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The Technical Achievement of C. Rossetti in Goblin Market and Other Poems

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The Technical Achievement of

C. Rossetti in Goblin Market and Other Poems

(TITLE)

BY

Jay D. Fisk

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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Abstract

During Christina Rossetti's lifetime (1830-1894), and for some fifty years after her death, critical attention focused on her life, more specifically on how that life affected her poetry. Critics tried to show how her Italian ancestors, artistic brothers, spiritual mother and sister, and her many illnesses influenced her works. Other than these basic facts, little else was known.

Later, psychological critics found much sexual symbolism in the "repressed" poet's works. "Goblin Market," with its tale of strange little goblin men seducing innocent maids with their fruits seemed particularly well-suited to a Freudian approach. This poem received so much attention that it overshadowed Rossetti's other works. Feminist critics of the later twentieth century have joined the psychological critics in concentrating on "Goblin Market." They see in the poem not only the repression of Rossetti's sexuality but also the oppression brought about by Victorian society's views of women.

Rossetti's works can support more than the feminist or psychological perspective. Rossetti is a skilled poet. To see her skill, one must only read her poetry. There is no need to examine speculative biographies, Freudian analyses, or feminist theories. All that Rossetti wants us to know is in her poetry.

The purpose of this study is to examine Rossetti's poetry as poetry. This paper examines her first volume, Goblin Market and Other Poems, and its technical skills. Special attention is given to rhyme, meter, and imagery. To limit the study, only those poems that deal with **renewal** are discussed. Rossetti produced many and varied poems with this subject and these provide many examples of her strengths and weaknesses.

During Christina Rossetti's lifetime (1830-1894), and for some fifty years after her death, critical attention focused on her life, more specifically on how that life affected her poetry. Critics tried to show how her Italian ancestors, spiritual mother and sister, and her many illnesses influenced her works. Other than these basic facts, little else was known. "Her quietness, the 'drab colour' of her existence, of her manner" frustrated these biographical critics (Cary 24).

Failing to find in the known biographical details an adequate explanation for the tensions, frustrations, and passions apparent in her poetry, her biographers too frequently resorted to playing games, making of her poems gnomonic biographical anagrams to define the boundaries of a psycho-sexual existence sublimated in terms of religious experience. (Fredeman 288)

Psychological critics found much sexual symbolism in the "repressed" poet's works. "Goblin Market," with its tale of strange little goblin men seducing innocent maids with their fruits seemed particularly well-suited to a Freudian approach. This poem received so much attention that it overshadowed Rossetti's other works. Feminist critics of the later twentieth century have joined the psychological critics in concentrating on "Goblin Market." They see in the poem not only the repression of Rossetti's sexuality but also the oppression brought about by Victorian society's views of women.

"Goblin Market" is one of Rossetti's best works, one that can support more than the feminist or psychological perspective. As Joan Rees has stated, "...the concentration on feminist politics is at present once again denying Christina Rossetti the long overdue

recognition which her skills and achievement as a poet deserve" (59).

Christina Rossetti is a good poet. She deserves to be recognized as such, and the way to do that is to examine her poems. For it is in her poems that her strengths lie. As Virginia Woolf states in her essay, "I Am Christina Rossetti": "Here we are rambling among unimportant trifles, rattling her writing table drawers, making fun of the Mummies and Maria and her love affairs" when all she really wants us to know is in her poetry (57).

Thus the purpose of this study is to examine Rossetti's poetry as poetry. I shall look at her first volume, Goblin Market and Other Poems, and study her technical skill in rhyme, meter, and imagery, aware that in a first volume these may be in a developmental stage. To limit my study, I shall discuss only those poems that deal with renewal. Rossetti produced many and varied poems with this subject, and these provide many examples of her strengths and weaknesses.

"Goblin Market" is the first poem of the collection. In it, Rossetti significantly combines theme, imagery, rhyme, and meter. This poem exemplifies Rossetti's inventiveness and skill. The story is simple. Young Laura is enticed to eat the magical fruit of the goblin men. The fruit, though sweet, is poisonous, and Laura begins to waste away. Sister Lizzie saves Laura by allowing the goblin men to smear juice on her face. Laura kisses the juice off her sister and is revived.

The poem is written in Skeltonic verse. "This verse form relies for its structure on stress, alliteration, and rhyme, rather than on syllabic count or feet" (deFord 364). Skeltonic verse is distinguished from other forms of tumbling verse by the frequent use of two- and three-beat lines rhyming in couplets. Providing great freedom, it allows the natural rhythms of the words to set the meter, as in the list of fruits:

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘
 Apples and Quinces,
 / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘
 Lemons and oranges,
 / ˘ / / ˘ ˘
 Plump unpecked cherries,
 / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ ˘
 Melons and raspberries,
 / / / / / ˘ ˘
 Bloom-down cheeked peaches,
 / ˘ / ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘
 Smart-headed mulberries,
 / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘
 Wild free-born cranberries,
 / / ˘ / ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘
 Crab-apples, dewberries,
 / / ˘ / ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘
 Pine-apples, blackberries,
 / ˘ / / ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘
 Apricots, strawberries. (5-14)

Rossetti varies the meter and length of the lines, allowing the meaning to dictate the form. In the following passage, by varying the

meter and changing the line length from two feet to five feet, adding a foot at a time, Rossetti conveys Lizzie's breathless excitement:

Did you miss me?
 Come and kiss me.
 Never mind my bruises,
 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
 Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
 Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
 Eat me, drink me, love me;
 Laura, make much of me:
 For your sake I have braved the glen
 And had to do with goblin merchant men. (465-74)

The limitations of the poem are self imposed by Rossetti, not by the rules of formal poetry. For example, she wisely limits the images to simple, everyday activities and objects. Many of the images deal with nature, and nature itself becomes a powerful element of the story. It serves as a protector for the girls:

Moon and stars gazed in at them,
 Wind sang to their lullaby
 Lumbering owls forbore to fly
 Not a bat flapped to and fro
 Round their nest. (192-5)

It also warns them of danger:

The sunset flushes
 Those furthest loftiest crags;
 Come, Laura, not another maiden lags,

No wilful squirrel wags,
The beast and birds are fast asleep. (221-5)

* * * *

The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,
Each glowworm winks her spark,
Let us get home before the night grows dark. (246-8)

Most importantly, nature provides beautiful descriptions and comparisons.

Morning is not merely the sunrise. It is the time when—

The first birds chirped about their eaves,
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass
Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass
And new buds with new day
Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream. (530-6)

Laura's neck is described as—

Like a rush-imbedded swan,
Like a lily from the beck,
Like a moonlit poplar branch,
Like a vessel at the launch,
When its last restraint is gone. (82-6)

Each simile expresses Laura's grace, while the double meaning of the last line foreshadows her surrender to temptation. Laura's quality of delicate strength is shared by her sister. Lizzie braves the attack of the goblin men:

Like a lily in a flood,
Like a rock of blue veined stone

Lashed by tides obstreperously,—

Like a beacon left alone

In a hoary roaring sea

Sending up a golden fire,—

Like a fruit crowned orange-tree

White with blossoms honey-sweet

Sore beset by wasp and bee,—

Like a royal virgin town

Topped with gilded dome and spire

Close beleaguered by a fleet

Mad to tug her standard down. (409-21)

Nature can also express weakness. The sisters are particularly susceptible to the forces of nature. After tasting the fruit, Laura—

dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn

To swift decay and burn

Her fire away. (278-80)

Even in weakness Laura's strength can be seen. Laura passes out, but she does not faint or swoon. She falls—

Like the watchtower of a town

Which an earthquake shatters down,

Like a lightning-stricken mast,

Like a wind-uprooted tree

Spun about,

Like a foam topped waterspout

Cast down headlong in the sea. (314-20)

The sisters are comfortable in nature's setting. Because they live on a farm, they are accustomed to the hard life of the country. Rossetti uses this fact poignantly to show Laura's feeling of dejection:

She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;
 But peering through the dimness, nought discerning,
 Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way. (261-3)

The goblin men are also described in terms of nature. At the first meeting they are viewed as playful, yet unusual, animals:

One had a cat's face,
 One whisked a tail,
 One tramped at a rat's pace,
 One crawled like a snail,
 One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
 One like a ratel tumbled hurry scurry. (71-6)

These "obtuse and furry" little men, tumbling "hurry scurry" appear to be harmless. Their greetings are pleasant:

The cat-faced purr'd,
 The rat-faced spoke a word
 Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;
 One parrot-voiced and jolly
 Cried "Pretty Goblin" still for "Pretty Polly;"
 One whistled like a bird. (109-14)

Yet each time they appear, they become more aggressive. They subtly change from frisky animals into grotesque beasts:

Chuckling, clapping, crowning,
 Clucking and gobbling,
 Mopping and mowing,

Full of airs and graces,
 Pulling wry faces,
 Demure grimaces,
 Cat-like and rat-like,
 Ratel and wombat-like,
 Snail-paced in a hurry,
 Parrot-voiced and whistler,
 Helter skelter, hurry scurry,
 Chattering like magpies,
 Fluttering like pigeons,
 Gliding like fishes. (335-47)

Finally all pretensions of goodness are stripped away, and the goblin men's true evil natures are revealed:

No longer wagging, purring,
 But visibly demurring,
 Grunting and snarling.
 One called her proud,
 Cross-grained, uncivil,
 Their tones waxed loud,
 Their looks were evil.
 Lashing their tails,
 They trod and hustled her
 Elbowed and jostled her
 Clawed with their nails
 Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking. (391-402)

Lizzie is victimized by these malevolent men. She endures their torture to renew her sister. This theme of renewal through a savior is

a common one for Rossetti. It is present in "From House to Home," "Advent," and several other poems in the volume. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in The Madwoman in the Attic, see Lizzie as not only a savior, but as a Christ figure also:

...just as Christ intervened to save mankind by offering his body and blood as bread and wine for general spiritual consumption, so Laura's "good" sister Lizzie, like a Female savior, negotiates with the goblins (as Christ did with Satan) and offers herself to be eaten and drunk in a womanly holy communion. And just as Christ redeemed mankind from Original Sin, restoring at least the possibility of heaven to Eve's descendants, so Lizzie rehabilitates Laura, changing her back from a lost witch to a virginal bride and ultimately leading her into a heaven of innocent domesticity. (566)

While Gilbert and Gubar are convincing in offering Lizzie as a savior, they lose credibility when they attempt to find spiritual parallels in the remainder of the poem. Christ's redemption of mankind is not comparable to Lizzie's rehabilitation of Laura. The terms are not interchangeable. Christ rescued mankind from sin and death; Lizzie only saved Laura from death. This attempt to deify Lizzie is not supported by the poem.

Rossetti's playful sense of rhyme is evident in even a small section of "Goblin Market." The rhyme patterns are consistently irregular. Sometimes a rhyme is repeated many times, as in the first section:

Maids heard the goblins cry: (2)

* * * *

Come buy, come buy: (4)

* * *

Morns that pass by

Fair eyes that fly;

Come buy, come buy: (17-9)

* * *

Taste them and try: (25)

* * *

Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;

Come buy, come buy (30-1)

At other times, Rossetti limits the rhyme to single closed
couplet:

They answered grinning:

"Our feast is but beginning." (370-1)

Other lively rhymes include the off rhyme, "upbraidings" and
"maidens" (141,143), and the feminine rhymes "seat with us"/"eat with
us" (368-9), and "sister"/"kissed her" (585-6). Another particularly
appropriate rhyme is contained in the following passage. The short i
sounds of "forbidden," "hidden," and "goblin-ridden" suggest smallness
(Nims 165). The diminishing that results from association with goblin
men is thus stressed in the rhymes.

Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted

For my sake the fruit forbidden?

Must your light like mine be hidden,

Your young life like mine be wasted,

Undone in my undoing

And ruined in my ruin,

Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden? (478-84)

The meter works to further the story also. The oft repeated cry: "Come buy, come buy," with its two spondees, is replaced by Lizzie's more evenly stressed trochees, "Come and kiss me" (466). The best example of the use of changing meter occurs at the climax as Laura falls.

She fell at last;
 Pleasure past and anguish past.
 Is it death or is it life?
 * * *
 Life out of death.

The iambs in the first line and anapests in line three slow the pace, the stanza break builds suspense, and the evenly stressed short line, which balances "life" and "death," reads like a judge's verdict. The allusion of trippingly simple verse in "Goblin Market" allows Rossetti to control the pace of the poem. She can manipulate the readers' responses. She is able to use rhyme, meter, and imagery together to create a brilliant poem.

In "From House to Home," a more structured poem, the intense imagery and other-world quality are comparable to those of "Goblin Market." The poem is in two parts, which are framed by a narrator. The use of a frame is unusual for Rossetti. She uses it again in "My Dream," another strange tale. In both poems truths are obtained while the narrator is in a dream state. Perhaps Rossetti feels that she must present her points in the context of dreams; or otherwise people will not accept them. She may also fear appearing judgmental.

In any case, the first part of "From House to Home" is set in a prelapsarian Eden. The female speaker is the only human, and therefore a type of female Adam. She is in charge of all her world. It is a beautiful place, described with strong visual images:

My castle stood of white transparent glass
 Glittering and frail with many a fretted spire,
 * * * * *
 My pleasaunce was an undulating green,
 Stately with trees whose shadows sleep below
 With glimpses of smooth garden-beds between
 Like flame or sky or snow. (13-4, 17-20)

Rossetti describes this mystical dream world in elaborate detail. Yet it does not exist. An example of the unreal quality of this world is found in the eighth stanza. The off rhyme emphasizes the difference between the existence of the lizards and the perception of their existence. This is particularly appropriate in a dream poem, where perception may be distorted.

My heath lay further off where lizards lived
 In strange metallic mail, just spied and gone;
 Like darted lightnings here and there perceived
 But no where dwelt upon. (29-32)

This is a paradise free from fear and care. The speaker shares this world with an angelic friend with whom she is able to communicate in songs and dreams. All seems perfect, until one day the angel-friend leaves. It is not clear why, but without him the perfect world is ruined. Dark winter makes this a lifeless world.

No bird, no lamb, no living breathing thing;
 No squirrel scampered on my breezy lawn,
 No mouse lodged by his hoard: All joys took wing
 And fled before that dawn. (81-4)

As exemplified here, the poem uses simple language and common rhymes. By generously punctuating the poem and using few end stops, Rossetti avoids the tiresome predictability which often accompanies heavily stressed rhyme.

The female Adam collapses from a broken heart and spirit:

Upon the frost-bound floor I stumbled, fell,
 And moaned: "It is enough: withhold the stroke,
 Farewell, O love, farewell."

* * *

Then life swooned from me. And I heard the song
 Of spheres and spirits rejoicing over me. (102-6)

She sees a pale woman in the east:

She stood on inner ground that budded flowers;
 While circling in their never slackening round
 Danced by the mystic hours. (126-8)

Though being at the center of time seems to be an enviable position, it is not. The woman is being victimized.

But every flower was lifted on a thorn,
 And every thorn shot upright from its sands
 To gall her feet, hoarse laughter pealed in scorn
 With cruel clapping hands. (129-32)

The unpleasantness is accentuated by the unusual rhythm. The extra syllable added to lines 114, 118, 120, and 135 produces a jarring

disharmony.

She bled and wept, yet did not shrink; her strength
 Was strung up until daybreak of delight:
 She measured measureless sorrow toward its length,
 And breadth, and depth, and height. (133-6)

She bleeds and weeps, but does not fall. She is supported by a "chain of living links" from heaven. Like Christ, she drinks from a cup filled with bitterness. The primary images here are from the Bible. "The wilderness shall blossom as a rose—" (158) echoes Isaiah 35:1:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
 The desert shall rejoice and blossom;
 Like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly
 And rejoice with joy and singing.
 The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
 The majesty of Carmel and Sharon
 They shall see the glory of the Lord,
 The majesty of our God.

The female Christ is renewed, but eventually dies with miraculous results. The bonds of time and space are loosened, as are the metrical bonds of the poem. The actions described can not be restricted to one metrical pattern:

Then earth and heaven were rolled up like a scroll
 Time and space, change and death, had passed away;
 Weight, number, measure, each had reached its whole;
 The day had come, that day. (161-4)

The "new-begotten from the dead" rise up, sing and rejoice because this female Christ has died for them.

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ /
 Multitudes—multitudes—stood up in bliss,
 ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
 Made equal to the angels, glorious, fair;
 ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
 With harps, psalms, wedding-garments, kiss of peace
 ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
 And crowned and haloed hair. (173-6)

* * * * *
 They sang a song, a new song in the height.
 Harping with harps to Him Who is Strong and True
 They drank new wine, their eyes saw with new light,
 Lo, all things were made new. (169-72)

The imagery of the following passage manages to convey a sense of the sublime:

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ /
 Tier beyond tier they rose and rose and rose
 ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
 So high that it was dreadful, flames with flames:
 ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
 No man could number them, no tongue disclose
 ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
 Their secret sacred names. (193-6)

As soon as Rossetti completes an image, she begins another. They are stacked atop each other like the multitudes—"So high that it was dreadful."

Each face looked one way like a moon new-lit,
 Each face looked one way towards its Sun of Love;
 Drank love and bathed in love and mirrored it
 And knew no end thereof. (181-4)

In the midst of this rejoicing, the female Adam figure sees the female Christ figure. Lona Mosk Packer believes that these two are the same person. (135). This theory is supported by the Bible, in I Corinthians 15:45: "'The first Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." It is also supported by the poem. The

speaker has seen the Christ figure stand on the thorns and drink the bitter cup. Later she says, "These thorns are sharp, yet I can tread on them;/This cup is loathsome, yet He makes it sweet." As Adam she experiences the same pain as Christ. At the end of the poem, order is restored. The meter returns to structured iambs. The speaker is more aware of her responsibility to God.

Altho' today I walk in tedious ways,
 Today, His staff is turned into a rod,
 Yet will I wait for Him the appointed days
 And stay upon my God. (225-8)

The phrase "the great birthday" in "From House to Home" offers an insight into another poem. "A Birthday" has caused interpretational problems since its first publication. William Michael Rossetti said—

I have been asked more than once whether I could account for the outburst of exuberant joy evidenced in this celebrated lyric; I am unable to do so....It is of course possible to infer that "Birthday" is a mere piece of poetical composition, not testifying to any corresponding emotion of its author at the time, but I am hardly prepared to think that.

(quoted in Packer 114)

Rossetti's use of the term "birthday" to mean the day of resurrection in "From House to Home" causes me to believe that it means the same thing in "A Birthday." This ebullient, joyful poem has more imagery than many of the poems, and the imagery is more detailed.

My heart is like a singing bird
 Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
 My heart is like an apple tree

Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;

My heart is like a rainbow shell

That paddles in a halcyon sea. (1-6)

Although the three similes describing the heart could hardly be more divergent, each is appropriate. The happy bird and its nest suggest a sense of security and protection. The lush productivity of the apple tree denotes a sense of completion, the accomplishment of a goal. Beauty and safety are also combined in the description of the "rainbow shell." The repetition of "my heart" celebrates the spirit of self in the poem, making it more personal. In the second stanza the speaker's happiness seems to have given her a commanding power:

Raise me a dais of silk and down

Hang it with vair and purple dyes;

Carve it in doves and pomegranates,

And peacocks with a hundred eyes;

Work it in gold and silver grapes. (9-13)

The tone, however, is not that of a tyrannical queen. The repetition of unstressed syllables produces a sense of joyous lightness (Fussell 35). The high frequency vowel sounds of the rhymes in this stanza add to this celebratory tone: "dyes,"/"eyes" and "fleurs-de-lys" and "me."

The speaker is happy "because the birthday of my life/Is come, my love is come to me." As seen in "From House to Home," love comes through resurrection:

Heart answered heart, soul answered soul at rest,

Double against each other, filled, sufficed:

All loving, loved of all, but loving best

And best beloved of Christ. (189-92)

"A Birthday" is Rossetti's glimpse of the "bliss that awaited her at the end of the journey" (Fairchild 314). Another glimpse is proffered in the devotional piece "Advent."

There is no parting, no more pain,
 The distant ones brought near,
 The lost so long are found again,
 Long lost but longer dear:
 Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard,
 Nor heart conceived that rest,
 With them our good things long deferred,
 With Jesus Christ our Best. (33-41)

Most of the poem deals with the period of waiting before the coming of Christ. Five of the seven stanzas deal with this wait. Highlighting this is the word "watch," which is repeated nine times. The alliteration and repetition within the stanzas also emphasize the lengthy wait, as do the masculine rhymes.

This Advent moon shines cold and clear,
 These Advent nights are long;
 Our lamps have burned year after year
 And still their flare is strong.
 "Watchman, what of the night?" we cry
 Heart-sick with hope deferred:
 "No speaking signs are in the sky,"
 Is still the watchman's word. (1-8)

the virgins wait for Christ who, as in "From House to Home," is symbolized as the sun. This sun/son image is an old one, yet it is one of the freshest in the poem. Christ is "sweeter than honeycomb." When

Christ and summer finally arrive, "figs shall bud/ and dove with dove/ shall coo the livelong day." The virgins believe that only through the coming of the savior will they be reborn in Paradise.

These poems just discussed deal with unusual aspects of renewal. A more traditional handling of renewal can be seen in Rossetti's nature poems. Her belief in renewal is best expressed in poems about the life-affirming beauty of spring. In "Winter Rain," one of the best of the spring poems, she contrasts the barrenness of winter with the lively movement of spring. At first the title, "Winter Rain," seems inappropriate. The rain in the poem is finally not the bitter, icy storm one associates with winter. In fact, it is called "kind." Rossetti uses the term "Winter Rain" because in the title and first stanza of the poem this rain is as cold and lifeless as winter itself. It is swallowed up by the earth. As we follow this downward movement, the first stanza becomes a burial of the rain. The short vowels and the repetition of the words "every" and "sinks" further the mournful tone of this stanza.

Evëry vällëy drïnks,

Evëry dëll and hõllow:

Whëre the kind rain sïnks and sïnks

Green of Spring will föllow. (1-4)

Spring does follow. The buds burst in joyous upward movement. This pattern of movement proceeds through the poem. The rising buds break the downward movement of the first stanza, and lead us upward.

Weave a bower of love

For birds to meet each öther.

Weave a canopy above

Nest and egg and mother. (9-12)

Following the upward journey of the buds, we see more evidence of life. The birds, the egg, and later, the lambs and sheep, all remind us of the poem's theme of renewal. The winter rain has become a source of life. The last five stanzas continue to emphasize that without rain none of the signs of spring would be possible. The lambs on the grassy leas and the moss and daisies of the meadow could not exist without the rain.

In the last stanza, the movement stops. The bursting, stripping, weaving, "fattening," "soaking," "rocking," and "waving" once again contrast with a barren world, a world where the winter rain remains buried in barren sand. By showing this lifeless world, Rossetti gives us proof of the renewing quality of the rain. The flowers, buds, and leaves show that the rain of winter is responsible for nature's renewal of spring.

Although "Another Spring" contains a lengthy list of nature imagery, it contains none of the bouncy rhythms of "Goblin Market." The images in "Another Spring" seem to be stacked on top of each other, forming a long, detailed list of plants and animals.

I'd have my crocuses at once,

My leafless pink mezerions,

My chill-veined snowdrops, choicer yet

My white or azure violet,

Leaf-nested primrose; anything

To blow at once, not late. (3-8)

Whereas "Goblin Market" uses the natural rhythms of the names of

the fruits to set the pace, this poem uses an iambic meter. This structured meter is appropriately used here to describe the wistful yearning of the speaker. Her thoughts are more reflective, and thus demand a more subdued tone.

In the second stanza, the speaker repeats the opening line, "If I might see another Spring," and then proceeds to listen to the sounds of spring. Yet the stanza is oddly lacking in auditory images. Rossetti proffers the common knowledge that birds sing and that there is music in the wind, but we do not hear the music. Nor are the sounds of the "lusty herds" heard in the poem. This wished-for spring is strangely quiet.

As suggested by the longing for nature's beauty at once, the persona of the poem appears to be speaking in winter. Symbolically, winter can be interpreted as the absence of life—death. Thus the speaker anxiously awaits another chance at life, which she assures us in the last stanza, will be lived more joyously.

If I might see another Spring
I'd laugh today, today is brief;
I would not wait for anything:
I'd use today that cannot last,
Be glad today and sing. (20-4)

This poem, though not as life affirming as "Winter Rain," still offers the hope of renewal.

The cyclical nature of the renewal process is vaguely alluded to in both "Winter Rain" and "Another Spring." This process is featured more obviously in another nature poem, "Spring." This poem, like the others, begins with "Frost locked winter," but quickly focuses on the

promise of new life. The second line of the poem, which is also repeated as the fifteenth line, has both an internal rhyme and a strong trochaic rhythm which anticipates the growth and movement of the "seeds, and roots, and stones of fruits" themselves. This movement is continued in the inversion of the subject and verb in lines ten through twelve:

Blows the thaw-wind pleasantly,
 Drips the soaking rain,
 By fits looks down the waking sun. (10-2)

Here the action of the poem becomes more important to the poem than the subject of the action. The blowing is more important than the wind, the dripping more important than the rain. Similarly, in the last stanza, the participles are placed at the beginning of each line to stress spring's animated quality. Spring life is—

Piercing the sod,
Clothing the uncouth clod.
Hatched in the nest,
Fledged on the windy bough,
 Strong on the wing. (32-6)

The use of the present tense in most of the lines, suggests the immediacy of spring. Stanza three continues this motif by accenting spring's newness:

Before new nestlings sing,
 Before cleft swallows speed their journey back
 Along the trackless track—

* * *

Before the daisy grows a common flower,

Before the sun has power

To scorch the world up in his noontide hour. (21-3, 26-8)

Though the poem is filled with the promise of life—shoots, seeds, birds, and flowers,—the speaker never forgets that this is "life—born to die." Spring life is destined to return to its mother—the one that nursed it. Life is "nursed in its grave by death." Spring is "now . . . newly born, and now/hastening to die." Both of these conditions exist in the now of the poem. Life and death exist simultaneously. In nature's cycle, life and death depend on each other. Death nurses life, and life is born to die.

This truth is expressed again by Rossetti in the appropriately titled "Sweet Death." The poem begins by expressing the frailty of life:

The youngest blossoms die.

They die and fall and nourish the rich earth

From which they lately had their birth;

Sweet life, but sweeter death that passeth by. (9-12)

The flowers shed their leaves, the perfume passes away, "and youth and beauty die." In their so doing, however, a greater, more lasting purpose is revealed. The flowers nourish the "rich earth" and the death of youth and beauty makes way for "Saints and Angels." Again death is seen as the beginning of new life.

The imagery of "Sweet Death" is unusually descriptive. The details, such as "the green churchyard," the "fresh leaves" and "the rich earth," are reminiscent of the vibrant nature imagery of "Goblin Market." The rhythm too adds to the meaning of the poem. In the third stanza the difference between the values of earth and those of heaven is emphasized

by the difference in the meter. "Better than beauty and than youth/
Are Saints and Angels, a glad company." It is as if this radical idea
can not be confined to a single rhythm. Even the off-rhymes add
variation, and keep this poem from becoming predictable: "die" is off-
rhymed with "thoughtfully," and later, with "company."

And youth and beauty die.
So be it, O my God, Thou God of truth
Better than beauty and than youth
Are Saints and Angels, a glad company.

All of these variations emphasize the unusual values of heaven, where
youth and beauty are unimportant.

Death is sweet for Rossetti, not merely because it is a "longed
for release from the painfulness of living" as Delores Rosenblum states,
but also because it provides an opportunity for a different, better
life (94).

A poem which deals with nature's ongoing cycle of life and death in
a somewhat different fashion is "Twilight Calm." Here the imagery is
not that of the changing seasons but of the changes which occur as day
turns into night. Evening is viewed as death, yet it is not to be feared.
It is a pleasant time of security. For the cattle, it is "home"; for
the deer, a time to sleep, "forgetting fear." There are few end-stops
in this poem. The action runs smoothly and no one is alarmed. There
are no shocks in this twilight world.

As in "Goblin Market," the subject determines the meter. The
iambic rhythm and traditional rhymes provide an appropriately soothing
tone, and Rossetti's use of punctuation causes the pace of the poem to
decelerate.

In sepa^rate herds the deer
 Lie; here the bucks, and here
 The does, and by its mother sleeps the fawn:
 Through all the hours of night until the dawn
 They sleep, forgetting fear. (41-5)

The seventh and eighth stanzas are revealing. The nightingale, associated with death and mourning since classical times, begins her song.

We call it love and pain
 The passion of her strain;
 And yet we little understand or know:
 Why should it not be rather joy that so
 Throbs in each throbbing vein? (36-40)

Perhaps it is with the joyous knowledge that night and death are not to be feared that the nightingale sings. For we discover that life does not stop at twilight. All does not end. The end of life, as symbolized by the evening twilight, is only a time of calm transition, a time of peace. It is that moment of great calm between the end of one type of life and the beginning of another. This transitional time is one of Rossetti's favorite topics. It is a time to rest, to sleep. In "Goblin Market," Laura experiences this transition after kissing the juices off her sister. In other poems, it is the time of sleep between this life and the next.

In "Twilight Calm," life begins again, but it is a strange, other-worldly life. The animals are quiet, and the stanza itself lacks harsh sounds. The description is reminiscent of the unusual world of the goblin men:

The gnats whirl in the air,
 The evening gnats; and there
 The owl opes broad his eyes and wings to sail
 For prey; the bat wakes; and the shell-less snail
 Comes forth, clammy and bare. (26-30)

This poem like many of those discussed above, deals with the ending of one life and the beginning of another; the process of decay and rebirth which occurs in nature.

Rossetti handles this topic again in her many death poems which comprise over one third of the volume. The primary image in these poems is the seemingly overworked death-as-sleep image. Rossetti, however, adds her own Adventist belief to this image and produces a fresher, more hopeful tone.

According to the Adventist doctrine of Soul Sleep...death initiates the period during which the soul is placed in a state of "sleeping" or suspension. Only at the Millenium, on the Last Day, is that sleep broken and the soul confronted with its final reward. (Mcgann 135)

By using this doctrine as the basis for the imagery, Rossetti avoids sentimentality.

"Sound Sleep" is one of the poems in which Rossetti, combining creative and technical skill, uses this image. It begins with two lines that contrast the state of the living with the state of the dead sleeper: "Some are laughing, some are weeping;/She is sleeping, only sleeping." This early introduction of the theme of this poem, the difference between the world of the living and the world of the dead, is uncharacteristic of Rossetti, yet it is fitting in a poem that seems

to be outside of time and space. The first stanza for example seems to be set in autumn:

There the wind is heaping, heaping
 Sweetest sweets of Summer's keeping,
 By the corn fields ripe for reaping. (4-6)

The "lilies," "roses," and "thrushes" of the second stanza, however, suggest the blossoming of spring.

There are lilies, and there blushes
 The deep rose and there the thrushes
 Sing till latest sunlight flushes
 In the west; a fresh wind brushes
 Thro' the leaves while evening hushes. (7-11)

The third stanza describes both day and night:

There by day the lark is singing
 And the grass and weeds are springing.
 There by night the bat is winging;
 There for ever winds are bringing
 Far-off chimes of church-bells ringing. (12-6)

This seemingly inappropriate switch from one period of time to another emphasizes that this world and its time frame mean nothing to the sleeper. She is outside of time and space. All that exists in this world only serves to remind her of heaven. All of the sounds have become one sound. "Night and morning, noon and even,/Their sound fills her dreams with Heaven." She dreams of heaven because there are no other concerns on her mind. Her work is finished. "The long strife at length is striven." The last two lines explain that this is the reward for dying "at rest and shriven."

"Sound Sleep" shows Rossetti's technical skill. It is a chaotic concept--the amalgamation of time--without chaos. By using a single rhyme in each stanza and by relying on the heavy use of alliteration and assonance, Rossetti provides a structural support for the poem. The very regular tetrameter provides a soothing note of security in the unpredictable world of this poem.

"Dream Land" is a poem very similar to "Sound Sleep" in subject and tone. "'Dream Land' provides a hypnotic effect through its pattern of melody..." (Stevenson 86). This pattern, consisting of three lines of iambic trimeter followed by a short two foot line, emphasizes the dying process. Every fourth line, comprised of an iamb and a troche, has an end stop, causing the reader to pause and consider the importance of what he has just read. The strict rhyme scheme also contributes to the somber tone by emphasizing the inevitability of death.

Another structural merit is the balance of pleasant and unpleasant images found in the poem. The first image is an unpleasant one: "Where sunless rivers weep/Their waves into the deep." This place is dark and wet; it is underground; and as suggested by the word "weep," it is a sad place. The sleeper in this poem is "far" from home, and she is where "shadows are." Read out of context, these images present a gloomy view of the grave. Rossetti balances these images by having the dead woman sleep "a charmed sleep." The single star of the fifth line, which has led the sleeper here suggests a spiritual mission. Perhaps it is the star of Bethlehem or one of the angelic morning stars of the Old Testament. Finally in this stanza we learn that the sleeper has come here to find "her pleasant lot." Later in the poem, the

repetition of "she left" emphasizes both the unpleasant fact that she did leave and the pleasantness of the life she used to lead. The water imagery of the first line is continued in the "water springs," "the rain," and the "mossy shore." Rossetti stresses these images to show that though the physical body may be in the damp earth, the spiritual body is not affected by this world. Like the woman in "Sound Sleep," this sleeper simply has to wait until "joy shall overtake/Her perfect peace."

All of the "sleeper" poems are about dead women. Lionel Stevenson believes this is due to the death wish of the author (86). Alice Law agrees, stating "Rossetti joyfully anticipated the thought of death and dwelt upon it as the prospect of eternal, soothing peace (quoted in Charles 39). Whether Rossetti did indeed have a death wish is a question of biography, and is not important to this study, but it must be noted that all of these poems contain a sense of relief. In "Sound Sleep" the dead woman's "long strife at length is striven," and in "Dream Land" a "perfect rest" unhampered by "pain" or "morn" is sought.

This sense of relief is also discernible in the sonnet "Rest." The dead woman in this poem has eyes that are "weary of watching." Her life seems to have been an unhappy one—one that the speaker seems pleased to see finished. This relationship between the speaker and the sleeper is unusual. The speaker expresses desires and voices feelings that are so personal that the speaker seems to be the sleeper. The sleeper, or restler in this case, has lived a life in which she often heard "sighs" and scornful "harsh laughter." Many things have "irked her from the hour of birth." We do not know what these things are, and it is futile to speculate. Appropriately the sonnet is a prayer to the

earth—not a prayer to God. For the speaker death is not merely joyful because it is the opportunity to be united with God; it is joyful because it is the opportunity to be isolated from man. This state of isolation, this "stillness that is almost Paradise," is the true reward for this sleeper's toils—not the heavenly rewards which are usually associated with spiritual labor.

Until the morning of Eternity

Her rest shall not begin nor end, but be

And when she wakes she will not think it long. (12-4)

This highlights a flaw in the poem. The contrast between the "tired Biblical diction" and the unbiblical tone does not seem appropriate (Bump 3). Much of the poem is formal—the sonnet form; the language: "O," "hath," "irked," "holdeth"; the alliteration: "Seal her sweet eyes weary of watching, Earth"; and the use of oxymorons: "blessed dearth," "clear darkness," "musical silence"; but these formal characteristics are not used consistently nor are they necessary for the subject. In the last line, she "wakes" rather than "waketh." Rossetti fills in the syllables needed for the meter by using the antiquated words and phrases, "Hushed in and," "blessed dearth," and "holdeth."

I have already mentioned that in "Rest" the speaker and the sleeper seem to be one person. Several of Rossetti's poems explicitly present the sleeper as speaker—the voice from the grave. "The First Spring Day" presents the speaker in a place where she is unable to determine if spring has come. In the second stanza, it becomes evident that she is not only concerned about the renewal of nature, but also about the renewal of her spirit:

I wonder if the springtide of this year
 Will bring another Spring both lost and dear;
 If heart and spirit will find out their Spring,
 Or if the world alone will bud and sing. (7-10)

It is as if she were a bird searching for a mate or a bulb buried beneath the earth waiting to feel the warmth of the sun. In the first two stanzas, she yearns for spring; she wonders if it has come. The nature imagery of the first stanza is reminiscent of the detailed description in "Goblin Market." The "wintry birds are dreaming," "the frozen snowdrops feel." By the end of the poem, she has decided spring will return. The verbs in this stanza make it one of the most life-affirming in all the volume:

The sap will surely quicken soon or late,
 The tardiest bird will twitter to a mate,
 So Spring must dawn again with warmth and bloom. (13-5)

Thus, the speaker is content in the knowledge that she will be reborn, recreated, "in this world, or in the world to come."

This lyric poem fulfills the request for a song expressed in the stanzas:

Sing, robin, sing;

* * *

Sing, hope, to me;

* * *

Sing, voice of Spring. (5,11,17)

The poem itself is the voice of spring, the robin's song of hope. The heroic couplets and the refrain-like repetition of the word "sing," with its nasal ng sound which provides resonance, add to the musical quality

of the poem (Nims 174).

The life-affirming tone of "The First Spring Day" is not repeated in "Echo." The tone of the latter poem is darker and less hopeful. The title "Echo" with its many interpretations suggests a more somber poem. Perhaps the title refers to Echo, the fairest of the nymphs, who pined away for Narcissus until all that was left was her voice. Since Echo never died, she may be the speaker. Another interpretation of the title is that it refers to the repetition in the poem. The many pauses and end stops help provide this echoing quality. In the first stanza, "Come," which is repeated four times, becomes a plea for attention. The second stanza emphasizes the "sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet" dream, and in the last stanza, almost every phrase is repeated:

Yet come to me in dreams that I may live
 My very life again tho' cold in death;
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
 Speak low, lean low,
 As long ago, my love, how long ago. (13-8)

This last line exemplifies the third interpretation of the title. The words of the speaker from the grave echo the words which were spoken while she was alive. The first stanza could easily be the cry of a rejected lover pleading for another chance. This stanza also gains intensity from its high frequency vowels.

Come to mē in the s̄ilence of the n̄ight;
 Come in the sp̄eaking s̄ilence of a dr̄eam;
 Come with soft rounded ch̄eeks and ēyes as bright
 As sunl̄ight on a str̄eam. (1-4)

The repetition allows for each idea to be fully developed. The "silence of the night" becomes the "speaking silence of a dream." Paradise is "where souls brimfull of love abide and meet" and—

Where thirsting longing eyes
 Watch the slow door
 That opening, letting in, lets out no more. (10-2)

Unlike the dead in Rossetti's other poems, the sleeper in "Echo" is not happy in the grave. She seems to have awakened too early. She is "cold in death," but she longs to live again. Her longing, however, is not for a rebirth in heaven, but for a return to earth. The poem is thus the frightened cry of a woman whose only chance to hear her lover's voice again, to live again, is in her dreams—in the dreams of her "Soul Sleep."

The octet of "Remember" is similar to the pleading for remembrance in "Echo." The speaker begs for her friend to remember her after death. In the sestet of "Remember," however, the speaker shows a maturity which is lacking in the other poem. She hopes that her friend will remember, but is also able to understand that he or she may forget.

Yet if you should forget me for a while
 And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
 For if the darkness and corruption leave
 A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,

Better by far you should forget and smile

Than that you should remember and be sad. (9-14)

The lack of plosive consonants in the poem provides a soothing tone:

Remember me when I am gone away,

Gone far away into the silent land;

When you can no more hold me by the hand,

Nor I half turn to go yet turn to stay. (1-4)

There are few surprises here. The two variations in meter, at the end of the octet and the sestet, emphasize the idea of the poem: "Only remember me" and "Better by far you should forget and smile/Than that you should remember and be sad."

In "After Death," another sonnet, the speaker is unlike the other speakers from the grave. She is very aware of her surroundings. Though her male friend believes she is asleep, she is not. Why she has not entered the state of "Soul Sleep" is not explained, and apparently it is not important.

The images are all standard death images. Rosemary and may are common funeral flowers. The curtains are drawn, the floor swept in preparation for the funeral. This sense of tidy completion continues throughout the poem. The visitor does not move the shroud or even ruffle the pillow to look at the speaker. He believes his chance to move her has passed.

The ambiguity of the last lines produces a certain irony. Why is it sweet "to know he still is warm tho' I am cold"? Is her love for this man so strong that she is glad that he is living after her death? or is she glad that he is in pain while she is in none? The meaning

is not clear.

As "After Death" has shown, not all of the poems dealing with death deal with life after death. Sometimes the thought of renewal is rejected. The often anthologized "When I am Dead, My Dearest" is a poem that rejects an afterlife. In this poem, the speaker does not speak from the grave. She is still alive, anticipating her own death. Like the others, she sees death as a type of sleep—a sleep which will separate her from the physical world.

Unlike the other poems, the repetition in this poem does not suggest the inevitability of death. In the first stanza, it is used to console the "dearest" of the poem: "And if thou wilt remember,/and if thou wilt forget." By repeating "I shall not see....," "I shall not feel....," "I shall not hear....," in the second stanza the speaker seems to be assuring herself that her senses will be numbed. As if in response to this, there is little imagery here, and what there is is conventional. The "roses," and "cypress tree" are common cemetery plants, and the "nightingale" singing "as if in pain" is a cliché. The heavily accented end stop rhymes are monotonously predictable.

Though the speaker does not fear death, she entertains no notions of rebirth. Death is the end. The twilight "doth not rise nor set." It is not a time of transition, as in "Twilight Calm," but a time of death. It is a persistent, unchanging world without the hope of another dawn.

"Fata Morgana" expresses the quest for the unknown. The speaker chases after the "blue-eyed phantom" without explaining what it is or why it is worth chasing. Sister M. Madeleva believes the poem represents the search for a spiritual Paradise. She says Rossetti's

"homesickness for heaven" caused her to write this. "To Rossetti... earth was a place of exile" (quoted in Charles 75).

The idea of pursuit is contained in the structure of the poem, also. The quick leaping effect of the first two lines of each stanza is largely due to the hard consonants—b, k, t, d, and g. "It breaks the sunlight bound on bound:/Goes singing as it leaps along." In the last two lines of each stanza the "full vowels" slow the time (Bald 269). The shortened fourth line of each stanza provides a refreshing pause before the chase continues. The action moves from the chase in the first half of the poem to the need for sleep in the last half. The "dreamy sound" of the "dreamy song" precludes the sleep of the last line.

At the beginning of this poem, the goal of the speaker is to catch the phantom, she now wants to "lie down some day,/Lie down and sleep." In Rossetti's world, according to Adventist belief, the pursuit of heaven and the pursuit of sleep are the same. If the sleep of the poem is a "Soul Sleep," the two goals become one. However, like "When I am Dead, My Dearest," this poem also contains a note of pessimism. The title, "Fata Morgana" refers to a mirage. The speaker will never overtake a mirage. The goal will never over be reached. If the speaker is attempting to reach heaven, as Sister Madeleva suggests, Rossetti is saying that heaven is a pipe dream, a mirage; it does not exist.

The joyous nature of this pursuit is echoed in "A Summer Wish." Here the speaker envies the carefree attitude of the flowers and birds. The rose is "meant/chiefly to give delight." The bird sings whether it is heard or not. The flower blooms for the "butterfly and bee." All

nature seems to know what to do instinctually, whereas the speaker does not. In the last two stanzas, she longs for this natural contentment:

Oh that it were with me

As with the flower;

* * *

Oh that my work were done

As birds' that soar

Rejoicing in the sun. (15-6, 22-4)

She wants to achieve these goals so that she "so might rest once more/
Cool with refreshing dew." This "refreshing dew" suggests a renewal which is also related to "Soul Sleep." This poem offers a great contrast between the subject and its presentation. The speaker yearns for the natural joy that is found in nature. She wants to be more like the plants and animals. Her language, however, is stilted and filled with overworked phrases. Some of the rhymes are painfully predictable:

Drop down thine evening dew

To gather it anew

When day is bright:

I fancy thou wast meant

Chiefly to give delight. (3-7)

One feels that the speaker will never obtain the carefree simplicity of nature. The rigid conformity of the poem negates the possibility of natural spontaneity, but this can be seen as either a strength or a weakness. If the conformity is used to emphasize that the work of the speaker is not done "as birds' that soar/Rejoicing in

the sun," then it strengthens the poem. Conversely the failure to achieve, or even attempt to achieve, nature's simplicity in this poem can be seen as a weakness.

"Up-Hill" which also deals with the pursuit of a goal, attempts to blend its subject and its structure.

In "Up-Hill," the halting movement of the short lines made up largely of monosyllables reproduces the effect needed to reach "that inn"; there is no increment from each paired question and answer or from stanza to stanza so that each exchange has a finality of its own and further emphasizes the laborious quality of the journey which the poem describes.

(Brzenk 369)

The use of questions emphasizes the laborious quality, by making the poem a type of riddle. By finding the answer, one obtains the goal.

Though the meter shows skill, the rhymes are all predictably standard: "night" and "sight," "before" and "door." Rossetti has not presented a new or exciting variation on the life-as-a-journey image either.

The goal of the speaker is the bed in the inn. Seen as a place to rest, to sleep, it is also approached with trepidation. The speaker is afraid of the unknown.

The belief in rebirth, generally accepted, is rejected in one poem. In "My Dream," rebirth is to be feared. The kingly crocodile, "lord and master of his kin" lives an immoral life. "He knew no law, he feared no binding law." After he devours all of the minor crocodiles, he falls asleep, with the "luscious fat distilled upon his chin." In sleep comes judgment, however. The crocodile shrinks. He awakens to

see a frightening mystical vessel. This ship, "Swift as a swallow, subtle as a flame," is white with a purple shadow. These colors, generally symbolizing purity and royalty, and the ship's ability to calm the water suggest that it is the ship of a god. Humbled in sleep, the crocodile is prepared to meet his god.

This poem is reminiscent of "Goblin Market" with its vivid imagery and its informal pattern of rhyme. The introductory stanza, with its high frequency vowels, "Hear now a curious dream I dreamed last night, / Each word whereof is weighed and sifted truth" introduces a sense of excitement. The first appearance of the crocodiles is as they rise from the waves, and the plosives of these lines are verbal representations of their arrival: "Young crocodiles, a gaunt blunt-featured crew, / Fresh-hatched perhaps and daubed with birthday dew."

As in "Goblin Market" Rossetti's descriptions of the grotesque creatures are particularly detailed, and the choice of verbs wonderfully apt.

Each crocodile was girt with massive gold
 And polished stones that with their wearers grew:
 But one there was who waxed beyond the rest,
 Wore kinglier girdle and a kingly crown,
 Whilst crowns and orbs and sceptres starred his breast.

All gleamed compact and green with scale on scale
 And special burnishment adorned his mail
 And special terror weighed upon his frown;
 His punier brethren quaked before his tail,
 Broad as a rafter, potent as a flail.

The two similes of the last line, which alter the iambic meter,

emphasize the strength of his tail. Its power is unable to be contained within a set rhythm.

Another strength is the similes of nature which surround the ship. Particularly fresh and inventive are the phrases "swift as a swallow, subtle as a flame," and "weightless as an idle mote."

"'My Dream' is not a real dream, yet it is the only poem in the volume that depicts a rebirth as a time of revenge" (Pakcer 93). Did Rossetti feel she had to lessen the impact of the poem by attributing it to her subconscious? Perhaps she felt that writing about the eerie, in-between world would reveal too many of her own doubts and fears. In any case, the use of the dream-form "discloses all conscious responsibility for the statement in the poem, and repels an interpretation of its content" (Kaplan 73).

Though Rossetti most often expresses rebirth through the imagery of nature and sleep, she seems to believe that renewal can best be found through the grace of the savior. At the beginning of "A Better Resurrection," the speaker admits:

I have no wit, no words, no tears;

My heart within me like a stone

Is numbed too much for hopes or fears. (1-3)

It is as if Rossetti is saying that her "wit," her "words," her imagery, her comparisons, are unable to adequately express the concept of rebirth. Yet she then proceeds to disprove that by creating beautiful images to express the fragility of life:

My life is like a faded leaf,

My harvest dwindles to a husk;

Truly my life is void and brief

And tedious in the barren dusk;
 My life is like a frozen thing,
 No bud nor greenness can I see. (9-14)

According to this poem, however, resurrection can only be understood by experiencing it through a relationship with Jesus. Without Him, there is no hope of revival—"life is void and brief/And tedious in the barren dusk."

Lona Mosk Packer sees the poem as a series of negative and positive currents:

The negative or countercurrent which initiates each stanza is expressed in a series of rapidly shifting images, sharp, dynamic, bold-clear as black shadows on a sunlit wall. But the positive or centric current seizes and transforms the imagery at the conclusion of each stanza, so that by means of the varied refrain, a crescendo effect rising to a climax in the third stanza is achieved. (111)

The positive current takes over when, in the three foot line at the end of each stanza, Jesus is implored to help.

O Jesus, quicken me.
 * * *
 O Jesus, rise in me.
 * * *
 O Jesus, drink of me. (8,16, 24)

It is he who "seizes and transforms" the negative—the life which is a "falling," "faded leaf"; "a frozen thing"; "a broken bowl." It is he who can "melt and remould," revive and resurrect. His resurrection is superior to that seen in nature and in sleep.

According to Rossetti's poems, not only do humans long for this rebirth, as in "A Better Resurrection," but Jesus longs to give it. In "'The Love of Christ Which Passeth Knowledge,'" which is written in the first person from Christ's point of view, he asks the reader to share his crown—to "come and reap." The repetition of "thee" or "thou" twelve times in the poem highlights the relationship between the savior, Christ, and the one needing to be saved, the reader. The emphasis here, however, is on the savior-as-martyr. Christ's account of his suffering dominates the piece, yet his account lacks graphic details. His dispassionate description is not nearly as intense as the description of Lizzie's suffering in "Goblin Market":

Tho' the goblins cuffed and caught her,

Coaxed and fought her

Bullied and besought her,

Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,

Kicked and knocked her,

Mauled and mocked her,

Lizzie uttered not a word. (424-30)

Lizzie's pain is viewed as more severe because she is a young child. Harming a child seems more despicable than harming a man. More importantly, Lizzie's torture is more severe because Rossetti shows us its severity by using many descriptive verbs, which are filled with plosives: "cuffed," "caught," "coaxed," "bullied," "kicked." Her torture sounds much worse than that described by Christ in "The Love of Christ...." He is detached in his account.

Thee did nails grave upon my hands, thy name
 Did thorns for frontlets stamp between mine eyes:

* * * * *

A thief upon my right hand and my left;
 Six hours alone, athirst, in misery. (17-8, 21-2)

He reminds the reader of why he endured the pain:

For thee I thirsted in the daily drouth,

For thee I trembled in the nightly frost:

Much sweeter thou than honey to My mouth. (9-11)

By downplaying his torture, however, he also downplays its importance.

Christ, as Good Shepherd is not the only Savior in the volume, however. The good shepherds in "The Lambs of Grasmere, 1860" are also saviors. The poem begins with a description of the starving lambs. The strong sensory images convey the animal's plight. The mothers butt their offspring. The piteous sounds are heard, and the white bones lie on the wet ground. The alliterative phrases "milkless mothers" and "mothers milk" emphasize the lambs' sucking. The nasal m "is associated with the affectionate and sensitive lips, which bring the human child the first pleasure it knows—food and the warm presence of its mother" (Nims 173).

The sounds turn the shepherds into mothers. The lambs depend on the shepherds for life, and the shepherds are always there. This dependency is emphasized in the repetition of words and sounds in the second stanza.

Day after day, night after night,

From lamb to lamb the shepherds went

With teapots for the bleating mouths

Instead of nature's nourishment.

The little shivering gaping things

Soon knew the step that brought them aid,

And fondled the protecting hand

And rubbed it with a wooly head. (9-16)

In the third stanza, the joy of being saved is expressed through word choice and the use of plosives: "Skipping, and leaping on the lea,/ Bleating in tender, trustful tones." The creative use of feminine rhymes also strengthens the poem. "Shepherds went" rhymes with "nourishment," "foreign strand" with "Westmoreland." The fourth stanza moves away from the shared intimacy of the lambs, the reader, and the shepherds. An unknown "I" forces her way into the last lines, though she is not needed. Her purpose is merely to state what is already evident from the poem. The shepherds deserve praise because they saved the sheep.

Sometimes people may not know they need to be saved. The bride in "Love From the North" believes she is making the right choice in the beginning of the poem. Her groom, like the first two stanzas which describe him, is agreeable, predictable.

He saddened if my cheer was sad,
 But gay he grew if I was gay;
 We never differed on a hair,
 My yes his yes, my nay his nay. (5-8)

The strong monotonously rhythmic meter, many monosyllabic words and end stops are appropriate when describing a man who "never dared to say me nay."

When the bride begins to doubt, the structure of the poem becomes

more complicated. Her confusion is expressed in the form of the poem itself. There are fewer end stops, and more polysyllabic words. Finally the man from the north seems to be the right choice. Not only does the bride seem happy, but by going with him she fulfills the pattern of ending each stanza with "nay." This pattern of rhyme gives a sense of completeness to the action. The success of the relationship is confirmed by the structure of the poem itself. Once again, as in "Goblin Market," "Twilight Calm," "Echo," and so many others, the poem is enhanced by the combination of technical and imaginative skills.

Another element, often overlooked, is the sheer variety of the imagery in Rossetti's poems. She devotes approximately one third of this volume to poems concerning renewal, yet each poem presents a fresh approach. There is renewal in nature, seen in the cycle of winter to spring in "Winter Wain," and in the day to night cycle of "Twilight Calm." There is renewal through "Sweet Sleep" in the similar yet separate poems, "Sweet Sleep," "Dross Land," and "Rest." There is renewal through "Love From The North," and through "Christ In The Desert" and "The Love of Christ Which Passeth Knowledge." Rossetti's ability to present multiple interpretations of a single subject combined with her skillful use of imagery, rhyme and meter result in a culmination of talent

Though Goblin Market and Other Poems is Christina Rossetti's first volume, it exemplifies her many strengths. "Goblin Market" itself is a beautiful poem, a lasting tribute to the skill of its author. In it, Rossetti is able to combine story and structure, binding the tale of the sisters' love together with free-spirited rhymes, vivid images and a varying meter. Similarly the meter in "Up-Hill" and "Fata Morgana" emphasizes the difficulty of the journey in each poem, and the reassuring quality of consistent rhyme is used to express harmony in "Twilight Calm." Rossetti's technical ability is inseparably linked with her imagination. Thus the frolicking goblin men are both funny and frightening, and the kingly crocodile is almost endearingly human. The unknown terror and loneliness of the grave are revealed with uncanny realism in "Echo." Even in these early poems, Rossetti manages to combine subject, imagery, rhyme, and meter to express her ideas.

Another strength, often overlooked, is the sheer variety of the imagery in Rossetti's poems. She devotes approximately one third of this volume to poems concerning renewal, yet each poem presents a fresh approach. There is renewal in nature, seen in the cycle of winter to spring in "Winter Rain," and in the day to night cycle of "Twilight Calm." There is renewal through "Sound Sleep" in the similar yet separate poems, "Sound Sleep," "Dream Land," and "Rest." There is renewal through a savior in "Love From The North," and through Christ in "A Better Resurrection" and "The Love of Christ Which Passeth Knowledge." Rossetti's ability to present multiple interpretations of a single subject combined with her skillful use of imagery, rhyme and meter result in a culmination of talent

rarely seen in a young poet. *Works Cited*

As evidenced in this early volume, Christina Rossetti is a skilled poet. To see her skill, one must only read her poetry. There is no need to examine speculative biographies, Freudian analyses, or feminist theories. As Virginia Woolf states, "All that Rossetti wants us to know about is in her poetry. 'Behold this green volume'" (57).

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