers of the *Art Journal* colours and colour combinations almost identical to those used in the dresses of the figures in these paintings:

In general the broken and semi-neutral colours are productive of an excellent effect in dress; these may be enlivened by a little positive colour ... and the contrasting colour ... should in general bear but a small proportion to the mass of principle colour.³⁰¹

Mrs Merrifield had also recommended looking at art for advice on colours and colour blending which could be applied to dress, particularly the Old Italian masters in the National Gallery.³⁰² As stated above, the wearing of these quieter shades was mainly limited to a small set of women in artistic circles until the 1870s when the muted fabrics

²⁹⁷ Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, 59.

²⁹⁸ Alison Victoria Matthews, 'Aestheticism's True Colours. The Politics of Pigment in Victorian Art, Criticism and Fashion', Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (eds), *Women and British Aestheticism*, Charlottesville and London, 1999, 176. Aniline dyes were discovered by William Henry Perkin (1839-1907) in England in 1856. Artificial mauvre was the first aniline dye to come on the market, followed by magenta and by the end of the 1860s most natural colours could be reproduced chemically.

²⁹⁹ Matthews, 'Aestheticism's True Colours', 176.

³⁰⁰ Mrs Merrifield, 'On the Harmony of Colours, in its Application to Ladies' Dress. Part I', *The Art Journal*, January 1 1852, London, 13.

³⁰¹ Mrs Merrifield, 'On the Harmony of Colours, in its Application to Ladies' Dress. Part IV', *The Art Journal*, April 1 1852, London, 117.

³⁰² Merrifield, 'Harmony of Colours. Part IV', 118.

became more popular. Alison Matthews argues in ‘Aestheticism’s True Colours’ that ‘the cheapness of modern synthetic dyes was reflected in the aesthete’s disdain for them as common, gaudy colours’³⁰³ and that, therefore, the use of colour in dress was bound up with class consciousness. As the inexpensive, bright fabrics became accessible to less prosperous women, some more affluent women turned to the Aesthetic colours to distinguish themselves from the majority. In the selected paintings, the figures are wearing conventional dresses in unconventional colours. In the mid-1860s, the meanings that these colours carried were shifting, but they would become increasingly associated with artistic taste, refinement and wealth.

In summary, by examining both Solomon’s and Rossetti’s depicted women, it is noticeable that Solomon’s are presented as more complete individuals. Most of them are almost full-length figures and some are positioned in domestic interiors, probably contemporary, which suggest their everyday lives led outside the moment shown. The pictured women’s thoughts are indicated as well as their bodies particularly through the books in two of the works: one book is being read and the other has been put aside while the woman perhaps reflects on its contents. Conversely, the gorgeous eyes, inviting lips and direct or aloof gazes of Rossetti’s figures set in their restricted, indefinable locations contribute to interpreting them as archetypal *femme fatales*. These females can be read as temptresses luring men into vague exotic worlds where they can yield to the pleasures of the senses in contradistinction to the restraint of standard Victorian morality. Plainer features, respectable hairstyles, dresses with corsets and crinolines, and poses indicating

³⁰³ Matthews, ‘Aestheticism’s True Colours’, 177.

conventional modesty make Solomon's figures more closely resemble the majority of contemporary middle-class women than Rossetti's. Nevertheless, Solomon's female figures are not entirely how one would expect typical, middle-class Victorian women to be portrayed. Their conventional dresses are not in the bright colours produced by the recently discovered and manufactured aniline dyes. The colours of the depicted fabrics are subdued, with brown as the dominant hue, so these figures exhibit an early preference for the muted, 'Aesthetic' colours which would gradually become more popular in the 1870s. The earthy browns, sages and blues³⁰⁴ used in the dresses and backgrounds contribute to the quiet mood of these pictures in which the depicted women with their pensive expressions can be interpreted as thinking, reflective individuals. Solomon's emphasis on the figures' thoughtfulness is also unusual when only limited mental activity by women was accepted in Victorian society. Although it could be argued that the figures look sad or dreamy as opposed to contemplative, it is possible to interpret them as absorbed in thought, particularly in the paintings where books appear to have inspired their reflections.

Conclusion

In this final chapter I have considered more thoroughly than has been done before a group of Solomon's paintings of solitary women. I have argued that these works have been

³⁰⁴ The dull tones and the matt finish of the watercolours stop the pictures from being as sensuous as those by Rossetti of the same period and prevent the women from being perceived as beautiful alluring visions. Although Rossetti also used 'Aesthetic' colours, such as deep blues and greens, in the 1860s, his colours are generally brighter, more lustrous and textural than Solomon's partly due to the oil paint which Rossetti normally used at this time.

passed over by art historians largely because they do not have any obvious visual connections to narratives which may be tied to Solomon's Jewish background or homosexuality. The representation of women in Solomon's *oeuvre* is a whole area which deserves further investigation. I have shown that these paintings have been and may be interpreted through the lens of Aestheticism and therefore that explanations of Solomon's work which dwell on his marginalised identities are not always the most helpful. However, in the final section, I have put forward a different interpretation of these works which reads them as portrayals of contemporary middle-class Victorian women.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

In this thesis I have proposed that most commentaries on Simeon Solomon and his work until now have focused on the artist as a marginal figure. I have argued that the dominance of this outlook has resulted in Solomon's pictures being interpreted primarily in terms of his Jewish and homosexual identities, while other readings have been neglected. Another consequence has been that certain images have received much attention while others, particularly those depicting only women, have been overlooked.

Focusing on *The Mother of Moses*, I have challenged the almost universal interpretation of Solomon's Old Testament pictures as chiefly expressions of his Jewish background and 'Jewishness'. I have demonstrated that such images might be explained to a great extent as products of the collective art practices of their time and might also be interpreted from a Christian perspective. In Chapter Three I have argued that Solomon's paintings of Christian ritual need not be interpreted as rejections of his Jewish identity or, through his handling of the male figures, as first and foremost articulations of homoeroticism and homosexuality. Alternatively these works might be read in the context of Solomon's personal interest in Roman Catholicism and in the broader milieu of Tractarianism and Ritualism in the nineteenth-century Church of England. Finally, I have examined a group of Solomon's paintings of single female figures which have rarely been discussed and, rather than explaining them in terms of the artist's identity, I have considered how Solomon has represented figures of contemporary women.

In this thesis certain images have been examined and interpretations suggested that have been overlooked previously because of a critical focus on Solomon as a marginalised figure. By taking into account important aspects of Solomon's contemporary social and cultural contexts and by selecting examples from a broader range of his work, I believe that I have presented new ways of perceiving and reading some of Solomon's paintings of the 1860s.

[The illustrations on pages 97 to 146 have been removed for reasons of copyright.

They can be traced from the listing given at the front of this thesis.]

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