

Julia Nunnally Duncan

Ophelia

When I look at the painting,
I see Elizabeth Siddal,
who would come to be
Gabriel Rossetti's model and wife,
her life cut short by laudanum.
For the artist Millais,
she reclined in a tub of cold water,
lying patient and still,
her body chilled,
to portray Ophelia.
I wonder how such work
could mean enough for her
to risk her health,
already frail.
When I look at the painting,
at Ophelia's face,
lovely and pale,
her upward gaze with eyes so gray;
and study her arms that are spread
and delicate hands uplifted
as if to embrace her fate,
I see Rossetti's Lizzie there,
whose own despair in time would be
more than she could endure.

End of the Trail

My father was moved by the image—
the warrior slumped wearily
on his pony's back.
It touched him so deeply
that he spoke about it to me
as long as he lived.
He felt respect and pity
for the Native American
who had bravely reached
the end of his struggle,
the end of his trail.
Maybe my father thought
of his own journey through life
and how he had traversed it.
Perhaps he wondered
if he would succeed
in all he set out to do,
through times of hardship.
Today Fraser's sculpture touches me, too,
and I see both its beauty
and its pain.