

***Conjugal Love and the Afterlife:*
New Readings of Selected Works
by Dante Gabriel Rossetti
in the Context of Swedenborgian-Spiritualism**

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Abstract

This thesis re-examines selected works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the light of a specific engagement with Victorian spiritualism, which is characterised by an interest in the esoteric writings of the eighteenth-century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. It locates Rossetti's use of Swedenborgian imagery and ideas in his written and artistic work, contextualising it within his engagement with spiritualism, and with reference to his interest in a visionary tradition of literature. The thesis therefore furthers what has begun in embryo in both Rossetti and Victorian scholarship; drawing together two hitherto separate areas of research, to formulate new and detailed inter-disciplinary readings of Rossetti's poetry, fine art and design.

The critical approach is twofold, combining historical scholarship with textual analysis. A cultural context is re-established which uncovers a network of Swedenborgian and spiritualist circles, and through original research, Rossetti's connections to these are revealed. The specific approach of these groups, which this thesis calls 'Swedenborgian-spiritualism' (thereby naming a new term), is characterised by an intellectual, literary interest in Swedenborg, coupled with a practical engagement with spiritualism, and a fascination with the mesmeric trance state.

In addressing three major works, 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) and *The House of Life* (1881), the thesis traces Rossetti's engagement with Swedenborgian-spiritualism through three distinct phases in his career, the result of which facilitates a greater understanding of the development of his poetics and artistry. In addition, the thesis returns to earlier critical sources, which show a response to Rossetti in this light, and questions long rooted assumptions which persist in Rossetti scholarship. Thus, it adds to the body of critical literature on Rossetti by re-establishing context and readings which are needed in order to fully understand his work, and reinstating a critical engagement with Rossetti that has become sidelined, or forgotten.

Table of Contents

Declaration	
Acknowledgments	
List of Abbreviations	
Introduction	1
<i>Part One: Background</i>	8
Chapter 1: Literature Review	9
Chapter 2: Context	36
<i>Part Two: The Dead Beloved</i>	79
Chapter 3: The Blessed Damozel	80
Chapter 4: Beata Beatrix	127
<i>Part Three: The House of Life</i>	161
Chapter 5: The House of Life, 1	162
Chapter 6: The House of Life, 2	209
Conclusion	246
Bibliography	260
Illustrations	277

Declaration

This thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted in any form for the award of a Higher Degree at any other educational institution.

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“Would God I knew there were a God to thank, When thanks rise in me!”
– Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *notebook fragment*

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Abbreviations

- CL* Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugial Love*, trans. by John Chadwick (London: Swedenborg Society, 1996)
- Correspondence* *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by William E. Fredeman, 9 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004-2010)
[Number of volume accessed given in reference details]
- CPP* *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann (New Haven and London, 2003)
- CW* *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Writings*, ed. by Jan Marsh (London: J.M. Dent, 1999)
- DLW* Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, trans. by Clifford Harley and Doris H. Harley (London: Swedenborg Society, 1969; repr. 1987)
- HH* Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell*, trans. by James Robson Rendell (London: Swedenborg Society, 1905)
- HH2* Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, trans. by K.C. Ryder (London: Swedenborg Society, 2010)
- List of Books* William Michael Rossetti, *A list of books belonging to D.G. Rossetti [c.1866] compiled 1905*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Facs. d. 269 d (fols. 145-7)
- ODNB* Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
[Information regarding individual entries given in reference details]
- PRB Journal* *The P.R.B. Journal: William Michael Rossetti's Diary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 1849-1853*, ed. by William E. Fredeman (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1975)
- RP* *Rossetti Papers 1862-1870*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Sands, 1903; repr. New York: AMS, 1870)
- Rossetti Archive* *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann (A Hypermedia Archive)
[<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/index.html>]
[Information regarding specific entries given in reference details]
- SD* William Michael Rossetti, *Séance Diary (1865–8)*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Angeli–Dennis Collection, Films 1676/3, Microfilm 3, Series A.1.3.

Introduction

This thesis re-examines the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti within the context of a particular engagement with Victorian spiritualism. This context is characterised by an interest in the eighteenth-century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, whose writings about the immortality of the soul and the nature of love and (reunion in) the afterlife enjoyed a revival in the mid-late nineteenth century in spiritualist circles. The early, and influential, histories of spiritualism, such as Frank Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism: A History and Criticism* (1902) and *The History of Spiritualism* (1926) by Arthur Conan Doyle, begin by establishing the importance of Swedenborg and his visionary writings upon the growth of the movement. The casting of Swedenborg as 'the first and greatest of modern mediums' emphasises the nature of his influence:¹

The idea of intercourse with distinctively human spirits, if not actually introduced by Swedenborg, at least established itself first in the popular consciousness through his teaching. Emanuel Swedenborg is therefore deservedly ranked as the first Spiritualist [...]. His special contribution to the Spiritualist belief consists in his conception of a future life.²

It is this aspect of Swedenborg that influenced Rossetti and those of his immediate circle, rather than the beliefs of New Church Swedenborgians, who formed a religion from his writings, and had little interest in the association with Swedenborg in the development of Victorian spiritualism.

Swedenborg's ideas were also taken up by those interested in the literary and artistic traditions of esotericism. This was often also accompanied by an interest in mesmerism, in so far as it related to spiritualism in its connection to the idea of clairvoyant trance.³ This particular engagement with spiritualism has recently begun to be recognised in embryo, but not named, by a few recent revisionist writers on Victorian spiritualism, who identify a group of intellectual, literary Swedenborgians

¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, 2 vols (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1926), 1, p. 12.

² Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and Criticism*, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1902), 1, p. 15.

³ Mesmerism is seen as an essential aspect of the development of Victorian spiritualism. Most histories of the phenomenon include discussion of its importance. See for example Podmore, 1, chapters IV, VII and VIII; pp. 51-66, 92-131.

who engaged with spiritualism and séance practice. This thesis uncovers Rossetti's connections to that group, defining their particular engagement as 'Swedenborgian-spiritualism' and, in doing so, establishes a new term which characterises a fresh and specific context in which to locate Rossetti's work.

It is the contention of this thesis that certain major works by Rossetti which deal with the themes of love, death and the afterlife cannot be fully understood without the retrieval of this specific context. Whilst the thesis acknowledges that Rossetti's written and artistic productions betray a synthesis of influences, both artistic-literary and historical-biographical, it seeks to thoroughly reinstate the influence of Swedenborgian-spiritualism as a significant factor in the shaping of key Rossetti works. These works include: the painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), the sonnet sequence *The House of Life* (1881) and the different published versions of the poem 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850-81). In order to demonstrate this, the thesis adopts a critical approach that combines historical research with textual analysis. Part 1 locates a historical, cultural and biographical background for Rossetti and his work, and establishes the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism. Parts 2 and 3 of the thesis present a series of new readings of selected Rossetti works (both written and pictorial) that deal with love and the afterlife, in order to show the presence of Swedenborgian-spiritualist imagery and ideas. In addition the thesis to some extent locates specific works within the literary and artistic traditions that respond to this context.

The twofold critical approach of the thesis emerged as the most thorough way of re-establishing an element essential to a complete understanding of Rossetti. It is also an approach that is suited to the interdisciplinary nature of the thesis, which analyses both artistic and written texts, and considers historical, cultural and biographical factors which influence their production. A range of published and unpublished sources, both primary and secondary were consulted in order to achieve this. The depth of textual analysis in this thesis, coupled with the establishment of a historical, cultural and biographical context, in order to establish an essential aspect of Rossetti's work, represents a fresh approach to Rossetti scholarship.

However, it must be stressed that whilst this thesis addresses both Rossetti's pictorial and literary productions, and in certain sections addresses their interrelationship (see Chapter 6) it does not employ a critical framework dependent on their interaction. Whilst this is an acknowledged and important aspect of Rossetti

criticism, and an obvious one considering his tendency to dual expression as Poet-Painter, the main aim of this thesis is to locate and re-establish the Swedenborgian-spiritualist elements, in order to elucidate one of the significant sources that Rossetti utilises in his presentation of key works associated with love and the afterlife. The thesis employs a chronological structure in order to show the developing nature of Rossetti's relationship to this context. This means that key works are considered for the most part in isolation, which to some extent precludes an intertextual critical engagement. Whilst on this subject it must be noted that although the thesis alludes to the influential presence of certain texts on Rossetti's works, such as Swedenborg's *Conjugial Love* (1768) and Blake's writing and designs, it does not employ a critical stance that engages with intertextual theory. Rather, it focuses on recovered instances of Swedenborgian-spiritualism in three important works from Rossetti's oeuvre.

Following the Literature Review (Chapter 1), the thesis begins with a chapter which re-establishes a context around Rossetti. It locates the importance of social, literary and Swedenborgian-spiritualist circles around Rossetti, in order to re-form a lost contextual framework through which to view his work. The importance of the social and cultural networks, to which Rossetti was connected, is considered and the value of biography in terms of establishing, or supporting, this context is brought to the fore.

After establishment of context, Parts 2 and 3 of the thesis address key works, analysing them systematically. They move chronologically from the early published poem 'The Blessed Damozel' from 1850 (written at a time of Rossetti's burgeoning interest in spiritualism, and more subject to secondary sources of Swedenborgian influence), via the painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) (produced at the height of Victorian spiritualism and the period of Rossetti's most direct engagement with it), through to the work that can be seen as the culmination of Rossetti's poetic achievement, *The House of Life* sonnet sequence, which was written across many years and was refined and published in complete form in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), the year before he died. A number of secondary works, both written and pictorial are brought into the discussion, where relevant, to support the main thesis.

Part 2 of the thesis is entitled *The Dead Beloved*, which is a term used by this thesis to describe one of the major themes employed by Rossetti in his poetry and painting; the figure of a beloved woman who has died. The two works considered here

in detail are the first published version of the poem 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850) (Chapter 3) and the original version of the painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) (Chapter 4). In looking at these two significant 'dead beloved' works that are informed by Swedenborgian-spiritualism, the thesis moves from an early work by Rossetti, which represents a predominantly intellectual engagement with the context, to a work which directly responds to it.

Despite addressing the subject of the dead beloved, and in awareness of the inherent and implied gender issues which attend it, the thesis does not engage with gender criticism. Although acknowledged and understood, the gender relationships and dynamics within Victorian spiritualism and its practices and the gender essentialism that characterises Swedenborg's writings are not addressed. The thesis focuses instead on reinstating, through textual analysis (predominantly in terms of imagery) and retrieval of context, a major influence upon Rossetti's presentation of the subject.

In concentrating on the first published version of the poem 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), Chapter 3 establishes that, even in this early version of a work of lifelong importance, the beginnings of a response to Swedenborgian-spiritualism is evident. This is exposed through a reading of the text which identifies the Swedenborgian imagery in the work. It shows an awareness of, and the beginnings of, an engagement with said ideas. At this point in his career, the influence has come predominantly through secondary sources. In accessing Swedenborgian ideas with which to present his Damozel, Rossetti is responding to a literary heritage that includes Swedenborg. This represents secondary knowledge – predominantly gleaned through his reading. The influence of the Romantic Gothic tradition which informs Rossetti's particular adoption of Swedenborgian ideas is therefore considered, indicating that he is responding to an esoteric literary tradition. Works by Edgar Allan Poe and William Blake, which are known to have informed 'The Blessed Damozel', are re-evaluated in terms of their significance as secondary sources of Swedenborgian influence, a factor which has not been discussed before in critical responses to Rossetti.

Analysis is limited in this chapter to the early version of the poem; the time at which it was first written is crucial in the narrative of Rossetti's relationship with Swedenborgian-spiritualism. The later published versions of 'The Blessed Damozel' poem and *The Blessed Damozel* paintings (produced over 20 years after the first

version of the poem), are considered later in the study as they reflect the changing nature of Rossetti's engagement with context. The linearity of this course of argument, while central to the aim of the thesis in showing the relationship with context through certain key stages, therefore precludes an intertextual response which may be the usual method in addressing Rossetti's multiple works.

In the painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) the intellectual is succeeded by the experiential, as what informs the work is less a tradition and more a direct context. Here is the period of Rossetti's immersion in séances and spiritualism, and of a more direct and serious consideration of Swedenborgian ideas. The chapter on Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) looks at the original version of this painting, analysing its content and presentation in light of Swedenborgian-spiritualism, suggesting it is a text as significant as other texts produced in this period by those in Rossetti's Swedenborgian-spiritualist circle. Produced at the height of the years of Rossetti's engagement with spiritualism, it can be seen as Rossetti's *Séance Diary*, encapsulating his experiences. This chapter also addresses Rossetti's reinterpretation of the Dante subject within the context of Victorian spiritualism, showing that his presentation of the love between Dante and Beatrice is informed by Swedenborgian ideas on romantic love, thereby showing the distinction between Dante, and Rossetti's Dante. It also reconsiders the critical importance of biography in the consideration of the painting, acknowledging its value in so far as it elucidates, and supports, context. The painting is treated as a standalone, as it occupies an important and special place in Rossetti's oeuvre as a text of cultural significance. Despite potential intertextual relationships with other Rossetti works (of which the sonnet 'The Portrait', written 1868, is perhaps the most frequently cited), it does not have a direct poetical equivalent, such as *Proserpine* (1874) and *Astarte Syriaca* (1877) which have accompanying sonnets. It also stands apart from Rossetti's numerous Aesthetic paintings from the same period, exemplified by *The Blue Bower* (1865), which further emphasises its unique status.

Part 3 of the thesis looks at Rossetti's sonnet sequence *The House of Life* (1881) and brings in for consideration a selection of paintings and designs by Rossetti which visually embody a similar response to context. A number of the sonnets are analysed in terms of their Swedenborgian imagery, and consideration is given to the form of the work, which also represents Rossetti's particular interpretation of Swedenborgian ideas. Here is the culmination of his interpretation of those ideas, as *The House of Life*

was written over an extended period throughout Rossetti's life. However, it was published in its complete form in 1881, towards the end of his life and, as such, was subject to alterations and additions which are pertinent to this last and most sophisticated phase of his work. *The House of Life* (1881) represents the most developed use of the Swedenborgian-spiritualist context. Here earthly love as a precursor to heavenly reunion is explored in addition to thoughts on the approaching afterlife. The sequence contains an explicit reference to Swedenborg in the three 'True Woman' sonnets, which, as they were written shortly before publication of *The House of Life* (1881), represent Rossetti's engagement with the context at this time. These sonnets embody Rossetti's most thorough and personal use of Swedenborgian ideas; thus the two chapters on *The House of Life* finish with consideration of these three poems.

Parts 2 and 3 of the thesis trace the development of Rossetti's engagement with the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism, by cataloguing its manifestation, in terms predominantly of imagery, at various key stages in his career. The two parts, which in essence analyse three major works, can be seen as corresponding to the phases that Rossetti himself laid down in the structure of *The House of Life* (1881). In the work he moves from 'Youth and Change' in the first part, to 'Change and Fate' in the second; highlighting, in fact, three distinct stages, which work well in reflecting those covered by this thesis. 'Youth' is represented by 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), an early work which draws predominantly upon secondary sources of Swedenborgian-spiritualism, found through Rossetti's discovery of Poe and Blake. *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), which represents that context pulled through the experiential side of Victorian spiritualism, represents 'Change', as it exemplifies Rossetti's conversion from a predominantly intellectual response to context, to an actual one, after the death of his wife Lizzie Siddal. *The House of Life* (1881) therefore can be seen as representing 'Fate'; a body of work which signifies Rossetti's ultimate response to the context. What begins as an intellectual response characterised predominantly by an interest in literary and artistic prototypes (and a burgeoning interest in aspects of Victorian spiritualism, namely mesmerism), becomes deepened by actual experience of séances after the death of Siddal; prompting a deeper involvement with Swedenborgian-spiritualism. Consequently later work shows a more emphatic engagement with

Swedenborgian ideas on love and the afterlife, suggesting that by the end of his life, he had clarified his vision.

This study concludes with a consideration of the different published versions of the poem 'The Blessed Damozel', which coincide with these three key stages, and thereby support the thesis as a whole.

Part One:
Background

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Part 1: The Current Situation with Regard to Rossetti,

Pre-Raphaelitism and Occult Scholarship; Recent Studies Cited

The current cultural climate has seen an increase in interest in the history of esoteric ideas and the occult. The republication of Colin Wilson's 1979 book *The Occult* (2004), and recent texts such as David S. Katz's *The Occult Tradition* (2005) and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (2008) are testament to this current interest.¹ This has inevitably led to critical re-evaluations of writers and artists using this aspect of scholarship. Rodger Drew's 2007 book on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Stream's Secret: The Symbolism of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2007), seeks to identify the sources for Rossetti's appropriation of aspects of occult imagery and symbolism.² Drew's book, based on his 1996 PhD thesis 'Symbolism and Sources in the Painting and Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 1996) discusses selected poems and paintings in the light of neoplatonic ideas and the history of hermeticism. In a section in his book entitled 'Rosicrucian Symbolism in the Pre-Raphaelite Circle' (pp. 181-199), Drew suggests Rossetti's interests were shared by his artistic coterie, and briefly re-evaluates selected works by other Pre-Raphaelites in this light. This is an important text as it locates Rossetti's work within an esoteric tradition of occult ideas, which has hitherto been critically under-explored. That he also suggests Rossetti was not alone in his esotericism bears witness to a shared intellectual context. However, Drew's research does not extend to the socio-cultural climate within which Rossetti's works were created, and stops short of mentioning one of the most immediate contextual sources for Rossetti's absorption of certain esoteric ideas: Victorian spiritualism, which was informed in part by the mystical writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, a key figure associated with the history of the occult. Drew avoids direct

¹ Colin Wilson, *The Occult* (London: Grafton, 1979; repr. London: Watkins, 2004); David S. Katz, *The Occult Tradition: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005); and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

² All references to 'Drew' in the thesis refer to this book and not the thesis by the same author.

discussion of Swedenborg in favour of other occult sources that he claims influenced Rossetti and his Pre-Raphaelite brethren, despite bringing Swedenborg briefly into the orbit of his own argument. In Drew's text Swedenborg is mentioned in a note, along with Blake, as a more contemporary incarnation of the neoplatonic ideas that he claims influenced Rossetti (p. 304, note 8).

Drew's research is also indicative of the resurgence of interest in Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in both a critical and popularist sense over the last two decades. Jerome McGann's *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must be Lost* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), an important re-evaluation of Rossetti's work, and his establishment of the *Rossetti Archive*, an extensive electronic resource, represent recent scholarly works which re-establish Rossetti's importance within the history of ideas. McGann's 2003 edition of Rossetti's collected poetry and prose, published by Yale University Press is a recent scholarly edition of Rossetti's work.³ Another recent Rossetti collection is Jan Marsh's *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Writings* (1999), published by J.M. Dent, London.⁴ Marsh's body of research on Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites has resulted in a number of useful and accessible secondary sources that include biographies of Rossetti (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999)), his sister Christina (*Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994)) and his wife Elizabeth Siddal (*The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (London: Quartet, 1989)). Marsh's work on the female artists of the Pre-Raphaelite movement represented by *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (London: Quartet, 1985), *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), and those in collaboration with Pamela Gerrish Nunn (*Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement* (London: Virago, 1989); *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998)) are other useful resources.

William Fredeman's work on Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites represents a significant contribution to the body of scholarly literature on Rossetti and his circle. His edition of *The P.R.B. Journal: William Michael Rossetti's Diary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 1849-1853* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) is an important

³ *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann (New Haven and London, 2003). Hereafter cited as *CPP*.

⁴ *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Writings*, ed. by Jan Marsh (London: J.M. Dent, 1999). Hereafter cited as *CW*.

resource, as are his many articles and monographs on Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites.⁵ Fredeman's major editorial achievement is the series of Rossetti correspondence, published by D.S. Brewer. These texts represent the definitive collection of extant Rossetti letters and are therefore an important primary research resource. Published from 2002 and running into nine volumes, they are also amongst the most recent flowering of Rossetti scholarship. Furthermore, his 1965 essay on Rossetti's *The House of Life* (1881) is of particular relevance, as it provides a thorough critical response to Rossetti's sonnet sequence.⁶ Fredeman addresses the sequence as a whole, in addition to considering the range of previous critical responses. There are several editions of the sonnet sequence, including an embryonic version included in Rossetti's *Poems* (1870). A scholarly work that documents these textual variants is the recently published variorum edition by Roger C. Lewis: *The House of Life: A Sonnet Sequence by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Variorum Edition; with an Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2007). A recent critical work on *The House of Life* by John Holmes, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence: Sexuality, Belief and the Self* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) places Rossetti at the forefront of a renaissance of English sonneteers, and opens with detailed discussion of the work, identifying Rossetti's use of Christian symbolism in his depiction of sexual love as a crucial aspect. This, Holmes acknowledges, has been the most problematic aspect in the history of critical responses, recognising that critical accounts often err 'in their assumption that the exaltation of Love necessarily needs to be to the exclusion of the Christian God' (pp. 26-7). In this, Holmes argues, Rossetti has drawn from a range of sources, including Dante, the New Testament and the Romantic poets, but Holmes does not mention Swedenborg, whose ideas on love can account for Rossetti's glorification of romantic love within a Christian context.

Other recent works are testament to the increased presence of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites within popular, as well as critical, culture. Popular, but well researched works which concentrate upon the private lives of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, such as Franny Moyle's recent *Desperate Romantics: The Private Lives of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: John Murray, 2009), which accompanied a light, fictional

⁵ Hereafter cited as *PRB Journal*.

⁶ William E. Fredeman, 'Rossetti's "In Memoriam": An Elegiac Reading of *The House of Life*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 47 (1965), 298–341. As regards *The House of Life* (1881), hereafter in this chapter I have not referred to the publication date in text.

BBC drama and a series of documentaries on the Pre-Raphaelites, and Lucinda Hawksley's book on Lizzie Siddal, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel* (London: Andre Deutsch, 2004), represent works of lesser critical importance but remain testament to the surge of interest in the subject. The 2006 book *Lady Trevelyan and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* by John Batchelor (London: Chatto & Windus, 2006) represents a more serious, yet accessible study of the group, viewed through the context of one of their major patrons, as does the recent biography by Angela Thirlwell on Rossetti's brother and sister-in-law: *William and Lucy: The Other Rossettis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003). Thirlwell's book provides a unique scholarly view of the subject, being the first recent work to highlight the impact of spiritualism upon Rossetti's circle. In parts she quotes directly from William Michael Rossetti's unpublished *Séance Diary*, a primary text of major contextual importance.⁷

Recent comprehensive texts informed by current critical thinking are represented by Elizabeth Prettejohn's *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate, 2000) which provides an overview of Pre-Raphaelitism formed from a collection of critical responses which includes sections on technical and formal considerations, gender studies, and feminist revisionist methodologies. In addition a chapter suggesting contexts for the art works is included, acknowledging the importance of historical and cultural frameworks in the creation of texts. Dinah Roe's edited book of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, *The Pre-Raphaelites: From Rossetti to Ruskin* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010) provides a thorough and scholarly selection of poetry from the major figures associated with Pre-Raphaelitism.⁸ Roe's recent biography of the Rossetti family entitled *The Rossettis in Wonderland: A Victorian Family History* (London: Haus, 2011) offers a series of new perspectives on their lives and achievements, viewed through the socio-historical contexts of the artistic, literary and spiritual communities with which they were involved. A recent volume edited by David Clifford and Laurence Roussillon, *Outsiders Looking In: The Rossettis Then and Now* (London: Anthem Press,

⁷ William Michael Rossetti, *Séance Diary* (1865–8). Oxford, Bodleian Library, Angeli–Dennis Collection, Films 1676/3, Microfilm 3, Series A.1.3. Hereafter cited as *SD*.

⁸ Another thorough and useful anthology which details the written work of the Pre-Raphaelites is Carolyn Hares-Stryker's edition *An Anthology of Pre-Raphaelite Writings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), which contains excerpts from key examples of literature, criticism and memoirs, interspersed with illustrations that help to contextualise the poetry selected.

2004), brings together a series of diverse critical essays on the Rossetti family by renowned Rossetti scholars, including Jerome McGann, Jan Marsh and Clive Wilmer. The text explores the Rossettis in their own time from many perspectives, providing a range of contexts within which to locate their life and work, from politics and religion to poetics and nationality. The book also explores, to some degree, their literary legacy.

Other important scholarly critical texts include *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext*, edited by Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), which seeks to re-establish major Pre-Raphaelites, including Rossetti, in a more central role within nineteenth-century European cultural history. It considers various responses to and definitions of pre-Raphaelitism and how they have shaped scholarship. The importance of Pre-Raphaelitism, hitherto sidelined within the development of modernism, is reconsidered. This text is also important as its thesis has an interdisciplinary approach, which incorporates a range of critical methodologies from different disciplines, including art history, literary and cultural studies. Elizabeth K. Helsinger's *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti & William Morris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008) is another recent work that employs an interdisciplinary approach, responding to both Rossetti's art and literature and their interrelationship, and establishing the role of 'translation' as key to Rossetti's poetics. Elizabeth Prettejohn's *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007) likewise reassesses key pictorial and literary productions by Rossetti, this time within the movement of Aestheticism. Prettejohn considers his work along with that of certain Victorian contemporaries including James McNeill Whistler, Frederick Leighton and Albert Moore, and therefore moves out from a narrow location of Rossetti within early Pre-Raphaelitism to reveal a wider shared context for his work with that of artists previously associated with movements often considered in opposition to Pre-Raphaelitism, such as the Holland Park Circle. In *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) J.B. Bullen also locates Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelitism within Aestheticism, through consideration of its avant-garde aspects, in particular the presentation of the sexualised body. Bullen's text explores the poetry and painting of Rossetti and others using an interdisciplinary method which addresses the culture of the period and the reception of the work in its

own time. His recent book, *Rossetti: Painter & Poet* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011) considers the development of Rossetti's painting through its relationship to his literature and to his life.

Another significant revisionist work is *Pre-Raphaelite Art in its European Context*, edited by Susan P. Casteras and Alicia Craig Faxon (London: Associated University Presses, 1995), which avoids well trodden art historical isolationist responses and takes a wider view, establishing the connections between works by Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites alongside continental works, suggesting a larger cultural climate that incorporates both. Through discussion of specific works and the artistic culture of the period, the text argues that the British works have more in common with their French and European counterparts than has hitherto been acknowledged, and should be reconsidered within the canonical histories, which historically have favoured French and continental works. All four texts; the Prettejohn, Helsing, and the Casteras/Faxon and Barringer/Giebelhausen editions, are important revisions of Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelitism because they acknowledge the necessity of applying new critical angles to the works in order to fully explicate their meaning: they acknowledge that Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites require a fresh scholarly approach, and are indicative of the recent flowering of interest in the field.

The resurgence of interest in, and the critical re-evaluation of, Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites is due in part to a series of exhibitions on the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle in recent years. The most recent and comprehensive of these, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (Tate Britain, 2012-13), sought, like recent critical literature, to re-establish the philosophies and practices of Pre-Raphaelitism within an art historical narrative which favours modernist innovation and avant-gardism. The catalogue, written by the curators Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith, who are major writers in the Pre-Raphaelite and Victorian field, has established itself as an important standard, and includes contribution by Elizabeth Prettejohn.⁹ There have also been a number of other Pre-Raphaelite themed exhibitions, such as the Ashmoleon's *The Pre-Raphaelites and Italy* (2010) and the 2011 exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite watercolours and drawings at Birmingham, which are testament to the renewed interest in Pre-Raphaelite studies. In addition in 2011, the V&A exhibition *The*

⁹ Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (London: Tate, 2012).

Cult of Beauty included works by the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Rossetti, considering their works within the context of the Aesthetic Movement. In addition to this, there have been major retrospectives of individual artists associated with Pre-Raphaelitism. These include the Tate Britain exhibition of *John Everett Millais* (2007-2008), the *William Holman Hunt* at Manchester Art Gallery (2008-9) and the *Simeon Solomon* exhibition of 2005-6 at Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, which featured a range of works with esoteric subject matter.¹⁰ Most recently an exhibition on Ford Madox Brown at Manchester Art Gallery was the first important retrospective on the artist for 50 years. Most pertinently there was a major retrospective exhibition on *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 2003-4. The accompanying exhibition catalogue, with contributions by Victorian scholars Julian Treuherz and Elizabeth Prettejohn is therefore an important recent Rossetti text.¹¹

A significant exhibition of recent times, in establishing a fresh context for Rossetti's artwork, is Tate Britain's exhibition of 1997-8 on Symbolist art: *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*. The exhibition thesis sought to recast Rossetti within European Symbolism. In doing so the critical thrust of the exhibition is in line with recent art historical critical texts (Prettejohn, 2007; Casteras/Faxon, 1995) which seek to revise previously held assumptions about British Victorian art and restore artists like Rossetti to a more central role in cultural history. The exhibition united the two timely subjects hitherto discussed: Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites *and* occult subject matter, through its concentration upon the importance of Symbolism, which is characterised by esoteric motifs and subject matter, such as love, death, sleep and spirituality. The accompanying exhibition catalogue remains a useful text as it identifies the shared cultural context that underpins much of the work presented. The context of esotericism presented is shown as significantly informed by Victorian spiritualism and Theosophy, which includes the presence of Swedenborgian ideas. Robert Upstone's entries on Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), and two works associated with 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850-81); *Sancta Lilies* (1874) and *The Lover – Study for 'The Blessed Damozel'* (c.1878) are perhaps the first contemporary interpretations of Rossetti which introduce the subject of Swedenborgian ideas upon

¹⁰ For details of the accompanying catalogues to the Millais and Solomon exhibitions, consulted in this thesis, see Bibliography.

¹¹ Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn and Edwin Becker, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2003).

his work.¹² Upstone briefly suggests a context for both these works (*Beata Beatrix* and *The Blessed Damozel*) which is situated in the intellectual climate of the period; one that included knowledge of, and an interest in, Swedenborgian ideas. Rossetti's experiences with spiritualism are also mentioned as part of this late nineteenth century context characterised by a rebirth of interest in occult ideologies and practices. However, as brief catalogue entries the pieces stop short of thorough critical investigation and are not supported with academic referencing.

Subsequent to this exhibition, recent responses have begun to briefly acknowledge the influence of a Swedenborgian context upon Rossetti's work. During discussion of Rossetti's influence upon William Butler Yeats in "'How They Met Themselves": Rossetti and Yeats in the 1890s', Pamela Bickley asserts that 'Swedenborg's concept of "Conjugal Love" informs "The Blessed Damozel" and some of the *House of Life* sonnets', but does not elaborate with specifics, other than to mention briefly the sonnet 'True Woman III'.¹³ Lisa Tickner writes that Rossetti 'seems to have been influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg's book, *Conjugal Love* (1768), which argued that sexual love was itself a religious experience through which humans could approach an understanding of the divine'.¹⁴ Likewise Philip Hoare identifies Swedenborg as an influence on Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* in his book *England's Lost Eden: Adventures in a Victorian Utopia* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), suggesting the image represents a Swedenborgian angel (see pp. 206–7). Both Tickner and Hoare would seem to have used Upstone's catalogue entry as an authority; their assertions appear to be unsupported by detailed independent research. However, Hoare moves further into a discussion of the larger context for the work, addressing the interest in Victorian spiritualism amongst Rossetti and his circle. This argument is echoed across his book as a whole, which traces the various alternative spiritual ideas and practices in

¹²*The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*, ed. by Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone (London: Tate, 1997), pp. 154-57, 191-94. The dates given here for the poem 'The Blessed Damozel' refer to its first and last published incarnations. The dates given for *Beata Beatrix* are specific to this thesis; Upstone gives the dates of *Beata Beatrix* as (c.1864-70). Hereafter, in this chapter, the dates of both works are not referred to in text. Further explanation regarding production dates and their significance is given in the chapters which deal specifically with these individual works.

¹³ Pamela Bickley, "'How They Met Themselves": Rossetti and Yeats in the 1890s', in *Yeats Annual No.14: Yeats and the Nineties*, ed. by Warwick Gould (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 50-103 (p. 84-5).

¹⁴ Lisa Tickner, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Tate, 2003), p. 54.

Victorian Britain. Hoare's book is not intended as an academic text, and so stops short of detailed critical investigation. Another important text that acknowledges in embryo the influence of Swedenborg upon Rossetti is Hazel Hutchison's essay 'Ideal Homes: James, Rossetti, and Swedenborg's House of Life' (*Symbiosis*, 8.1, 2004). Hutchison recognises that Rossetti's sonnet cycle *The House of Life* draws 'heavily on [...] Swedenborg's images of domestic spirituality', and points out the significance of the sequence's title, which Hutchison argues is Swedenborgian.¹⁵ Hutchison's article and Upstone's catalogue entries represent introductory acknowledgments of this aspect of Rossetti's work. Hutchison's words in the final paragraph of her essay; 'the impact of Swedenborg's language and imagery on Victorian literature should perhaps be reappraised', identify the brevity of this line of critical response and indicate the necessity for thorough critical investigation (p. 18).

Richard Lines, Secretary of the Swedenborg Society, has been crucial in this regard in uncovering and re-establishing an interest in Swedenborg amongst members of the nineteenth-century literati. His essays on Victorian writers influenced by Swedenborgian ideas for recent published editions of the *Journal of the Swedenborg Society*, such as those on Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning ('Swedenborgian Ideas in the Poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning', in *In Search of the Absolute: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. by Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004)), and Coventry Patmore ('Eros and the Unknown Victorian: Coventry Patmore and Swedenborg', in *Between Method and Madness: Essay on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. by Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2005)), represent important beginnings in this aspect of Victorian scholarship. Lines has also gone some way to establishing a shared social context for this interest in Swedenborg, through uncovering a network of friends and acquaintances. His essay on the Brownings, for example, mentions their friend the Swedenborgian physician Dr. James John Garth Wilkinson. Other pieces by Lines on Wilkinson ('James John Garth Wilkinson: Author, Physician, Translator', *Journal of the New Church Historical Society* (2002), 40-59) and on the Victorian poet Henry Sutton ('Henry Sutton: Poet, Journalist, and New Church Man', *Journal of the New Church Historical Society* (2003), 40-47)

¹⁵ Hazel Hutchison, 'Ideal Homes: James, Rossetti, and Swedenborg's House of Life', *Symbiosis: a Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations*, 8.1 (2004), 49-62 [accessed via 2nd electronic edition, Humanities-Ebooks LLP, 2007, 1-18 (p. 5)].

confirm the presence of a group of literary Swedenborgians who knew each other, including the poets Emerson, Tennyson and Philip James Bailey. As this thesis establishes, Rossetti also had connections with this circle. A primary document crucial to the research for this thesis is located in the Swedenborg Society Archive. It is a copy of a letter from Rossetti to Dr. Wilkinson in 1865 which establishes an acquaintance between the two men.¹⁶ Indeed, the Swedenborg Society acknowledges Rossetti as one of a number of writers influenced by Swedenborg's works, but has thus far not explored this in any depth critically.

Dr. Wilkinson has been identified by recent writers on Victorian spiritualism as associated with the specific brand of (what this thesis defines as) Swedenborgian-spiritualism, which is characterised by an interest in Swedenborg and an involvement with spiritualism in the form the mesmerism and séance participation.¹⁷ Both Janet Oppenheim in *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Alex Owen in *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) identify Wilkinson as part of a specific group of influential Swedenborgians who also engaged with spiritualism. Mioara Merie in the article 'The "Airy Envelope of the Spirit": Empirical Eschatology, Astral Bodies and the Spiritualism of the Howitt Circle', *Intellectual History Review*, 18.2 (2008), 189-206) also traces the interest in this particular vein of spiritualism shown by this group. These recent historical critical texts seek to re-establish spiritualism as more central to Victorian culture than has previously been acknowledged. The growth of interest in this area of Victorian studies has produced a number of recent books on nineteenth-century spiritualism. These include Deborah Blum's *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death* (London: Century, 2007), Antonio Melechi's *Servants of the Supernatural: The Night Side of the Victorian Mind* by (London: Heinemann, 2008), and Peter Lamont's book on the famous Victorian spiritualist medium Daniel Dunglas Home; *The First Psychic: The Peculiar Mystery of a*

¹⁶ Swedenborg Society Library Archive, K/141: Wilkinson, Dr. J.J.G. Letter from D.G. Rossetti (copy).

¹⁷ Dr. Wilkinson's unpublished manuscript book on mesmerism (Swedenborg Society Library Archive, A/56i: Wilkinson, Dr. J.J. Garth. Sleep, Mesmerism, & Hypnotism on MS article, 1849), places importance on the idea of the clairvoyant trance and its mediumistic potentialities. It is a key source in this regard as it illustrates this specific engagement with spiritualism and related ideas.

Notorious Victorian Wizard (London: Little, Brown, 2005). It has also resulted in the reprinting of earlier studies, such as Ronald Pearsall's *The Table-Rappers: The Victorians and the Occult* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004) which was first published by Michael Joseph in 1972.

These are supported by the republication of key texts from the period which characterise the particular engagement with Swedenborgian-spiritualism shown by Wilkinson and his group. D.D. Home's account of his life as a spiritual medium, *Incidents in My Life* (University Books Inc. 1864; repr. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005), for example, was produced in collaboration with people from this group, such as William Howitt, whose own extensive two volume *History of the Supernatural* has been recently republished in facsimile.¹⁸ Sophia De Morgan's *From Matter to Spirit: The Result of Ten Years' Experience in Spirit Manifestations* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1863; repr. London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 2000) is pitched from a Swedenborgian point of view and addresses the connection between mesmerism and spiritualism in the idea of the clairvoyant trance.

Another text of import is Alison Winter's *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), a history of Victorian mesmerism which acknowledges its esoteric side and connection to Victorian spiritualism, in addition to charting its scientific and medical applications. In addition Colleen McDannell's and Bernhard Lang's book *Heaven: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), which traces the evolution of the western concept of heaven from biblical to modern times, discusses the importance of Swedenborgian ideas upon nineteenth-century depictions of heaven, recognising their impact upon Victorian spiritualism.

Part 2: The History of Critical Responses to Rossetti, Briefly Traced (with regard predominantly to this Thesis)

¹⁸ William Howitt, *History of the Supernatural*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1863; repr. Kessinger, 2004), I.

Contemporary critical responses to Rossetti's work, and in particular, those published in the years immediately following his death, often emphasise the inherent mystical and spiritual qualities. They illustrate that his work was seen in his own day, or shortly after, as associated with, or responding to, an esoteric tradition which contextually included Victorian spiritualism. F.G. Stephens in his essay on Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* ('*Beata Beatrix* by Dante G. Rossetti' *Portfolio*, 22 (1891), 45-47), for example, discusses the painting using the language of spiritualism. Stephens' reading of the work emphasises its mystical qualities and is an early example of a critical response that asserts a spiritualist context for the work. Dante's *New Life* becomes the afterlife in this reading, which is accessed clairvoyantly by the depicted Beatrice: 'the heavenly visions of the New Life are revealed to the eyes of her spirit' (p. 45). As one of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Stephens' descriptions and reviews of Rossetti's works are close to source and persist as important resources. Other writers such as Walter Pater, William Sharp, Frederic Myers and Charles J. Whitby in writing about Rossetti in the years following his death responded primarily to this mystical quality in his written work. In each, despite the inherent variety of critical response, there is a distinct categorisation of Rossetti as a poet of a mystical order, whose work must be viewed as part of an esoteric tradition in order to fully understand it.

As a founder member in 1882 of the Society for Psychical Research, Frederic Myers was directly involved with later aspects of Victorian spiritualism. In his essay 'Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty' in *Essays, Modern* (London: Macmillan, 1883), published the year following Rossetti's death in 1882, Myers recognised the innate spiritualism in Rossetti's work:

He is not a prophet but an artist; yet an artist who, both by the very intensity of his artistic vision, and by some inborn bent towards symbol and mysticism, stands on the side of those who see in material things a spiritual significance, and utters words of universal meaning from the fullness of his own heart. (pp. 321-22)

In discussion of his poetry, Myers identifies one of the major motifs in Rossetti's oeuvre; the figure of the dead beloved. For Rossetti, Myers argues, the contemplation of the dead beloved 'seems visibly to bridge the passage between the transitory and the supernal world', thereby responding to the works' spiritualistic qualities (p. 330). Myers identifies the importance of reunion with the beloved in the afterlife as a major

theme in the final sonnet, 'The One Hope', of Rossetti's *The House of Life*: 'how one vanished hand may seem to offer the endless welcome, one name to symbolise all heaven, and to be in itself the single hope' (p. 331). Sexual love in *The House of Life* sonnets, Myers argues, is spiritual and he stresses that the 'parallel between Rossetti and Dante must not be pushed too far', understanding the pitfall into which some critics have fallen since, in placing too great an emphasis on Rossetti's perceived identification with Dante and his work (p. 321).

Walter Pater in his 1883 essay on Rossetti also responds to the mystical quality in Rossetti's work. He writes: 'A sustained impressibility towards the mysterious conditions of man's everyday life, towards the very mystery itself in it, gives a singular gravity to all his work'.¹⁹ Pater recognises the esoteric framework in which this influence can be located in his suggestion that Rossetti reads 'like a believer in mesmerism' (Pater, p. 214). This he mentions with regard to a number of works, naming 'The Blessed Damozel' in particular, which he elsewhere describes as 'profoundly visionary' (p. 207). Pater, like Myers, responds to the fusion of the spiritual and material in Rossetti's oeuvre. In a discussion of *The House of Life*, he suggests that an understanding of Swedenborg's ideas regarding the relationship of the body to the soul can help to elucidate this aspect of Rossetti's work (p. 214). Pater's essay on Rossetti is therefore a key text in establishing a context for Rossetti that was recognised as central to an understanding of his work at the time.

Crucially both Pater and Myers were responding critically to Rossetti as an Aesthetic poet, and as such, both make the distinction between an empty materialism sometimes associated with the aesthetic values of physical and sensual beauty, and the spiritual infusion in the Aesthetic work of Rossetti. Hence William Sharp's comment, in one of the first posthumous studies of Rossetti in 1882, that Rossetti 'was too true a poet to indulge in the heresy underlying the doctrine of art for art's sake'.²⁰ By this Sharp, who knew Rossetti in his last years, means that to define Rossetti purely in this way would be to deny the inherent spirituality of his work. In 'The Mystical Poems of Rossetti' (*Occult Review*, 15 (1912), 337-342), Charles J. Whitby reinforces this reading, arguing that Rossetti's poems and pictures 'are simply steeped in psychic

¹⁹ Walter Pater, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti', in *Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, 1889; repr. 1920), pp. 205-218 (p. 211).

²⁰ William Sharp, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study* (London: Macmillan, 1882; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 414.

and spiritual emotion' and that his grasp of spiritual fundamentals indicates that Rossetti rose above the 'rampant materialism' of his age (p. 337). In his essay Whitby sets out to illustrate 'the profound sense of the occult revealed in so many of his poems' through the identification of selected examples from a range of Rossetti's works, including 'The Blessed Damozel' and identifying, as did Myers and Pater before him, the significance of *The House of Life* in this regard (p. 337).

In arguing that Rossetti's 'poems and pictures were a unique protest against the crude materialism' of some of his contemporaries, Whitby addresses a key aspect of critical response to Rossetti; the perceived tension between the spiritual and material in his depictions of love in *The House of Life* sonnets and 'The Blessed Damozel' (p. 342). The inability of certain readers to reconcile the spiritual and the material in the sexual love described by Rossetti has led to charges of empty sensualism, beginning infamously with the contemporary critical response 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti' by Robert Buchanan (and the expanded pamphlet of 1872) which discussed an embryonic version of *The House of Life* published in Rossetti's *Poems* (1870).²¹ Buchanan fails to recognise the spiritual dimension of the sexual love characterised in the sonnets. It is to this which Myers refers in his essay: 'how superficial is the view which represents Rossetti as a dangerous sensualist' (p. 331); and likewise William Sharp, who declared that Rossetti was 'more hurt by a charge of animalism than can be well made realisable, for he considered his genius to be of an essentially spiritual though mystical order' (pp. 412-3).

A contemporary essay by the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne on Rossetti's *Poems* (1870), which included the embryonic *House of Life* ('The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *The Fortnightly Review* (May 1870), 551-579) is perhaps one of the earliest critical responses in this vein. As with F. G. Stephens' response to *Beata Beatrix*, Swinburne, who was also Rossetti's contemporary and supporter, intuitively recognises the contextual framework that enlightens the sonnets; their focus on the supremacy of chaste sexual love and its true flowering in the afterlife: 'The birth of love, [...] his utter union in flesh and spirit, [...] the light of the unaccomplished hour which missed its chance in one life to meet it in another, where the sundered spirits

²¹ Robert Buchanan [pseudo. Thomas Maitland], 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti', *The Contemporary Review*, 18 (1871), 334-50. The expanded pamphlet: Robert Buchanan, *The Fleshly School of Poetry and other Phenomena of the Day* (London: Strahan, 1872).

revive into reunion' (p. 555). In his essay Swinburne emphasises the spiritual dimension that accompanies the physical descriptions of love: 'all forms and colours of the world without are touched and drawn into the service of the spirit' (p. 555). Swinburne's words are echoed by Rossetti himself in his published refutation of Buchanan's criticisms in 'The Stealthy School of Criticism' (*The Athenaeum*, December 1871), in which he protests against accusations of empty sensualism, arguing, as Swinburne does, that any inherent worldliness in his work is clearly accompanied by a spiritual dimension.²²

Buchanan later recanted his critical attack on Rossetti and made a point of acknowledging his recognition of Rossetti as a great poet. This was expressed in a short dedicatory verse 'To an Old Enemy' at the opening of his novel *God and the Man* (1881) in which he praises the spiritual quality of Rossetti's work, and admits his initial interpretation of empty sensualism to be misguided: 'Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song'.²³ This was later furthered in subsequent editions following Rossetti's death in 1882, both in a second dedicatory poem 'To Dante Gabriel Rossetti', and in the preface dated 18 August 1882, in which Buchanan retracts his initial response, and apologises for having misunderstood Rossetti's poetry:

That I should ever have underrated his exquisite work, is simply a proof of the incompetency of all criticism, however honest, which is conceived adversely, hastily, and from an unsympathetic point of view; but that I should have ranked myself for the time being with the Philistines, and encouraged them to resist an ennobling and refining literary influence [...], must remain to me a matter of permanent regret. (*God and the Man*, vi)

In the second verse dedication, Buchanan imagines that he and Rossetti will know each other in the afterlife:

I never knew thee living, O my brother!
But on thy breast my lily of love now lies;
And by that token, we shall know each other,
When God's voice saith 'Arise!' (*God and the Man*, iii)

²² See *CW*, pp. 329-335.

²³ *God and the Man*, iii. Both dedications are included, together with the preface, in the prefatory pages of Robert Buchanan, *God and the Man* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1890), iii-vi.

The spiritualistic overtones may indicate Buchanan's intuitive understanding of the context for Rossetti's work, which he failed to recognise at first. It is therefore an important, yet small and often overlooked text.

Despite Buchanan's later retraction of his criticisms, a number of subsequent critical responses tend to follow Buchanan's initial 'fleshly school' attack in so far as they marginalise the spiritually sophisticated aspect of Rossetti recognised by Myers, Pater and others. However, this manifests in later twentieth-century Rossetti criticism in a diluted form, shifting from a rebuke of inferred empty sensualism, to the suggestion that the earthly and spiritual aspects in Rossetti's work cannot be reconciled, and therefore represent a flaw, or incongruity in his work. At the centre of much of this aspect of Rossetti criticism is the emphasis upon the perceived influence of Dante Alighieri's poetry, with regard to its presentation of idealised love and the landscape of its afterlife, and the received notion that Rossetti's work aspires to emulate it. Graham Hough's interpretation of 'The Blessed Damozel' in his section on 'Rossetti and the P.R.B' in *The Last Romantics* (London Duckworth, 1947; repr. London: Methuen, 1961), for example, finds that the presentation of the Damozel as a substantial form in the afterlife is problematic: 'one is surprised to find the lady still sufficiently material for her bosom to make the bar she leaned on warm' (p. 77). This is because the poem is viewed as 'Dantesque' (p. 77). As a result these elements are regarded as failed homage to Dante and his contemporaries. A similar critical response from the second half of the twentieth century is expressed in John Dixon Hunt's *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination 1848-1900* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1968). Hunt's text locates the Pre-Raphaelite antecedents for Symbolist and decadent works, and traces the movement through a series of modes of creative imagination employed by the artists and writers of the period. This is an important work which anticipates the later re-contextualisation of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites within wider European artistic culture. Rossetti is an emergent figure in the text and key works are explored, such as *Beata Beatrix*, *The House of Life* and 'The Blessed Damozel'. However, once again, the response is characterised by an inability to reconcile the spiritual aspects of the work and their apparently 'physical' treatment. In *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Twayne, 1969), Robert D. Johnston attempts to present a line of thematic development through Rossetti's oeuvre, avoiding the muddying of the critical waters that sometimes occur through recourse to biography. Johnston sets out to suggest the

differences between Rossetti and Dante, and acknowledges that Rossetti has moved beyond Dante. However, he persists in comparing Rossetti with Dante and the Early Italians, in his discussion of both 'The Blessed Damozel' and *The House of Life*. As with Hunt, it is the seeming paradox between the earthly and spiritual that troubles him.

In his 1983 text *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (London: Cornell University Press, 1983) David G. Riede succinctly summarises this much visited line of argument. He recognises that it is essentially inherited from Buchanan, but has softened into a perceived flaw in Rossetti's approach:

Though the moral outrage of Buchanan is gone, the objection that Rossetti failed to achieve a sacramental vision remains, as does the claim that he failed to take seriously the Christian symbolism he borrowed from Dante. (pp. 110-11)

For Riede, 'Rossetti's use of Christian forms without Christian faith' is a reflection of his desire to represent an aspiration to the infinite that is philosophically wider than particular faith (p. 112). Despite his recognition that in spite of Rossetti's 'occasional medievalism, his most serious poetry is very much a product of his age', Riede reverts to the old argument in a discussion of 'The Blessed Damozel' (p. 112). Once again, the fusion of the earthly and the spiritual that characterises the work cannot be accounted for, other than as eccentricity on Rossetti's part: 'The hope in these lines for the bare possibility that earthly love may be continued after death has little to do with any Christian heaven' and the supposed opposition of the two qualities cannot be reconciled (Riede, p.84).

Two other major twentieth century critical approaches include those that are concerned with the biography of Rossetti's personal relationships, and blend the myth of the art together with that of the artist, and those that have recourse to a formal and/or technical response to his work, such as Evelyn Waugh's *Rossetti: His Life and Works* (London: Duckworth, 1928, repr. 1975), which does both. Waugh's assessment of Rossetti's artistic prowess rests primarily upon a formalist response to his painting, one that reflects the art historical modernism of the 1920s, as characterised by the writings of the critic and artist Roger Fry, who presented a formalist response to Rossetti's watercolours in an essay of 1916 (see 'Rossetti's Water Colours of 1857' (*Burlington Magazine*, 29, no.159 (1916), 100-109). This approach is aptly illustrated by

Waugh in a series of diagrams that trace the linear compositional rhythms within selected Rossetti paintings (pp. 144-5). It is from this aspect that Rossetti is often found wanting in Waugh's judgement. In his concluding chapter 'What is Wrong with Rossetti' he suggests that sometimes the 'root cause of Rossetti's failure' (p. 226) lies in a sort of moral mediocrity combined with indifference to 'express the necessary relations of forms' (p. 223). A notable exception is Waugh's response to *Beata Beatrix*, which he credits with 'exquisite beauty' (p. 227). Pertinently, there is a brief admission in Waugh's closing argument that a different form of critique is needed in order to approach an understanding of Rossetti's art; one that takes into account the visionary aspect of creativity, rather than merely the formal.

Waugh's book is also representative of a series of early to mid twentieth century responses from the generation of writers following Rossetti, who had familial connections to him and/or his artistic peers. Waugh, for example, was related to both William Holman Hunt and Thomas Woolner, two of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. An example that predates Waugh is Ford Madox Hueffer's *Rossetti: A Critical Essay on his Art* (London: Duckworth, 1902; reissued 1914). Hueffer (later novelist Ford Madox Ford) was the grandson of Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti's lifelong friend to whom he was related by marriage. Hueffer's book begins immediately with reference to Rossetti's perceived technical limitations. For Hueffer, Rossetti's 'erratic handling of his material' is only saved by the 'charm' of his works (p. 9). *Beata Beatrix* is reduced to the following: 'It was an expression, made for himself, of his own personality in the mood of thinking of one dead. Its value lies in that.' (p. 62). It is deemed successful, despite 'its defects' (p. 61) because the conception of the work is technically 'well within his powers' (p. 62). It is interesting to note that Hueffer and Waugh betray evident familial bias, despite claims for objectivity through technical analysis. Both also were novelists, as was Violet Hunt whose quasi-biographical work *The Wife of Rossetti: Her Life and Death* (London: Bodley Head, 1932) weaves fiction with anecdotal biography and focuses on both Rossetti and his wife Lizzie Siddal. Hunt was also connected to the previous generation of Pre-Raphaelites (her father was Alfred William Hunt) and her book is concerned with the myth of the man; comments regarding Rossetti's work are often inseparable from purported details about his life.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949) by Rossetti's niece Helen Rossetti Angeli represents the culmination of this

particular aspect of Rossetti biography. It was written expressly with the intention of defending Rossetti by attempting to counter some of the more sensational assertions made by her peers, such as Violet Hunt. This is an important work as it draws from original sources, as well as heavily from the many edited works on Rossetti by her father William Michael Rossetti. Although ostensibly about Rossetti, his family, friendships and artistic connections, it contains a section devoted solely to Rossetti's engagement with spiritualism, suggesting its contextual importance. Another work from 1949, Oswald Doughty's critical biography *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Frederick Muller, 1949), assigns biographical critiques to Rossetti's work.²⁴

Alongside this renewed interest in Rossetti's life and work in the early-mid twentieth century (coinciding with the centenary of his birth in 1928) are scholarly pieces which analyse Rossetti's work in biographical terms. This strain of critique, which can sometimes reduce Rossetti's work to the biography of his personal relationships, is represented by Doughty's comments on the *House of Life* sonnets in his critical biography. The sonnets are analysed in terms of Rossetti's relationship with Jane Morris and evidence for that relationship is justified through this specific reading of the sonnets:

Certainly, if we may take the sonnets of 1871 as evidence – they obviously continue the love-story of 1869-70 – Janey and Gabriel were supremely happy together during that secluded summer at Kelmscott [...] These sonnets, which surely reflect the atmosphere of Kelmscott during the lovers' residence there in 1871, voice many moods of love. (p. 533)

Precursors to this strain of critique in which the sonnets are read literally as authorial autobiography are represented by Frederick M. Tisdell's 'Rossetti's "House of Life"' (*Modern Philology*, 15.5 (1917), 257-276), which attempts to establish a chronological order for the production of the sonnets 'in order to bring them into close connection

²⁴ In addition to this book Doughty's significant contribution to Rossetti scholarship is represented by an edition of Rossetti's poems (London: Dent, 1957), an edited collection of Rossetti's letters to his publisher, F.S. Ellis (London: Scholartis Press, 1928), and the five volumes collected letters (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1965-7) co-edited with J. R. Wahl, which was the favoured edition before the recent Fredeman collection.

with the poet's life' (p. 258), and 'Personal Experience in Rossetti's "House of Life"' by Ruth C. Wallerstein (*PMLA*, 42.2 (1927), 492-504).

The early-mid twentieth century period is dominated by this more biographical approach to Rossetti scholarship, and the recognition evident in early critical responses, such as those of Myers and Whitby, of the inherent mysticism of his work to some extent falls away during this time. A notable exception is Kerrison Preston's *Blake and Rossetti* (New York: Haskell House, 1944; reissued 1971), which discusses the relationship between the life and work of the two poet-painters, acknowledging that Rossetti represents a continuation of a mystical literary and artistic tradition to which William Blake also belonged. The visionary qualities of both are explored in an unusual critical work that itself can be categorised as esoteric. Key to this study is Preston's refutation of the types of criticism hitherto applied to Rossetti. These are, what he terms 'the "Oral Tradition"' (p. 51) as characterised by Violet Hunt's *The Wife of Rossetti* (1932), and the recognition of the insufficiency of a purely formalist response to both Blake's and Rossetti's work: 'There must be form, but there must also be significance, which implies something less superficial, something emotional or spiritual' (p. 61). For Preston, in order to understand Rossetti, one must understand the occult tradition from which his work springs, and it is this, he argues, which accounts for the fusion of the earthly and the spiritual in his work:

Mysticism is not, as some suppose, a matter of mistiness, or mystification. It is precisely the opposite, and creates a clear vision which sees through mysteries. The mystic pierces the surfaces and grasps the true reality. The mystery of sex, for instance, is clearer to one accustomed to seeing the human body inseparable from soul, and passion transmuted in love. (p. 64)

Preston's summation of Rossetti recalls the response of those earlier writers who understood the mystical context for Rossetti's work, and represents a survival into the mid twentieth century of this particular strain of Rossetti criticism.

In seeing a close association between Rossetti and Blake, and suggesting a specific strain of occult tradition embodied in both, Preston's study represents a furtherance of the poet William Butler Yeats' categorisation of Rossetti. In 'Symbolism in Painting' (1898) (*Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 146-152) Yeats evokes Rossetti as part of a visionary tradition that also includes Blake,

characterising him as a Symbolist in both a specific and general sense, thereby locating a literary and artistic context for his occult qualities (see also Bickley, pp. 50-103).

The later twentieth century saw a rebirth of serious interest and scholarship surrounding Rossetti's work. A number of articles from the 1960s onward address aspects of Rossetti's *The House of Life* which have contributed significantly to the body of criticism on the sonnet sequence. These include Michael E. Greene's 'The Severed Self: The Dramatic Impulse in *The House of Life*' (*Ball State University Forum*, 14.4 (1973), 49-58), J.L. Kendall's 'The Concept of the Infinite Moment in *The House of Life*' (*Victorian Newsletter*, 28 (1965), 4-8), and essays that seek to address the structure of the sequence from different theoretical viewpoints, such as Douglas J. Robillard's 'Rossetti's "Willowwood" Sonnets and the Structure of *The House of Life*' (*Victorian Newsletter*, 22 (1962), 5-9) and 'Inorganic Structure in *The House of Life*' by Robert D. Hume (*Papers on Language and Literature*, 5 (1969), 282-295). These works move away from a critical response that favours the biography of Rossetti's personal relationships, and view the work as a sophisticated literary text independent of (or abstracted from) authorial autobiography. These texts, together with those by John Dixon Hunt (1968) and Robert D. Johnson (1969) mentioned hitherto, anticipate the flowering of Rossetti criticism which occurred in the 1970s. Of major note are those works by William E. Fredeman mentioned at the start of this review and the pieces by Virginia Surtees, including several articles and catalogues, of which the two volume *Catalogue Raisonné, The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), is perhaps the most crucial.

Two articles of note from this period are Ronald W. Johnson's article 'Dante Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* and the *New Life*' (*Art Bulletin*, 57 (1975), 548-58); a thorough study which explores the painting through from preparatory studies to possible artistic prototypes and potential readings, and Houston A. Baker's 'The Poet's Progress: Rossetti's *The House of Life*' (*Victorian Poetry*, 8 (1970), 1-14) which goes some way to emphasising the importance of 'the hope for the attainment of a physical ideal in some eternal realm' as one of the central themes of the sequence (p. 1).

A notable text which appeared in the 1970s, which is crucial in establishing a context for Rossetti's work is *Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century Letters* by Russell M. and Clare R. Goldfarb (London: Associated University Presses, 1978). This important text traces the engagement (or lack thereof) by biographers and academics, with the

involvement in spiritualism of prominent nineteenth century figures, such as John Ruskin. It locates an interest amongst members of the literary and artistic communities and contains a considerable section on Rossetti. It reassesses the impact of spiritualism upon the culture of the period, retrieving it from its hitherto sidelined position within the history of ideas to a more central role; asserting, for example, in the case of Rossetti, that 'Almost everyone connected with the Rossetti circle seems to have had some contact with spiritualism' (p. 120). It therefore paves the way for further studies which redress the impact of spiritualism upon the work of those involved.

The level of interest in Rossetti in the 1970s is embodied by the 1973 exhibition of his works shown at the Royal Academy, London, and Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery. The number of articles throughout the 60, 70s and 80s (and into the present) from Alastair Grieve on Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites and D.M.R Bentley on Rossetti's written and artistic productions are testament to the seriousness of the body of critical work from this period.²⁵ The Tate Gallery *Pre-Raphaelites* exhibition of 1984 (with accompanying catalogue, edited by Leslie Parris (London: Tate, 1984; repr. 1994)) also marked a major resurgence of interest. Several studies of note on Rossetti's work also appeared in the 1980s, represented by Joan Rees's book on Rossetti's poetry, *The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Modes of Self-Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and by *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1989) by Alicia Craig Faxon, which focuses on his art work. Rees's study concentrates in depth on Rossetti's poetic output, suggesting that prior to her study, a thorough account of this aspect of his oeuvre had been neglected. Although thorough in its mention of possible templates for Rossetti's self-expression in verse, Rees's text reasserts Dante and the Early Italians as *the* major influence on Rossetti's poetics. However, it moves outward to locate Rossetti within a tradition of self-expressive impulse within Victorian poetry in general, through consideration of Christina Rossetti, William Morris and Thomas Hardy. Faxon's monograph features Rossetti's artistic output, tracing his development from early Pre-Raphaelitism and medievalism, through to his later more voluptuous Venetian inspired paintings. The book, which is a well illustrated monograph on Rossetti, also addresses his design work and contains some key insights into some of his major artistic productions. David G. Riede's study

²⁵ See Bibliography for details of the works by Grieve and Bentley consulted in this thesis.

(1983), mentioned previously, represents another key work of the period which discusses both Rossetti's artistic and poetic output.

Interestingly, the two strands of critical response – biographical and formalist – discussed earlier in relation to early and mid twentieth century Rossetti criticism, persisted as critical approaches into the 1980s. Miriam Fuchs' formalist assessment of Rossetti's work locates his art, through a consideration of his 1850s watercolours, within a modernist formalist tradition from which he has hitherto been sidelined. Fuchs' article 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Caught Between Two Centuries' (*Victorian Newsletter*, 63 (1983), 3-7) therefore represents an important reassessment of his work within modernism. In contrast Debra Mancoff's 'A Vision of Beatrice: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the *Beata Beatrix*' (*Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 6.1 (1985), 76-87) presents a biographically informed tradition of criticism, in which *Beata Beatrix* is seen as predominantly informed by Rossetti's relationship with Lizzie Siddal, and as indicative of his identification with Dante through the casting of his wife as Beatrice: 'He formulated his ideals of art upon his understanding of Dante's writings and expressed these ideals as an autobiographical allegory in his painting' (p. 83).

Part 3: Further Elaboration of Method and how it Informed the Literature Accessed

In tracing the development of critical responses to Rossetti it becomes evident that there has been a gradual falling away from the recognition of an esoteric framework within which to locate his work; something assumed and recognised by writers contemporary with Rossetti, or those writing in the years following his death in 1882 (represented by Pater, Myers, Yeats, etc.). This was obscured to an extent by a growing interest in his personal biography and critical responses that favour this approach (Tisdell, Wallerstein, Doughty). The critical fashion in Art History in the early-mid twentieth century that favoured a more formalist response to paintings meant that the mystical qualities were perhaps temporarily sidelined (Fry, Waugh). This is something which has begun to be addressed in the last few decades, as Rossetti's work has been retrieved and re-evaluated in terms of the development of modernism with

regard to other aspects inherent in his work (McGann, Casteras). Rossetti's artistic and poetic productions have been located within wider critical frameworks, such as Aestheticism and European Symbolism (Upstone, Prettejohn).

The revision of the importance of Swedenborgian ideas within the history of western philosophical thought, suggesting a greater significance than had previously been supposed, has begun (Lines, Goodrick-Clarke, Katz, McDannell and Lang). In addition the reassessment of the impact of spiritualism upon the intellectual life of the mid-late Victorian period has been recently explored and found to be of greater cultural importance than has been previously acknowledged (Goldfarb, Oppenheim, Owen). The impact of this has meant that reappraisals of Rossetti in light of this context have begun; appearing sporadically and in embryo, but remaining hitherto critically under-explored (Upstone, Hutchison, Hoare). The retrieval of contemporary and early critical responses to Rossetti's work, showing that it was seen in his own day, or in the immediate years following his death, as associated with, or responding to, the cultural context of Victorian spiritualism, and its associated esoteric and mystical traditions, is therefore important (Myers, Pater, Stephens, Whitby).

Consequently this thesis employs a critical method which represents in part a return to contemporaneous sources in order to establish the way in which Rossetti was received in his own time, and demonstrates the Swedenborgian-spiritualist context in which he was working. The critical approach in this thesis is twofold. The cultural context (both immediate and general) is re-established around Rossetti, together with provision of direct evidence of his interest in, and involvement with, Swedenborgian-spiritualism. This is followed by readings of both his poetry and artwork in order to demonstrate its impact upon his work, thus retrieving a previously sidelined and partly forgotten aspect. If one reads Arthur C. Benson's early monograph on Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1904), for example, he mentions Rossetti's belief in a 'future life' (p. 71) and asserts that 'he had at one time carefully studied Swedenborg' (p. 77). It is this type of information that has been ignored in subsequent critical works, or become removed from its context. Rossetti's relationship with the Swedenborgian-spiritualist Dr. Wilkinson, for example, rarely features in biographies or critical works. Wilkinson is reduced in recent biographies to a brief mention; he is referred to as the Swedenborgian doctor who treated Lizzie Siddal, without any accompanying

explanation of the significance of the label 'Swedenborgian'.²⁶ A consultation of the sale catalogue of Rossetti's house contents after death (London: T.G. Wharton, Martin & co. Auctioneers Catalogue, July 1882) proves that Rossetti owned a life of Swedenborg (item 614, p. 29). William Michael Rossetti's manuscript list of Rossetti's books located in the Bodleian Library, dated 1905, but 'drawn up [...] at some such date as 1866', contains texts by writers, such as Thomas Shorter, who were associated with this particular branch of Swedenborgian-spiritualism.²⁷

Letters and diaries and other primary source documents (both published and unpublished) have been consulted in this thesis in order to recreate the context in which Rossetti's work was made and can be truly understood. In addition to the series of recent volumes of Rossetti letters edited by Fredeman et al (published by Brewer, from 2002), the edition by John Bryson of the correspondence of Rossetti and Jane Morris (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1976), which contains a direct reference to Rossetti having quoted Swedenborg in the *House of Life* sonnet 'True Woman III' is an edition of importance, as it also details the connection with Dr. Wilkinson in the accompanying footnote.²⁸ A primary source document that supports this is a handwritten notebook entry in which Rossetti transcribed the quotation with 'Swedenborg' written underneath.²⁹

In addition to early memoirs by those that lived with Rossetti, such as Henry Treffry Dunn's *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his Circle* (first published 1904) and Hall Caine's *Recollections of Rossetti* (1882; rev. 1928), which remark upon Rossetti's interest in spiritualism and Swedenborg respectively, are the number of published diaries of Rossetti's friends and associates.³⁰ The diaries of Rossetti's Pre-

²⁶ See Marsh, *Painter and Poet: 'the Swedenborgian Garth Wilkinson'* (p.118); Hawksley, 'the Swedenborgian physician Dr Garth Wilkinson' (p. 74).

²⁷ No. 18, under [S], in *A list of books belonging to D.G. Rossetti [c.1866] compiled by W.M. Rossetti 1905*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Facs. d. 269 d (fols. 145-7). Hereafter abbreviated to *List of Books*.

²⁸ *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence*, ed. by John Bryson (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1976), p. 168.

²⁹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Untitled Notebook* (c.1871-80), British Library, Ashley 1410 (2), 'Small Notebook Two', p. 18v.

³⁰ Henry Treffry Dunn, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his Circle, or Cheyne Walk Life*, ed. by Rosalie Mander (Westerham: Dalrymple Press, 1984). Hereafter cited as Dunn. This edition represents a fuller version of Dunn's memoirs as it reinstates some original passages excluded in the 1904 edition (see p. 6-7). This thesis, however, has also consulted the 1904 edition, as the notes contain additional information: Henry Treffry Dunn, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his Circle (Cheyne Walk Life)*, edited and annotated by Gale Pedrick

Raphaelite peers are therefore also of interest, represented by those of Ford Madox Brown (ed. Virginia Surtees, London: Yale University Press, 1981), William Allingham (ed. Geoffrey Grigson, (London: Centaur Press, 2000), a renowned reader of Swedenborg, and Rossetti's poet-painter friend William Bell Scott's *Autobiographical Notes* (ed. W. Minto, London: James R. Osgood, 1892) have also been consulted. A diary of major importance is the hitherto mentioned *Séance Diary*, written by William Michael Rossetti, which is located in archive (microfiche) in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The diary covers the years 1865-68 and records a number of spiritualist séances, both public and private that both he and Rossetti attended. This is a crucial text in the establishment of this context for Rossetti's work. The large body of work associated with William Michael Rossetti, which includes his diaries edited by others, his art criticism, and editions of his brother's and sisters' works, persist as significant contributions to Rossetti scholarship. Of particular interest to this study is his 1901 collected edition (together with Preface) of the Pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ*, (repr. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1992), the two volume edition of Rossetti's family-letters, with memoir (London: Ellis, 1895), and his book: *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (London: Cassell, 1889). *The Diary of William Michael Rossetti, 1870-1873*, edited by Odette Bornand (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) is another important and useful resource.

William Michael Rossetti's edition *Rossetti Papers 1862-1870* (1903) has also been a useful text.³¹ In addition to reproducing selections from his *Séance Diary*, it details his correspondence with the artist Seymour Kirkup, a confirmed spiritualist, who purported to see the spirit of Dante. This text, taken together with Bornand's edition of William Michael's diaries 1870-73 and his *Séance Diary* (1865-8) form a unique view of the Rossetti brothers' concerns during a period concurrent with the height of interest in spiritualism. From William Michael we also get details about his father's interest in Swedenborg, which indicate the presence of the ideas in the

(London: Elkin Matthews, 1904). This edition is cited Dunn 1904. This study has also consulted two versions of Caine's *Recollections*: 1882 and 1928 (repr. 1990). See Bibliography for further details.

³¹ William Michael Rossetti's *Rossetti Papers 1862-1870* (London: Sands, 1903; repr. New York: AMS, 1870). Hereafter cited as *RP*.

Rossetti family household.³² This is in relation to Rossetti's father's own esoteric studies on Dante and would suggest that Rossetti's approach to Dantesque subjects is informed by this interpretation, which sees Dante located within an occult tradition that includes Swedenborgian ideas. These two texts raise the key issue of Rossetti's reinterpretation of Dante through the context of esoteric spiritualism. A recent exhibition (*Dante Rediscovered: from Blake to Rodin*, Wordsworth Trust, 2007) is testament to this aspect of Dante scholarship. It featured a significant number of illustrations from Dante including those by Rossetti set into a tradition of esoteric interpretations which also include those by Blake and Flaxman (who were both informed by Swedenborg in their work). This further indicates that the researcher must return to the context of nineteenth century Swedenborgian-spiritualism in order to understand the particular presentation of Dante found in Rossetti's work.

The aim of this thesis is to add to the body of critical literature on Rossetti by re-establishing what has become sidelined, or forgotten, in critical responses to his work. A specific cultural and social context is recreated using a range of texts, and is paired with textual analysis, in order to re-evaluate Rossetti's major works. In doing this, the thesis furthers what has begun in embryo in both Rossetti and Victorian scholarship. The beginnings of recognition of the significance of spiritualism and Swedenborg in understanding Rossetti's work, has recently emerged, but hitherto it has not been addressed in detail to a scholarly or extensive degree. The re-evaluation of the impact of Swedenborg and spiritualism upon Victorian literary and social culture has also recently begun, and through establishing (and labelling) a specific context for Rossetti (Swedenborgian-spiritualism), this thesis uncovers networks and groups that further and support this historical revision.

³² *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family-Letters, with a Memoir*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti, 2 vols (London: Ellis, 1895), I, p. 64.

Chapter 2: Context

Part 1: Networks and Groupings: Swedenborgian-spiritualism in

Rossetti's Circle

Almost everyone connected with the Rossetti circle seems to have had some contact with spiritualism.¹

This chapter re-establishes a context for Rossetti and his work. Through provision of evidence it identifies a number of inter-connected individuals who engaged in different ways with 'Swedenborgian-spiritualism' and establishes Rossetti's connection to them. Following this, Rossetti's direct engagement with this context is documented.

The Swedenborgian-Spiritualist Coterie in Rossetti's Circle

What appears now as an enmeshed context of separate but intrinsically linked aspects of esotericism – namely spiritualism, Swedenborgianism and mesmerism – enjoyed a web-like interconnectedness within the Victorian period, and informed the preoccupations of a particular social circle who were heavily involved with a specific aspect of Spiritualism in the 1850s and 60s:

In London, a loose grouping of middle-class intellectuals and professionals became the early propagators of a particular brand of spiritualism. These individuals included Dr. Ashburner, a Royal Physician and advocate of mesmerism; Mrs. Sophia De Morgan, wife of Augustus De Morgan, the logician and professor of mathematics at University College, London; [...] William M. Wilkinson, a solicitor, and his wife; and their friends, William and Mary Howitt. From this group, most of whom knew each other, came a good proportion of early spiritualist works. These books differed considerably in style and content from the later outpourings of spiritualists. They reflected the authors' identification with a particular strand of European mysticism and their familiarity with the writings of the eighteenth-century Swedish seer, Emanuel Swedenborg. (Owen, p. 21)

¹ Goldfarb, p. 120.

It is in this 'loose grouping of middle-class intellectuals' that we can locate Rossetti, who knew personally many of those directly associated with this particular strand of spiritualism, which included a marked interest in Swedenborg; a characteristic engagement which this thesis terms Swedenborgian-spiritualism. Rossetti, whose library included a biography of Swedenborg, and who attended séances throughout the 1860s, was, as a poet-painter, connected with this cultural group, which at its widest incorporated many of the literati of the period. The poets William Allingham and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for example, came within the group's orbit, as did the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Their circle in its wider form also encompassed William Cowper-Temple and his wife Georgina (later Lord and Lady Mount-Temple), who commissioned Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, and through them for a time from 1864, John Ruskin.² Most significantly, the group's spiritualist pedigree was enhanced by its strong connections to the famous medium Daniel Dunglas Home.

The beliefs and activities of this group provide a contextual framework for Rossetti and his work, aspects of which respond directly to this circle of influence. The following sections detail particular members of this group, establish their importance within the context and locate Rossetti's relationship to them. Some sections consider members individually, but others identify members' roles as part of a specific dynamic, or sub-group.

Dr. Garth Wilkinson

The Swedenborgian homeopathic physician Dr. James John Garth Wilkinson, was one of the central members of this group whose interests in the 1850s and 60s centred on a particular engagement with spiritualism. His brother was the solicitor William Martin Wilkinson mentioned in the previously quoted group of London intellectual spiritualists, who was for a time Secretary of the Swedenborg Society.³ Dr. Wilkinson had strong connections with the literary community and his extensive acquaintance included Charles Dickens, Alfred Tennyson, George MacDonald and

² Van Akin Burd, *Ruskin, Lady Mount-Temple and the Spiritualists: an Episode in Broadlands History*. Guild of St. George Ruskin Lecture (London: Brentham Press, 1982), p. 9.

³ Lines, 'Wilkinson', p. 42.

Henry James, who was a long term family friend.⁴ He also knew Rossetti and was on friendly terms for a number of years.

Located within the Swedenborg Society archive is a copy of a previously unpublished letter from Rossetti to Dr. Wilkinson. The letter, dated 25 January 1865, expresses a fond acquaintance and a shared interest in poetry, commenting as it does upon Wilkinson's own book of published poems, that Rossetti had read and enjoyed:

Many thanks for the poems, with which I have begun to renew my acquaintance and find again much delight in many of them. 'Turner' and 'Poe' surprise me as much as ever, and I should like to hear something from yourself about them, when I take advantage of your invitation, as I hope to do soon. Ever yours truly, D.G. Rossetti. (K/141, pp. 1-2)

The accompanying note in the archive from Wilkinson's daughter explains briefly their relationship, suggesting that Wilkinson may have been one of the four doctors called out by Rossetti to Lizzie Siddal's deathbed in 1862: 'My dear father Dr. James John Garth Wilkinson attended the wife of D.G. Rossetti in her last illness' (K/141, pp. 2-3). It was due to Siddal's illness eleven years earlier that Rossetti first became familiar with Dr. Wilkinson. In March 1854, at the suggestion of the Howitt family, Siddal (who at that time was Rossetti's chief companion and model) consulted him due to a lapse in good health. Rossetti wrote a letter to Ford Madox Brown in which he referred to this:

Lizzy has been very unwell lately. [...] The Howitts insisted on Lizzy's seeing a Dr. Wilkinson, a friend of theirs and I believe an eminent man. He finds that the poor dear has contracted a curvature of the spine, and says she ought not to paint at present, but this of course she must.⁵

⁴ See E. I. Carlyle, 'Wilkinson, (James John) Garth (1812-1899)', rev. Logie Barrow, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2005 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29427>, accessed 9 Feb 2010]. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* is hereafter abbreviated to *ODNB*. See also Lines, 'Wilkinson', pp. 47-54. Wilkinson was good friends with Henry James Senior for a number of years and the two families were close. Henry James' younger brother was named Garth Wilkinson James after his father's friend (Lines 'Wilkinson', p. 52). Henry James visited Rossetti's studio in the late 1860s and commented on the striking paintings of which Jane Morris was model (see Marsh, *Painter and Poet*, p. 364; p. 552, note 25).

⁵ *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Formative Years, Volume I, 1835-54*, ed. by William E. Fredeman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), p.334 (letter 54.29). Hereafter cited as *Correspondence I*.

This letter locates the beginning of their acquaintance, and when taken together with the one written directly to Wilkinson located in the Swedenborg Society, establishes a direct relationship between the two men which lasted over ten years.

Wilkinson is an important contextual figure; he exemplifies the subtle connections between aspects of mesmerism, Swedenborg's theosophical writings and certain ideologies and practices within Victorian spiritualism which characterise this particular societal and intellectual context. He is the context in microcosm. Characterised as 'the best known Swedenborgian in Victorian England' Wilkinson was also interested in mesmerism – having met Dr. James Braid (who first coined the term hypnotism) in 1849, while lecturing in Manchester.⁶ The Swedenborg Society archive also contains a handwritten notebook by Wilkinson entitled *Sleep, Mesmerism and Hypnotism* (dated 2 June 1849) in which he details and discusses aspects of the phenomena. Of particular interest to Wilkinson is the inducement of the trance, and the resultant state of 'Clairvoyance, in its perfection, is one of the rarest and least regular of the mesmeric phenomena' (A/56i, p. 7); indicating that his interest in mesmerism lies especially in those aspects that anticipate the clairvoyant trance of the medium found in Victorian spiritualism:

This waking sleep tends to develop to an extraordinary degree its two component elements, of sleeping & waking; producing in certain cases, and at certain times, an insensibility more like death than sleep, in others again mental powers superior or additional to waking. Thus on the one hand we have double consciousness & clairvoyance; on the other, entranced sleep. These states also are mingled in all degrees, and pass into each other. (A/56i, p. 4)

The phenomena would also have been something familiar to Wilkinson through his knowledge of Swedenborg's clairvoyant episodes. Wilkinson wrote a biography of Swedenborg, published in 1849.⁷

Wilkinson was also directly involved in spiritualism. Together with his brother William Martin Wilkinson, he evinced an early interest in spiritualism and attended séances. His specific approach to spiritualism was aligned with that of the aforementioned group of London intellectuals established previously:

⁶ Lines, 'Wilkinson', p.40. Clement John Wilkinson, *James John Garth Wilkinson: A Memoir of his Life, with a Selection from his Letters* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1911), p.73.

⁷ James John Garth Wilkinson, *Emanuel Swedenborg: A Biography* (Boston: Otis Clapp, 1849; repr. Kessinger: 2003).

Wilkinson's belief in the spiritual world was, of course, a fundamental article of his Swedenborgian faith. It was buttressed, for a while, by the spiritualist beliefs of his brother William, their friends the Howitts, and the circle of middle-class intellectuals and professionals in London who avidly attended séances from the early 1850s.⁸

In a letter dated 11 May 1855, Wilkinson writes to a Mr. Westwood referring to a visit to the medium Daniel Dunglas Home, describing the events and his belief in them:

A curious event occurred the other night. My wife and I went to see a Mr. Home, an American medium of renown. Besides the most extraordinary physical phenomena, (which proved to my mind that the power of spirit is actual and tangible, – for I literally grasped the spirit-fingers in my own, – and that by & bye the upper world will prove to be a grand motive power,) – at the end of the séance, to my wife's astonishment, a spirit requested by Alphabet to speak with her. He spelt out this [...] Imortality [*sic*] – is a great truth.⁹

This would seem to be Wilkinson's first sitting with Home, as the medium had recently arrived in England from America in April 1855 (Home, p. 62). It would also appear to be the same séance described by Wilkinson in a letter to the *Morning Advertiser* written in defence of Home, and quoted in full in Home's autobiography *Incidents in My Life* (1863). In it the same incidents are related and the same phrase is received from the spirits through the 'alphabetic telegraph', that 'Imortality [*sic*] is a great truth'.¹⁰ Also noted with interest by Wilkinson is that 'the medium fell into an apparently mesmeric trance' (Home, p. 74).

Wilkinson 'never joined the New Church' and so was not subject to the strict religiosity of those Swedenborgians, who were, on the whole, opposed to spiritualism and its practices.¹¹ Wilkinson is therefore aligned with those Swedenborgians

⁸ Oppenheim, p. 234-35.

⁹ Swedenborg Society Library Archive, K/89: Westwood, Mr. Letter from J.J.G. Wilk, 11 May, 1855, mentioning visit to the medium Home, p. 3.

¹⁰ Home, p. 74. It is interesting to note that reference is made to the incorrect spelling of immortality, found both here and in Wilkinson's letter to Westwood: 'The spelling 'imortality,' surprised me at first; but I recollected that the deceased, whom I knew well, was constantly versed in black letter writing, which makes elisions in that way' (p. 74).

¹¹ Lines, 'Wilkinson', p. 40. A contemporary document that addresses these concerns is found in the review of Edward Brotherton's 1860 pamphlet, *Spiritualism, Swedenborg, and the New Church: An Examination of Claims* published in *The Intellectual Repository, and New Jerusalem Magazine*, VIII (London: General Conference of the New Church, 1861), 73-82. The essay aptly illustrates that although some Swedenborgians were also spiritualists, some New Church

associated with a 'particular strand of European Mysticism' whose interests lay predominantly in Swedenborg's esotericism and occult heritage (Owen, p. 21). Wilkinson was a literary man and, in addition to his biography of Swedenborg, he published translations of Swedenborg's work from 1839 onwards. It is clear that Wilkinson saw Swedenborg as part of a larger and longer tradition, as evidenced by his use of a quotation from Dante in the opening pages of his biography of Swedenborg.¹² In 1839 he also published 'the first ever letter-press edition of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*' (Lines, 'Wilkinson', p.45). Wilkinson's interest in both Swedenborg and Blake, places him, along with Rossetti, who was fundamental in establishing Blake's work and reputation after his discovery of the British Museum manuscript, within a literary tradition informed by spiritualist concerns.¹³

Wilkinson and Rossetti therefore had much in common; their interest in Swedenborg stemming from an intellectual esotericism that included a sense of the occult literary tradition of which Dante, Swedenborg and Blake are all a part. This is a feature of the group that forms the crux of this context: 'For a while, these spiritualists and others like them carried on a tradition which was later to find expression in esoteric groupings like the Rosicrucian Society'.¹⁴ It also aligns Wilkinson with William Howitt in particular from this group, whose own spiritualist writings reflect this strand of literary spiritualism.

The Howitts

The Howitt family, who were central to this group of literary minded spiritualists and Swedenborgians, were good friends of Rossetti and part of the London literary and artistic scene. William and Mary Howitt were both poets and writers (Mary was also a translator) and between them they produced over 180 books in their

members were alarmed by what they considered to be the 'obnoxious element' of spiritualism with its 'false' and 'phantastic' claims (p. 74).

¹² Wilkinson, *Swedenborg*, title page.

¹³ See section on *The Rossetti Manuscript* in Chapter 3, Part 3: 'The Importance of Blake'.

¹⁴ Owen, p. 21. Rodger Drew traces the beginnings of this in the work of Rossetti and his Pre-Raphaelite associates, through consideration of their use of Rosicrucian symbolism (see Drew, *Stream's Secret*, pp. 144-98).

lifetime.¹⁵ Their daughter Anna Mary Howitt was an artist and a contemporary of Rossetti often referred to as a Pre-Raphaelite painter. She trained at Sass's drawing academy, where Rossetti and two other of the future Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; William Holman Hunt and Thomas Woolner were also students, and was engaged for a period to Rossetti's friend Edward Bateman.¹⁶ Anna was part of the wider pre-Raphaelite circle of artists and writers including other Pre-Raphaelite women painters such as Lizzie Siddal and Barbara Leigh Smith. In 1854 she joined The Folio club, a sketching club formed by Rossetti and his friends. Rossetti recorded the event in a letter to George Price Boyce in March of that year: 'Miss Howitt has joined the "Folio"' (*Correspondence I*, p. 332, 54.27). The Howitts were early supporters of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, to which William Michael Rossetti's entry in the *PRB Journal* for March 1850, regarding William Howitt's support of the Pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ*, testifies: 'Tuesday 12th. A copy of Howitt's paper, *The Standard of Freedom*, was left us by Bateman, in which there is a very favorable [sic] review of *The Germ*.' (p. 62). It was through the Howitts that Rossetti was first introduced to Dr. Wilkinson in 1854, when he treated Lizzie Siddal. William Howitt and his wife Mary were friends with 'the Garth Wilkinsons' and spent time with them over Christmas 1850.¹⁷

William Howitt wrote one of the earliest histories of spiritualism in his book *The History of the Supernatural in All Ages and Nations, and in All Churches, Christian and Pagan Demonstrating a Universal Faith*, published in the early 1860s. Volume Two, published in 1863, traces the development of spiritualism in England, but also seeks to locate the phenomenon within an esoteric tradition which includes Swedenborg's writings. The book also includes a chapter on the manifestation of spiritualism in literature, referring to Dante and tracing the interest in the supernatural in Romanticism. In his book Howitt discusses the esoteric influence of Swedenborg's ideas about death and the afterlife, suggesting a subconscious acceptance of his theosophy over time: 'By the silently, almost unconsciously diffused revelations of Swedenborg, death has lost his terrors' (p. 391). It is this kind of Swedenborgianism that Howitt (like Wilkinson) enjoyed and promoted, as it is directly related to the

¹⁵ Peter Mandler, 'Howitt, William (1792-1879)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13998>, accessed 10 Feb 2010]

¹⁶ Pam Hirsch, 'Howitt [Watts], Anna Mary (1824-1884)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63040>, accessed 10 Feb 2010]

¹⁷ *Mary Howitt: An Autobiography*, ed. by Margaret Howitt (London: Isbister, [1889]) p. 200.

practices of spiritualism in which he is involved: 'They are coming to know from Swedenborg and spiritualism that the spirit is the real man, the body but a mere temporary wrapping' (p. 390). He consequently distances himself from church-bound Swedenborgians who were against spiritualism, whom he considers as 'endeavouring to shut up the door that their apostle opened' (p. 391). For Howitt – and for those like Wilkinson within his circle – Swedenborg's ideas form part of a universal wisdom that is 'for all mankind' and should not be limited to 'the narrow region of a sect' (p. 391).

Both William and Mary Howitt were significantly involved with spiritualism and, like Wilkinson, were both friendly with the medium D.D. Home, and are mentioned in Home's *Incidents in My Life* (1863). A testimonial from William Howitt regarding his séance experiences with Home is included in Home's book, with his spiritualist credentials described in advance, with reference to his own book *The History of the Supernatural* (1863), which was about to be published:

Mr William Howitt, who has made such deep researches into this subject, and has in his great work now ready for the press, brought together the testimonies, ancient and modern, to the supernatural in all ages, was present on several occasions to observe and investigate the phenomena. (Home, p.189)

Howitt returned the favour and devoted a section to Home in his book (W. Howitt, pp. 200-205). Howitt also publicly defended Home, against whom there were many imputations of posturing to which a newspaper article in *The Derby Mercury* in October 1860 entitled 'Mr. William Howitt in Defence of Spiritualism' makes reference. The article, which begins 'Mr. W. Howitt has sent to a London contemporary a long defence of spiritualism against the attacks made upon that singular movement by *Blackwood*' provides further evidence of the sense of this circle under discussion as Wilkinson's brother William Martin Wilkinson is mentioned alongside Howitt and Home.¹⁸

Mary Howitt, herself an important member of this group, was also included in Home's *Incidents in My Life* (1863). In the chapter entitled 'In Memoriam', she contributed a written posthumous tribute to Home's wife Sasha, who died the same year as Rossetti's wife in 1862 (Home, pp. 212-18). She describes her introduction to spiritualism in her autobiography:

¹⁸ 'Mr. William Howitt in Defence of Spiritualism', *Derby Mercury*, 10 October, 1860, p. 3.

In the spring of 1856 we had become acquainted with several most ardent and honest spirit mediums. It seemed right to my husband and myself, under the circumstances, to see and try to understand the true nature of those phenomena in which our new acquaintance so firmly believed. (M. Howitt, p. 231-32)

Her first experience seems to have been at a séance held at the home of Professor De Morgan (also one of this group – see opening paragraphs) at which she was ‘much astonished and affected by communications purporting to come to me from my dear son Claude’ who had died in 1844 (M. Howitt, p. 232). As a consequence the Howitts began experimenting with spiritualism at their home The Hermitage, but not without ‘constant prayer for enlightenment and guidance’, or the realisation that with regard to the séance the ‘system was clearly open to much abuse’ (M. Howitt, p.232).

In the same year as Mary Howitt discovered spiritualism in earnest, Rossetti was on close enough terms with the family that he wrote a letter to the poet William Allingham, referring to the recent events and expressing concern for Anna in particular, with regard to her absorption into spiritualism:

Have you heard of the Howitts? I have seen them, though not very lately, and fear that Miss H. is anything but well. *Spiritualism* has begun to be in the ascendant at the Hermitage, & this to a degree which you could not conceive possible without witnessing it.¹⁹

It is the excessive immersion in spiritualism which elicits Rossetti’s concern, as he suggested in the same letter that his opinion regarding spiritualism was close to that of William Howitt, suggesting his interest at this stage to be in alignment with Howitt’s more intellectual approach to spiritualism as a continuation of an older tradition of esotericism:

I elicited from Mr. Howitt, before his family, his opinion of it with some trouble, & found it to be a modified form of my own which of course I give without reserve – but the ladies of the house seem to take but one view of the subject. (*Correspondence II*, p. 148, 56.59)

¹⁹ *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Formative Years, Volume II, 1855-62*, ed. by William E. Fredeman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), p. 147-48 (letter 56.59). Hereafter cited as *Correspondence II*.

However, Rossetti's concern was justified as Anna gave up her art in favour of spiritualism after a breakdown, brought into focus by harsh criticism of her painting from John Ruskin (and perhaps instigated by her break up with Bateman).²⁰ Mary Howitt also explained the situation regarding her daughter's forays into spiritualism, which explain Rossetti's concerns for Anna in his letter:

Our daughter had, both by her pen and pencil, taken her place amongst the successful artists and writers of the day, when, in the spring of 1856, a severe private censure of one of her oil-paintings by a king among critics so crushed her sensitive nature as to make her yield to her bias for the supernatural, and withdraw from the ordinary arena of the fine arts. (M. Howitt, p. 231)

Anna did continue with her art but in a very specialist form; that of spirit drawing. In 1859 she married Alaric Watts, a colleague of William Michael Rossetti from the Inland Revenue, and shared with him 'a deep immersion in spiritualism' (Marsh and Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, p. 104). William Howitt refers to his daughter in Volume 2 of his spiritualist masterwork *The History of the Supernatural* (1863) as an important spiritual artist:

Great numbers of English spiritualists have developed into writing and drawing mediums, and some of these have already reached an excellence far beyond anything in this department, [...] yet witnessed in America. I may refer, in proof of this statement, to the water-colour drawings of Lady Ellis; to those of Mrs. William Wilkinson, [...] and to the pencil drawings of my daughter, Mrs. Watts. (W. Howitt, p. 225)

Howitt also refers here to the spirit drawings of Mrs. William Wilkinson; the wife of William Martin Wilkinson and the sister-in-law of Dr. Garth Wilkinson, further elucidating this particular circle of Swedenborgian-spiritualists.

Anna's spirit drawings were born out of her experiments with automatic writing, which soon changed to 'the delineation of forms'.²¹ The forms were apparently suggested to her through visions which appeared to her sometimes when her eyes were closed, and sometimes when they were open. Certain initials repeatedly appeared to her: 'one day, as she sat sketching irises and talking to a friend, her pencil drew by itself the initials ARB' (Morley, p. 110). They stood for 'Angelico, Raphael and

²⁰ See Marsh and Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, p. 104, and *Women Artists*, pp. 43-6.

²¹ John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), p. 110.

Blake', an interesting combination considering her pre-Raphaelite connections – the inclusion of Blake is particularly pertinent, as an innate sense of the visionary tradition is evoked with his name (Morley, p. 110). From 1870 onwards Anna and her husband Alaric Watts lived at 19 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea near to Rossetti, who lived at number 16, and the two regularly frequented séances (Hirsch, *ODNB*). Several years earlier Alaric Watts had attended a 'supper-séance' on Friday 24 April, 1868 with Rossetti himself. The séance, recorded by William Michael Rossetti in his *Séance Diary* was the second of that month conducted with the famous medium Mrs. Guppy (*SD*, entry 19). Participants also included William Morris's wife Jane Morris and Lucy Madox Brown, the daughter of the painter Ford Madox Brown who went on to marry William Michael Rossetti in 1874, showing the extent to which Rossetti and his Pre-Raphaelite circle were involved in spiritualism.

Literary Spiritualism: 'From this group, most of whom knew each other, came a good proportion of early spiritualist works'²²

In 1883 Anna Mary Howitt published *Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation*. The book, 'an apologia for spiritualism, mesmerism, and associated phenomena' contained biographical sketches of her father William Howitt and his experiences in spiritualism and of Dr. Justinus Kerner, the nineteenth century German doctor associated with the renowned clairvoyant healer Frederica Hauffe, the 'Seeress of Prevorst'.²³ Twenty years earlier her father had also mentioned Hauffe in his *History of the Supernatural*, in a period rich with spiritualist works produced by this group of literary Swedenborgian-spiritualists within Rossetti's circle.

In addition to William Howitt's book (1863), there were several other notable publications of Swedenborgian-spiritualist literature published by the group around the mid 1860s. Rossetti was no exception; throughout the mid-late 1860s he was working on his spiritually inclined masterpiece *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), in the same period that he was engaging more seriously in spiritualism and attending a number of séances (c.1864-68). These were therefore important years in the expression of this

²² Quotation comes from section quoted in opening paragraph from Owen, p. 21.

²³ Hirsch, *ODNB*; Lewis Spence, *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism* (London: Routledge, 1920; repr. Mineola, New York: Dover, 2003), p. 380.

characteristic brand of spiritualism. The books associated with this group represented the aspect of spiritualism that is reflected in Rossetti's work – a blending of the current craze for physical séances, which is underlined by a theosophy that has its roots in the esoteric tradition:

Many of Swedenborg's notions were popularised and taken up by the spiritualist movement as a whole, but the pronounced arcane element in his teachings particularly appealed to the intellectual, philosophical, and religious proclivities of a well-educated elite. (Owen, p. 21)

In an article about the Howitts and their particular engagement with spiritualism, Mioara Merie has also identified this same group of 'personalities who were to become the most articulated voices of Christian Spiritualism' (Merie, p. 189). Merie lists the other members of this identified group, which include some now familiar names:

Howitt's circle also included their daughter, Anna Mary Howitt Watts (1824-1889), Camilla Newton Crosland (1812-1895), Sophia DeMorgan (1808-1892) and her husband, Professor Augustus DeMorgan (1806-1871), Thomas Shorter (born 1823), and William Martin Wilkinson (d. 1887).(Merie, p. 189)

These likeminded spiritualists between them produced a number of key books during the period and many also knew Rossetti personally, or featured within his wider social circle.

Sophia De Morgan wrote *From Matter to Spirit: the Result of Ten Years' Experience in Spirit Manifestations* (1863) about her experiences in spiritualism as a medium. The book, like Howitt's, stands as an early history of the movement. However, De Morgan's book focuses on her practical experiences and personal philosophies and has a direct quality not present in Howitt's epic tome. The areas covered by De Morgan in her book represent the context under discussion, as it is 'concerned with the adaptation of Swedenborgian philosophy to modern spiritualism' (Owen, p. 21). De Morgan and her husband Augustus were deeply involved in spiritualism and it was at their house that the Howitts experienced their first séance (M. Howitt, p. 232). The De Morgans also had pre-Raphaelite connections as their son William De Morgan, a novelist and ceramicist was associated with William Morris and had designed pieces for his design company Morris & Co. – or The Firm as it was

known – and of which Rossetti was one of the original partners. In the early 1870s William De Morgan went to live with his mother Sophia and his sister Mary at 8 Great Cheyne Row, near to where Rossetti lived in Chelsea. During this period William De Morgan was associated with both William Morris and Rossetti's other friend and artistic disciple, Edward Burne-Jones: 'The Burne-Jones, Morris, and De Morgan households were all now in west London, and there was much coming and going between them'.²⁴

Rossetti also had close connections with another of this group, Thomas Shorter, who, in addition to his spiritualist leanings, was the first secretary of the Working Men's College, founded in 1854 by the Christian Socialist F. D. Maurice (Oppenheim, pp. 40-41). Rossetti taught at the college for a time and there are several extant letters from him to Shorter regarding Working Men's College business.²⁵ The college was located in Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury, where Rossetti shared a studio for a time with Walter Deverall in 1851.²⁶ Ruskin also taught there, as did Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite associates Arthur Hughes, Thomas Woolner and Alexander Munro. Shorter also contributed to the body of spiritualist literature associated with Howitt and his group. He published *Confessions of a Truth Seeker: A narrative of personal investigations into the facts and philosophy of spirit-intercourse* (1859) and, under the pseudonym Thomas Brevior, he published *The Two Worlds: the Natural and the Spiritual* (1864).²⁷ Rossetti owned a copy of the latter, which was catalogued as part of his library by his brother William Michael Rossetti in 1866 (*List of Books*, [S], 18).

Shorter's other great contribution to spiritualist literature from the period came through his editorship of the *Spiritual Magazine* which he shared with William Martin Wilkinson. The publication epitomised the approach of their group:

The *Spiritual Magazine* [...] was edited during most of the 1860s by Thomas Shorter and William Wilkinson, with William Howitt as one of its chief contributors, and it echoed the orientation of this group: middle class, Swedenborgian, and pro-Christian (although anti-church). (Owen, p. 23)

²⁴ Alan Crawford, 'Morgan, William Frend De (1839-1917)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Oct 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32779>, accessed 9 Feb 2010].

²⁵ See *Correspondence II*, p. 33 (55.20.1); p. 74 (55.55); p. 211 (58.4).

²⁶ Rossetti mentions looking at his old studio whilst visiting Ruskin's drawing class at the college in December 1854 (*Correspondence I*, p. 399, 54.72).

²⁷ Doyle, p. 324; Oppenheim, pp. 40-41.

William Martin Wilkinson was closely involved with another important piece of spiritualist literature published in this same period, and mentioned previously in connection with Dr. Garth Wilkinson and the Howitts: Daniel Dunglas Home's autobiography *Incidents in my Life* (1863). William Martin Wilkinson, who was also Home's solicitor contributed a written piece for the work entitled 'My First Séance with Mr. Home'; an account in support of the veracity of Home's séance phenomena, which he begins by asserting that 'I have been on terms of intimacy with Mr. Home for some years' (Home, pp. 183-89). This is arguably the most definitive book from the period which unites the major members of this group, many of whom contributed to it; the text being largely made up from a collection of accounts of spiritualism by interested parties. The year 1863 was productive for this group, as both Howitt's and De Morgan's books were first published, with Thomas Shorter's *The Two Worlds* (owned by Rossetti) following in 1864. It is no accident that these two years are given as the inception dates for Rossetti's painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), which draws heavily upon this particular brand of spiritualism, fusing the imagery of Swedenborg and mesmerism in its recasting of a subject from Dante.²⁸

Literary Swedenborgians: The Circle Widens

In the letter from Rossetti to Dr. Garth Wilkinson, located in the Swedenborg Society archive, Rossetti makes reference to Wilkinson's own poems. The book, *Improvisations from the Spirit* (1857), was 'written in a Blakean mode', thereby aligning the work within the visionary poetic tradition espoused by Blake, which no doubt accounted in part for Rossetti's admiration of them (Oppenheim, p. 235). In a letter to the poet William Allingham in July 1860, Rossetti again makes fond reference to Wilkinson's poems:

By the bye, I remember sending you a little book of bogie-poems in emblematic green cover, and hearing from you that you had one already. If you still have mine would you oblige me by sending it back as I sometimes think of it when I want to be surprised. (*Correspondence II*, p. 306, 60.24)

²⁸ The painting's year of commencement is often given as 1864 (e.g. Tate). This thesis takes it from 1863; see Chapter 4: *Beata Beatrix* for further clarification.

William Fredeman has positively identified the ‘bogie-poems’ mentioned as Wilkinson’s *Improvisations from the Spirit* (1857); ‘bogie’ being a Rossettian word for anything of a supernatural savour (p. 307, 60.24, n.8). By November 1860 Rossetti again referred to the subject of Wilkinson’s poems, as Allingham still hadn’t returned the book:

By the bye, talking of Blake, did I (I think I did) solicit from you one of the 2 copies you have, or had, of a certain greenish Book of Bogies, one whereof was sent you by the present applicant, who lately found out from the Ghost’s publisher that the literary character is quite out of print & has no further views on the British press? (*Correspondence II*, p. 324, 60.46)

It is significant that the letter was to Allingham, who was close with Rossetti throughout the 1850s, as he was ‘a keen reader of Swedenborg’; hence his familiarity with Wilkinson and his poems (Lines ‘Sutton’, p. 41). Allingham was also connected more directly to the spiritualist coterie of Wilkinson, like Rossetti, through friendships with the Howitt family, with whom he was close in the 1850s: ‘During this time in London he saw a good deal of William and Mary Howitt, then living in St. John’s Wood, but his chief companions were Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Woolner’.²⁹ His diary shows him to be interested in the particular cast of spiritualism (informed by Swedenborg and the occult tradition) associated with this group. A conversation of summer 1884 with Alfred Russell Wallace, evolutionary theorist and confirmed spiritualist, locates this group as central to the promotion of the specific Swedenborgian-spiritualist context in which this thesis places Rossetti:

Sit with Wallace under tree and talk a long while on Spiritualism, apparitions, mediums, etc. [...] He said about one person in ten, probably, is a medium. He spoke with unqualified praise of every book and writer on the spiritualistic side – William Howitt, Professor De Morgan, Professor Barrett, F.W.H. Myers, etc. – showed us, in a magazine, drawings done by thought-readers. He gave an account, essentially Swedenborgian, of the state of spirits in the next world – but he does not take Swedenborg for a prophet.³⁰

²⁹ *William Allingham’s Dairy 1847-1889*, ed. by Geoffrey Grigson (London: Centaur Press, 2000), p. 68. Hereafter cited as Grigson.

³⁰ Grigson, pp. 329-330. Note the inclusion of Frederick Myers in this list. Myers wrote about Rossetti’s mystical poetry, locating him within the esoteric tradition that manifests in the period as an interest in Swedenborg and spiritualism (see Chapter 1: *Literature Review*).

However, Rossetti's letters to, and friendship with, Allingham (and Wilkinson) introduces another dimension to the circle, which moves outward from the spiritualist coterie, to incorporate other literary figures interested specifically in Swedenborg. There are references throughout Allingham's diary to Swedenborg which illustrates the degree to which there was an interest in, and awareness of, the mystic's writings within his circle, which included various literary luminaries, some of whom are also referred to in Rossetti's November 1860 letter to Allingham: Robert Browning, Coventry Patmore and Thomas Carlyle.

Thomas Carlyle lived at Cheyne Row, Chelsea near to Rossetti and the aforementioned spiritualists Anna Mary Howitt and the De Morgans. Allingham writes in his diary of a conversation with the renowned writer in 1871, regarding Swedenborg, which illustrates the extent to which the visionary and his writings were known and discussed in the period. Rather pertinently they discuss the biography of Swedenborg which Rossetti owned: 'We spoke of White's *Life of Swedenborg*' (Grigson, p. 205). Allingham also discusses Swedenborg with the poet laureate Alfred Tennyson. His diary entry for 20 July 1868 included the lines: 'We spoke of Swedenborg: T. says his Hell is more striking than his Heaven' (Grigson, p. 183). Tennyson's brother Frederick was also a friend of Allingham and another 'reader of Swedenborg' who, along with two of his sisters Mary and Emily, was a member of the Swedenborgian New Church.³¹ Tennyson's own poetry, particularly *In Memoriam* (1850), has been shown to contain allusions to Swedenborg and his ideas (Lines, *Angels and Authors*, pp. 36-40). This was apparent to William Howitt, who noted the Swedenborgian elements in the work in the section on Swedenborg's influence upon mid-nineteenth century thought in his spiritual masterwork *The History of the Supernatural* (1863):

How many of our most popular preachers of different denominations are now actually promulgating Swedenborgianism! how many of our philosophical writers and philosophical poets are doing the same, and it passes in them for originality! What amount of Swedenborgianism exists in 'In Memoriam.' (W. Howitt, p. 389)

³¹ Michael Thorn, 'Tennyson, Frederick (1807-1898)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27138>, accessed 18 Feb 2010]; see also Richard Lines, *Angels and Authors: Some Influences of Swedenborg on Victorian Literature*. Swedenborg Society Presidential Address (London: Swedenborg Society, 1993), p. 39.

This indicates that it was something more detectable to readers of the period, than readers and critics in recent years. The historical context for the work needs therefore to be re-established in order to fully appreciate its referential richness, which is also true for Rossetti and his work. The knowledge that an interest in Swedenborg was prevalent in the literary community around Rossetti is central to an understanding of his work.

Rossetti himself of course also knew Tennyson, having been introduced to him by the poet Coventry Patmore (*Correspondence I*, p.97, 49.12, n.10). Rossetti was one of the illustrators on the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems, published in 1857 (*Correspondence II*, p. 7, 55.4). A portrait bust of Tennyson was undertaken by Rossetti's fellow Pre-Raphaelite brother, Thomas Woolner, to which Rossetti makes reference in a letter to Woolner in 1856 (*II*, p. 135, 56.5). There is also a pen sketch by Rossetti of Tennyson reading *Maud* drawn at Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's home in September 1855.³²

The Brownings

Rossetti's introduction to Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning occurred in 1851.³³ By November 1855 their friendship had developed and Rossetti had become quite close to both poets, as a letter to Allingham confirms: 'I saw them a good many times, and indeed may boast of some intimacy with the glorious Robert by this time' (*Correspondence II*, p. 78, 55.58). Rossetti's friendship with the Brownings is central to establishing this context for his work as both poets were interested in, and influenced by, the writings of Swedenborg. As Richard Lines has noted: 'ideas emanating directly or indirectly from Swedenborg's religious writings had a profound impact on the work of the two poets' (Lines 'Browning', p. 23). Both the Brownings were readers of Swedenborg, and *Conjugal Love* (1768) was a particularly strong influence on their work after they were lent the book by the 'well-known English Swedenborgian and a

³² Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Tennyson Reading 'Maud'* (1855) Brown pen and wash over black ink, on paper, 20.7 x 15.5 cm (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number 1904P495). For Rossetti's account of the evening and his sketching of Tennyson, see *Correspondence II*, p.80, 55.58.

³³ See *Correspondence I*, p.181, 51.18. Rossetti had previously corresponded with Browning, however, in 1847(see *I*, pp. 45-6, letters 47.3 and 47.3a).

founder member [...] of the Swedenborg Society' Charles Augustus Tulk in 1848 (p. 24). Elizabeth noted in a letter to her sister Henrietta, from the same year, in reference to Tulk: 'he lends us Swedenborg & Blake's poems'; which emphasises the visionary tradition to which both belonged and indicating the aspect of Swedenborgianism prevalent in the literary community of the period.³⁴ In a letter to Henrietta of 1857, Elizabeth suggested her interest in the mystic had deepened and moved into the realm of belief: 'I'm a Swedenborgian you know, and believe in "spheres", "atmospheres" and "influences"'.³⁵ This accounts for the Swedenborgian elements in her work, the presence of which, as with Tennyson, was noted by William Howitt in *The History of the Supernatural* (1863). No doubt Rossetti would also have been aware of this aspect in the work of one of his favourite poets: 'What a mass of Swedenborgian truths are swallowed down by the poetical public in 'Aurora Leigh,' and imagined to be the original ideas of Mrs. Browning' (W. Howitt, p. 390). It is likely that Rossetti's apparent familiarity with Swedenborg's *Conjugial Love* in particular, was received via his friendship with the Brownings in the 1850s.

Robert Browning was an exact contemporary of Dr. Garth Wilkinson, whom he had met in the late 1830s, after Wilkinson attended a private reading of Browning's play *Strafford*.³⁶ Writing to Wilkinson in 1887, Browning recalled the influence his Swedenborgian friend had upon his reading:

I well remember the letter in which you recommended me to study Swedenborg. I believe that you and I have always been in accordance as to aspiration and sympathy, though we may differ in our appreciation of facts connected with them. (Quoted in Lines 'Wilkinson', p. 46)

There is an anecdote in William Allingham's diary from the following year, regarding Browning, who read to him from one of Wilkinson's books: 'Then he took up a book from the table, *Oannes, an Ancient Myth, as told by Berossus*, by J. Garth Wilkinson' (Grigson, p.373). Allingham notes with impressed exclamation that Browning managed to read half a page without the aid of spectacles!

³⁴ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, quoted in Lines 'Browning', p. 24.

³⁵ *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Letters to her Sister, 1846-1859*, ed. by Leonard Huxley (London: John Murray, 1929; repr. 1931), p. 283, letter 94. Hereafter cited as Huxley.

³⁶ Lines, 'Browning', p. 25-6; 'Wilkinson', p. 46.

Although close with Wilkinson in terms of a philosophical interest in Swedenborg's writings, Browning differed from him in his attitude to spiritualism. In this he also differed from Elizabeth Barrett Browning who was an enthusiastic spiritualist. In the same year as Daniel Dunglas Home embarked on his career in England – 1855 – Elizabeth expressed her interest in the growing craze to her sister Henrietta:

I have heard some more wonderful things about the spirits – so extraordinary that I scarcely like repeating them except upon evidence which I have not yet. Think of water-colour drawings being produced by the spirits, and letters written and folded and put into your hand – and this not once, but by hundreds. Sir Edward Lytton told it to me. (Huxley, pp. 233-34, letter 72)

Sir Edward Lytton was the son of the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton (who was also witness to Home's séances and had written about mesmerism) and was a favourite of Elizabeth.³⁷ He is mentioned with frequency in her correspondence. In November 1852 she wrote of a visit by the attachés of the English Embassy, and of Lytton in particular she says: 'As he is a seer of visions, a great supernaturalist, I shall comfort myself greatly in his society' (Huxley, p. 173, letter 49). After hearing of Sir Edward Lytton's experiences, the Brownings attended a séance with Home at John Rymer's house at Ealing at which a wreath was placed upon Elizabeth's head.³⁸

Robert Browning, however, was sceptical of spiritualism in general and Home in particular. In 1864 Browning told Allingham over lunch that his poem 'Mr. Sludge the

³⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote in detail about mesmerism across two volumes of *The Monthly Chronicle*. See 'Animal Magnetism', *Monthly Chronicle*, 1 (1838), 289-306; 'Animal Magnetism (Cont.)', *Monthly Chronicle*, 2 (1838), 11-30.

³⁸ Peter Lamont, *The First Psychic: The Peculiar Mystery of a Notorious Victorian Wizard* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), p. 49. Edward Lytton and his father Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton were also present at one of the séances held at Rymer's house with Home, and witnessed the effects of a 'spirit hand' (p. 48). This is probably the séance at Ealing that Home refers to in his autobiography: 'Whilst I was at Ealing, a distinguished novelist, accompanied by his son attended a séance, at which some very remarkable manifestations occurred' (Home, p. 65). We can assume this despite Home's reluctance to name the men, as he suggests that the following message came through from the other side for the 'distinguished novelist': 'I am the spirit who influenced you to write Z –!' (p. 65). 'Z' presumably is the novel *Zanoni* (1842) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, which featured Rosicrucianism as a central theme. Bulwer-Lytton asked the spirit for proof and was furnished with the aforementioned spirit hand: 'putting his hand beneath the surface of the table, it was immediately seized by a powerful grasp, which made him start to his feet in evident trepidation' (p. 65).

Medium' (published 1864) was definitely a reference to Home, which Allingham recounts in his diary:

Sludge is Home, the Medium, of whom Browning told me to-day a great deal that was very amusing. Having witnessed a séance of Home's, at the house of a friend of B.'s, Browning was openly called upon to give his frank opinion on what had passed, in presence of Home and the company, upon which he declared with emphasis that so impudent a piece of imposture he never saw before in all his life, and so took his leave. (Grigson, p. 101)

Elizabeth remained steadfast in her belief however and, in 1855, attempted to interest John Ruskin in spiritualism and to encourage him to attend a Home séance (Burd, p. 11). Rossetti alluded to Robert Browning's concern for Elizabeth's unquestioning spiritualist beliefs in the same letter of 1856 in which he himself expressed concern for the similarly excessive assent of Anna Mary Howitt and her mother for spiritualism:

Astounding as it may appear, Mrs. Browning has given it her adherence. I hope *Aurora Leigh* is not to be followed by "that style only." Browning, of course, pockets his hands & shakes his mane over the question, with occasional foamings at the mouth, & he and I laid siege to the subject one night, but to no purpose. (*Correspondence II*, p. 148, 56.59)

It is interesting that Rossetti appears more sceptical of spiritualism at this stage; his own enthusiasm for it deepening after Lizzie Siddal's death in 1862. It is clearly the extent of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spiritualist beliefs that is of concern as both Rossetti's and Browning's work up to this point shows an intellectual engagement with Swedenborgian ideas concerning love and the afterlife. In addition, despite the satirical nature of 'Mr. Sludge the Medium' in which the medium is revealed as a fraud, Browning still alluded to the possible truth of an afterlife (Lines, *Angels and Authors*, p. 42).

Coventry Patmore

Prior to his friendship with the Brownings, Rossetti was in close association with another poet who was influenced by Swedenborg; Coventry Patmore. In 1846

Patmore acquired a position working as an assistant librarian at the British Museum.³⁹ It was while working there that he first read Swedenborg's *Conjugial Love* (1768), and was 'delightedly and profoundly' affected by its ideas on romantic love.⁴⁰ His interest in Swedenborg was further inspired through his acquaintance with the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, who 'visited England in 1847/8 and lectured on Swedenborg'.⁴¹ Patmore later referred to Swedenborg as a 'Blake upon a colossal scale', reinforcing with hyperbole an affinity between the two writers, and locating his own interest as a poet within an esoteric literary tradition.⁴² Despite his conversion to Catholicism, the poet retained a fondness for the visionary: 'Patmore continued to admire and draw on Swedenborg, whom he called 'my favourite saint', in his later poetry and prose' (Lines, 'Sutton', p. 41).

Patmore had the honour, along with Tennyson, and Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, of being included in the Pre-Raphaelite 'List of Immortals'. The list, composed predominantly of artists and writers, has been described as a 'serio-comic document', but is nevertheless testament to the style and direction that the youthful brotherhood of painters and writers intended to pursue.⁴³ It is therefore significant that these Swedenborgian influenced poets were rated highly within the Pre-Raphaelite circle.

Rossetti met Patmore in November 1849 (*PRB Journal*, p.23). The meeting was organised by William Michael Rossetti at the house of pre-Raphaelite sculptor Thomas

³⁹ John Maynard, 'Patmore, Coventry, Kersey Deighton (1823-1896)', ODNB, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Oct 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21550>, accessed 22 Feb 2010].

⁴⁰ Richard Lines, 'Eros and the Unknown Victorian: Coventry Patmore and Swedenborg', in *Between Method and Madness: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. by Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2005), pp. 65-79 (p. 66). Hereafter cited as Lines, 'Patmore'.

⁴¹ Lines, 'Patmore', p. 66. It would be possible to widen the circle of literary Swedenborgians to include Emerson, who was also influenced by Swedenborg (see Anders Hallengren, 'Swedenborgian Simile in Emersonian Edification' in *In Search of the Absolute: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. by Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004), pp. 15-22). In addition to knowing both Coventry Patmore and Henry Sutton (Lines 'Sutton' p. 41), Emerson met Wilkinson on several occasions, after admiring his translations of Swedenborg (Lines, 'Wilkinson', pp. 48-50). Rossetti himself read Emerson (see for example *Correspondence II*, p. 227, 58.16); he had copies of Emerson's *Poems* (1847), *Essays* (1845) and *Orations, Lectures, & Addresses* (1849) in his library in 1866 (*List of Books*, [E], 1,2 and 4).

⁴² Coventry Patmore, "'Swedenborg'" (St. James's Gazette, April 16 1886)', in *Courage in Politics and Other Essays 1885-1896* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 101-105 (p. 103).

⁴³ *PRB Journal*, Appendix 2: 'List of Immortals', p. 106-7.

Woolner, who was engaged in producing a portrait medallion of Patmore.⁴⁴ There are numerous references to Patmore's close association with the Pre-Raphaelites in the *PRB Journal*, and of course, he contributed to the Pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ*. Both Rossetti brothers were regular visitors to Patmore's house throughout 1849-50 and it is likely that discussions concerning Swedenborg occurred, as William Michael Rossetti stated in his Pre-Raphaelite Journal that conversations often took 'a religious turn' (*PRB Journal*, p.28). In addition Patmore also knew William Allingham, having made his acquaintance through his librarianship at the British Museum. Allingham's Diary entry for August 16 1849 roots the very beginnings of their friendship in a shared interest in the visionary tradition of poetry: 'We talk about Blake' (Grigson, p.53). It is in his capacity as librarian that Patmore was engaged by Dr. Garth Wilkinson, who was also acquainted with the poet, and wrote to him on behalf of some friends wishing to visit the British Museum.⁴⁵

Patmore's poem on married love, *The Angel in the House* (1854), was influenced by his reading of Swedenborg. This he acknowledged openly and cited the influence particularly of *Conjugal Love* upon his work:

Patmore's best known poem, *The Angel in the House*, (hugely popular in its day as an exposition of ideal marriage) was deeply influenced by his reading of *Conjugal Love* (an indebtedness which the poet acknowledged in a footnote to the first published part of the work).⁴⁶

The poem has been much misunderstood, having been seen for much of the twentieth century as an idealisation of the female domestic role. However, the 'angel in the house' is a Swedenborgian conjugal angel and 'represents the love between the couple, rather than the wife herself' (Maynard, *ODNB*). As with Rossetti and his work, the specific mystical context that informs the poem has been forgotten, or sidelined, in much twentieth-century criticism, and needs to be retrieved in order that it is fully understood and appreciated.

⁴⁴ Woolner went on later to do the same for Tennyson, probably through introduction by Patmore. See *PRB Journal*, p. 21, entry for 18 October 1849.

⁴⁵ This manuscript letter is currently located in the Swedenborg Society Archive: 'My dear Mr. Patmore, Can you show my friends, the bearers of this, [...] the Reading & Book Part of the British Museum? You will much oblige. Yours very truly, J.J. Garth Wilkinson' (Swedenborg Society Library Archive, K/30: Patmore Coventry. Letter from J.J.G. Wilkinson, n.d.)

⁴⁶ Lines, 'Sutton', pp. 40-41. For more on the Swedenborgian content of *The Angel in the House* and Patmore's interest in Swedenborg, see Lines, 'Patmore', pp. 65-79.

Patmore sent the proofs for the first part of *The Angel in the House*, entitled *The Betrothal*, to Rossetti for him to read, which Rossetti mentioned in a letter to Allingham in November 1854.⁴⁷ In December of that year Rossetti noted to poet William Bell Scott: 'Patmore has just published his *Angel in the House*. I dare say some of us could manage to send you a copy to read if you like' (*Correspondence I*, p. 399, 54.72). In a letter from January 1855 – again to Allingham – Rossetti makes positive comment upon the work, dismissing the cruel review printed in the *Athenaeum* on the 20 January:

I remember, for one thing, you asked me how I liked *The Angel in the House*. Of course it is very good indeed, [...] From what I hear, I should judge that, in spite of idiots in the *Athenaeum* & elsewhere, the book will be of use to its author's reputation – a resolute poet, whom I saw a little while back, and who means to make his book bigger than the *Divina Commedia*, he tells me.⁴⁸

It is interesting to note that Rossetti is one of those granted an early view of the piece by Patmore, as this would suggest that Patmore felt that Rossetti would appreciate the poem, perhaps because of a shared interest in the Swedenborgian aspects. The allusion to Dante is also interesting as it would suggest Patmore in some respects, despite the poem's modernity, alludes to a tradition of which both Dante and Swedenborg belong; the presentation of an epic, idealised love.⁴⁹

Rossetti was also familiar with the poetry of Patmore's 'lifelong' friend, the Swedenborgian Churchman Henry Sutton, which he mentions in a letter to Allingham who also knew Sutton.⁵⁰ It was in fact by way of Sutton that Allingham became introduced to Patmore at the British Museum.⁵¹ Henry Sutton was in turn a good

⁴⁷ See *Correspondence I*, p. 395, 54.70: 'I have read Patmore's poem which he sent me', and p. 397, 54.70, n. 8.

⁴⁸ *Correspondence II*, p. 8, 55.4: See also p. 20, 55.8, n.3, for details of the *Athenaeum* review.

⁴⁹ Rossetti was again selected by Patmore to read the proofs of *The Espousals* (1856), which was the second published part of the poem. In a letter to the author in 1856 Rossetti praised the work: 'I have still to thank you for all the pleasure *The Espousals* have [*sic*] given me. This volume I think has some decided advantages in form over the first, and there is more incident and variety of character. As poetry, the whole is simply admirable of its kind' (*Correspondence II*, p. 91, 56.3).

⁵⁰ Lines, 'Sutton', p. 40. See also *Correspondence I*, p. 372, 54.57; p. 374, 54:57, n.9.

⁵¹ See Allingham's Diary entry for 11 August 1849: 'Find Henry Sutton's lodging. Talk, then out to walk [...] Sutton gives me a letter to Mr. Patmore' (Grigson, p. 53).

friend of the poet Philip James Bailey.⁵² Bailey wrote *Festus* (1839), a poem in the Gothic tradition based upon the Faust legend, which Rossetti read, and enjoyed, as a young man: 'Bailey's *Festus* was enormously relished [...] read again and yet again'.⁵³ The poem, which 'adverts to the situation of the lover on earth [...] and the beloved in heaven, in order to show how sentimental passion may penetrate the cosmos', is an acknowledged influence upon Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), which features a similar dynamic between lovers separated by death.⁵⁴ Tennyson, Bulwer-Lytton and Mary Howitt were also amongst the poem's admirers.⁵⁵ They no doubt responded, as we can assume Rossetti did also, to the supernatural elements in the work which draws similarly upon a Swedenborgian-spiritual context.⁵⁶

The sense of a circle of Swedenborg influenced poets therefore deepens through Patmore, making his friendship with Rossetti significant in terms of context. Rossetti's familiarity with Patmore and his circle, his friendships with Wilkinson, Allingham, and the Brownings, and his relationship with the Howitts and other members of the middle-class intellectual spiritualist scene, are central to establishing a Swedenborgian-spiritualist context for his work.

Part 2: Rossetti's Experiences with Swedenborgian-Spiritualism

Spiritualism

In a chapter entitled *Spiritualism*, from her biography of Rossetti, Helen Rossetti Angeli addresses the importance of this subject with regard to her uncle Gabriel. This is an important place in which to begin discussion of Rossetti's direct

⁵² W.B. Owen, 'Sutton, Henry Septimus (1825-1901)', rev. Sayoni Basu, ODNB, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36376>, accessed 22 Feb 2010]

⁵³ *The Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1900), p. xxvi.

⁵⁴ Alan D. McKillop, 'Festus and *The Blessed Damozel*', *Modern Language Notes*, 34.2 (1919), 93–97 (p. 94).

⁵⁵ Ronald Bayne, 'Bailey, Philip James (1816-1902)', rev. D.E. Latané, Jr., ODNB, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30529>, accessed 22 Feb 2010]

⁵⁶ See Chapter 3, Part 2: 'The Influence of the Gothic Tradition', note 28, for a brief discussion of the Swedenborgian content of this poem and its influence on Rossetti's poem.

experiences of, and interest in, spiritualism. This is because Angeli makes a crucial distinction between the idea of Rossetti's interest in spiritualism as an idiosyncrasy which betrays simple belief, and the idea that it is evidence of a shared cultural experience. Before detailing briefly Rossetti's experiences with spiritualism (and related subjects) and his life-long interest in the supernatural, she emphasises the importance of context as opposed to outright belief in a discussion of Rossetti:

It has been repeatedly stated that at a period subsequent to his wife's death, Rossetti was much addicted to spiritualism, and the common inference is that he developed a weak and foolish infatuation for occult practice and speculation. There is very little evidence in support of this. The late 'fifties and 'sixties were a period of renewed interest in psychic and occult studies, which became much involved with one another [...] Hypnotism, mesmerism, electro-biology, and spiritualism with its claims to communion with the souls of the departed, became an obsession with many people, and attracted for a time even the most level-headed and sceptical.⁵⁷

The distinction is drawn between critical approaches to Rossetti that focus upon the anecdotal and biographical, and those that locate, through investigation of Rossetti's participation and interest in spiritualism, a grander and firmer context that informs his work. It represents an innate understanding of the intellectual importance and cultural significance of Victorian spiritualism. The inter-relatedness of the phenomena is also recognised, accounting for the mingled presence of many aspects of the occult in works from the period. The chapter ends with a long quotation from her father, William Michael Rossetti, from his unpublished notes on Rossetti's attitude to spiritualism. In it William Michael includes reference to Rossetti's experiences with both séances and mesmerism, including electro-biology, indicating the perception from those who lived through the period of the intimate relationship between these apparently different branches of esotericism; their commonality lying in the idea of the suspension of the will and the achievement of a trance state. As a man of his time, William Michael makes no initial distinction between mesmerism and séances, which fall under the same umbrella, namely '*Gabriel's concern in Spiritualism etc.*' (Angeli, p. 208).

⁵⁷ Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. 205.

With the distinction drawn by Angeli in mind, this section traces Rossetti's direct experience with spiritualism. The different aspects that characterise his involvement; mesmerism, séance attendance and an interest in Swedenborg's writings, are detailed separately, for the purposes of clarity, but it should be borne in mind that Rossetti's particular engagement, which this thesis names 'Swedenborgian-spiritualism', is characterised by a layered approach that, even in its most practical form – such as séance attendance – is informed by an interest in an esoteric intellectual tradition in which Swedenborg features significantly.

It is from William Michael Rossetti, who documented his own and his brother's experiences with spiritualism, that we gain the closest insight into Rossetti's direct interest in spiritualism and an indication of how far it may have informed his work. In addressing William Bell Scott's assertion in his *Autobiographical Notes* (1892) that Rossetti believed in life after death, William Michael assents to its veracity, but crucially relates the belief immediately to his work, thereby distinguishing between an anecdote of biographical interest to the reader concerning Rossetti's belief in an afterlife, and the significance of this belief in terms of his work:

As to my brother's reported assertion "I believe in a future life," this was partially true at all periods of his career, and was entirely true in his closing years. It depended partly upon what we call "spiritualism," on many of whose manifestations he relied. (W.M. Rossetti, *Family-Letters*, I, pp. 380-81)

This passage is footnoted by William Michael in which he furthers his point with specifics, referring briefly to *The House of Life* sonnets that reflect this concern:

In my book entitled *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (p. 261) I have called attention to twelve sonnets in *The House of Life* which bear upon the question of the destiny of the soul. Of these, eight indicate a belief in immortality; three a sense of uncertainty; one does not point clearly to anything. (p. 381)

William clearly asserts here that ideas pertaining to the afterlife have a direct relevance to Rossetti's work, and that Rossetti's involvement with Victorian spiritualism deepened this concern.

William Michael's writings are also testament to the general level of social interest in spiritualism within the period, giving the reader a sense of historical

context. In an entry in the *PRB Journal* for 1 February 1850, during the period in which both Rossetti brothers were in close association with Coventry Patmore, William Michael recorded: 'I had a letter from Mrs. Patmore, inviting me for Thursday next, when I shall have a chance of being mesmerized by a friend of theirs who will be present' (p. 50). This highlights the nature of mesmerism (and spiritualism) in the period, which was engaged with on a variety of levels, both publicly and privately, and the experiences of Rossetti and his coterie were no exception. The casual manner in which William Michael records the proposed event is indicative of the presence of the phenomenon in everyday society within the period. By 1850, mesmerism was established as both a medical practice and, through the idea of the clairvoyant trance, as a phenomenon associated with more esoteric ideologies.

Mesmerism

In addition to Patmore, other figures in Rossetti's circle were involved in mesmerism in a medical and/or esoteric manner, indicating the degree of engagement present within the period, and suggesting a heritage for the appearance of its imagery in Rossetti's work. Rossetti's maternal Uncle Dr. John Polidori, who wrote the Gothic novella *The Vampyre* (1819), and represents for Rossetti a direct familial lineage in terms of the Romantic-Gothic tradition, was for a time Lord Byron's physician.⁵⁸ Polidori trained as a doctor in Edinburgh, where his graduation thesis was on Somnambulism.⁵⁹ Sleepwalking in the period was often viewed as akin to states of trance and mesmerism: 'Mesmerism, electro-biology, Braidism, hypnotism and somnambulism are all one and the same thing'.⁶⁰ The term *Somnambule* was used to designate a mesmerised subject, as sleepwalking's 'affinity with hypnosis was early recognised'; thus it became synonymous with spiritual mediumship.⁶¹

⁵⁸ William Michael relates that the spirit of 'uncle John' Polidori comes through at a séance held by the famous medium Mrs. Marshall on 25 November 1865 and confesses to having in fact killed himself and to not being very happy in the afterlife (*SD*, entry 4).

⁵⁹ Nigel Leask, 'Polidori, John William (1795-1821)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22466>, accessed 4 Nov 2011]

⁶⁰ T. P. Barkas, March 1889, quoted in Ronald Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers: The Victorians and the Occult* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), p. 16.

⁶¹ Spence, p. 373.

Another familial connection to mesmerism is through Dr. John Elliotson, who treated the Rossetti family in his professional capacity as a medical doctor. William Michael Rossetti remembered him as ‘our accustomed family doctor, resolutely refusing—for he was a most kind and generous man—to accept any fees for his valuable advice’ (W.M. Rossetti, *Family-Letters*, I, p. 48). Elliotson, a prolific physician and medical pioneer who built up ‘perhaps the largest private practice in London’ was a devotee of mesmerism.⁶² His success brought him a number of friends amongst the London literati: in addition to the Rossettis he was friendly with novelist William Makepeace Thackeray and taught mesmerism to Charles Dickens.⁶³ Elliotson was instrumental in the introduction of mesmerism as a medical treatment to the University College Hospital, London in the late 1830s, and in 1849 helped to establish the London Mesmeric Infirmary. However, his interests in mesmerism were not confined to its medical applications, as his research also touched upon ‘alleged mesmeric clairvoyance’ (Gauld, *ODNB*). This was a precursor to his involvement with spiritualism in general and with the medium D.D. Home in particular.⁶⁴ This connects Elliotson with the coterie of Swedenborgian spiritualists established in the earlier section of this chapter; his interest in mesmerism aligns itself with the spiritualism of D.D. Home’s circle. Dr. Garth Wilkinson, for example, attended Elliotson’s demonstrations on animal magnetism and mesmerism in the 1830s.⁶⁵

Rossetti himself had an interest in, and a direct experience of, mesmerism. Between 1850 and 1852 public lectures were given on electro-biology (an American term for mesmerism) to the Royal Society of Physicians by Dr. Marshall Hall.⁶⁶ One of

⁶² Alan Gauld, ‘Elliotson, John (1791-1868)’, *ODNB*, oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8671>, accessed 4 Nov 2011]

⁶³ W.M. Rossetti, *Family-Letters*, I, p. 48; Pearsall, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Oppenheim, p. 221; see also Gauld, *ODNB*.

⁶⁵ Oppenheim, p. 233. Wilkinson’s sister visited Elliotson’s house in 1840 to see some mesmeric experiments, where Charles Dickens was also a guest (Lines, ‘Wilkinson’, p. 47). This furthers the sense of the circle and the interest in mesmerism in the period. In addition, Wilkinson may have been instrumental in the Swedenborg Society’s gift to Dickens of a copy of Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell* (p. 47). The Swedenborg Society Archive contains a thank you letter from Dickens upon having received the book (Swedenborg Society Library Archive, K/39: Dickens, Charles. Letter, with photostat copy, to the society, ackn. gift of Heaven & Hell, 9 Sept. 1841).

⁶⁶ Although ostensibly an interchangeable term for mesmerism, ‘Electro-biology’ defines a particular aspect of the phenomenon, as Alison Winter has detailed: ‘New terms and new practices appeared, [...]. The first of these was “electrobiology.” In 1850 and 1851 American showmen introduced Britons to the practice of electrobiology, in which social relations were

these lectures was attended by Rossetti and fellow Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt in 1851. In a letter to his brother from May of that year, Rossetti asserts his intention of going to see the demonstration with his fellow Pre-Raphaelites: 'I believe Millais, Hunt, & self, are going tomorrow night to have another shy at seeing the Electro-Biology. Do you like to come?' (*Correspondence I*, p. 173, 51.10 and n.1). In discussion of this letter William Michael Rossetti furnishes the note with some details concerning the lecture, testifying to Rossetti's interest in anything of that nature:

I can remember something of the "Electro-biology" to which the following note refers. It was a public display, conducted either by Dr. Marshall Hall, or by an over-plausible and fresh-complexioned Irish-American whom my brother characterized as "the Pink Owl". The Electro-biology was in the nature of clairvoyance, or what we now call hypnotism. For anything of this kind, including table-turning and spirit-rapping, my brother had a rather marked propensity and willing credence. (*Family-Letters, II*, p. 90)

Again, William Michael casts Rossetti's interest in mesmerism within a specific context; that of spiritualism and the aspects of mesmerism which relate to it, namely 'clairvoyance'.

This is furthered in the memoirs of Henry Treffry Dunn, who lived with Rossetti as a studio assistant and general factotum from the 1860s. Dunn writes: 'Mesmerism, Rossetti had a reasonable faith in' and recounts a party in Rossetti's garden in Chelsea to which the mesmerist Mr. Bergheim was asked to come and 'give a proof of his mesmeric gift to some friends whom he should invite to meet him' after Rossetti had met him at a party and was 'much impressed' with his skills (Dunn, p. 48). Here again, it is the idea of clairvoyant trance that seems to have been of interest to Rossetti. At the garden party Bergheim brought with him two young women whom he mesmerised into a 'clairvoyant state' in order that they would be 'his mediums for the evening' (p. 51). The ensuing events are described in significant detail by Dunn in his recollections, which he justifies as of interest to the reader because they are indicative of Rossetti's interest in all things relating to spiritualism:

I merely write this account of Bergheim and his power over certain mediums to show the interest that Rossetti took in Mesmerism and all connected with it

treated as an electric circuit.' (Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 281)

just then. [...] We had several similar clairvoyant experiments on subsequent occasions but it would be only relating the same kind of thing over again and I question if anyone would believe a word of it if I did. We often for hours would talk about spiritualism and many were the curious relations we revealed to each other of our experiences. (Dunn, pp. 52-3)

Bergheim was a member of the Spiritualism Committee of the London Dialectical Society, which was established to investigate spiritualism, together with two other of Rossetti's garden-party guests; George Augustus Sala, the journalist, and the Master of Lindsay.⁶⁷ Bergheim's mesmeric experiments with clairvoyance are representative of his commitment to spiritualism.

In addition to his interest in its esoteric aspects, Rossetti also sought out the medical application of mesmerism in order to help him cure his addiction to chloral in the 1870s. In 1876 he consulted Sir William Jenner (Queen Victoria's own surgeon) in consultation with his own doctor John Marshall regarding his chloral hydrate addiction and bouts of insomnia.⁶⁸ The doctors prescribed two nights without the drug, to which Rossetti commented to his mother, the result 'will be utter sleeplessness'.⁶⁹ However the following week he wrote again to his mother on 21 September 1876 that, due to mesmerism his situation had improved significantly:

My own nights have been much improved lately. I have no pains in the limbs at present or for some time past, the mesmerism seeming certainly to have carried them off, and I take only about half the chloral I used to take, or hardly so much as half. (*Correspondence VII*, p. 310, 76.130)

⁶⁷ *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Chelsea Years, Volume V, 1871-72*, ed. by William E. Fredeman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), Appendix 7, p. 402-3. Hereafter: *Correspondence V*. In 1869 Dr. Garth Wilkinson stated his earnest belief in a spirit world in a letter to the Spiritual Committee of the London Dialectical Society (Oppenheim, p. 234 & p. 451, n.95). His brother William also contributed his opinions to their report (Oppenheim, p. 33 & p. 404, n.14).

⁶⁸ For an account of Rossetti's chloral addiction and related issues, see Louis J. Bragman, M.D., 'The Case of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Psychological Study of a Chloral Addict', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 92 (1936), 1111-1122. Interestingly Bragman makes reference to the impact that Rossetti's father's idiosyncratic beliefs had upon the mental health of his children, and in doing so mentions Swedenborg: 'An eccentric [...] worshipper of Dante of the Inferno, a student of gnostics and astrology, with a religion of his own which included Swedenborg' (p. 1111).

⁶⁹ *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Last Decade, Volume VII, 1875-77*, ed. by William E. Fredeman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), p. 308-09, 76.128 and n.1. Hereafter: *Correspondence VII*.

This was followed in October by a letter to Georgina Cowper-Temple in which he again attested to the treatment's efficacy:

As to my health, I can now inform you that the mesmerism was tried & resulted in the complete removal of the pains though it failed after many trials to give me sleep. I have now continued quite free from the pains for a month or more, and have during that time reduced the obnoxious drug to less than half what I used to take at Broadlands. My nights are quiet & the amount of sleep not insufficient. (Correspondence VII, p. 313, 76.134)

It may have been whilst he was staying at Broadlands, the Cowper-Temple's country estate, in August 1876, that Rossetti decided to try mesmerism at the suggestion of a Mrs. Wagstaff, 'a homeopathic clairvoyant' who was their physician (Burd, p. 23). Mesmerism is once again, even from the medical angle, associated with aspects of spiritualism and trance mediumship, as Mrs. Wagstaff's cures seemed to have been in the nature of a spiritual healing and esoteric in style: 'She comes up to London if desired, and works wonderful cures. *In* her trances her conversation is most remarkable, but out of them she is a very ordinary person'.⁷⁰

Rossetti painted one of the versions of *The Blessed Damozel* during his stay at Broadlands.⁷¹ It was also the home of the first version of Rossetti's painting *Beata Beatrix*, and indeed it is significant that the Cowper-Temples were associated with the two painted works by Rossetti that most overtly illustrate the influence of this context, as they were also participants in spiritualism. William Cowper-Temple kept a Séance Diary which detailed their involvement:

William Cowper's séance book shows that between 1861 and 23 February 1864, when Ruskin first joined them for a sitting, the Cowpers had attended at least thirty-one séances not only with Home but other prominent mediums of the day. (Burd, p. 9)

In addition, the Cowper-Temples were connected to the Swedenborgian-spiritualist circle around Dr. Garth Wilkinson, having been introduced to Swedenborg's writings –

⁷⁰ Augustus Hare, quoted in Philip Hoare, *England's Lost Eden: Adventures in a Victorian Utopia* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), p. 209.

⁷¹ Marsh, *Painter and Poet*, p. 494-95. This is the version of the painting commissioned by William Graham, which pictures heaven as a reunion of embracing lovers. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-78) **Oil**, 212.1 x 133 x 8.9 cm (Harvard Art Museums, Fogg Museum, Accession Number 1943.202). See Fig. 4, p. 278.

and also the medium D. D. Home – by the Howitts (p. 9). In a letter to his mother from August 1866 Rossetti wrote that he was pleased that the Cowper-Temples were to own *Beata Beatrix*, indicating that with them the work had found its spiritual home: ‘I am glad Mr. Cowper [...] is to have the Beatrice, as he & his wife particularly are very appreciative people & it is pleasanter sending a poetic work where it will be seen by cultivated folks’.⁷²

There were also pre-Raphaelite connections at Broadlands as the sister of the Sculptor Alexander Munro, a good friend of Rossetti, was employed by the Cowper-Temples as a governess to their adopted child.⁷³ Annie Munro was also ‘something of a medium’ and during his stay Rossetti was pleased to be in the company of ‘My excellent old friend Miss Munro’.⁷⁴ Indeed, Broadlands had many visitors, including Ruskin, who also experienced the mediumistic powers of Mrs. Wagstaff and Miss. Munro (Burd, p. 26). The poet William Allingham visited in August 1882 and friends of the Cowper-Temples included the aforementioned Thomas Carlyle and F.D. Maurice.⁷⁵ Broadlands was the site of an annual religious conference from summer 1874, at which members of the clergy mixed with those with more esoteric tastes, as all were made welcome: ‘Quakers, spiritualists, Shakers, budding theosophists, nonconformists, ritualistic curates, and members of the church Army’ (Surtees, *ODNB*). Rossetti stayed during the conference of 1876, to which he made reference in a letter of 24 August 1876, describing Georgina Cowper-Temple in appropriately spiritual language as ‘an angel on earth’ (*Correspondence VII*, p. 302, 76.122).

Séances and Mediums

In *Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century Letters* (1978) Clare R. and Russell M. Goldfarb trace the interest shown by nineteenth-century literary figures in spiritualism.

⁷² *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Chelsea Years, Volume III, 1863-67*, ed. by William E. Fredeman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), p. 463, 66.144. Hereafter: *Correspondence III*.

⁷³ See Rossetti correspondence 7, 76.122, p. 302.

⁷⁴ Burd, p. 25; *Correspondence VII*, p. 302, 76.122.

⁷⁵ Grigson, pp. 318-9; Virginia Surtees, ‘Temple, Georgina Cowper- , Lady Mount-Temple (1821?-1901)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University press, Sept. 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53965>, accessed 9 Feb 2010]

It is a text which recognises the social significance of spiritualism, its impact upon the literati in general and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in particular:

One belletristic group of people to express interest in the phenomenon were the artists, poets, and essayists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, and chief among them was Dante Gabriel Rossetti. (Goldfarb, p. 115)

Rossetti's more prominent role within spiritualism is therefore established. The authors stress further the importance of spiritualism with regard to a study on Rossetti; indicating that the subject must be addressed because of its enduring presence in his personal and professional life: 'it would seem that no biographer should easily dismiss the subject of spiritualism; it occupied Rossetti for nearly twenty years' (p. 117).

It is in this spirit that Henry Treffry Dunn discusses his inclusion of anecdotes bearing on spiritualism in his memoir of life with Rossetti: 'In recalling these scenes I have many times asked myself why I should relate them and whether such things are not too trivial to set down in writing' (Dunn, p. 53). Their importance lies in their relationship to Rossetti's work:

My answer to myself was always that the interest displayed by Rossetti in everything bearing on the occult gave me an insight into his nature and however trivial these relations may appear they showed how largely both his poetry and his painting was influenced by the bent of mind in that direction and his yearnings for the unseen. (p. 53)

For Dunn, as for Helen Rossetti Angeli, Rossetti's interest in spiritualism is not mere idiosyncrasy, but indicative of a larger cultural context; 'Table-turning, spirit-rapping, planchette and mesmerism under its many phases had taken hold of Society and was the trifle of the day' (pp. 46-48). Hence consideration of Rossetti's experiences with spiritualism is crucial in establishing a context for his work. It is likely that Rossetti's experiences with spiritualism (discounting his interest in mesmerism in the 1850s) began in earnest in the 1860s. Dunn writes: 'spiritualism he took up with a feverish interest for some considerable time, going to all the private séances to which he might be invited' (p. 48).

Rossetti attended shows by the Davenport brothers in 1864.⁷⁶ As part of his summary of Rossetti's spiritualistic experiences, William Michael informs the reader: 'he went more than once to the performances of the Davenport Brothers; in which the performers, professedly by the agency of spirits, were released from complicated rope-bindings'.⁷⁷ Rossetti must have been equally 'electrified' along with the rest of London at the brothers' performances (*RP*, p. 68). A letter, in reply to Rossetti, from his sister Christina of December 1864, bears witness to its topical status:

Your notes on the Davenport *séance* are most interesting. To me the whole subject is awful and mysterious; though, in spite of my hopeless inability to conceive a clue to the source of sundry manifestations, I still hope simple imposture may be the missing key: - I hope it, at least, so far as the hope is not uncharitable. At any rate I hope without any qualification that you and William escaped bumping bangs to the maiming of your outer men.⁷⁸

The final sentence is most likely in reference to the dramatic phenomena produced at the Davenports' *séance*. An article from *The Times* of 30 September 1864 details these events which included various physical happenings by unseen 'spiritual agency', from the patting of a knee, to a strike to the face! The correspondent himself 'received a blow on the face from a floating guitar, which drew enough blood to necessitate the employment of towel and sponge'.⁷⁹

'Do you know the Davenports?' was a question posed to the spirits by William Michael Rossetti at a *séance* of 4 January 1866.⁸⁰ William recorded that the spirits replied 'No.'. He then proceeded with 'Do you know that Gabriel attended their *séance* a few days ago?' and once again the reply came in the form of a negative, communicated through two tilts of the table.⁸¹ This indicates that Rossetti (Gabriel)

⁷⁶ Ira and William Davenport were American mediums whose performances were more in the nature of Houdini as they made a 'speciality of untying themselves after being trussed up'. Their first London *séance* took place in 1864 (Pearsall, p. 76).

⁷⁷ William Michael Rossetti quoted in Angeli, p. 208.

⁷⁸ Christina Rossetti quoted in *RP*, p. 69.

⁷⁹ 'The Brothers Davenport', *The Times*, 30 September 1864, p. 4.

⁸⁰ *SD*, entry 8.

⁸¹ *SD*, entry 8. This excerpt gives an insight to how the spirits purportedly communicated: one tilt (or knock, 'rap') for 'yes'; two for 'no' – hence 'table-turning' and 'table rapping' as synonyms for *séance* activity. Other methods of communication were also used, such as 'a stamped alphabet, and a pencil to touch the letters' (used at a *séance* of 11 November 1865; see *RP*, p. 155). In addition to these and, of course, 'trance utterance' through the medium (Oppenheim, p. 8), a planchette was also used in spirit communication. This consisted of a

was still attending shows by the Davenports over a year after he first encountered their performances.

William Michael Rossetti's role as journal-keeper for the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood emerges again with regard to spiritualism with his *Séance Diary* (1865-68), in which a number of séances both public and private which were attended by him, and some by Rossetti, were recorded. One of the spirits addressed during the 4 January 1866 séance was Lizzie Siddal, who purportedly came through wishing to communicate with her brother-in-law William Michael. After several clues and partially spelt names, William asks 'Are you Lizzie, my brother's wife?' to which a 'yes' was clearly received (*SD*, entry 8). On 12 May 1866 Rossetti himself attended a séance at the home of Charles Augustus Howell at which he managed to make contact with Lizzie (entry 10). Prior to this Lizzie had come through in earlier séances, such as the one held with the poet-painter William Bell Scott and his wife at their home in Elgin Road on 25 November 1865, from which William later recorded that 'Lizzie professed to come' (entry 5).

Six out of the twenty séances recorded between November 1865 and August 1868 by William Michael in his *Séance Diary* were held in Rossetti's studio at his home at 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Lizzie purportedly comes through on a number of occasions in these studio held séances, such as Sunday 12 November 1865 (entry 2) and Sunday 25 February 1866 (entry 9), indicating that she was most clearly on Rossetti's mind at this time; a period during which he was working at intervals on *Beata Beatrix*.⁸² The *Séance Diary* ends with a long entry documenting a séance held at Rossetti's studio. The event, dated 14 August 1868, begins with William Michael, Fanny Cornforth (Rossetti's model and mistress) and Dunn at the table, with Rossetti joining in once the séance had commenced. Both Lizzie and Rossetti's father purport to come through, and rather poignantly Rossetti enquires of Lizzie's supposed spirit; 'Are you now happy?' (entry 20).

'thin-heart-shaped piece of wood, mounted on two small wheel-castors and carrying a pencil, point downwards, for the third support' (Spence, p. 324). The hand is then placed on it and the pencil writes automatically, or by spirit force via the medium.

⁸² See for example William Michael Rossetti's diary entry for Friday 7 December: 'At Chelsea [...] Ruskin called on Gabriel on Wednesday [...] expressing great admiration of the *Beatrice in a Death-trance*' (*RP*, p. 199).

Rossetti participated in other séances at Cheyne Walk, not recorded by William Michael in his *Séance Diary*, as Henry Treffry Dunn writes:

Rossetti thought he would have little séances at his own house, and from time to time Whistler, Bell Scott, Fanny and a few others would gather together at Cheyne Walk to have their own experiences on the matter and on these occasions the spirit-rappings and gyrations of the tables would be carried to the uncanny hour of midnight. [...] I believe on one or two occasions some rather remarkable messages were sent by the spirits which could not well be accounted for.⁸³

This would imply the private séances were motivated by more personal concerns, entered into for reasons other than mere amusement. In addition to these private séances (and those of the Davenports), Dunn attests to Rossetti having seen the following spiritual mediums: 'Mrs. Guppy, Mrs. Fawcett and Home and others of more or less reputation' (Dunn, p. 48). Rossetti himself refers directly to séances at the Tebbs household which were held by the medium Mrs. Guppy. In a letter to Emily Tebbs of 31 March 1868, Rossetti makes reference to a séance at which he has been invited to attend the following evening, asking if Jane Morris would be permitted to accompany him: 'May I and another friend of yours take a great liberty and add one more to your séance tomorrow evening? The purposed additional student of necromancy is Mrs. Morris'.⁸⁴ This is the séance of 1 April 1868, which in the event did include Rossetti and Jane Morris, as well as the hosts Mr. and Mrs. Tebbs and others. It was the first of two séances presided over by Mrs. Guppy attended by Rossetti and recorded by William Michael.⁸⁵ Mrs. Guppy, whom William Michael described as 'a strapping woman, [...] age about 28', was a well known medium during the 1860s and 70s (*SD*, entry 18). Before her marriage to the much older Mr. Guppy (William Michael states '77 yrs old'), Miss Nicholl, as was, had embarked upon her spiritualistic career as

⁸³ Dunn, p. 48. The reference to the painter James McNeill Whistler in this quotation is evidence that Rossetti also had séances not recorded or attended by William, as William does not mention Whistler in his *Séance Diary*. However, it is known that Whistler was present at least one of the Bergheim visits (see Dunn, p. 68, note 43).

⁸⁴ *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Chelsea Years, Volume IV, 1868-70* ed. by William E. Fredeman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), p. 50, 68.64. Hereafter: *Correspondence IV*.

⁸⁵ *SD*, entry 18. Henry Virtue Tebbs was a friend of Rossetti, who, in a legal capacity, was one of those involved in the infamous exhumation of Lizzie Siddal's coffin in 1869 in order that Rossetti could retrieve the manuscript poems he had buried with her in 1862. See *Correspondence IV*, p. 302-03, 69.181.

a professional mesmerist before developing her mediumistic skills.⁸⁶ This first séance included standard séance experiences, such as flowers produced on demand, table raps, a bright light and a ‘very sensible current of cold air’, felt by Jane Morris (*SD*, entry 18). A week later the events were discussed by Rossetti and his brother, and recorded by the latter in his Diary entry for Monday 6 April 1868:

Discussed with Gabriel the spiritual *séance* of Wednesday last. He agrees with me that there was nothing in it which could reasonably be called convincing – unless possibly the affair of the mysterious light seen by Mrs. Morris as well as others. (*RP*, p. 304)

The séance party reconvened on the 24 April, this time with the addition of Lucy Madox Brown and Alaric Watts, the husband of Anna Mary Howitt, the Pre-Raphaelite and spirit artist (*SD*, entry 19). This gathering was also referred to by Rossetti in an acknowledgment of invitation, again to Emily Tebbs: ‘I shall be very glad to bogify or be bogified again in your good company, as will Mrs. Morris who is again staying here’.⁸⁷

Despite William Michael having attended several séances by the famous ‘washer-woman medium’ Mrs. Marshall, it is unclear whether Rossetti actually did.⁸⁸ Three séances at Mrs. Marshall’s are recorded in William Michael’s *Séance Diary*, and later published in *Rossetti Papers*. These were on Sunday 11 and Saturday 25 November 1865, and Thursday 18 October 1866 and were attended by William Michael, William Bell Scott and others, but of those recorded; none seem to have been attended by Rossetti.⁸⁹ It is likely however that he may have attended one at some point. At a private séance of Sunday 12 November 1865 held at the Cheyne Walk studio, Rossetti asked William Michael to enquire whether the spirit of Lizzie would communicate ‘with G [Gabriel (Rossetti)] were he to go to Marshall’s’ (*SD*, entry 2).

⁸⁶ Oppenheim, pp. 219-220.

⁸⁷ *Correspondence IV*, p. 54, 68.72. It is interesting to note that there is a reference in William Michael’s *Rossetti Papers*, from February of this same year, to Rossetti’s fellow Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt having recently attended a Guppy séance with Henry Tebbs, which is further testament to the interest shown in spiritualism by the Pre-Raphaelite circle (*RP*, p. 298).

⁸⁸ *RP*, p. 154. Mrs. Marshall was a well known and successful medium of the day: ‘England during the 1850s and 1860s [...] was dominated by mediums like the eminent society favourite, Daniel Dunglas Home, and matronly women such as Mrs. Guppy and Mrs. Mary Marshall’ (Owen, p. 41).

⁸⁹ *SD*, entries 1,4 and 13; published as séances 1,2 and 4 in *RP*, pp. 154-161, 210-213.

This indicates at the least his intention to attend one, and it seems likely that he would have, as Dunn suggests that Rossetti saw a variety of the known mediums of the day.

Henry Treffry Dunn, who lived with Rossetti during this period, asserts that Rossetti did attend, however, séances held by the famous medium D.D. Home:

In spiritualism he took an interest for some time; he went to all the private séances to which he happened to be invited, and now and again would give me an account of some of them, when such well-known mediums as Mrs. Guppy, Mrs. Fawcett, and Daniel Home, and others were present.⁹⁰

This would indeed be fitting regarding Rossetti's relationships with members of the Swedenborgian-spiritualist circle around Home, such as the Wilkinsons and Howitts. However, in an appendage note Gale Pedrick, editor of the 1904 edition of Dunn's reminiscences, adds the following piece of information concerning Rossetti and Home: 'Mr. W. M. Rossetti does not think his brother ever saw him'.⁹¹ Violet Hunt in her much debated anecdotal biography *The Wife of Rossetti* (1932) asserts that Rossetti *did* go to séances held by Home at the Spiritual Athenaeum in Sloane Street:

Gabriel Rossetti would tell ghost stories [...] And accounts of the séances that he and Blanchard were attending at the Academy in Sloane Street, describing D. D. Home, his eyes, inferior and pale by day but, by night, "like little phosphorescent lights that come together and dart away again." (V. Hunt, p. 47)

The source for the quotation is unclear and so the reference remains a tantalising – yet often quoted – one.⁹²

However, Rossetti does refer directly to Home in his letters, but not specifically in regard to a particular séance. In a letter to Charles Fairfax Murray, 13 August 1871, Rossetti's comment regarding an art historical matter reflects how famous and established the name of Home had become in the popular culture of the time: 'Vasari I fear will have to be left at peace, unless you can interest Mr. Home in the question, when a medium might perhaps prove even a match for a deceased art-critic'.⁹³ Home was certainly a chief topic of conversation at one of the 'mesmeric séances' held in

⁹⁰ Dunn quoted in Gale Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti, or, No Peacocks Allowed* (London: Macdonald, 1964), p. 98.

⁹¹ Dunn 1904, p. 93, n.91.

⁹² See for example Burd, p. 16; Hoare, pp. 231-32.

⁹³ *Correspondence V*, p. 112, 71.122.

Rossetti's garden in Chelsea and presided over by the mesmerist Bergheim.⁹⁴ Dunn recalls that the Master of Lindsay 'related a wondrous story' about having witnessed a spectacular levitation by Home at a previous séance (Dunn, p. 49). There is also a reference to Rossetti discussing spiritualism in general, and Home in particular, with William Allingham in 1867. A diary entry from Allingham for Sunday 15 September reads: 'We talk of Home and other 'spiritualists', about whom D.G.R. has at the least a curiosity' (Grigson, p. 160-61). This offers evidence for Rossetti's interest, if not of direct contact, prior to this date. It is possible that this curiosity was satiated and Rossetti did attend a séance with Home at some point after 1867, as his interest in spiritualism continued into the next decade.

Swedenborg

Rossetti's experiences with spiritualism furthered his interest in the supernatural as a source both of entertainment and of solace. The repeated attempts to contact Lizzie Siddal during the séances of the 1860s are testament to his speculative belief regarding the idea of an afterlife, and therefore deepened the presence of this in his work. The afterlife had always been a favoured subject, as had the theme of the dead beloved, but the experiences with spiritualism root the subject in a direct context. Towards the end of his life the issue of the afterlife occupied a significant presence in his thoughts. William Michael writes of this later period:

In November 1879 I found that his mind was much occupied with spiritualism, and that he was then fully convinced, or re-convinced, of immortality; and I am sure that from this belief he never afterwards receded. (*Family-Letters*, I, p. 381)

It is in this year that Hall Caine first wrote to Rossetti. Caine's position as acolyte matured into a friendship and Caine stayed for a while with Rossetti at his home, becoming a close companion in Rossetti's last years. Their correspondence begins in the summer and becomes cemented through Rossetti's delight in Caine's enthusiasm

⁹⁴ Rossetti employed Bergheim on several occasions. The first mention of him in this regard is in a letter of March 1864 (*Correspondence III*, p. 123, 64.29); another letter, from August 1870, refers to Bergheim as the 'operator' for '2 mesmeric séances' held in a tent in Rossetti's garden (*Correspondence IV*, p. 514, 70.200).

for his poetry, which was expressed in part through an article sent to Rossetti. Crucially, as Rossetti's reply elucidates, the subject of Rossetti's poetry that attracted Caine was pertinent as regards the poet's current state of mind:

I return your article on the *Supernatural in Poetry*. In reading it, I feel it a distinction that my minute plot in the poetic field should have attracted the gaze of one who is able to traverse its widest ranges with so much command. I shall be pleased if your plan of calling on me is carried out soon.⁹⁵

Caine supplies an interesting anecdote regarding Rossetti's state of mind towards the end of his life in the early 1880s. According to him, Rossetti was concerned regarding his friend's intention of attending a séance. Caine, whose 'reading of Swedenborg' had piqued his spiritual curiosity, asked whether Rossetti's concern sprung from a conviction of fraudulence. However, the truth of spiritualism seems not to have been at issue for Rossetti, but rather the nature of the spirits that appear: 'they're evil spirits – devils – and they're allowed to torment and deceive people'.⁹⁶

Rossetti's musings regarding an afterlife at this time are symptomatic of the direction in which his work was moving. In 1880 he wrote to Caine about the proofs for *The House of Life*, the sonnet sequence later published in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881). The postscript to the letter of 18 December is illuminating as it refers to the newly written *True Woman* sonnets that 'wind up Part 1 of *The House of Life*' (*Dear Mr. Rossetti*, p. 190). These are the most overtly Swedenborgian of all Rossetti's works in that they refer directly to Swedenborg's writings and to the idea of heaven. Pertinently Rossetti writes to Caine that of all *The House of Life* the three *True Woman* sonnets 'are my best', indicating their importance within his oeuvre (p. 190). The reference to Swedenborg in the third *True Woman* sonnet was explained by Rossetti in a letter to Jane Morris, which was also written in December 1880. The letter accompanied two of the *True Woman* sonnets sent for her inspection:

As you were so kind in valuing the Sonnet I last sent, I send 2 more on the same theme, forming as trio with which I intend to wind up the first part of the House of Life [...] The *seer* in the sonnet is Swedenborg, and the saying a very fine one. (Bryson, pp. 167-68)

⁹⁵ *Dear Mr. Rossetti: The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Hall Caine 1878-1881*, ed. by Vivien Allen (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 19.

⁹⁶ Hall Caine, *Recollections of Rossetti*, ed. by Jan Marsh (London: Cassell, 1928; repr. London: Century, 1990), p. 150.

This letter suggests that Rossetti was familiar with Swedenborg's writings in person, in addition to the general knowledge of Swedenborgian ideas he gleaned from his literary interests, his circle of acquaintance and his spiritualistic activities. Caine supports this notion in a passage from his memoirs in which he describes inspecting Rossetti's library at Cheyne Walk. Caine writes that Rossetti 'seemed to be a reader of Swedenborg, as White's book on the great mystic testified.'⁹⁷ This is the biography of Swedenborg referred to by William Howitt in his *History of the Supernatural* (1863); 'There are also excellent and concise lives of him in English by Dr. Wilkinson and Mr. William White', suggesting that it may have been through the Howitt-Wilkinson circle of intellectual Swedenborgian-spiritualists that Rossetti came to be introduced to the book (W. Howitt, p. 395). An investigation of Rossetti's book collection in the sale catalogue of his house contents after death confirms he owned this biography of Swedenborg.⁹⁸ This supports Arthur C. Benson's assertion that Rossetti 'had at one time carefully studied Swedenborg' (Benson, p. 77). Importantly, Benson's text on Rossetti for the Macmillan *English Men of Letters Series* is sanctioned by Helen Rossetti Angeli, who singles out the book for positive praise from a collection of sensational and anecdotal early twentieth century works about her uncle. She writes that Benson's is a 'sympathetic study of Rossetti [...] at times very revealing' (Angeli, p. 212).

In addition to reading a life of Swedenborg, Rossetti's works are testament to his having accessed Swedenborg's works directly. His reference to Swedenborg in the *True Woman III* sonnet as 'the seer' follows a line which paraphrases a saying from Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (1758). It is likely also, considering his depiction of romantic love, that Rossetti was familiar in particular with Swedenborg's text on married love, *Conjugal Love* (1768), which describes the reunion of lovers in heaven and the achievement of sacred sexual love in spiritual people on earth. Richard Lines, Secretary of the Swedenborg Society suggests that it may have been through his friendship with Robert Browning that Rossetti 'became acquainted with the work *Conjugal Love*'.⁹⁹ However, another possible source is Coventry Patmore, who sent proofs of his *Conjugal Love*-influenced work *The Angel in the House* to Rossetti for his

⁹⁷ T. Hall Caine, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Elliot Stock, 1882), p. 234.

⁹⁸ Wharton, Martin & Co. *Auctioneers Catalogue* (1882), item 614, p. 29.

⁹⁹ Richard Lines, 'Eros, Swedenborg and Literature', *Things Heard and Seen: Newsletter for the Swedenborg Society*, 14 (2004), 32-36 (p. 35).

approval in 1854. It is also likely that Dr. Wilkinson had an influence here, as in addition to his biography of Swedenborg (1849) and his edition of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1839) poems, he produced 'many translations of Swedenborg' (Lines 'Wilkinson', p. 45). Considering Rossetti read and enjoyed Wilkinson's own poems, he may have been encouraged to read other works either produced, or suggested, by him.

Rossetti had a much earlier acquaintance with Swedenborg and his works, however, which preceded his friendships with the Swedenborg interested literati, such as Browning and Patmore, or his association with Swedenborgian-spiritualists like Wilkinson and Howitt. Rossetti's father was familiar with Swedenborg's ideas. Gabriele Rossetti, an Italian political refugee and intellectual, was engaged in a lifelong study of Dante Alighieri, which was unconventional and rooted in the esoteric. His thesis regarded Dante's writings as allegorical and drew upon many aspects of the occult tradition, including Swedenborg. William Michael described their father's work in his memoir of Rossetti:

Our father, when writing about the *Comedia* or the *Vita Nuova*, was seen surrounded by ponderous folios in italic type, "*libri mistici*" and the like (often about alchemy, freemasonry, Brahminism, Swedenborg, the Cabbala, etc.), and filling page after page of prose, in impeccable handwriting, full of underscorings, interlineations, and cancellings. (Family-Letters, I, p. 64)

This illustrates a natural acceptance and awareness of key mystical and occult works within the Rossetti family environment. Their father's ideas represent a reinterpretation of Dante which included Swedenborg and may herald a precedent for Rossetti's own distinctive spiritualist interpretation of Dante and his incorporation of Swedenborgian imagery in his subjects from Dante. Gabriele Rossetti's study linked both Dante and Swedenborg to a larger alternative occult belief system that opposed Roman Catholic papal doctrine and promoted 'a naturalistic system of belief'.¹⁰⁰ Key to this is how this alternative system was 'closely connected with the history of Freemasonry' and later emerged in the writings of Swedenborg.¹⁰¹ Gabriele was

¹⁰⁰ R.D. Waller, *The Rossetti Family 1824-1854* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1932), p. 88.

¹⁰¹ Waller, *Rossetti Family*, p. 88. It is interesting to speculate whether his father's interest in the arcane may have been influential in Rossetti's naming of the rather occult sounding *Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*.

himself a Mason from 1809, which may have been his introduction to Swedenborg, as there are Masonic rites that incorporate Swedenborg's doctrines.¹⁰² In addition, as part of the London literati of the 1820s (in whose community he had established himself after settling in England following his exile from Italy), Gabriele was acquainted with the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.¹⁰³ Coleridge also had Swedenborgian connections, primarily through his friendship with Charles Augustus Tulk, who introduced him to Swedenborg's ideas.¹⁰⁴ Tulk, who was friendly with Dr. Garth Wilkinson through their membership of the Swedenborg Society, also introduced the Brownings to Swedenborg and Elizabeth Barrett Browning to *Conjugal Love* in particular.¹⁰⁵ Therefore before Rossetti became involved with the Swedenborgian and spiritualist circles of 1850s and 60s, his father had prior connections to that group a generation earlier. Rossetti's intellectual interest in Swedenborgian ideas, his subsequent experiences with mesmerism and spiritualism, and his response to this occult context in his work, can consequently be seen as flowering from a securely embedded root of familial heritage.

¹⁰² Present in The Swedenborg Society Archives is an interesting document from 1916 pertaining to this connection (Swedenborg Society Library Archive, G/6: Freemasonry, A Brief Sketch of the Swedenborgian Rite of, by Thos. Carr, M.D. 5th May, 1916). For Gabriele Rossetti's membership of the masons see Waller, *Rossetti Family*, p. 81.

¹⁰³ Dinah Roe, *The Rossettis in Wonderland: A Victorian Family History* (London: Haus Publishing, 2011) p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ H.J. Jackson, "'Swedenborg's Meaning is the truth': Coleridge, Tulk and Swedenborg", in *In Search of the Absolute: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. by Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004) pp. 1-13, (p. 1).

¹⁰⁵ Lines, 'Wilkinson', p. 45; 'Browning', p. 24.

Part Two:
The Dead Beloved

Chapter 3: *The Blessed Damozel*

Part 1: 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850): Swedenborgian Readings

The two are still not parted by the death of one, since the spirit of the dead man or woman constantly lives with the spirit of the one who is not yet dead. This continues up to the death of the other, when they meet again and are reunited, loving each other more tenderly than before, because they are then in the spiritual world.¹

The above quotation from Emanuel Swedenborg's *Conjugial Love*, reads like a narrative prose paraphrase of Rossetti's poem 'The Blessed Damozel', which describes lovers parted by the death of one, yet still connected and looking forward to their reunion in the afterlife. This chapter considers the 1850 version of 'The Blessed Damozel', which, in its depiction of heaven as a reunion of lovers, is significantly informed by Swedenborgian ideas.² The poem is analysed in terms of its Swedenborgian ideas and imagery, the presence of which is catalogued in order to illustrate this major aspect of Rossetti's poetics. This element of Rossetti's poem has been all but ignored, or at least, under-acknowledged in prior critical responses.³ Its presence and importance must be rediscovered therefore in order to achieve a full understanding of the work.

As the work is a major example of Rossetti's use of the 'dead beloved' motif (the subject of a deceased beautiful female lover), the poem has been seen as primarily informed by the medieval love poetry of Dante Alighieri and the Early Italians. However, Rossetti's poem also draws upon the Gothic tradition in its use of a dead beloved subject and supernatural theme. This has been recognised previously in the history of critical responses; however, the significance of these Gothic antecedents as possible secondary sources of Swedenborgian influence is considered for the first time in this thesis. Therefore, after briefly addressing the assumed influence of Dante

¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugial Love*, trans. by John Chadwick (London: Swedenborg Society, 1996), 321.7, p. 313. Hereafter cited as *CL*.

² Hereafter in this chapter I have not referred to the publication date of 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850) in text. As a singular poem, published in a larger work, the title is written in single quotation marks.

³ Robert Upstone has briefly pointed out some Swedenborgian aspects of the work in passing during discussion of associated artwork. See *Age of Rossetti*, pp. 154-57, 191-94.

and the Early Italians, and establishing the presence of Swedenborgian ideas and imagery in the 1850 poem, this chapter then moves on to consider the significance of selected works from the Gothic tradition by Edgar Allan Poe as secondary Swedenborgian influences upon the poem. The chapter concludes with a section on the importance of William Blake's personal utilisation of Swedenborgian ideas in informing aspects of Rossetti's poem.

'The Blessed Damozel': 'Dantesque heavens'?

'The Blessed Damozel' in its entirety represents a major body of work within Rossetti's oeuvre. It was first published in the Pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ* (1850), and was rewritten and republished a number of times throughout Rossetti's career.⁴ The 'Blessed Damozel' also featured in Rossetti's pictorial output: two oil paintings were produced in the 1870s, plus the smaller derivative work *Sancta Liliis* (1874).⁵ Despite its later stature as a multiple work, 'The Blessed Damozel' began life in the late 1840s and appeared, prior to its first publication in 1850, in a more rudimentary form amongst Rossetti's poetic juvenilia. In writing to his mother in 1873 Rossetti suggested its early conception: 'I remember that for the family *Hotch Potch*, long and long ago, I first wrote *The Blessed Damozel*' (*Family-Letters, II*, p. 293). An early incarnation of the work is thought to have been amongst the manuscripts sent to the Romantic poet Leigh Hunt at the end of 1847. Hunt's favourable reply regarding

⁴ The *Rossetti Archive* contains detailed information on the poem's textual and printing history, which spans c.1847 to 1881. The major published editions appeared in *The Germ* (1850), *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856), *Poems* (1870) and a revised edition of *Poems* (1881). There are also two minor variant editions. For more information on the poem's textual and printing history, and variant editions see 'The Blessed Damozel: Scholarly Commentary' in *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, edited by Jerome J. McGann, [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1847.s244.raw.html>], accessed 18 December 2011] (resource hereafter cited as *Rossetti Archive*). This thesis considers three main incarnations of the work: 1850, 1870 and 1881 (see Conclusion). This chapter considers the 1850 published version; references to the work in text remained undated (it can be assumed, unless otherwise stated, that the 1850 poem is under discussion).

⁵ The first painted version of *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-8) was commissioned in 1871 (Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums; accession number 1943.202). See Fig. 4, p. 278. The second (c.1875-9), a replica, is in The Lady Lever Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool; accession number LL3148. *Sancta Liliis* (1874) is a cut-down initial version of the work in the Tate collection (reference number N02440).

the verse includes reference to 'your Dantesque heavens'.⁶ This has been acknowledged as a response to the heavenly setting of 'The Blessed Damozel'.⁷ Leigh Hunt has therefore interpreted Rossetti's choice of the dead beloved subject as reference to Dante's Beatrice. Whilst an important influence upon Rossetti, a critical reliance on Dante has sometimes obscured the variety of sources present in the poem.⁸ As D.M.R. Bentley has recognised, Leigh Hunt's initial response has coloured subsequent readings: 'In a sense, Hunt's informal comments on "The Blessed Damozel" establish the precedent for most of the criticism on the poem'.⁹

Leigh Hunt's comments may have been coloured by the inclusion of translations alongside the original poetry sent by Rossetti for his consideration; and by Rossetti's own comments in his accompanying letter to Hunt regarding his intention of studying and translating 'the lyrical poems of Dante [...] as will form a complete history of his love for Beatrice' (*Correspondence I*, p. 50, 47.5). In this letter Rossetti indicates his interest in the verse of the medieval Italian poets, with particular reference to Pugliesi's Canzone on the death of his lady, of which he suggests 'Surely no man ever wrote a more deeply touching and pathetic poem' (p. 50). Rossetti's translations of Dante and his contemporaries were later published in his book *Early Italian Poets* (1861). That Rossetti was in the midst of translations from these poets at the time of writing 'The Blessed Damozel' has also given rise to the idea of the dominance of these works as templates for Rossetti's dead beloved subject. John Dixon Hunt writes:

⁶ *Correspondence I*, p. 52, 47.5A: 'Leigh Hunt to Dante Gabriel Rossetti'. of *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Vol.1; 1835-54*, ed. by William E. Fredeman (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), 52, letter 47.5A.

⁷ *Correspondence I*, p. 64, letter 48.6, n.2: 'Leigh Hunt's mention of "Dantesque Heavens" must refer to "The Blessed Damozel"'.

⁸ There are in fact a number of possible sources. D.M.R. Bentley has summarised the poem's Romantic and Victorian influences: 'Coleridge, Keats, Goethe, Musset, Blake, Shelley, Tennyson, and the Bailey of *Festus*' (D.M.R. Bentley, "'The Blessed Damozel": A Young Man's Fantasy', *Victorian Poetry*, 20.3-4 (1982), 31-43 (p. 31). Hereafter cited as Bentley, 'Damozel'. This chapter addresses several of these for their significance in terms of a Swedenborgian reading. Bentley finds the claim for Poe's direct influence 'dubious' (p. 31). This will be addressed further along in this chapter.

⁹ An early response that draws Dante into a discussion of 'The Blessed Damozel' is found in Walter Pater's essay 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti' (1883). Interestingly, Pater does not acknowledge the Swedenborgian elements of this work, despite invoking Swedenborg in his interpretation of Rossetti's *The House of Life* (Pater, p. 214). Pater likens the 'definition of outline' used in the poem to 'the pictures of those early painters contemporary with Dante' (p. 207); perceiving this trait as one of Rossetti's 'conformities to Dante' (p. 208).

'The blessed Damozel', first written during 1847 in the very middle of his most sustained work on the translations, reveals the [...] impact made by the Italian poetry on an impressionable imagination [...] The poem's theme seems to have been inspired generally by *La Vita Nuova* and more particularly by Jacopo da Lentino's 'Of his Lady in Heaven' and perhaps Pugliesi's 'Canzone of his Dead Lady'.¹⁰

That the poems mentioned by Hunt deal with similar subject matter to 'The Blessed Damozel', and, as with Dante's works, represent prototypes for a narrative of loss concerning the dead beloved cannot be disputed: both are laments for a dead lover. However, there are crucial differences. Jacopo da Lentino's poem expresses the desire 'to serve God' in order that he can enter heaven and 'behold' his beloved in her rightful place.¹¹ The poetic voice assures the reader that he intends no 'sin' (l. 10), only wishing to look upon her once more. Pugliesi's 'Of His Dead Lady' ends with a desire for the restoration of the past again on earth; with the poetic voice acknowledging the unbridgeable gap between this world and the next:

Had I my will, beloved, I would say
To God, unto whose bidding all things bow,
That we were still together night and day:
Yet be it done as His behests allow.
I do remember that while she remain'd
With me, she often called me her sweet friend;
But does not now,
Because God drew her towards Him, in the end.
Lady, that peace which none but He can send
Be thine. Even so. (CPP, pp. 245-6, ll. 54-63)

In 'The Blessed Damozel', Rossetti reverses the perspective, giving voice to the dead beloved in heaven who also laments the loss of her beloved: 'I wish that he were come to me'.¹² The heavenly reunion sought is romantic, and a continuation of that experienced on earth; she desires to touch, not merely to 'behold': 'I'll take his hand,

¹⁰ J.D. Hunt, p. 78. In this Hunt follows an established critical path, which can be seen in Pater's early response, albeit in an indirect way, when he draws Rossetti's "early Italian poets" translations into a discussion of the poetic style of 'The Blessed Damozel' (see Pater, pp. 206-7). See also Hough (pp. 77-8), for example, who sees the poem as 'Dantesque' and adds Guido Guinicelli's canzone as a possible source.

¹¹ CPP, p. 242; ll. 1, 11. These are Rossetti's translations, published in *The Early Italian Poets* (1861).

¹² CW, p. 9, l. 61. All subsequent line references quoted in text refer to 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850) in CW, pp. 8-11, unless otherwise stated.

and go with him / To the deep wells of light' (l. 69-70). This line encapsulates the aspects of the poem which differs from its supposed Early Italian prototypes; the apparent physicality of the heavenly Damozel and her desire for romantic reunion with her lover. As has been consistently recognised by critics, Rossetti departs from the type of Christian heaven of Dante and the Early Italians in two crucial ways: his emphasis upon the continuation of human romantic love after death, with its possibility for sexual reunion ('We two will lie i' the shadow of / That living mystic tree' (l. 79-80)), and the use of physical, material language in a celestial setting: 'The blessed Damozel leaned out / From the gold bar of Heaven' (l. 1-2). As R.D. Waller has written:

The Damozel may be in Heaven, but she is not a disembodied spirit like those in the *Paradiso* of Dante; she is human, longs for her human lover, and gazes down towards him out of her heavenly peace. (Waller, *Rossetti Family*, p.203)

These departures are regarded as failure, or inconsistency, when the poem is too closely associated with Dante and the Early Italians. In this light, Rossetti is perceived as having 'failed imaginatively to reconcile the Christian images learnt from the Italians and his own highly romantic ideas' (J.D. Hunt, p.79). Even Walter Pater, who intuitively invokes Swedenborg in his discussion of Rossetti's *The House of Life* (1881), finds difficulty with the presence of physical imagery in the poem: 'One of the peculiarities of *The Blessed Damozel* was a definiteness of sensible imagery [...] in a theme so profoundly visionary' (Pater, p. 207). Crucially Pater's comment comes in the midst of his comparison of Rossetti with Dante.

As Graham Hough has suggested regarding this strain of critical response: 'Many people have been disturbed by an inconsistency between the Christian symbolism of the poem and its purely romantic emotional orientation' (Hough, p. 78). These concerns are accounted for when the influence of Swedenborgian ideas upon Rossetti's poem are acknowledged. One can move from Hough's conclusion that Rossetti uses 'Christian symbols as mythological decoration to a romantic love-poem' to the idea that Rossetti has drawn upon a more esoteric source for the Christian heaven in which to place his Damozel (p. 78). This accounts for the differences from Dante and the Early Italians and places the work in connection with other literary traditions which influence the work.

The Blessed Damozel as Swedenborgian Angel

'Physicality' in Heaven

Rossetti's heavenly Damozel is described in strikingly physical terms. The 1850 poem opens with an image of her leaning out from heaven's 'gold bar' (l. 2), communicating a sense of solidity which is reiterated in a later stanza (ll. 49-52):

And still she bowed herself, and stooped
Into the vast waste calm;
Till her bosom's pressure must have made
The bar she leaned on warm

She is likened to the beauty of the natural world. Her 'eyes', 'hand', 'neck' and 'back' are referred to, communicating a sense of bodily substance, as is her hair, 'yellow like ripe corn' and clothing 'Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem'.¹³ She seems to have retained her earthly appearance, despite her celestial situation. It is this quality that is perceived as incongruous in the poem when the work is seen primarily as homage to Dante and the Early Italians:

Rossetti starts well enough and emphasises the pure spirituality he wishes to impute to the lady [...] But the disturbing elements appear almost immediately; first, with the artificial simile of her hair and its insistence upon ripeness; then, in the fourth stanza, with Rossetti's emphasis upon her physical presence – 'Surely she leaned o'er me – her hair / Fell all about my face.' The very bar of heaven is warmed by the pressure of her bosom. And by the middle of the poem, when she speaks, the spirituality Rossetti may have wished to emulate from the *dolce stil nuovo* has been forgotten. (J.D. Hunt, p. 78)

It is this quality however that distinguishes Rossetti's poem as an original work. Rossetti is clearly and deliberately invoking another tradition that allows him to further what he has learned from the Early Italians. He has moved beyond emulation and one of the most obvious and characteristic ways in which he does this in 'The Blessed Damozel' is through the seemingly physical depiction of the heavenly Damozel.

¹³See the opening two stanzas of the poem, lines 1-12.

Here Rossetti is drawing upon Swedenborg's idea of the sustenance of the human substantial form after death.¹⁴ In writing about heaven, Swedenborg suggested that a person's physical attributes appear to be retained after death. They, in effect, seem to themselves as they were on earth:

It needs to be known that after death a person ceases to be a natural man and becomes a spiritual man, but he looks to himself exactly the same, and is so much the same that he is unaware that he is no longer in the natural world. He has the same kind of body, face, speech and senses, because in affection and thought, or in will and intellect, he remains the same. (*CL*, 31, p. 36)

In acknowledging the influence of Swedenborg, it becomes clear why Rossetti's Damozel has retained her human form in the afterlife.

Rossetti's emphasis upon the corporeality of his Damozel is his reinterpretation of a Swedenborgian heaven. This allows him creatively to incorporate pictorial language and linger upon aesthetic values. Rossetti's 'definition of outline' in 'The Blessed Damozel' lends the poem a painterly quality.¹⁵ In drawing upon Swedenborgian ideas, Rossetti is afforded the opportunity to emphasise the figurative, as the human form is celebrated. In *Heaven and Hell* Swedenborg sets down his knowledge of the world of spirits and of heaven as gleaned through his spiritual experiences. For Swedenborg the physical, earthly body is dictated by the essential substantial form of man, which is his spirit: 'That the form of man's spirit is the human form, or that even in its form the spirit is a man, is evident'.¹⁶ This is true both for the newly dead and for the angels in heaven they become, if so fitted: 'every angel is in a perfect human form' (*HH*, 453, p.337).

In his discussion of the 1850 *Germ* version of Rossetti's poem, David G. Riede suggests that the sensual treatment is at odds with its spiritual subject matter: 'Even in the early version, [...], "The Blessed Damozel" had not represented a genuinely

¹⁴Substantial is a Swedenborgian term which indicates a heavenly equivalent of corporeality: 'Everything here is *substantial*, not material; material things owe their origin to what is substantial. We who are present here are spiritual people, because we are substantial, not material' (*CL*, 207.5, p. 205).

¹⁵ Pater, p. 207. Pater also notices the painterly quality of Rossetti's poem, suggesting that the physical language and imagery is 'as naively detailed as the pictures of those early painters contemporary with Dante' (p.207). The poem is therefore Pre-Raphaelite in this interpretation.

¹⁶ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell*, trans. by James Robson Rendell (London: Swedenborg Society, 1905), 453, p. 337. This is detailed further in 'Man After Death is in a Perfect Human Form' (See sections 453 – 460, pp. 337-346). Hereafter cited as *HH*.

spiritual view of heaven – the damozel had always been hot-blooded enough to warm the gold bar of heaven, and the emphasis had always been on human love’ (Riede, p.84).¹⁷ However, the sensuality described by Rossetti can be read as spiritual in a Swedenborgian reading of the poem:

A man as a spirit also enjoys every sense both external and internal which he enjoyed in the world; he sees as before; he hears and speaks as before; he smells and tastes as before, and, when he is touched, he feels as before; he also longs, desires, wishes, thinks reflects, is affected, loves, and wills, as before; and he who is delighted with studies, reads and writes as before. (*HH*, 461, p. 346-47)

This is reinforced when one considers Rossetti’s presentation of the Damozel as a feeling woman whose desires remain unchanged after death. She longs for reunion with her beloved: ‘I wish that he were come to me’ (l. 61). Her retention of earthly attributes is consistent with a Swedenborgian definition of spirituality and consequently not contradictory to the spiritual subject matter of the poem. Rossetti’s use of concrete language in his representation of the Damozel and the emphasis on the continuation of the world of sense in heaven (‘she saw’, l. 55; ‘I sing here’, l. 87; ‘hand in hand’, l. 121) further illustrate his response to Swedenborgian ideas regarding the nature of the afterlife.

Sexual Reunion in the Afterlife

Riede’s criticisms highlight the other major aspect to the work that is often regarded as incongruous in critical responses to the work: Rossetti’s emphasis on human, romantic love in heaven. The damozel’s sexuality has troubled critics who have predominantly regarded Rossetti’s poem as homage to Dante and the Early Italian

¹⁷ Bentley makes an interesting point as regards the use of physical language, suggesting a complex narrative viewpoint, which allows for this: an imagined ‘historical percipient in the poem – an omniscient and speculative figure whose style and assumptions characterize him as the representative of the medieval-Catholic awareness that the reader is invited to enter’ (Bentley, ‘Damozel’, p. 36). The function of the percipient encourages the reader to suspend his/her disbelief, thus allowing for the mixture of earthly and heavenly in the poem because, according to Bentley, this recreates a medieval-Catholic sensibility ‘in which Heaven and Earth are simultaneously knowable’ (p. 36). However, this strain of argument, like the over reliance on Dante and the Early Italians, relies again upon the idea that Rossetti draws predominantly on medieval tropes and does not allow for other more contemporary influences.

School. John Dixon Hunt's comment that Rossetti's 'Damozel achieves the rather puzzling situation of being a spirit in Heaven consumed by distinctly earthly passions' is made in the light of his assertion that Rossetti's poem was written under the influence of Dante and his contemporaries (J.D. Hunt, p. 78). Another line of critical response is represented by Joan Rees, whose argument, despite acknowledging Rossetti's intentional portrayal of sacred sexual love, retains a critical approach that sees a disparity between body and soul in the work:

To begin with, there are his attempts at reconciling body and soul in what is envisaged as an ideal love relationship. That daring poem 'The Blessed Damozel' challenges the reader to notice the warmth of the girl's bosom and claims implicitly that sex may become sacred. (Rees, p. 113)

An acknowledgement of Rossetti's use of Swedenborgian imagery accounts for this fusion, in which the spiritual or essential man may be seen as embodying both a spiritual and a 'bodily' presence.

Rossetti's poem depicts the Damozel in heaven, lamenting the separation from her loved one on earth, and looking forward to their eternal reunion in the afterlife: "'I wish that he were come to me, / For he will come," she said' (ll. 61-2). Her confidence that she will be romantically reunited with her beloved after death is an idea consonant with a Swedenborgian-spiritualist view of the afterlife. For Swedenborg 'Angels and spirits are human beings' that have passed into the afterlife (CL, 30, p. 35). It follows that they retain the essence of their humanity, which includes their sexuality: 'people retain mutual and reciprocal sexual love after death' (CL, 37, p. 40). This sentiment is clearly stated in Rossetti's poem, as the damozel desires sexual and spiritual reunion: 'We two will lie i' the shadow of / That living mystic tree' (ll. 79-80).

Swedenborg's term for chaste sexual love in heaven is conjugal love; it is to the spiritual man what sexual love is to the natural man, and represents a continuation of romantic love in heaven.¹⁸ Swedenborg wrote exclusively about this love in his

¹⁸ Note the term 'conjugal love' derives from Swedenborg's term *conjugalis*, which derives from *conjugium* ('marriage'), rather than *conjugalis*, which derives from *conjux* ('a married partner'); hence conjugal, not conjugal love ('Translator's Introduction' by John Chadwick in CL, p. vi-vii). The distinction is important as 'conjugal' better emphasises the state of union achieved through this love, rather than a relational role. The term does not always apply to literal marriage, but rather to a true marriage of souls, as not all those who were in a married

visionary text of the same name, *Conjugal Love*. In it he claimed that people retain sexual love after death because the impulse inherent in the sexes is to be joined: 'Love taken by itself is nothing but a desire and hence an impulse to be joined; conjugal love is an impulse to be joined into one' (*CL*, 37, p.40). When a man and woman join together in heaven, they become one supreme angel: 'For in heaven a couple are not called two, but one angel [...] they are no longer two, but one flesh' (*CL*, 50, p. 55). It is this to which Rossetti's Damozel aspires; she longs to become one with her beloved: 'We two will live at once, one life; / And peace shall be with us' (ll. 137-38).

Rossetti utilises this idea of the Swedenborgian angel in his portrayal of the Damozel. Her longing for reunion is indicated in the poem through the repetition of similar phrases which echo her desire: 'I wish that he were come to me, / For he will come' (l. 61-2); "'All this is when he comes'" (l. 141). As a Swedenborgian angel she 'longs to be joined to the other' and to become whole: 'conjugal love makes an angel perfect, since it unites him with his partner'.¹⁹ Rossetti's particular use of Swedenborg can be said to further develop his presentation of the dead beloved, allowing him to incorporate a sexual element not present in Dante, and showing a deliberate break with the Early Italian poets, in order to present an idealised love relationship that responds to mid-nineteenth century sensibilities, moving it on from a medieval Christian, Italian viewpoint.

Other Swedenborgian Imagery in the 1850 Poem

The speech of the Damozel which narrates her imagined, anticipated reunion with her beloved forms the central section of the work. These are stanzas 11-15 and 18-24 out of the 25 stanzas that form the full 1850 poem. It is for the most part these sections which describe events in heaven, in which Rossetti draws significantly upon Swedenborgian ideas and imagery.

Trinity

partnership on earth continue so in heaven. Instead, their true conjugal partner is found in the afterlife. See Chapter III: 'The State of Married Couples after Death' (*CL*, pp. 50-63.)

¹⁹ *CL*, 37, p. 40, 52, p. 56.

The damozel's anticipated love reunion is envisaged in the most holy of places, which suggests its chaste and noble nature:

We two will lie i' the shadow of
That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Sometimes is felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
Saith His name audibly. (Ll. 79-84)

The couple are blessed by the Holy Spirit, who is but one aspect of the Divine encountered by the lovers in the imagined heavenly reunion of the lovers. They encounter firstly God, who is described as a flow of light:

I'll take his hand, and go with him
To the deep wells of light,
And we will step down as to a stream
And bathe there in God's sight. (Ll. 69-72)

This is consistent with a Swedenborgian view of God as the 'Sun of heaven' (*HH*, 117, p. 73), with light representing specifically the truth of love, which 'flows into heaven from the Lord from His Divine Love' (13, p. 10). Swedenborg writes that 'all who are in the heavens turn themselves constantly to Him' (123, p. 78). This is distinct from the sun of the natural world, to which it corresponds, and 'appears to the angels as something dark opposite to the Sun of heaven' (122, p. 77): hence Rossetti's damozel, in the opening stanzas, can 'scarce see the sun' (l. 30) that presides over the natural world, and experiences instead 'The peace of utter light' (l. 38), which suggests the ultimate and total light of God.

After bathing in the light of God, the conjugal couple of Rossetti's poem 'lie' in the presence of the Holy Spirit, as mentioned before, and then are brought before 'Christ the Lord' to receive blessings (l. 127). It is after encountering all three aspects of the Lord, the Trinity, that complete union with the beloved as conjugal angel is envisaged by the damozel: 'We Two will live at once, one life; / And peace shall be with us' (l. 137-8). This can be seen as referring to Swedenborgian theosophy in which all three aspects of the Lord must be reconciled, representing complete union into one being (the conjugal angel in microcosm):

The Unity in which is the Trinity, or the one God in whom is the trine, does not exist in the Divine which is called the Father, nor in the Divine which is called the Holy Spirit, but in the Lord alone; for in the Lord is a trine, that is to say, the Divine called Father, the Divine Human called Son, and the Divine Proceeding which is the Holy Spirit, and this trine is One because it is of one Person and may be called a Triune.²⁰

It is fitting that the Damozel imagines herself and her beloved expressing their love in ‘the shadow of / That living mystic tree / Within whose secret growth the Dove / Sometimes is felt to be’ (ll. 79-82). In addition to its traditional status as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, the dove has specifically Swedenborgian connotations. In its association with ‘the Divine Proceeding’, the dove represents the highest form of conjugal love (Stanley, p. 40). In a section describing his experiences in the Palace of Love in heaven, where he is educated about conjugal love, Swedenborg writes that ‘doves mean conjugal love of the highest region’ (CL, 270.4, p. 263). The palace is surrounded by sacred trees, including the olive, which corresponds with the dove (270.4, p. 263). The ‘mystic tree’ (l. 80) in the poem, therefore, in this reading, is olive. The dove appears as a sign indicating revelation throughout *Conjugal Love* at moments in which Swedenborg wishes to know more about the secrets of conjugal love:

Then I pressed them strongly to reveal some of these secrets to me too. At once they started looking towards the window facing the south, where we saw a shining white dove, with its wings glistening [...] standing on a branch from which sprang an olive. When the dove tried stretch its wings, the wives said, ‘We will reveal something; when the dove appears, it is a sign that we may’. (CL 155.4, p. 162)

In a later section, regarding the dynamics of conjugal love between husbands and wives, the dove appears again, indicating to the wives of conjugal love how much knowledge may be disclosed to Swedenborg (CL, 208.4, p. 208). Interestingly, ‘dove’, appears as an alternate for ‘Dove’, in a later published variant of ‘The Blessed

²⁰ Swedenborg, *Apocalypse Explained*, 1106.3, quoted in *Emanuel Swedenborg: Essential Readings*, ed. by Michael Stanley (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2003), pp. 42-43. A Swedenborgian Trinity is a triune of aspects, not persons: ‘An angel of heaven is a trine and therefore one. The *esse* of an angel is called his soul, his *existere* is called his body, and the proceeding from both is called the sphere of his life [...] It is from this trine that an angel is an image of God’ (Swedenborg, *AE*, 1111.3, quoted in Stanley, p. 41).

Damozel' which encourages a more general symbolic interpretation rather than the particular reference to the Holy Spirit.²¹

Swedenborgian Heaven

In 'The Blessed Damozel', Rossetti has created a heaven which is full of music and singing. The Damozel is described as 'one of God's choristers' (l. 14) and angels 'sing / To their citherns and citoles' (l. 125). Similar imagery pervades Swedenborg's depictions of heaven, in which musicians play instruments and 'entertain the citizens with the most delightful anthems and songs, either in choirs or as solos' (CL, 17.1, p. 24). The Damozel of Rossetti's heaven looks forward to teaching her beloved 'The songs I sing here' (l. 87) while they are 'lying' (l. 86) together in romantic reunion. This is reminiscent of a Swedenborgian heaven in which singing is associated with the expression of the beauties of conjugal love, particularly that of wives, maidens and girls, and the music associated with conjugal love is described by Swedenborg as 'sweet' on many occasions, which signifies 'chaste sexual love'.²² Significantly, the 'five handmaidens' of 'the lady Mary' (l. 104-05) in 'The Blessed Damozel' are reminiscent, seated in their 'groves' (l. 103), of the communities of wives of conjugal love that Swedenborg encounters 'sitting in the rose-garden' in heaven (CL, 293, pp. 279). Their association with chaste sexual love is expressed in the poem through their names which are described as 'five sweet symphonies' (l. 106).²³

²¹See *The New Path* version (1863), line 87; detailed in William E. Fredeman, 'Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel": A Problem in Literary History and Textual Criticism', *English Studies Today* (1973), 239-69 (p. 266). This is one of the American publications of the poem.

²²CL, 55.2, p. 58. See also 17.2, p. 24 and 55, pp. 58-61 for passages that detail sweet singing in heaven.

²³There is a section in Dante's *Paradiso* which Rossetti appears to have also drawn upon for his representation of Mary and 'her five handmaidens' (l. 105) in 'The Blessed Damozel' (See *Paradiso XXXII*, Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by C.H. Cisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 490-91). However, there are six maidens sitting below Mary in Dante's heaven, all specific biblical characters; 'Rachel [...] Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and the woman', together with Beatrice (ll. 8-10). The heaven of Rossetti's poem is by contrast less biblical and grandiose; the five women sit 'Weaving' (l. 112) and are given distinctly medieval names, albeit it with some derived from the biblical also: 'Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen, / Margaret, and Rosalys' (l. 107-08). However, since the handmaidens inhabit 'groves' (l. 103), this is further evidence that Rossetti appropriates aspects of a Swedenborgian heaven. Trees correspond to wisdom in a Swedenborgian reading, and gardens in general correspond to heaven; 'On this account the ancients, who were skilled in the knowledge of correspondences, held their worship in groves' (HH, 111, p. 68).

The handmaidens in 'The Blessed Damozel' are weaving 'birth-ropes' (l. 113) for the spirits entering heaven newly born as angels:

Circle-wise sit they, with bound locks
And bosoms covered;
Into a fine cloth, white like flame,
Weaving golden thread,
To fashion birth-ropes for them
Who are just born, being dead. (Ll. 109-114)

These are Rossetti's equivalents for the 'angelic garments' given to spirits who are ready to enter Swedenborgian heaven, which are described in *Heaven and Hell* as 'white like fine linen' (HH, 519, p. 415). Thus, it is only when her beloved is 'clothed in white' (l. 68) that the damozel imagines she will begin the process of reunion:

When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I'll take his hand, and go with him
To the deep wells of light,
And we will step down as to a stream
And bathe there in God's sight. (Ll. 67-72)

In his discussion of the various sources used by Rossetti in his depiction of heaven in the poem, R.D. Waller suggests that the white garments are amongst a number of features taken from *Revelation*:

For some of its elements one needs to look no farther than the Bible and the Holy Jerusalem of *Revelation*, where you find the seven stars and the white robes, golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints, and 'the living mystic tree' – the 'tree of life which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.'²⁴

Considering William Michael Rossetti's comment, regarding his brother's reading interests, that the 'Bible was deeply impressive to him, perhaps above all Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Apocalypse', Waller makes an interesting point.²⁵ However, the

²⁴ R.D. Waller, 'The Blessed Damozel', *Modern Language Review*, 26.2 (1931), 129-141 (pp. 136-37)

²⁵ W.M. Rossetti, *Poetical Works*, p. xxvi.

context of *Revelation* and that of the Damozel's heaven are distinctly different. The white robes in 'The Blessed Damozel' are consistent with the clothing of the newly dead as described by Swedenborg, and this is the subject of the poem. That some of the imagery from *Revelation* is also found in the poem, however, does not preclude a Swedenborgian reading of the work, given that Swedenborg published *Apocalypse Revealed* (1766), his verse by verse interpretation of *Revelation*, two years before *Conjugal Love* (1768) (Stanley, p. 24). It is quite possible that Rossetti was aware of this, given his knowledge of Swedenborg's life, and one can speculate that this common interest may have been one of the factors that drew his interest toward Swedenborg's ideas.

The 'Blessed' Damozel and her Seven Stars

Another issue raised by Waller is the significance of the seven stars in the Damozel's hair. Again, it is tempting, given the repeated use of seven as a significant number throughout *Revelation*, to infer that Rossetti appropriated the symbolism from the last book of the bible: 'The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches' (Revelation 1. 20).²⁶ However, as the stars are worn by the Damozel in her hair, they are most likely to be associated with her specifically:

The blessed Damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven: [...]
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven. (Ll. 1, 2, 5,6)

²⁶Jerome McGann also cites *Revelation* as a possible source for the imagery in Rossetti's poem, referencing *Revelation* 1.16 ('And he had in his right hand seven stars') and 12.1 ('And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman [...] and upon her head a crown of twelve stars'). In addition he suggests that the seven stars may refer to the Pleiades, particularly with regard to the painted version of the work:

In the painting the damozel has a crown of six stars, not seven. The discrepancy defines the crown as the Pleiades, which traditional astrology saw as being composed of seven stars, though one – the "lost pleiad" – was invisible. This lost Pleiad, a favourite subject in the romantic tradition since Byron, is Merope, who was cast from her starry place because she fell in love with a mortal man. In this context the Damozel is the lost Pleiad.' (*CPP*, p. 377)

This is an interesting point, but does not fit with the context of poem, in which there is no distinction made between the seven stars. The poem's main theme is love reunion in the afterlife. Despite a fleeting sense of connection at the closing lines of the poem, the Damozel does not lose her celestial status, but remains in heaven and the lover, on earth.

The number seven has symbolic associations in Swedenborg's theosophy, which are appropriate in terms of Rossetti's *Damozel*, as Robert Upstone has gone some way to explaining:

The stars in the *Damozel's* hair 'were seven', a number to which Swedenborg attached great symbolic significance, corresponding to his beliefs about the 'seven ages of the mind', as well as the seven days of Creation. Stars to Swedenborg represented someone's knowledge of good and truth. (*Age of Rossetti*, p. 192)

However, the significant point, not mentioned by Upstone, is that the number seven is specifically associated with that which is holy and celestial in Swedenborg's heavenly symbolism:

For example, whenever the number seven occurs, instead of seven there at once comes to the angels the idea of what is holy; for seven signifies holy, because the celestial man is the seventh day.²⁷

Rossetti's appropriation of seven stars can therefore be seen as a reference to the *Damozel's* celestial state. Her seven stars signify her status to the other angels of heaven. Most pertinently the number symbolises conjugal love, which is the 'linking of love and wisdom' (*CL*, 65 p. 69): 'Seven, [...] signifies the complete inseparable union in the Divine of Love and Wisdom – hence what is holy' (Very, pp. 192-93). Thus, the opening stanza of Rossetti's poem establishes the *Damozel's* celestial situation, her holy status, and her association with conjugal love. It also establishes the *Damozel's* association with the trinity: 'three lilies in her hand' (l. 5). The *Damozel's* epithet 'blessed' (l. 1), reinforces this, but also specifically identifies the Swedenborgian-spiritualist context for the poem, in its association particularly with conjugal love. In an explanation of truly conjugal love Swedenborg describes the joys felt by those who experience it: 'every kind of blessedness [...] that the Lord the Creator could ever confer on a person are concentrated on this love of his' (*CL*, 68.2, p. 71). Her anticipated future status as conjugal angel is therefore indicated by her name; the very title of the poem: 'The Blessed *Damozel*'.

²⁷ Swedenborg, *Heavenly Arcana*, 1988, quoted in Frank W. Very, 'Swedenborg's Theory of Correspondences' from *The Epitome of Swedenborg's Science, Part 2* (Boston MA: Four Seas, 1927; repr. Kessinger, 2005), p. 190.

Part 2: The Influence of the Gothic Tradition

In a letter to his Aunt Charlotte of May 1848 Rossetti referred to Leigh Hunt's written response to the early version of 'The Blessed Damozel', which was sent to him for consideration in late 1847. Rossetti's words are important in that they suggest Leigh Hunt's narrowing of the work solely to 'Dantesque' may be misleading:

When Hunt [...] speaks of my "Dantesque Heavens," he refers to one or two of the poems, the scene of which is laid in the celestial regions, and which are written in a kind of Gothic manner which I suppose he is pleased to think belongs to the school of Dante. (*Correspondence I*, p. 63, 48.6)

The phrase 'Gothic manner', used by Rossetti to describe the style of the poem, suggests sources other than Dante for the supernatural elements in the work and the dead beloved theme which characterises it. Rossetti's interest in the Romantic Gothic forms part of a recognised literary heritage for the poem.²⁸ David G. Riede has argued, for example, that 'the influence of gothic tales on Rossetti's imagination, actually, was probably greater than the influence of medieval Christianity' (Riede, p. 24). A major imaginative gothic influence came from Rossetti's reading of American writer Edgar Allan Poe, as William Michael tells us: 'Along with *The Raven*, other poems by Poe – *Ulalume*, *For Annie*, *The Haunted Palace*, and many another – were a deep well of delight to Rossetti' (*Family-Letters, I*, p. 107). Rossetti's illustrations of 'The Raven' and other Poe subjects are testament to his enthusiasm, as is Poe's inclusion in the Pre-

²⁸ Philip James Bailey's poem *Festus* (1839), based upon the Faust legend, is another gothic influence (see Alan D. McKillop, 'Festus and *The Blessed Damozel*', *Modern Language Notes*, 34.2 (1919), 93–97). However, the potential significance that Bailey's poem may represent a secondary source of Swedenborgian imagery for Rossetti has not been hitherto explored. Bailey's *Festus* contains a template for the idea of the continuation of romantic love after death, represented through Festus' desire to reunite with one of his loves, Angela. Certain sections are narrated from the point of view of Angela in heaven, suggesting a possible source for this dynamic in Rossetti's poem. Pertinently, Angela at one point expresses her desire for reunion with Festus in Swedenborgian terms, evoking the image of the conjugal angel: 'But love can never die [...] Come to me when thou diest! [...] Then, in each other's arms, we will waft through space, / Spirit in Spirit, one! Or we will dwell / Among these immortal groves' (*Festus*, quoted in McKillop, p. 95); an image which feeds into Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel': "We two will live at once, one life; / And peace shall be with us." As one in a circle of Swedenborg influenced writers, including Patmore and Sutton, Bailey's, and his poem's, possible Swedenborgianism is worthy of further research. See also Chapter 2: Context; section on Coventry Patmore).

Raphaelite Brotherhood list of 'Immortals', which detailed a number of individuals the group deemed inspirational (*PRB Journal*, p. 107). During the 1850s James Hannay, a journalist friend of Rossetti, published an edition of Poe which he dedicated to Rossetti; a further testament to the esteem in which Rossetti held Poe.²⁹ It is also interesting to note that the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe would appear to have been a shared literary interest between Rossetti and the Swedenborgian-spiritualist Dr. Garth Wilkinson, to which they alluded in their correspondence.³⁰ This last point adverts to the significance in the present context of Rossetti's interest in the Gothic tradition, as regards the influence of Poe's work on Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel'. That is; in representing the afterlife in his poems, Poe may well have drawn upon the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Poe's depiction of heaven and his ideas on the continuation of romantic love after death, represent secondary sources of Swedenborgian imagery and ideas for Rossetti which influenced his own poem.

Poe Reconsidered – the Gothic Dead Beloved

Poe was familiar with the writings of Swedenborg, as evidenced by his reference to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* as part of Roderick Usher's occult library in his story 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839).³¹ In addition, as Roger Forclaz has suggested in a summary of Poe scholarship, there has been critical recognition of 'Poe's interest in Swedenborg's theory of correspondences'.³² Many of Poe's works utilise the dead beloved as a central theme. The poems 'Ulalume' (1847), 'For Annie' (1849), 'Lenore' (1831) and 'The Raven' (1845) all express the idea of the continuation of love beyond death. The influence of 'The Raven' upon Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' has already enjoyed much critical discussion. However, as has been recognised, Rossetti's poem 'may owe just as much to Poe's "To One in Paradise", [...]

²⁹ Alastair Grieve, 'Rossetti's Illustrations to Poe', *Apollo*, 97 (1973), 142-45 (p. 144)

³⁰ In the copy of the letter from Rossetti to Wilkinson in 1865 (Swedenborg Society Library Archive K/14), Rossetti refers to Poe as the subject of one of Wilkinson's poems that he enjoyed reading. It is interesting to speculate whether the Swedenborgian aspects in Poe's writing form the basis of Wilkinson's interest; certainly the supernaturalism of his subjects satisfy both Wilkinson's and Rossetti's interest in spiritualism.

³¹ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 149.

³² Roger Forclaz, 'Poe in Europe Recent German Criticism', *Poe Studies*, XI.2 (1978), 49-55.

which also deals with “the grief of the lover on earth”³³. The speaker’s lamentations of loss in ‘To One in Paradise’ (1833), ‘For, alas! alas! With me / The light of Life is o’er!’, certainly anticipate the tone of Rossetti’s earthly lover in ‘The Blessed Damozel’ who fears loneliness in a similarly dramatic manner; ‘Alas for lonely Heaven! Alas / For life wrung out alone! (ll. 95-6).³⁴ More important is the suggestion in Poe’s poem of the longing for future romantic reunion. As in Rossetti’s poem, the earthbound lover imagines his dead beloved in the afterlife:

And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy dark eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams –
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams. (ll. 21-26)

Her voice seems to call him on to the future when they will be united: ‘A voice from out the Future cries, / “On! On!” – but o’er the Past / (Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies’ (ll. 10-12). The supernatural quality of this disembodied voice which interjects into the main body of the poem finds its equivalent too in Rossetti’s poem in the earthly lover’s parenthetical descriptions of the imagined contact from the dead beloved in the spirit world: ‘(I saw her smile)’ (l. 145); ‘(I heard her tears)’ (l. 150). Most significantly Poe’s poem was first published, in an earlier form, in the story ‘The Visionary’ (1832).³⁵ The tale culminates in the idea of death as a reunion of true lovers, who cannot be together in life. The heavenly form of the female beloved is anticipated in a portrait kept by her lover, in which she is portrayed surrounded by a ‘brilliant atmosphere’, reminiscent of Swedenborg’s descriptions of the heavenly light, ‘which seemed to encircle, and enshrine her loveliness’ (Poe, ‘Visionary’, p. 43). The imagined dead beloved, as envisioned in the painting, is, like Rossetti’s damozel, given a voice.

³³ ‘The Blessed Damozel: Scholarly Commentary’ in *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, edited by Jerome J. McGann, [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1847.s244.raw.html>], accessed 20 February 2008]

³⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven and Other Poems* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1991), p. 20, ll. 14-15. All subsequent line references from this poem refer to this edition.

³⁵ The first version was published in 1832. According to the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, no original manuscripts are known to exist; therefore the 1834 published version is referenced. Edgar Allan Poe, “The Visionary [The Assigment]”, *Godley’s Lady’s Book*, 8 (1834), 40-43 [<http://www.eapoe.org/works/tales/assiga.htm>], accessed 18 April 2012]

She 'speaks' to her lover, calling him onward through the portrait: 'On a scroll which lay at her feet were these words – "I am waiting but for thee."' (p. 43).

A further example of Poe's utilisation of Swedenborgian ideas in his representation of a profound love that outlasts death is represented by the poem 'Annabel Lee' (1849). The image of conjugal love is at the heart of Poe's poem, which takes the form of a lament from an earthbound lover for his adored dead beloved; a typical theme:

But we loved with a love that was more than love –
I and my ANNABEL LEE –
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me. [...]
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE:³⁶

The soul of the speaker and that of his beloved Annabel Lee cannot be severed as they have become one. This can be read as a reference to conjugal love, the supreme love experienced by humans, which is a linking of souls: 'One love meets the other, makes itself known and instantly joins their souls' (CL, 44.6, p.4 8). The supremacy of conjugal love as 'the highest form of love' (73, p. 74) is expressed in Poe's poem as the 'love that was more than love' (l. 9). This is the 'one life' (l. 137) of the conjugal angel that Rossetti's Damozel anticipates living with her beloved in heaven.

Also influential are other Poe poems which detail the imagined landscapes of the afterlife, and represent prototypes for Rossetti's depictions of the celestial sphere in his poem. Two examples are indicated as significant (without elaboration) by Alastair Grieve in his discussion of Rossetti's Poe illustrations: 'His best known early poem, *The Blessed Damozel*, [...] was written to provide a heavenly counterpart to the longing of the earthbound lover in *The Raven* and lines from Poe's *Al Aaraaf* and *Israfel* are also reflected in this poem' (Grieve, 'Poe', p. 142). 'Israfel' (1831-45) is particularly relevant to the present discussion, as, in addition to several phrases which find echoes in Rossetti's poem, one stanza particularly refers to Swedenborg's description of

³⁶ Poe, *Usher and Other Writings*, pp. 89-90, ll. 9-12, 30-33. Note line 32: 'Can never dissever my soul from thy soul', which could be a precedent for Rossetti's use of the images of severing and sundering, and the imagery of mirroring, which characterise his depictions of conjugal love in *The House of Life* sonnets (See Chapter 5: *The House of Life*, 1).

heaven. 'Israfel' begins: 'In Heaven a spirit doth dwell'.³⁷ It opens, as Rossetti's poem does, with the heavenly character described in the third person: 'The Blessed Damozel leaned out / From the gold bar of Heaven' (l. 1). Israfel, an angel, fills heaven with beautiful music, which silences even the 'hymns' (l. 6) and the 'starry choir' (l. 16) of the celestial realm. Rossetti's heaven is similarly musical. The Damozel is one of 'God's choristers' (l. 14); and in the angels 'sing/ To their citherns and citoles' (l. 125-26). There is some consonance also between the closing of the second verse of Israfel, '(With the rapid Pleiads, even, / Which were seven)' (l. 13-14), and the closing lines of the first stanza of 'The Blessed Damozel': 'And the stars in her hair were seven' (l. 6). Poe's poem begins with a description of Israfel in heaven and slowly moves to focus on the narrator directly. His experience on earth is brought into sharp focus by the use of 'I' which draws the reader from the epic and celestial into the present and the personal; 'If I could dwell / Where Israfel / Hath dwelt' (l. 45-47). This in some respects foreshadows the dynamic in 'The Blessed Damozel' in which the Damozel is imagined in heaven by her beloved, who brings the narrative back to his earthly viewpoint at several points within the poem, most dramatically in the last line, with the use again of 'I': '(I heard her tears)' (l. 150).

The Swedenborgian elements in Poe's 'Israfel' come to the fore in stanza 7, in which the narrator makes the distinction between the heaven of Israfel and his own dwelling place; earth. He addresses the angel:

Yes, Heaven is thine; but this
Is a world of sweets and sour;
Our flowers are merely – flowers,
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours. (Ll. 40-44)

The phrase 'Our flowers are merely flowers' is a reference to Swedenborg's writings on the heavenly counterparts of natural things, such as flowers. The heavenly equivalent represents a deeper philosophical truth which cannot be fully understood on earth: 'no one today can know, except from heaven, the spiritual things in heaven to which natural things on earth are counterparts, since the knowledge of correspondences has

³⁷ Poe, *Usher and Other Writings*, pp. 69-70, l. 1. All subsequent line references to this poem in text refer to this edition.

now been completely lost'.³⁸ The qualities they symbolise become clear to the angels in heaven who can see their greater glory, according to Swedenborg:

The flowers [...] were even more pleasing to their minds than to their eyes because in every one of these sights they see correspondences, and through the correspondences they see elements of what is divine. (*HH2*, 185, p. 122)

This is reinforced in the following lines of the poem which express the idea of the sun in the natural world as a mere shadow in heaven; as Swedenborg writes: 'the earth's sun is seen by the angels as an extremely dark object directly opposite the heaven's sun' (122, p. 83).

The conjugal angel is evoked in Poe's poem through the phrase 'perfect bliss' (l. 43). As discussed previously, this is the state of bliss achieved through the experience of conjugal love, which is also referred to in Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel'. In addition, the image of the conjugal angel as an expression of the divine in microcosm is conveyed to the reader in Poe's poem, who is told that 'Love's a grown-up God' (l. 25) in the heaven of Israfil.³⁹ Poe's phrase expresses the notion that romantic love achieves its adulthood in heaven; in accord with Swedenborg's writings that the love experienced on earth merely foreshadows this ultimate state, becoming fully conjugal after death (*CL*, 38, p. 40).

The Raven

Hall Caine's claim that Rossetti cited Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven' (1845) as a thematic template for 'The Blessed Damozel' has been, as noted by D.M.R. Bentley, 'More frequently mentioned than applied'.⁴⁰ Caine paraphrased Rossetti's apparent

³⁸ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, trans. by K.C. Ryder (London: Swedenborg Society, 2010), 110, p. 73). A more recent edition of *Heaven and Hell* is referred to here, as the translation for these lines is clearer than that of the 1905 edition. Simpler, contemporary language is utilised making it easier for the reader to understand what Swedenborg meant in these particular passages. This edition cited as *HH2*.

³⁹ The image itself of Love as a God in Poe's poem, symbolising the conjugal angel, which unites the attributes of the divine, can be seen as a source, alternative to Dante, for Rossetti's Love personified in *The House of Life*.

⁴⁰ Bentley, 'Damozel', p. 31. As Bentley suggests, the critical responses to Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' treat of the influence of Poe's 'The Raven' only briefly, with little elaboration. Both Waller (1931) and Knickerbocker (1932) in their respective essays raise the idea and dismiss it within the space of a paragraph (Waller 'Damozel', p. 130; K. L.

statement of authorial intent: 'Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and I determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven'.⁴¹ The point of confluence between the two poems, despite differences in treatment, is their subject; that of lovers separated by death and the longing for romantic reunion in the afterlife.

Poe's citing of the subject of the dead beloved as key to his poetics can be seen as just as important an influence upon Rossetti's adoption of the subject in his work, as that which has been ascribed to Dante and the Early Italian poets. As Paul Lauter correctly points out: 'the aesthetic principle underlying Rossetti's poem is very likely Poe's' (p. 345). Lauter refers to 'The Philosophy of Composition', in which Poe states during an explication of his poetic process in writing 'The Raven', that the most poetical subject in the world is that of the dead beloved:

The death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world – and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of a bereaved lover.⁴²

In consideration of the two poems, it is initially apparent that, despite their difference in tone ('The Raven' has a different structure and rhythm from 'The Blessed Damozel' and is distinctly more melodramatic) the two works share a supernatural quality. Both can be said to be informed by the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism as they have at their centre the idea of connection between the earth and the spiritual realms. They share the motif of the natural invested with a potentially supernatural essence and use techniques in relation to the earthbound lover (the speaker of 'The Raven'; the earthly lover of 'The Blessed Damozel'), that show a particular heightened psychological state in which these spiritualist phenomena are experienced. The tapping at his chamber

Knickerbocker, 'Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel"', *Studies in Philology*, 29.3 (1932), 484-504 (pp. 487-488). Both critics cite Kurt Horn's more attentive consideration of the traces of Poe's poem found in 'The Blessed Damozel' in *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von D.G. Rossettis Dichtungen* (Bernau, 1909). An exception is Paul Lauter's more detailed consideration of the relationship between the speaker of 'The Raven' and the earthly lover of 'The Blessed Damozel' in 'The Narrator of "The Blessed Damozel"', *Modern Language Notes*, 73.5 (1958), 344-348). Lauter also acknowledges the importance of Poe's 'aesthetic principle' (p. 345) as a significant point of influence for Rossetti. Bentley himself remains unconvinced by what he refers to as 'T. Hall Caine's dubious reminiscence that Rossetti himself gave Poe's "The Raven" as the direct inspiration and point of departure for his poem' (p. 31).

⁴¹ Caine, quoted in *Family-Letters*, I, p. 107.

⁴² Poe, *Usher and Other Writings*, p. 486.

door is at one point dismissed by the speaker of Poe's 'The Raven' as 'the wind and nothing more'.⁴³ A similar episode is found in Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' in the first bracketed stanza which introduces the earthly lover:

..... Yet now, here in this place
Surely she leaned o'er me, - her hair
Fell about my face.....
Nothing: the Autumn-fall of leaves. (Ll. 20-23)

In addition the male protagonists of both poems doubt their worthiness as candidates for heaven and therefore fear they will not reunite with their loved ones; the sense of doubt being particularly bleak in Poe's poem: 'Nevermore!'⁴⁴

However, it is the vision of reunion that the speaker in 'The Raven' vainly hopes for that is at the heart of the poem's influence on Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel':

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us – by that God we both adore –
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore –
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.' (Ll. 91-96)

The image that Poe introduces of the lovers clasping in heavenly reunion describes the substantial quality of conjugal love one also finds in 'The Blessed Damozel'. It appropriates the sexually romantic image of the embrace, one which Rossetti also uses visually in one of the painted versions of *The Blessed Damozel* to portray the heavenly sexual reunion suggested in his poem.⁴⁵ The word 'Clasp' is appropriated by Rossetti in his *House of Life* sonnets 'Severed Selves' and 'Silent Noon' to express conjugal love.⁴⁶ It is a distinctly physical word that articulates the joining of two lovers. It is interesting to consider that Rossetti's particular use of the word may have been appropriated from Poe, due to perhaps a shared Swedenborgian context.

⁴³ Poe, *Usher and Other Writings*, p. 78, l. 36: all subsequent line references to 'The Raven' in text refer to this edition.

⁴⁴ The raven itself may represent by correspondence an omen of the future hell the speaker fears he will inhabit, as opposed to the heaven his beloved dwells in. Certain birds, such as owls and ravens appear in Swedenborg's writings as counterparts to the doves which symbolise conjugal love in heaven (See *CL*, 526.2, p. 488; *HH2*, 429, p. 329). Hence it is a 'thing of evil' (l. 85) in the mind of the speaker of the poem.

⁴⁵ This is the version in the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard. See Fig. 4, p. 278.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 5: *The House of Life*, 1 for further discussion.

The name of the beloved in Poe's 'The Raven' is also something which is indicative of Swedenborgian theosophy. The name 'Lenore', meaning 'light', is reinforced through the description of her as a 'rare and radiant maiden' (l. 11). As with the portrait of the beloved in Poe's story 'The Visionary', who glows with a 'brilliant atmosphere', Lenore's heavenly angelic status is communicated in terms of her association with light. The most pertinent Swedenborgian aspect of her name, however, is that the reader is told that she is 'the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore – / Nameless *here* for evermore' (l. 11-12). These lines articulate Swedenborg's theory that, after death; 'everyone in the spiritual world drops his baptismal name, and the name of his family, and is named according to his quality.'⁴⁷ Hence the dead beloved in 'The Raven' is given a name symbolic of her character, which, as it means 'light', indicates her status as an angel close to the Lord, who is the sun in heaven and the source of heavenly light, which is divine truth:

So whatever appears in heaven from the Lord as the sun appears in light. Because this is the source of light in heaven it varies according to the level of the angels' reception of divine truth from the Lord, or according to the level of understanding and wisdom the angels possess, [...]. In short, the level of light they are in depends on the degree to which they are receptors of divine truth; that is, the degree to which they possess understanding and wisdom from the Lord. So, the angels of heaven are called Angels of Light. (*HH2*, 128, p. 86)

This, together with the reference to Lenore as the 'sainted maiden', which reinforces her exalted heavenly status, suggests a Swedenborgian prototype for the name given to Rossetti's dead beloved; the 'blessed damozel' of *his* poem.⁴⁸

The most significant Swedenborgian aspect to Poe's poem is that the speaker talks of his 'soul'. This sets the context for the drama, and the nature of the love lost. The poem contains three references to 'my soul' (ll. 19, 31, 107), and, in the stanza in which the speaker asks in desperation if he will reunite with his dead beloved, the phrase becomes 'this soul' (l. 93). This is because, despite the sense of romantic love

⁴⁷ Swedenborg, *Invitation to the New Church*, 41, quoted in Stanley, p. 121.

⁴⁸ The similarity between the 'sainted maiden' of 'The Raven' who dwells with the angels in a 'distant Aidenn', and Rossetti's 'Blessed Damozel' who dwells with the angels in heaven has been apparently noted by Kurt Horn in *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Dante Gabriel Rossettis Dichtungen* (Bernau, 1909); as discussed in Waller 'Damozel', p. 130, and Knickerbocker, pp. 487-488. However, it is the significance of the similarities which is the critical point, made here: both poems draw upon Swedenborgian ideas concerning conjugal love and heaven.

conveyed by the poem, and the hoped for reunion being described in physical language ('clasp'), the connection is between souls, which signals that the love between the speaker and Lenore is conjugal. It is the true substantial form of man, the spirit, which achieves reunion: 'Tell this soul [...] if, within the distant Aidenn, / It shall clasp a sainted maiden' (l. 93-94).

Joan Rees has recognised that this focus upon a connection of souls is where Poe and Rossetti meet. In a discussion of 'The Raven' and its influence on 'The Blessed Damozel' Rees argues that both poet's use of the supernatural allows them to explore the interiority of personal experience. She suggests that Rossetti picks up where Poe left off in this regard, but that Rossetti's adoption of this technique is actually 'far subtler', becoming central to his poetics:

Rossetti's favourite goal in these travels into mysterious regions is a moment of communion of souls. The psychological interest which lies behind this and the kind of imagery which is used to develop it form a major part of Rossetti's achievement as a poet. The achievement is often underestimated because its character is not clearly recognised. (Rees, p. 65)

What Rees does not suggest however is that this can be attributed to an interest, common to both poets, in Swedenborg's writings regarding the nature of conjugal love as 'the union of souls' (*CL*, 49, p. 54).

Poe's adoption of aspects of Swedenborg in the idea of heaven as a reunion of lovers, and the presentation of the dead beloved as an angelic 'sainted maiden' in 'The Raven', provide a template for Rossetti's use of them in 'The Blessed Damozel'. The acknowledgement of this provides a substantial connection between the two that is often missed in critical responses because of the distinct stylistic differences between the two works. R.D. Waller's response is typical in this respect:

Without Rossetti's own indication nobody could have guessed that there was any relationship between the two poems so entirely different as these. With it, it is possible to believe the relationship existed, but it leaves the origin of most of the peculiar features of our poem unexplained. (Waller, 'Damozel', p. 130)

A consideration of the employment by Poe of aspects of Swedenborg's writings on the nature of heaven and the conjugal angel, and the appearance of similar imagery in 'The Blessed Damozel' pinpoints the relationship between the two works, and does

account for some of the 'peculiar features' of Rossetti's poem. This stands for itself without Rossetti's indication of its influence. However, considering Rossetti did cite it as an influence suggests that after all he knew best regarding which works were influential upon his own poem.

A Few Words on Rossetti's Illustrations for 'The Raven'

In the period concurrent with the initial production of 'The Blessed Damozel' poem and the sending of this early version to Leigh Hunt in 1847, Rossetti executed a number of drawings inspired by Poe's works.⁴⁹ These included several illustrations to 'The Raven'. A consideration of Rossetti's 'The Raven' illustrations, produced c.1846-8, show his preoccupation with the most potentially Swedenborgian aspects of Poe's poem. Subsequent to an early illustration dated 1846, which was derivative in style, and, as Alastair Grieve has noted, was probably influenced by the Romantic artist Theodore von Holst, Rossetti's illustrations show a marked change in style to one with a more recognisably Pre-Raphaelite quality (Grieve, 'Poe', p. 143). This would indicate that Rossetti's interest in Poe was a generative one in terms of the development of his artistic style. This happened concurrently with the development of his treatment of the dead beloved theme in his written work, as the influence of Poe's vision is found in 'The Blessed Damozel'.

Rossetti's illustrations to 'The Raven' focus on the same dramatic moment in the poem. At first glance they each refer to lines from stanza 14, the section that is most reflective of Rossetti's interest in spiritualism and the supernatural:

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
'Wretch', I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee – by these angels he hath
sent thee (Ll. 79-81)

The Whitwick Manor picture (c.1846) shows the seated speaker to the right of the composition and a line of winged female angels to the left, moving past him from the

⁴⁹ The illustrations, which include *Ulalume* (c.1848) and *The Sleeper* (c.1848), are testament to Rossetti's fascination with Poe and his particular use of the dead beloved subject. See Grieve, 'Poe', pp. 142-45, and Treuherz, Prettejohn and Becker, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, pp. 142–43.

background towards the foreground, with the raven perched top left of the picture.⁵⁰ The angels are Rossetti's interpretation of the Seraphim of Poe's poem and, as in the poem, they are depicted swinging censers. However, there is more going on in Rossetti's interpretation. In the centre of the composition one of the angels leans out of line, slightly towards the speaker and looks at him, whilst he appears to return the glance in a dramatic moment of connection. Rossetti has added his own elaboration on the dead beloved theme expounded by Poe in his poem. The moment of connection depicted suggests that this angel is the 'sainted maiden' Lenore, in an interpretation of the text which emphasises the context of spiritualism. In introducing this, Rossetti is also alluding in his illustration to stanza 16 of 'The Raven', in which the speaker asks if he will be reunited with his dead beloved in heaven. This contains the poem's most overtly Swedenborgian lines: 'Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn, / It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore' (l. 93-4). The moment of connection that the speaker longs for is anticipated in the picture through their glance, showing Rossetti's interest in Poe's poem lies in the idea of reunion, or reconnection with the dead beloved, which also characterises 'The Blessed Damozel'.

The basic form of the Whitwick picture (c.1846) is repeated in the Birmingham (c.1847), and the V&A (c.1848), illustrations.⁵¹ That the latter two are subsequent to the Whitwick is reinforced in the depictions of the angels across the three works. In both the V&A and the Birmingham pictures, the angels are not the angular winged angels of Italian gothic painting, as in the Whitwick, but clearly more naturalistically human. In the Birmingham picture, their wings are scarcely visible – and are nonexistent in the V&A. This would suggest the growing influence of Swedenborg's ideas about the afterlife, in which angels are described as having retained their substantial human form. In the V&A illustration the representation of the angels is distinctly spiritualistic; they float like spirits in a somnambulist trance. Only the stars above their heads indicate their blessed heavenly status. This provides a pictorial association with 'The Blessed Damozel', whose starred head indicates her celestial

⁵⁰ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Raven* (c.1846) Ink and wash on paper, 23 x 21.6 cm (Whitwick Manor, Wolverhampton). See Fig. 1, p. 277.

⁵¹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Raven* (c.1848) Pen and brown ink on light-brown paper, 22.9 x 21.6 cm (Victoria and Albert Museum; museum number E.3415-1922); Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Raven* (c.1847) Pencil, pen and brown and black ink, and ink wash on paper, 22.2 x 17.5 cm (Birmingham Museums and Gallery, accession number 1904P268). See Figs. 2 and 3, p. 277.

situation, which suggests the common context that informs both Rossetti works. As with the Whitwick, one of these angels looks toward the speaker.

The Birmingham 'Raven' illustration is even more overt in its depiction of the angel who looks towards the speaker, and therefore in its suggestion that she represents Lenore. In this picture the angel is clearly delineated from the rest as markedly feminine and with original features that differ from the rest of the group (the Whitwick's are symbolic angels and clone-like in appearance). She leans across the table that separates her from the speaker (a symbolic motif used in all three pictures to signify the separation between earth and heaven) and gazes into his eyes whilst he returns the gaze. Both figures are in profile and their postures mirror each other in an early example of the imagery Rossetti uses to depict conjugal love; they are shown as two halves that will join together to form one conjugal angel.⁵² The glowing table lamp seems to connect them as it stands at heart height of the two figures; their heavenly reunion anticipated. This is a clear visual echo of the imagery that Poe uses of the connection of souls; the clasping of the sainted maiden in heaven for which the speaker longs. It represents an innovation by Rossetti to incorporate the visual presence of the dead beloved into the work.⁵³ Rossetti's visual interpretation of Poe's poem concentrates upon the imagined moment of romantic heavenly reunion, essentially defining the poem's subject as the possibility of the continuation of romantic love after death. In doing so he has identified the Swedenborgian aspect in the work, and magnified those Swedenborgian qualities in his pictorial presentations.

From 1846-8, in the period of the genesis of 'The Blessed Damozel' poem, Rossetti was clearly influenced by his reading and illustration of Poe's poems. The importance of Poe's work as a template for the dead beloved in this early work

⁵² See Chapter 6: *The House of Life*, 2 for further discussion of Rossetti's visual depictions of conjugal love and their relation to textual imagery.

⁵³ Rossetti incorporates the dead beloved Lenore into the V&A illustration in another symbolic way, through the motif of a portrait within the picture. Just as Poe has introduced the motif of a portrait of the dead beloved in his story 'The Visionary', Rossetti similarly uses the device in this illustration to 'The Raven'. The portrait is included compositionally in the centre top of the picture. By introducing a portrait of her which stands compositionally above the figures in the image, Rossetti literally places Lenore above in a heavenly domain, from which, like his own 'Blessed Damozel' looks out from 'the gold bar of heaven' – or, in this instance – the frame. She is literally above in the work, as well as symbolically above in heaven. This addition also suggests Rossetti's familiarity with Poe's story 'The Oval Portrait' (1845) in which the narrator passes his convalescence in a room in which there is a strikingly lifelike painting of a dead woman (*Usher and Other Writings*, pp. 250-253).

therefore rivals that of Dante and accounts for Rossetti's own description of his poem as in the 'Gothic manner'. Hall Caine remembers that Rossetti, towards the end of his life in autumn 1881, liked to repeatedly recite both 'The Raven' and 'Ulalume'. It was this which prompted Rossetti to tell Caine, regarding 'The Raven', that 'out of his love of it while still a boy his own *Blessed Damozel* originated'.⁵⁴

That Rossetti returned to Poe in the early 1880s is significant, as it is during this period when he was also working on his most Swedenborgian poem, the sonnet 'True Woman III: Her Heaven' and returning to Swedenborgian ideas regarding sacred love and the dead beloved. It was also the period in which he was revising 'The Blessed Damozel' for the reissue of *Poems* in 1881. With this in mind it is clear that Rossetti associated Poe with both Swedenborg and his early production of 'The Blessed Damozel', suggesting Poe's influence may have shadowed 'The Blessed Damozel' from its conception to its final despatch. Poe's utilisation of Swedenborgian ideas regarding love and the afterlife in his work, and Rossetti's further emphasis on those Swedenborgian aspects in his Poe illustrations, form part of a Gothic template for the dead beloved in his work, and represent a significant counterpoint to the Italian Dantesque aspect.

Part 3: The Importance of Blake

In his essay upon Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' D.M.R. Bentley lists a summary of poetic influences hitherto critically recognised as influential upon Rossetti's poem. He suggests that the poem is indebted 'not just to Dante and the other poets of his circle, but to a small galaxy of romantic and Victorian writers' (Bentley 'Damozel', p. 31). Included in this list is William Blake, whom Rossetti found inspirational from youth onward. The case for Blake's influence upon Rossetti is often mentioned in general terms in critical response, and with minimal elaboration; avoiding a closer identification of how, and in what ways, the visionary poet-artist was important in the formation of Rossetti's poetics and artistic style. K.L. Knickerbocker's comment regarding 'The Blessed Damozel', made during a summary of the poem's

⁵⁴ Caine, *Recollections of DGR* (1882), p. 284.

influences, is typical in this respect: 'It is possible to feel the inspiring ghost of William Blake hovered near' (Knickerbocker, p. 488).⁵⁵ Furthermore, the language used by Knickerbocker aptly expresses the context for that influence; spiritualism. Blake's influence is connected to a Swedenborgian-spiritualist context for Rossetti's work, accounting perhaps for the promotion and popularity of Blake by Rossetti and his circle.

Knickerbocker's response succinctly embodies the general feeling that it is Blake's mystical quality that inspired Rossetti; that despite their many differences, as Kerrison Preston has written, the two poet-artists share 'affinities of spirit' (Preston, p. 9). This has been noted in responses to both artists' work by those in Rossetti's circle, showing an innate understanding of their similarities which suggests the particular kind of influence that Blake had upon Rossetti's work. The poet Coventry Patmore, writing after Rossetti's death, succinctly expresses this mystical quality to Rossetti's work: 'in much of his work there is a rich and obscure glow of insight into depths too profound and too sacred for clear speech, even if they could be spoken'.⁵⁶ Significantly, in his essay on William Blake, Patmore quotes William Michael Rossetti's comments on Blake; words which echo his own regarding Rossetti's work: "'We feel its potent and arcane influence, but cannot dismember this into articulated meanings'".⁵⁷ Key to Blake's importance for Rossetti, as regards a mystical quality, is his presentation of love as both sexual and spiritual, as R.L. Stein has recognised:

The debt to Blake should not be pushed too far, but it is truer of Rossetti than of any other Pre-Raphaelite. Although his verse lacks Blakean simplicity and force, there is a dialectic in both his poetry and his painting that seems much like Blake's, frequently supporting his argument for the interconnection of sexual and spiritual love.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Joan Rees for example suggests that Blake was influential 'in fashioning the population of the soul' found in *The House of Life* sonnets (Rees, p. 82). However, there is little elaboration upon this initial assertion. In a similar vein is Riede's unelaborated comment that Rossetti was 'influenced by the sensual gothic of Blake's art' (Riede, p. 74). This sense of a Blakean presence in Rossetti's work, alluded to, yet little elaborated upon, is also present in early responses to Rossetti's work. Pater's essay in *Appreciations* comments upon Rossetti's originality by drawing a parallel between his 'poetic utterance' and 'Blake's design of the Singing of the Morning stars', yet the analogy is left undeveloped (Pater, p. 210).

⁵⁶ Coventry Patmore, 'Rossetti as a Poet', in *Principle in Art* (London: George Bell, 1898), pp. 98-105 (p. 105).

⁵⁷ Coventry Patmore, 'Blake', in *Principle in Art* (London: George Bell, 1898), pp. 92-97 (p. 92).

⁵⁸ Richard L. Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts as Literature in Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater* (London and Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 127.

This aspect of Blake's work that influenced Rossetti's was, in part, inspired by his interest in Swedenborg.

Blake and Swedenborg

Blake's engagement with Swedenborgian theosophy purportedly began after the death of his younger brother in 1787: 'In that same year, we have the record of his close study and annotation of Emanuel Swedenborg's writings'.⁵⁹ These incorporated the major works pertaining to romantic love and the afterlife, including *Conjugal Love* (1768), *Heaven and Hell* (1758) and *Apocalypse Revealed* (1766).⁶⁰ Blake's interest seems to have been born under suitably spiritualistic circumstances after seeing a vision of his brother's spirit body rising from his material body, and clapping his hands for joy. Subsequent to this he apparently felt his brother's spirit presence on many occasions.⁶¹ This places Blake's interest in Swedenborg firmly within the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism, and it is this more esoteric aspect that characterises his engagement with the mystic's ideas.

London of the 1770s and 80s was significant in the dissemination of Swedenborgian ideas in England. Swedenborg himself died whilst in London in 1772 and the first translation of Swedenborg's writings into English was in 1778, when Blake was aged twenty-one.⁶² The year 1788 was particularly important as it saw the foundation of the Swedenborgian New Church in England and marked the first year of publications from the Theosophical Society, which was set up in part to 'translate the works of the Swedish sage' (*Blake Dictionary*, p. 392). Blake's London circle included those interested in Swedenborg, such as the sculptor, designer and illustrator John Flaxman, and Richard Cosway, a painter who taught Blake at Pars' Drawing School. Cosway was 'a practising occultist' and, like Blake, 'saw visions, too, and drew from them' (Ackroyd, p. 101). Flaxman, 'an ardent Swedenborgian', was involved in New Church committees and knew Charles Augustus Tulk, one of the founder members of

⁵⁹ Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), p. 101.

⁶⁰ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973; repr. 1979), p. 392.

⁶¹ Kathleen Raine, *William Blake* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970; repr. 2000), pp. 43-44.

⁶² Stanley, p. 25; *Blake Dictionary*, p. 392.

the Swedenborgian Society who, as mentioned previously, introduced the Brownings to *Conjugal Love*.⁶³

Blake's interest went so far as to induce himself and his wife Catherine to attend a general conference in 1789 at the Swedenborgian chapel in Great East Cheap, and, according to Kathleen Raine, the Blakes were both members of The Swedenborg Society at this time.⁶⁴ However, 'he resisted all efforts to persuade him to join the Church' and ultimately his interest in Swedenborg was characterised by an intellectual interest in the esoteric nature of his writings.⁶⁵ Despite disagreeing with aspects of Swedenborgian philosophy (in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) Swedenborg's prophecies are much undermined), Blake 'adopted, or adapted, many of Swedenborg's ideas' in his own mythologies.⁶⁶ It could be said that Blake's tendency to symbolism in his poetry and design work was inspired in part by Swedenborg's 'doctrine of correspondences'; a theory which asserts that everything in heaven has its material signifier on earth. Blake's comment regarding Swedenborg in his *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809 would seem to support this: 'The works of this visionary are well worthy the attention of Painters and Poets; they are the foundations for grand things'.⁶⁷

Most pertinently perhaps, as regards his influence upon Rossetti, Blake was intrigued by Swedenborg's writings about sexuality, which, to an extent, he incorporated into his own theories: 'Like Swedenborg, he believed that sex impulses are the faint shadows of the heavenly struggle toward Oneness, and the sex act itself the earthly equivalent of that union' (Schorer, p. 174). These aspects of Blake's engagement with Swedenborgian ideas illustrate his importance as a template for Rossetti's particular use of them. The following sections, after introducing the

⁶³ Mark Schorer, 'Swedenborg and Blake' *Modern Philology*, 36.2 (1938), 157-178 (p. 158); Lines, 'Browning', p. 27. As with Poe, Patmore, the Brownings, Emerson and Tennyson; Flaxman was included in the PRB's 'List of Immortals' (*PRB Journal*, p.107.)

⁶⁴ Ackroyd, p. 102; Raine, *Blake*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ *Blake Dictionary*, p. 392. See Alexander Gilchrist's brief assessment of this distinction between a church bound Swedenborgianism and Blake's interest in Swedenborg as occult mystic in Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, with Selections from his Poems and Other Writings*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1880; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), I, pp. 15-6. It is this approach which characterises Rossetti's interest in Blake, and that of his Swedenborgian-spiritualist circle.

⁶⁶ *Blake Dictionary*, pp. 262-63, 393.

⁶⁷ Blake, quoted in Schorer, pp.159-60.

importance of Rossetti's discovery of Blake's notebook, consider Blake's Swedenborgian influence upon Rossetti's 1850 version of 'The Blessed Damozel'.⁶⁸

The Rossetti Manuscript

In 1847, during the period concurrent with his initial productions of 'The Blessed Damozel' and his reading and illustrations of Poe, Rossetti acquired William Blake's notebook. On the 30 April that year, William Palmer, a British Museum attendant, whose brother was the Blake influenced artist Samuel Palmer, offered the eighteen year old Rossetti Blake's notebook, which he and his brother subsequently purchased.⁶⁹ William Michael Rossetti later recounted the experience:

One day, while attending at the British Museum Reading-room on one of his ordinary errands, he received, from an attendant named Palmer, the offer of a MS. book by Blake, crammed with prose and verse, and with designs. This was in April 1847. The price asked was ten shillings. Dante's pockets were in their normal state of depletion, so he applied to me, urging that so brilliant an opportunity should not be let slip, and I produced the required coin. (*Family-Letters, I*, p. 109)

The notebook, which would later become known as the Rossetti Manuscript, proved a great inspiration to the young Rossetti: 'He then proceeded to copy out, across a confused tangle of false starts, alternative forms, and cancellings, all the poetry in the book' (p. 109). This insight into the power of Blake's personal vision must have made a strong impression, as eight years later Rossetti's enthusiasm for him seemed unabated: 'Old Blake is quite as loveable by his oddity as by his genius' (*Correspondence II*, p. 78, 55.58).

⁶⁸ This chapter considers only Blake's influence upon 1850 version of 'The Blessed Damozel' poem. This thesis also considers, to some extent, the importance of Blake's designs. See Chapter 6: *The House of Life, 2* for a consideration of the impact of Blake's interpretation of Swedenborgian ideas in his designs upon Rossetti's art, in particular the influence of Blake's depiction of heaven as a union of lovers and his use of visual symmetry.

⁶⁹ Rossetti wrote the following in pencil on the verso of the front fly-leaf: 'I purchased this original M.S. of Palmer, an attendant in the Antique Gallery at the British Museum, on the 30th April, 1847. Palmer knew Blake personally, and it was from the artist's wife that he had the present M.S. which he sold me for 10.s.' (*The Notebook of William Blake: a Photographic and Typographic facsimile*, ed. by David V. Erdman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 1-2.

Blake's eccentricity expressed itself in his notebook through intense ramblings, and fragments of verse, most notably embryonic versions of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Most crucially for Rossetti, it communicated Blake's individualistic creed for creative endeavour through the promotion of imagination and vision over conventional academic practices. These were expressed through rails against the artistic establishment, and in particular through critical attacks upon Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first president of the Royal Academy. Blake's manuscript contains a lament over the state of the Arts in England: 'To recover Art is/has been the business of my life to the Florentine Original & if possible to go beyond that Original this I thought the only pursuit worthy of a Man. To imitate I abhor'.⁷⁰ Blake's emphasis on personal vision, combined with a reverence for Florentine art, can be seen as a rallying cry to the young Rossetti, and reads almost as a manifesto for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. William Michael Rossetti attests to its importance in forming Rossetti's own sense of what it means to be an artist:

His ownership of this truly precious volume certainly stimulated in some degree his disregard or scorn of some aspects of art held in reverence by *dilettanti* and routine-students, and thus conduced to the Præraphaelite movement; for he found here the most outspoken (and no doubt, in a sense, the most irrational) epigrams and jeers against such painters as Correggio, Titian, Rubens, Rembrandt, Reynolds, and Gainsborough—any men whom Blake regarded as fulsomely florid, or lax, or swamping ideas in mere manipulation. These were balsam to Rossetti's soul, and grist to his mill. (*Family-Letters, I*, p. 109)

Another key aspect of the notebook was the supernatural and mystical quality of much of the embryonic verse. On a superficial level the references to angels and devils delighted Rossetti, who, according to William Michael, enjoyed all things supernatural: 'Any writings about devils, spectres, or the supernatural generally, whether in poetry or in prose, had always a fascination for him' (W.M. Rossetti, *Poetical Works*, p. xxviii). In his Introduction to Blake's notebook, David V. Erdman quotes Rossetti's comment that Blake's works possess a 'heavenly spirit', and suggests that it is this quality that appeals to him (p. 2). Also present in the notebook, and accounting for much of this 'heavenly spirit', were embryonic versions of some of Blake's most Swedenborgian

⁷⁰ Erdman, *Notebook*, transcript N20.

poems, such as 'The Divine Image'. The significance of this will be discussed further in later sections.

On a more fundamental level Blake's use of symbolism and his allegorical style conveyed a sense of a deeper spiritual meaning lying beneath a veil of apparent simplicity of form. This aspect of Blake, combined with his anti-establishment stance, provided a template for Rossetti of an approach to poetic and artistic practice that persisted throughout his career, despite changes of style, subject, scale and commission. As R. L. Stein has noted in an assessment of the importance of Rossetti's acquisition of Blake's notebook:

Rossetti's career as poet-painter draws on this earlier exemplar; and his concept of the sister arts follows Blake in seeing as their essential connection the artist's grasp of truths beyond nature. In Blake, furthermore, Rossetti found a model of the painter as psychic revolutionary, for whom a distinctive style is an assertion of spiritual vision. (Stein, p. 126)

The notebook manuscript was to prove a useful resource when Rossetti aided Alexander Gilchrist in the 1860s with his biography of Blake, first published in 1863.⁷¹ Rossetti prepared Blake's poetry for publication in the second section of the book and finished the biography after Gilchrist's death.⁷² This means that Rossetti was once again returning to Blake in the period just prior to and during his deeper involvement with spiritualism, and the subsequent production of works following this period, such as *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) and the 1870 revised version of 'The Blessed Damozel' poem. Crucially, a further return to a close study of Blake reoccurred later in his career

⁷¹ Through his research on the Blake biography Gilchrist had access to Blake's copy of Henry Fuseli's translation of Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* (Ackroyd, p. 107). Lavater was 'a convinced Swedenborgian' and Blake's enthusiastic annotations suggest an affinity with aspects of these ideas (p. 107). Gilchrist described these as "'gold dust'" as they provided such a strong insight into Blake's ideas at the time (p. 107). It is certain that Rossetti and Gilchrist were close at this period and shared information concerning Blake. This would suggest the Gilchrist biography project provided further exposure for Rossetti to Blake's Swedenborgian ideas and connections.

⁷² William Michael Rossetti summarises the extent of Rossetti's involvement with Gilchrist's Blake biography:

The volume was moreover the origin of all his after-concern in Blake literature; as Alexander Gilchrist, when preparing the *Life of Blake* published in 1863, got to hear of the MS. book, which my brother then entrusted to him, and, after Gilchrist's premature death, Rossetti did a good deal towards completing certain parts of the biography, and in especial edited all the poems introduced into the second Section. He again did something for the re-edition dated 1880. (*Family-Letters, I*, pp. 109–110)

as he prepared some rewrites for the 1880 edition of Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*. This is the period concurrent with a revisiting of Poe and a resurgence of interest in Swedenborg, in which he produced the 'True Woman: III' sonnet, his most explicitly Swedenborgian poem, and the final published version of 'The Blessed Damozel' in 1881. This suggests that this synthesis of related influences was seen by Rossetti as crucial in the honing of his poetic and artistic style, as each revisiting coincides with a period of production, or revision of key works.

Blake's Interpretation of Swedenborg and its Relationship to Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850)

Human Form Divine

Blake's poem 'The Divine Image' from *Songs of Innocence* (1789) articulates one of the central tenets of Swedenborg's theosophy; that God is a 'Divine human'.⁷³ Consequently, the idea that the earthly human form is worthy of reverence, as it is a reflection of the divine form, is at the heart of Blake's verse:

Then every man of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine
Love Mercy Pity Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, turk or jew.
Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.⁷⁴

As Kathleen Raine has written, this poem represents an important example of the effectiveness with which Blake assimilated concepts into his poetry which are essentially Swedenborgian: "The Divine Image" is the quintessence of his prophetic message – that God is "in the form of man" and that the Incarnation is not particular

⁷³ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, trans. by Clifford Harley and Doris H. Harley (London: Swedenborg Society, 1969; repr. 1987), 11-13, pp. 5-6. Hereafter cited as *DLW*.

⁷⁴ *William Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 111, ll. 13-20. Hereafter, all line references for this poem in text refer to this edition.

but universal'.⁷⁵ Raine argues that the apparent simplicity of Blake's poetic style provides a vehicle for Swedenborg's central message, of which the human form divine is a key part; one that is not easily disseminated through his own 'stilted and voluminous' writings:

Such poems as "The Divine Image" win the assent of the heart before their doctrinal implications become apparent. [...] So, unawares, the teachings of the Swedenborg's Church of the New Jerusalem have permeated the spiritual sensibility of the English nation, through Blake'. (Raine, 'Human Face of God', p. 89)

Rossetti was aware of this Swedenborgian Blake poem prior to acquiring Blake's notebook (the 'Rossetti manuscript') in 1847; as William Michael tells us whilst recounting the story of the notebook acquisition: 'He was already a hearty admirer of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*' (*Family-Letters*, I, p. 109). The essential message of this poem – the exaltation of the human form - would have been magnified through the embryonic verses and fragmentary ideologies contained in the notebook. Its impact upon Rossetti was, as Kerrison Preston has suggested, profound: 'The influence of Blake's Notebook on the youthful Rossetti was still more dangerous in exalting the human form divine and the mystical beauty of enhanced sensuous enjoyment' (Preston, p. 44). The resonance of this influence can be detected in Rossetti's poem 'The Blessed Damozel', the first version of which he wrote around the time of his discovery of Blake's notebook. The Damozel's human form is celebrated in the poem through sensually vivid descriptions of her physical beauty: 'And her hair, lying down her back, / Was yellow like ripe corn' (l. 11-12). Her humanity does not lessen her exalted status as 'One of God's choristers' (l. 14) in heaven; it embodies it, as her form is a reflection of the divine. For Swedenborg human form is *the* essential form, repeated at every stage of man's existence, because it is firstly the form of God: 'From the fact that God is a Man, all angels and all spirits are men in complete form' (*DLW*, 11, p. 5).

Blake's poem 'The Divine Image' contains a line which appears to express Swedenborg's theory of conjugal love: 'And Love, the human form divine' (l. 11). The

⁷⁵ Kathleen Raine, 'The Human Face of God', in *Blake and Swedenborg: Opposition is True Friendship*, ed. by Harvey F. Bellin and Darrell Ruhl (New York, N.Y.: Swedenborg Foundation, 1985), pp. 87-101 (p. 88).

fullest expression of the divine that man can achieve, according to Swedenborg, is through the highest form of sexual union (conjugal love), which unites the states of love and wisdom found in God.⁷⁶ Therefore, 'Love', as expressed in Blake's poem, relates not merely to an abstract emotion or an experience, but to an entity, or state of being. Hence in Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' the romantic reunion the Damozel longs for will reunite her with her beloved to form the fullest reflection of the divine, as love and wisdom are united in conjugal love: 'We two will live at once one life; / And peace shall be with us' (ll. 137-8). One can almost hear the echo of Blake's lines in Rossetti's: 'And Love, the human form divine, / And peace, the human dress' (ll. 11-12). Blake's poem provides Rossetti with another template for the subject of conjugal love. It can be argued that the Swedenborgian ideas in Rossetti arrive partly filtered through Blake's interpretation of them. In addition these lines suggest another possible source, other than Dante, for the personification of Love in Rossetti's work.

In addition to Blake's influence upon Rossetti's poem in terms of aspects of content, some stylistic affinities are also apparent in the poem. It is the presentation of Swedenborg that Rossetti has also inherited from Blake; the communication of esoteric ideas in an apparently simple and straightforward fashion. If one looks at Rossetti's work as a whole, the comparison with Blake is, in the first instance, much more appropriate for his sister Christina's poems, some of which have a similar deceptive simplicity of form, and Rossetti's style can often read as densely complex (particularly in *The House of life* sonnets, for example). However, although his style differs from Blake's, 'The Blessed Damozel' is one of several Rossetti works which convey deeper meanings through apparently straightforward narrative.⁷⁷ The essential substantial humanity of the damozel's heavenly incarnation is emphasised through a description of her beauty, which is related in earthly terms, using, for the most part, simple language; the tone dictated by the opening line: 'The blessed Damozel leaned

⁷⁶ 'It cannot be denied by anyone that Love together with Wisdom in its very essence is in God' (*DLW*, 29, p. 12); 'Truly conjugal love is nothing else but the linking of love and wisdom' (*CL*, 65, p. 69).

⁷⁷ Of Rossetti's poems perhaps 'The Honeysuckle' (writ. 1853, pub. 1870) and 'The Woodspurge' (writ. 1856, pub. 1870) have this particularly Blakean quality of apparent simplicity and naturalness, infused with profound symbolic resonance (*CW*, pp. 221, 231 and 488).

out / From the gold bar of Heaven' (l. 1-2).⁷⁸ The ballad form emphasises this quality of apparent accessibility.

The human form divine, which forms the essence of Blake's poem, is one of the ideas from Swedenborg that outlasts Blake's ultimate rejection of his doctrines, as Peter Ackroyd has commented:

Eventually he turned against Swedenborg and the New Church, in the way he abjured all those who might have influenced him or affected him, but much of his art and poetry of the period is suffused with a spirituality that can have only one immediate source. (Ackroyd, p. 104)

This is an important point in terms of Blake's Swedenborgian influence upon Rossetti: It is Swedenborgian New Church doctrine that Blake rejects, and the mystical aspect of Swedenborg, which exalts the human form and celebrates human sexual love, that he retains. It is precisely these aspects that Rossetti responds to and this type of Swedenborgianism that Rossetti adopts as part of his poetics: sacred sexual love and the exaltation of the human form, which is often confused with overt sensuality and a misplaced sense of fleshly concerns. It is this aspect which characterises the interest in Swedenborg espoused by those in Rossetti's Swedenborgian-spiritualist circle, such as Dr. Garth Wilkinson and William Howitt; the intellectual occult heritage, of which Blake is a part.

It must be remembered that Rossetti, like Blake, was not a theological scholar of Swedenborg, but a poet-painter whose attraction was to those ideas in Swedenborg that express what he desires to communicate: that the spirit lives on as human form, and that form – be it earthly or heavenly – is sacred. Certain Swedenborgian ideas, sometimes filtered through Blake, enable Rossetti to formulate a style which is at once sensual and spiritual.

Microcosm – Macrocosm and the Doctrine of Correspondences

Another Swedenborgian theme picked up by Blake that is echoed in Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' is the idea of microcosm-macrocosm. Swedenborg's universe

⁷⁸ I am not here referring to the scattering of odd archaisms of language, which seem to lend the work a self-conscious medievalism; such as 'Herseemed' (l. 13) and 'Saith' (l. 84). Despite these interruptions, the poem reads quite simply.

operates upon a law of relation that repeats essential form from the smallest to the largest entities. This idea has been partially brought forward during the discussion of Blake's 'human form divine' and the Swedenborgian idea that underlies it: that the human form is a reflection of the divine image. For Swedenborg the form of God is the essential template form that moves through to the arrangement of heaven, to each angel and spirit that inhabits it, and each human soul (*HH*, 78, p. 48). Thus, in *Divine Love and Wisdom* (1763), he writes: 'Man was called a microcosm by the ancients from the fact that he represents the macrocosm which is the universe in its whole complex' (*DLW*, 319, p. 135).

This is the idea that there is an arcane law in the universe in which the grand is related by degrees to the small; a sense of interconnectedness of all things as reflections of others. This relationship moves both ways:

All uses from firsts to ultimates have a relation to, and a correspondence with all things of man, consequently that man is, in a certain image, a universe, and conversely that the universe, viewed as to its uses, is in image a man. (*DLW*, 317, p. 134)

One finds this interpreted in Blake's famous lines that open his poem 'Auguries of Innocence', which describes a profound relationship between the smallest and humblest things in nature and the most grandiose abstract concepts:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour⁷⁹

Blake startles the reader with his powerful juxtaposition of scale; a dramatic poetic technique that also features in Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel'. Rossetti was most likely familiar with Blake's poem, which was later included in the poetry he helped to select for Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863).⁸⁰ This can account to some degree for the presence of this dramatic shift in Rossetti's poem between the epic and the intimate, a quality that Arthur C. Benson has called, 'the combination of vastness and nearness in the poem which lends it an incomparable charm' (Benson, p.114). The first

⁷⁹ *Blake Poems*, p. 506, ll. 1-4.

⁸⁰ *Life of Blake*, II, p. 107.

half of 'The Blessed Damozel' in particular is characterised by a series of juxtapositions between the humble and the huge. The local and the personal, ('her hand' (l. 5), 'It was the terrace of God's house / That she was standing on' (ll. 25-26)), exist alongside the 'vast' (l. 50) and impersonal: 'The void' (l. 35), 'Beyond all depth or height' (l. 42). The phrase in which Rossetti perhaps comes closest to Blake is found at the end of stanza 6 of the 1850 version, in the section of the poem which describes the immensity of the Damozel's celestial surroundings: 'this earth / Spins like a fretful midge' (ll. 35-6).

Intimately connected with the concept of degrees of relation between the grand and the small, is Swedenborg's theory of the doctrine of correspondences, which runs as a central idea throughout his works. This is, in its most basic form, the theory that the natural world is a mirror for higher concepts or states in the spiritual world, which in turn reflect the Divine (*HH*, 106, p. 63-4). This idea surfaces in Blake and lies at the heart of his poetics in what he calls the 'vegetable glass of nature'. The material world is merely a mirror which reflects higher and permanent spiritual truths, as he explains in a discourse on his own artwork *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (c.1810):

This world of imagination is the world of eternity. It is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the vegetated body. This world of imagination is infinite and eternal, whereas the world of generation is finite and temporal. There exist in that eternal world the eternal realities of everything which we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature. (*Life of Blake, II*, p. 187)

Here Blake has furthered Swedenborg's ideas to incorporate (and exalt) the importance of imagination; essential to his visionary and symbolic style as poet-artist. In doing so Blake turns Swedenborg's assertion that since ancient times, or the Golden Age, man has lost the instinctive understanding that things in the material world are not meaningful in themselves, but only as representative of 'such things as exist in heaven', into a manifesto for his art: 'The nature of my work is visionary, or imaginative; it is an endeavour to restore what the ancients called the Golden Age'.⁸¹ In returning to 'Auguries of Innocence', it becomes clear that this is what is meant by Blake's lines: 'We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see *with* not Thro the Eye' (*Blake Poems*, p. 510, ll. 125-26).

⁸¹ Swedenborg, *Arcana Caelestia*, 1122, quoted in Stanley, p. 65; *Life of Blake, II*, p. 186.

In 'The Blessed Damozel', Rossetti reverses Blake's 'vegetable glass' and finds earthly correspondence in heavenly things. This is a development from a source of inspiration akin to his decision to 'reverse the conditions' of Poe's 'The Raven' and 'give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven', and represents poetic innovation by Rossetti (*Family-Letters, I*, p. 107). The Damozel is likened specifically to things in the natural world. Her eyes are blue and deep like water; her hair is 'yellow like ripe corn' (ll. 3-4, 12). Both have potentially Christian associations that reinforce her 'blessed' status (the water of baptism, symbolising her spiritual rebirth in heaven; the Eucharistic associations of corn).⁸² In addition, the descriptive likenesses serve to reinforce the idea of the continuance of human substantial form in the afterlife. However, there is a hint of a more Blakean approach in the bracketed sections that are narrated from the viewpoint of the lover on earth, who seems to sense his beloved through his own fleeting 'vegetable glass', mistaking 'the Autumn-fall of leaves' for her hair falling around his face.

From these examples it can be seen that Blake's interpretation of Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences has informed Rossetti's symbolic style in his own work. Rossetti would have encountered Blake's description of his *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, in which he discusses his 'vegetable glass' theory, in Blake's Notebook. As Kerrison Preston has acknowledged, it proved to be 'one of the richest store-houses in the Rossetti Manuscript' (Preston, p. 65). Rossetti's own work is suffused with the inclusion of potentially symbolic things from the natural world which lends a mystical or visionary quality to his own work. John Dixon Hunt has cited the opening lines of Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' as 'lines which doubtless appealed to the Pre-Raphaelite love of intensely observed and resonant natural detail, a faculty which both Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti reveal and which Ruskin encouraged in the movement from the start' (J.D. Hunt, p. 168). Considering that these lines embody Blake's particular take on Swedenborg's theosophy, it can be inferred that the Swedenborgian aspects of Blake therefore have influenced not just Rossetti's poem, or his poetic and artistic style, but perhaps informed the Pre-Raphaelite approach in general.

⁸² Fittingly the symbolism also serves to reinforce the spiritualistic context of the poem: as corn is harvested it has connotations of the newly dead. In addition, the Damozel has 'blue grave eyes' (l. 3) which, in addition to connoting seriousness, evoke literally, the burial plot.

The Blessed Damozel and Jenny: Rossetti's Songs of Innocence and Experience

In March 1880, in the period that saw a resurgence of interest for Rossetti in Poe and Swedenborg, Rossetti wrote to Hall Caine concerning his poem 'Jenny', that it 'was written almost as early as the *Blessed Damozel* which I wrote (and have altered little since) when I was 18' (*Dear Mr. Rossetti*, p. 51). This would place the original composition date for 'Jenny' around 1847 in the period concurrent with Rossetti's discovery in the British Museum of Blake's notebook. As with 'The Blessed Damozel', 'Jenny' went through several revisions from its early incarnation c.1847-8, but was first published 1870 in the form in which it now appears anthologised.⁸³ The letter to Caine suggests that, in Rossetti's mind, the genesis of the two poems share a common initial production period, suggesting a possible connection between the two works. Both works were specifically altered for and published in *Poems* (1870).⁸⁴

Both works treat of sexual love; 'The Blessed Damozel' deals with an idealised sanctified sexual love relationship, whilst 'Jenny', a poem which narrates an encounter between a young man and a prostitute, deals with earthly lusts of the flesh. It has been established that 'The Blessed Damozel' is influenced by Swedenborgian ideas, and in particular can be read as presenting an idealised form of sacred sexual love, much influenced by Swedenborg's definition of conjugal love. In his work about love, entitled *Conjugal Love* (1768), Swedenborg not only discusses at length conjugal love, but also, its 'contrary', or opposite state, which he calls 'scortatory love':

The joys of scortatory love begin from the flesh, and remain fleshly even in the spirit; but the joys of conjugal love begin in the spirit and remain spiritual even in the flesh. (*CL*, 423, p. 398)

Thus, Rossetti's 'Jenny', in dealing solely with the subject of pleasures of the flesh, can be read as embodying aspects of scortatory love.

⁸³ See McGann regarding the history of 'Jenny': 'First version composed in 1847-48; completely reworked in 1859-60 into a dramatic monologue; buried in 1862 with his other poems in his wife's coffin. Rossetti recovered it in 1869 and reworked it again for printing in the 1870 *Poems*. Collected thereafter' (*CPP*, pp. 381-82).

⁸⁴ This chapter refers to the version of 'Jenny' published in *Poems* (1870) (*CW*, pp. 232-241). All subsequent line references refer to this edition.

This section therefore briefly explores the idea of Rossetti's two works as sister pieces which express the two sides of Swedenborg's definition of love; *Conjugal Love* (the highest form of human love and an expression of the divine), which is dealt with in 'The Blessed Damozel', and *Scortatory Love*, its opposite, which is suggested by a lust and commerce based 'love' experience – the visiting of a prostitute, or fallen woman. But they are Swedenborg's two contrary states of love as filtered through Blake, whose own *Songs of Innocence and Experience* can be said to draw in part from this idea, which is indicated in the title of the complete work of fifty-four plates published in 1794: *Songs of Innocence and Experience Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. It has been critically recognised that these two states relate to 'unfallen' and 'fallen' man, and can be read as ecstasy versus despair (*Blake Dictionary*, p. 378). Rossetti, who was, as has been established earlier, familiar with Blake's *Songs* prior to his acquisition of the notebook, has alluded to these two states in his poems. They can be read as Rossetti's own versions of *Innocence* ('The Blessed Damozel') and *Experience* ('Jenny'), and represent Swedenborgian ideas pulled through Blake and reinterpreted within a mid-nineteenth century view of idealised and fallen love relationships. The difference in the poetic form of each work reflects its subject matter. 'The Blessed Damozel' is a ballad, and has the timeless, lyrical and romantic associations of that form, fitting for the presentation of idealised love and the heavenly setting. 'Jenny' is presented as a dramatic monologue, with a modernity and an earthly directness fitted to the subject matter of the fallen woman in mid-nineteenth century London.

That the two works have an interrelationship, despite their differences, is indicated in several ways, most notably through the presentation of the woman in each case. The woman in each poem is essentially symbolic and archetypal; something emphasised through their names. The Damozel is generic; 'Jenny' appears specific, but could be any one. The Damozel is dead, imagined and idealised, and 'Jenny' lies asleep through the course of the poem: thus the poetic voice is free to imagine them as representative women. Both the Damozel and Jenny are similarly described as if they are two aspects of the same woman – or two paths which love can follow. In 'Jenny', the 'blessed Damozel' has become conversely 'the thoughtless queen / Of kisses' (ll. 7-8), or 'shameful Jenny' (l. 18). Both share similar physical attributes but expressed with different and appropriate similes: The damozel's 'blue grave eyes' are deep like water

(ll. 3-4) and her hair, 'yellow like ripe corn' (l. 12), indicate her naturalness and purity. Jenny has instead eyes like 'blue skies' (l. 10), in a more vacant and transient image, and her hair 'Is countless gold incomparable' (l. 11); language which emphasises material possession and commerce. Each is associated with a mythological archetype of femininity. The Blessed Damozel, wears 'a white rose of Mary's gift' (l. 9), conveying, with reference to the Christian ideal, her status as a woman of virtue. Jenny is, in contrast, given pagan equivalents. She is, appropriately, a 'Paphian Venus' (l. 362), but also, as the speaker imagines her waking and the coins he placed in her hair falling to the ground, she is 'A Danaë for a moment' (l. 376), evoking the mother of Perseus who was ravished by a lustful Zeus disguised as a shower of gold.

This sense of opposition is brought through in Rossetti's use of Blakean flower symbolism in both poems. In Blake's mythology, the lily is the 'flower of innocence' and idealised love: 'While the Lily white shall in Love delight, / Nor a thorn, nor a threat, stain her beauty bright'.⁸⁵ It is intended to symbolise these qualities also in Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel', where it emphasises the purity of the Damozel: 'three lilies in her hand' (l. 5). For Jenny this morphs into the image of her 'lazy lily hand' (l. 97), but also represents death and the corruption of innocence: 'What, Jenny, are your lilies dead?' (l. 111). The rose, associated by Blake with both idealised (when combined with the lily)⁸⁶ and corrupted love (it 'puts forth a thorn')⁸⁷, also appears in both Rossetti's poems. The Damozel's rose is white, is 'of Mary's gift' (l. 9), and is associated, as in Blake, with innocence: it signifies conjugal love. In 'Jenny', the dark side of love is conveyed in a passage which features Blake's motif of the thorned rose:

What, Jenny, are your lilies dead?
 Aye, and the snow-white leaves are spread
 Like winter on the garden-bed.
 But you had roses left in May,-

⁸⁵ *Blake Dictionary*, p.240; William Blake, 'The Lilly', ll. 3-4, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (*Blake Poems*, p. 126).

⁸⁶ *Blake Dictionary*, p.240. Rossetti combines the two flowers in the name of one of the Virgin Mary's handmaidens in 'The Blessed Damozel', as has been recognised by Jerome McGann:

Rosaly is a kind of pure signifier, a linguistic construct made from two of the Madonna's most characteristic symbols (the rose and the lily). The extremity of Rossetti's secular spirituality also appears in this signifier, for the rose = beauty/passion/love while the lily= chastity/purity/devotion (*CPP*, p. 378).

Not mentioned by McGann, however, is that the combination of Rose and lily as an ideal of love could have its source in Blakean flower symbolism.

⁸⁷ 'The Lilly', l. 1, *Blake Poems*, p. 126.

They were not gone too. Jenny, nay,
But must your roses die, and those
Their purpled buds that should uncloze?
Even so; the leaves are curled apart,
Still red as from the broken heart,
And here's the naked stem of thorns. (Ll. 111-120)

Here the corruption of scortatory love is conveyed by Rossetti in a manner similar to Blake in his poem 'The Sick Rose' from *Songs of Experience* which deals with the corruption of love through lust:

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.⁸⁸

The flower symbolism employed by Blake has been adopted by Rossetti in order to convey both idealised innocence and the corruption of experience in his presentation of two types of love in 'The Blessed Damozel' and 'Jenny'. These correspond to Swedenborg's ideas of conjugal love and scortatory love, and provide templates for Rossetti for the presentation of what has been described as the 'key Rossettian theme of the dialectic of Sacred and Profane love' (*CPP*, p. 381). The acknowledgement of this thread of influence from Swedenborg to Blake, and through to Rossetti, offers a new way in which to account for these contrary states in Rossetti's work.

⁸⁸ 'The Sick Rose', *Blake Poems*, pp. 123-24.

Chapter 4: *Beata Beatrix*

Part 1: *Beata Beatrix*: a ‘spiritual translation’ of Dante

***Beata Beatrix*: ‘spiritual translation’**

It must of course be remembered, in looking at the picture, that it is not intended at all to *represent* death, but to render it under the semblance of a trance, in which Beatrice, seated at a balcony overlooking the city, is suddenly rapt from earth to heaven [...] while the bird, a messenger of death, drops the poppy between the hands of Beatrice. She, through her shut lids, is conscious of a new world.¹

These lines, written by Rossetti in 1871, form a brief explanation of his painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71).² They were written to Georgina Cowper-Temple who had commissioned the work in 1866, and give an insight into Rossetti’s intentions for the work.³ The painting, which depicts Rossetti’s deceased wife Lizzie Siddal as Dante’s idealised love Beatrice Portinari, is regarded as one of Rossetti’s works on the subject of the dead beloved, and as a memorial portrait to Siddal. Indeed, death is part of the subject of the painting. However, as Rossetti’s comments suggest, rather than a literal death scene, the painting depicts Beatrice in a trance state, ‘embodying symbolically’

¹ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

² This thesis gives the production dates for the first version of *Beata Beatrix* as 1863-71. The Tate gives the production dates of the original as c.1864-70. Scholarly opinion differs however; for example Alicia Craig Faxon cites 1862 as the date of its inception (see Faxon, 1989, p. 143). The consensus remains 1863-70 (see *Rossetti Archive*, [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s168.rap.html>, accessed 27 October 2009]; Treuherz, Prettejohn and Becker, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, no. 98, pp. 83, 186; Sharp, p. 183) The date of 1863 is taken from the first reference to the subject of *Beata Beatrix* in a letter from Rossetti to Ellen Heaton 19 May 1863: ‘I thought of a Dantesque subject which I have long meant to do [...] This would be Beatrice seated by a sundial, the shadow of which should be falling on the hour of nine’ (*The Correspondence III*, p. 51, 63.54). Another letter from Rossetti to Heaton in December of that year suggests the painting was initially begun much earlier, but reinforces 1863 as a significant date in its rebirth as Rossetti’s intention to recommence the work is clarified (p. 98, 63.116, and n.2). I have taken the completion date as 1871 rather than 1870, with respect to William Michael Rossetti’s reference regarding this first version of *Beata Beatrix* as being ‘about finished’ in a diary entry of 27 January 1871 (Bornand, p. 41). Hereafter, the date of the work will not be mentioned in text, unless pertinent to the discussion at hand.

³ See *Correspondence III*, p. 454, 66.130 and n.1, p. 463, 66.144, regarding the Cowper-Temples’ commission of *Beata Beatrix*. See Fig. 7, p. 279 for image of the painting.

her death which forms the main subject of the work to which it refers; Dante's *Vita Nuova*.⁴

In his explicatory letter, Rossetti locates the subject in a specific context, through his use of the language of spiritualism. Beatrice is depicted accessing her future life in heaven temporarily whilst in a clairvoyant trance. The production dates of the original painting (c.1863-71), which is currently held in the Tate collection, span nearly a decade and cover the period which saw the peak of Rossetti's experiential engagement with spiritualism.⁵ Rossetti executed a number of replicas in subsequent years, however the first version of the work relates most directly to this context, therefore discussion in this chapter centres on this version, with reference made to other versions only where relevant.⁶

The spiritualistic imagery of the original version of *Beata Beatrix* draws upon those aspects of Victorian spiritualism that Rossetti had a particular interest in, or experience of: the mesmeric trance state, the séance and Swedenborgian ideas about love and the afterlife. This provides a direct context for the painting and a specific vocabulary with which to read the work. In fact the painting's production dates suggest its affinity with a number of texts informed specifically by Swedenborgian-spiritualism. The date of commencement for the work as we know it, c.1863-4, coincides with the production period of written works by proponents of this particular brand of spiritualism, many of whom were known to Rossetti. These include William Howitt, Thomas Shorter, Sophia De Morgan and D.D. Home – all of whom published spiritualist works in 1863 or 1864.⁷ Rossetti's painting can be seen as an artistic equivalent of these texts.

Much has been made of the fact that the model for Beatrice in *Beata Beatrix* was Rossetti's late wife, Lizzie Siddal, and the painting is often read as a memorial portrait, which, to some degree it is, being the last painted from her likeness. However, the work is much more than this. The original painting was begun prior to

⁴ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix* (c.1864-70) [Tate dates] Oil on canvas, 86.4 x 66 cm (Tate, reference number; N01279). See Fig. 7, p. 279.

⁶ It is acknowledged that there are six known versions of *Beata Beatrix* as copies were requested owing to the work's popularity: 'three in oil, a watercolour, and two in coloured chalks' ('Beata Beatrix: Scholarly Commentary', *Rossetti Archive*, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s168.raw.html>, accessed 27 October 2009).

⁷ See Chapter 2: Context, section on 'Literary Spiritualism'.

Siddal's death in 1862 and resurrected subsequent to it, to which Rossetti's letter to his patron Ellen Heaton in 1863 testifies:

I lately found a commencement of a life size head of my wife in oil, begun many years ago as a picture of Beatrice. It is only laid in and the canvas is in a bad state, but it is possible I might be able to work it up successfully either on this or another canvas and should like to do so if possible, as it was carefully begun. The picture was to represent Beatrice falling asleep by a wall bearing a sundial, and I have pencil sketches for it as a half figure comprising the arms & hands).⁸

This letter, as Ronald Johnson has also acknowledged, goes some way to questioning the romantic notion of the work as 'a last commemorative to his love' (Johnson, 'Beatrix', p. 548). Of all Rossetti's works this is perhaps the most subject to a romantically inclined interpretation concerning the myth of the artist and his muse. In her book on Rossetti, for example, Alicia Craig Faxon states in the romantically suggestive Chapter 7: 'The End of a Dream' that 'Rossetti started a painting in 1862 that symbolised his relationship to Siddal. This was *Beata Beatrix* [...], which he worked on throughout the 1860s' (p. 143). This kind of critical response has encouraged a particular reading of the work which emphasises the biography of Rossetti's personal love relationships. It mythologizes Rossetti's relationship with Siddal and her portrayal as Beatrice, and suggests Rossetti's approach to his art was coloured solely by a romantic identification with Dante: 'In *Beata Beatrix* Rossetti joined his life with the legend of his art and presented the death of Beatrice as a paradigm for his own tragedy' (Mancoff, 'Beatrix', p. 80). Graham Hough's comment that 'It is almost as if Elizabeth Siddal had to die in order to fulfil her role in his poetic myth' is an extreme example of this type of reading, in which Rossetti's artistic template of the dead beloved is coloured by biographical ideas (p. 76). The reality is of course more complex and less romantic, as a cursory look at subsequent versions of the painting indicates: they begin, in some respects, to resemble Jane Morris rather than Lizzie Siddal.⁹

In his 1891 article on *Beata Beatrix*, Pre-Raphaelite critic F. G. Stephens traces the likeness of Lizzie Siddal in the face of Beatrice, but emphasises that it is not a

⁸ *Correspondence III*, p. 98, 63.116.

⁹ See, for example, Jerome McGann on the 1872 version of *Beata Beatrix*: 'In the Tate Gallery oil the face is clearly modeled [*sic*] from Rossetti's dead wife, Elizabeth. Repainting the picture for Graham, Rossetti dissolved that memory image into a synthetic *figura* in which we also discern the features of Alexa Wilding, Jane Morris, and perhaps others as well' (McGann, *Game*, pp. 99-100).

faithful, or rather, literal portrait of her. Stephens' remarks remind the viewer to avoid a narrow analysis of the work which identifies too closely with the choice of model: 'Her face is in some respects a likeness of the painter's wife, [...]. It is obviously, however, not intended as a portrait of that lady, but it may well be called a spiritual translation' (Stephens, p. 46). Stephens phrase 'spiritual translation' suggests a symbolic resemblance in which literal copying is avoided in favour of poetic interpretation, and follows Rossetti's lead in using a spiritualist vocabulary with which to describe the work. Lizzie Siddal's death is pertinent to the production of the painting, but only as it prompted Rossetti's deeper involvement with spiritualism, thus adding an experiential dimension to Rossetti's engagement with Swedenborgian-spiritualism. The biographical significance of Siddal as a model for the painting is therefore important in so far as it elucidates context. It is this aspect of biography that remains applicable to the meaning of the work, and it is this reading that is favoured over a romanticised depiction of Rossetti's relationship with Siddal as a reflection of his identification with Dante.

The phrase 'spiritual translation', used by Stephens to describe Rossetti's artistic method in depicting his wife as Beatrice in *Beata Beatrix*, is indicative of a major aspect of his creative approach. The concept of 'translation' represents a key aspect of Rossetti's poetics, which centres on idiosyncratic reinterpretation, when drawn in subject from an earlier literary, or historical, painterly source. Elizabeth K. Helsinger has identified this method specifically with regard to Rossetti's poetic translations. In a discussion of Rossetti's translations from Dante in *The Early Italian Poets* (1861), which includes his translation of the *Vita Nuova*, Helsinger describes his method as a form of reinterpretation that alludes to the spirit of the original, but is made over in a new language. She writes: 'the translated poem returns, but with a difference'; and it is in the difference that the originality is located and the potentiality exists for new reference points for the work (p. 17).

This concept of translation is equally applicable to Rossetti's artistic works, many of which refer to earlier literary and artistic models. Rossetti expressed this method in a letter to William Allingham, in regard to his illustrations for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems. In it he writes that such illustration is the kind of work 'where one can allegorize on one's own hook on the subject of the poem, without

killing, for oneself & everyone, a distinct idea of the poet's'.¹⁰ The painting *Beata Beatrix* can be seen as an example of such a translation, in which perhaps the essence of Dante's *Vita Nuova* as a whole is translated, rather than a particular section illustrated. *Beata Beatrix* represents the Beatrice of Dante, but translated through the filter of Rossetti's interpretive and creative powers, and reconfigured in a new context; that of Swedenborgian-spiritualism.

The Recasting of Dante as a 'hero of Spiritualism'

Dante Drawing the Angel¹¹

The painting *Beata Beatrix* is a 'spiritual translation' of a subject from Dante. It is Dante reconceived through Rossetti, who draws upon Swedenborgian-spiritualism to present his supernatural subject:

The mysticism and mystery of *Beata Beatrix* are due to that which was, so to say, the innermost Rossetti, or Rossetti of Rossetti. The spirit of Dante never found in art or otherwise an apter or more subtle expression than this wonderful vision of that border-realm which lies between life and death. (Stephens, p. 45)

This method of approach utilised by Rossetti has been recognised in passing by Colin Cruise in his essay on Frederick Rolfe. In it, Cruise suggests that Rossetti's Dante works are the source of a particular view of the medieval Italian poet; one that associates him with the mystical and the visionary, and changes significantly future visual representations of Dante:

The idea of Dante as a hero of Spiritualism, as opposed to literature, is itself a part of the tenor of late nineteenth-century British cultural life, beginning with Rossetti's perception of Dante as a ghostly figure.¹²

¹⁰ *Correspondence II*, p. 7, 55.4.

¹¹ This is the alternative title for the pen and ink version of Rossetti's picture *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1849) (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; catalogue number: 485'04).

¹² Colin Cruise, 'Baron Corvo and the Key to the Underworld', in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, repr. 2005), pp. 128-148 (p. 137).

This presentation is visually apparent in the background of *Beata Beatrix*, in which Dante is depicted on the right as a mysterious and indistinct figure shrouded in mist and shadow. However, Rossetti's depiction of Dante as actively spiritualist is apparent in an earlier work; the watercolour entitled *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1853).¹³ The painting illustrates directly a scene from Dante's book *Vita Nuova*, or, 'The New Life', which Rossetti translated, and later had published in *Early Italian Poets* (1861), in which Dante draws an angel on the anniversary of Beatrice's death: 'On that day which fulfilled the year since my lady had been made of the citizens of eternal life, [...] I betook myself to draw the resemblance of an angel upon certain tablets'.¹⁴ In the painting, Dante is depicted as absorbed in his task and wears the blank, 'fixed and glazed' expression of someone in a mesmeric trance, as his friends enter and interrupt him.¹⁵ This imagery is recognised by Cruise in his discussion of the earlier pen and ink version of the subject, which he describes as 'Dante as an automatic draughtsman producing art in a kind of trance'.¹⁶

This interpretation of Dante in Rossetti's visual work is evident also in his own written translation of the *Vita Nuova*, when one looks at the passage on which the watercolour, and the pen and ink drawing mentioned by Cruise, is based. The painting depicts closely the narrative of the written passage to which it refers, as Dante's friends enter the room initially unperceived by him, and watch him drawing. His total absorption represents a kind of trance like state, the drama of which is emphasised in Rossetti's translation as Dante finally realises apologetically that his friends are watching him:

I perceived that some were standing beside me to whom I should have given courteous welcome, and that they were observing what I did: also I learned afterwards that they had been there a while before I perceived them. Perceiving whom, I arose for salutation, and said: 'Another was with me.' (*New Life*, p. 72)

¹³ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1853) Watercolour on paper, 42 x 61 cm (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; bequeathed 1894). See Fig. 6, p. 279.

¹⁴ Dante Alighieri, *The New Life*, trans. by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, with a preface by Michael Palmer (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002), p. 72.

¹⁵ Bulwer-Lytton, 'Animal Magnetism', I, p. 297.

¹⁶ The earlier pen and ink version is *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1849), alternatively titled *Dante Drawing the Angel* (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; catalogue number: 485'04). Cruise, 'Baron Corvo', p. 137.

The phrase; 'Another was with me', presumably refers to the spiritual presence of Beatrice, as if it were she who were guiding his drawing, or was herself being drawn by Dante. A footnote at this point in Rossetti's translation clarifies his intention for the line: he states that in the majority of other translations Dante's reply contains greater explication, but that he has deliberately kept Dante's response brief in order to heighten the drama: 'Thus according to some texts. The majority, however, add the words, "And therefore was I in thought": but the shorter speech is perhaps the more forcible and pathetic'.¹⁷ The shorter speech also has greater ambiguity – and consequently mystery – as there is no clarification in Rossetti's translation that Dante was lost in thought, thus removing the subjective rational process of imagination from the meaning. What remains reads literally ('Another was with me') and the reader is left with the impression of a ghostly presence, not an imagined one.

In drawing upon the imagery of the spiritualist trance and through the suggestion of ghostly presence, Rossetti has reinterpreted this episode from Dante's *Vita Nuova* (in both his written translation and his illustrative painting) within the context of Victorian spiritualism. These texts can therefore be seen as forerunners to *Beata Beatrix*, which represents a more deliberate and thorough example of a 'text' informed by aspects of Victorian spiritualism. Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* represents a further innovation and a separation from Dante, and a movement towards a more idiosyncratic and individual work by Rossetti. The status of the painting as the fullest expression of these ideas is due primarily to its originality, as it is in some respects the least reliant upon Dante's original text.

Although, in writing to Georgina Cowper-Temple, Rossetti suggested that the painting 'illustrates' the *Vita Nuova*, crucially, *Beata Beatrix* it is not directly illustrative of a particular passage in that text.¹⁸ Rather it represents Rossetti's imagining of the event of Beatrice pre-figuring her own death. It is Beatrice who is depicted as actively having a vision, which reverses the textual norm of Dante as visionary.¹⁹ Whereas the watercolour *Dante Drawing an Angel on the First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1853), (and indeed other Dante paintings, such as two of the versions of *Dante's*

¹⁷ Rossetti, note 26, *New Life*, p. 72.

¹⁸ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

¹⁹ This method is akin to that used by Rossetti in his poem 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), in which he reverses the convention of the speaker as the lamenting earthbound lover and instead gives voice to the dead beloved in heaven.

Dream (1856, 1871)), reference text directly through visual translation of passages from the *Vita Nuova, Beata Beatrix* represents an imagined scenario which relates to the text indirectly: Beatrice is shown 'seated at a balcony overlooking the city, [...] while the bird, a messenger of death, drops the poppy' into her hands, with the figures of Dante and Love pictured behind, gazing upon one another.²⁰ The painting is an original Rossetti invention that is 'imagined out of Dante'.²¹

Dante's Ghost

In addition to Rossetti's particular presentation of a spiritualist Dante, there are precedents for this view of Dante amongst Rossetti's Swedenborgian-spiritualist coterie. This suggests the movement towards a representation of 'Dante as a hero of Spiritualism', that Cruise suggests has influenced the representation of Dante in the late nineteenth century, is born not just from Rossetti's interpretation, but from a particular view espoused by the Swedenborgian-spiritualist group associated with him.

Dr. Wilkinson's biography of Emanuel Swedenborg, published in 1849, contained a quotation from Dante on the title page, suggesting an immediate association between the two visionary writers. This association is also present – and elaborated upon – in William Howitt's *History of the Supernatural* (1863), one of the key Swedenborgian-spiritualist texts. In Chapter XXI of his book entitled 'A Chapter of Poets', Howitt devotes several pages to the presentation of Dante as a spiritualist, and claims that his writings represent the truths of spiritualism; applying a literal interpretation of Dante's poetic visions. After quoting from the *Paradiso* of the *Divine Comedy*, he writes: 'This is strikingly borne out by all the experiences of modern spiritualism' (p. 415). Howitt claims that Dante inherited his visionary talents from his mother, ascribing his genius to be of a mystical, rather than creative, order. Howitt therefore presents a view of a spiritualist Dante consistent in some regards with Rossetti's representation of the poet. Howitt finishes his portrait of Dante as a spiritualist by retelling the supernatural event related in Boccaccio's *Life of Dante* of the appearance of Dante's ghost to his son Jacopo. This is further evidence, he argues,

²⁰ The *Dante's Dream* paintings can be related directly to passages in the *Vita Nuova*, for example; see *New Life*, pp. 45-51. *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

²¹ 'Beata Beatrix: Scholarly Commentary', *Rossetti Archive*.

of Dante's spiritualistic credentials: 'As Dante believed in spirit communication, so it seems that, after his death, he had to make one himself' (p. 417).

The spirit of Dante was purportedly in communication with another Victorian associated with Rossetti: Seymour Kirkup; a spiritualist who lived in Florence. Kirkup was an artist friend of Rossetti's father, who had trained under John Flaxman and also had an 'early acquaintance' with William Blake.²² He was, in addition, acquainted with Robert Browning and was connected, independently of the Rossettis, to the group of London Swedenborgian-spiritualists which included spirit-artist Anna Mary Howitt, whom Kirkup mentions in the course of his correspondence, and the American medium D.D. Home who he describes as 'my friend Home, the greatest medium yet known'.²³ Kirkup had contributed to *The Spiritual Magazine*, which was edited by William Wilkinson and Thomas Shorter from that same circle of Swedenborgian-spiritualists.²⁴

Rossetti's brother William Michael was in regular correspondence with Kirkup in the late 1860s, during the production period of *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71). Some of their correspondence was published by William Michael in *Rossetti Papers* (1862-71), in which he also published extracts from his *Séance Diary* (1865-8). The topic of many of the letters is spiritualism, and Kirkup makes repeated reference to his spiritualist medium Regina and their purported communications with the spirit of Dante in the afterlife. In April 1866 he writes: 'My own celebrated medium Regina [...] saw Dante lately, and so did another medium who was here, and he gave us some interesting notices' (*RP*, p. 183). In November of that year he writes that Dante had 'drawn part of his own portrait, and written his name under it'; a spirit drawing produced through a medium in trance, not unlike the episode depicted by Rossetti in his painting of Dante drawing an angel (p. 215). Documentary evidence of this supposed supernatural event followed in March 1867, to which William Michael refers in his diary, and most likely shared with his brother: 'Kirkup sent me a photograph of the face of Dante which he

²² *RP*, p. 170-71. See also L. H. Cust, 'Kirkup, Seymour Stocker (1788-1880)', rev. David Robertson, *ODNB*, Oxford University press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15680>, accessed 28 Nov 2012].

²³ For Kirkup's reference to his acquaintance with Browning, see *RP*, p. 368; for Anna Mary Howitt: 'Do you know Mrs. Watts, née Howitt, an extraordinary spirit-drawing medium?' (*RP*, p. 219); for his friendship with D. D. Home, see *RP*, p. 177.

²⁴ *RP*, p. 368; Owen, p. 23.

drew, and to which Dante's ghost (according to himself) added the outline of the head, a wreath, and the signature' (RP, p. 226).

Kirkup's spiritualistic experiences and Howitt's written portrait of Dante can be seen as related to Rossetti's presentation of Dante: despite their differences, the source for their reinterpretations of Dante can be traced, in each case, back to an engagement with Victorian spiritualism.

Part 2: *Beata Beatrix*: Swedenborgian-Spiritualist Text

'Beatrice in Trance'

The working title for the painting *Beata Beatrix* was '*Beatrice in Trance*', which emphasises Rossetti's intention for the piece.²⁵ This alternative name declares the presentational aspects of the work to be as important as the subject. Rossetti's own words regarding the painting in his 1871 letter to Georgina Cowper-Temple clarify his intentions for the work; his description of the work guides the reading of the picture, indicating that it does not literally illustrate the dead beloved, but rather draws upon a specific vocabulary with which to represent the Dante subject:

It must of course be remembered, in looking at the picture, that it is not intended at all to *represent* death, but to render it under the semblance of a trance, in which Beatrice, seated at a balcony overlooking the city, is suddenly rapt from earth to heaven. (*Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43)

The supernatural language used in the letter and the way in which Beatrice is depicted in a trance in the painting evoke the visual language of mesmerism. As with the representation of Dante in *Dante Drawing an Angel on the First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1853), Rossetti has recast the Dante subject in *Beata Beatrix* using contemporary imagery relating to spiritualism, of which the mesmeric trance state is a central element. In the watercolour Rossetti illustrates an episode from the *Vita Nuova* which has a visionary or clairvoyant aspect and emphasises this aspect through the

²⁵ See William Michael Rossetti's Diary entries for Friday 27 January and Sunday 19 February, 1871 (Bornand, pp. 41, 45).

presentation of the work. In *Beata Beatrix* he goes one step further and imagines a scenario in which it is Beatrice herself who is in a trance.

The open eyed fixed, glazed expression of Dante in the watercolour is replaced in *Beata Beatrix* with the closed eyes of Beatrice. Both states are consistent with mesmeric imagery:

The eyes sometimes remain closed as in sleep, but are oftener open. When open, they are sometimes fixed and glazed like those of a natural somnambulist, rendering manifest the insensibility of the organ.²⁶

In *Beata Beatrix* Rossetti has developed the idea of the mesmeric trance in the depiction of the closed eyes which create greater mystery through the sense of interiority. Beatrice is represented deep in trance which, together with the explanation Rossetti gives as to his deliberate intention for the work, show the appropriation of mesmeric imagery to be more emphatic in this piece.

In the trance state the next world can be momentarily accessed, and Rossetti describes this in his letter of explication: 'suddenly rapt from earth to heaven' (V, p. 42, 71.43). The afterlife is briefly experienced; thus Beatrice is depicted in the painting in the act of foreseeing her future life in heaven. That a clairvoyant episode is depicted in *Beata Beatrix* is reinforced by Rossetti in explanation: 'She, through her shut lids, is conscious of a new world' (V, p. 42, 71.43). She is depicted as a Seer; a quality associated with spiritual mediumship, which is awakened in the medium through the inducement of a mesmeric trance state. Dr. Wilkinson, the Swedenborgian-spiritualist friend of Rossetti, wrote about this aspect of the phenomenon in his unpublished manuscript on *Sleep, Mesmerism and Hypnotism* (1849):

When sight thus sleeps, it tumbles down into feeling: when it thus awakens, it appropriates the attributes of mind within those of vision; it reaches as far as thought, and is not limited to the place of the body. So the sleeper travels visually to distant places [...] He professes to hold intercourse with that influential branch of the absent we call dead, and narrates his experimental walks in a spiritual world.²⁷

²⁶ Bulwer-Lytton, 'Animal Magnetism', I, p. 297.

²⁷ Swedenborg Society Library Archive; A/56i, p. 7.

It is this to which Rossetti's painting alludes. Beatrice's clairvoyant abilities are emphasised in the painting by the gnomon of the sundial which points directly to the position on the forehead where the symbolic third eye, associated in eastern *and* western esoteric traditions with higher consciousness, is located.²⁸ The sundial shows the hour of nine; the hour and date of Beatrice's death, and a number associated with her throughout Dante's *Vita Nuova*: the gnomon then points both to the future hour of her death and towards her mind in a visual motif that indicates foreknowledge.²⁹ She is precogniscent of her own future blessedness: the state described by Dante at the end of the *Vita Nuova* (and narrated in the *Paradiso* of *The Divine Comedy*): 'that blessed Beatrice who now gazeth continually on His countenance' (*New Life*, p. 87). These closing lines of Dante's text linger on the image of the heavenly Beatrice, emphasising her blessed state, in much the same way as Rossetti's title does in *Beata Beatrix*, which translates as 'Blessed Beatrice'. Rossetti's innovation is to depict Beatrice as if she had foreknowledge of this state, using imagery relating to the contemporary context of spiritualism.

In the painting, Rossetti depicts the character of Beatrice at the point of mediation between two worlds. Her body remains on earth, while, as art critic and Rossetti's fellow Pre-Raphaelite F.G. Stephens explained in his critical review of the work, 'the heavenly visions of the New Life are revealed to the eyes of her spirit' (p. 45). This is reinforced throughout the painting through a mediation of opposites. The setting is twilight; it is neither day, nor night, and the use of the complementary colours of red and green form the most prominent colour dynamic of the painting: the bird, figure of Love and Beatrice's hair are reddish; the gown and the general ambient glow are in the green range. The bridge in the background, associated with the Ponte Vecchio in Florence in a literal Dantesque reading, takes on a symbolic aspect in this sense as that which mediates between earth and heaven. It is a *Bridge of Souls* in this

²⁸ Contemporary accounts from the period suggest a familiarity with this esoteric idea within spiritualist circles, including references to it from those in the circle around Rossetti. Elizabeth Barrett Browning for example refers to it in a letter to her sister Henrietta in March 1848: 'My secret, I can't tell yet, because it was committed to me in strict confidence. It will make Arabel open her two eyes, and one in her forehead besides – if there should be the seed of an eye anywhere thereabouts' (Huxley, p. 78). Reference is made to the third eye in D.D. Home's *Incidents in my Life* (1863) (p. 199).

²⁹ See Rossetti's letter to Ellen Heaton 19 May 1863 (*Correspondence III*, p. 51, 63.54) regarding the significance of the number nine in Dante, and the introduction of the sundial in *Beata Beatrix* as a significant detail.

reading; 'a means of passage for the soul from this earth to eternity'.³⁰ There is something at once supernatural and natural in Rossetti's depiction of Beatrice; the viewer is looking simultaneously at both the earthly woman and the angel of heaven that she will become. One is also aware that the woman presented is both the fictional Beatrice and the real Siddal.³¹ Such is the mystical atmosphere of the image; it seems to suggest a transitional space: 'she is simultaneously sensual and ethereal, pale and yet radiant'.³² Beatrice inhabits a shadowy 'border-realm which lies between life and death' and like a clairvoyant in a mediumistic trance she simultaneously 'exists' on earth and in heaven (Stephens, p. 45).

The triangular composition of the painting also serves to reinforce the representation of mediation. There are two main triangular forms traceable within the composition – one pointing upwards (in echo of the column of light above Beatrice's head) that suggests heaven. This is formed by Beatrice herself and reinforced geometrically by the angle of the gnomon of the sundial. The other can be traced from the heads of the figures of Dante and Love within the painting, with the bottom centre of the painting (marked by the point at which the green garment gives way to the undergarment – or the centre of the triangular cutaway directly above) acting as the notional third point, and pointing down to symbolise earthward. These two overlapping triangles approximate and evoke the two intersecting triangles of the hexagram (like the Star of David, or Seal of Solomon) which symbolises heaven and earth joined; or bridged, mediated.³³ Rossetti reinforces the importance of the triangular composition through repetition of the form throughout the painting: Beatrice's hands form one point of a triangle upon her lap; the shape of the gnomon

³⁰ Spence, p. 79. The supernatural symbolism of the *Bridge of Souls* is 'widely disseminated' in world folklore and superstition. References to it in variant forms exist from ancient times, and in a number of cultures, including classical Rome, Norse mythology and British and Chinese folklore (Spence, pp. 79-80).

³¹ This quality exists in other Rossetti paintings that similarly depict iconic models such as Jane Morris. These works occupy an uneasy transitional state between recognisable portrait and symbolic woman; they function on both a realist and imaginative level. As Colin Cruise has noted in a discussion of Rossetti's *The Blue Silk Dress* which depicts Jane Morris: 'Thus, while the painting is not a portrait, neither is it a heroic abstraction. It is, instead, an awkward, if intense, combination of two traditional modes' (Cruise in Giebelhausen and Barringer, eds., *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 179).

³² Johnson, 'Dante Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* and the *New Life*', p. 552.

³³ Adele Nozedar, *The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Signs and Symbols: The Ultimate A-Z Guide from Alchemy to the Zodiac* (London: HarperElement, 2008), pp. 152-53.

itself; the bird from beak to wing tips and the cut away parts of the overgarment (and to a certain extent the exaggerated thrust of Beatrice's chin, which echoes the shape of the gnomon). It is entirely appropriate that Rossetti has suggested this esoteric symbol through the internal composition of his work. As Stephens suggests, the 'true inspiration of his theme required that the figure of Beatrix, being an inmate of that border-realm which divides life from death, should appear occult' (p. 46). Hence her special spiritual location as a medium is identified compositionally.

The figure of Beatrice in the painting is clothed in symbolic colours that represent her liminal state. The green mantle she wears covers a greyish purple, sombre garment which can be seen as symbolic of earthly life and death respectively.³⁴ Or, as Stephens suggests, they are 'the colours of hope and sorrow', which are psychological states associated with life and death (p. 46). There is also in the use of both 'symbolical hues' the evocation of ideas of re-birth, reinforcing the future New Life in heaven that Beatrice will attain (p. 47). This duality is the key to one aspect of the painting's power, as Beatrice is at once of heaven *and* earth. Rossetti depicts both the earthly Beatrice in a clairvoyant trance, prefiguring her future life in heaven, and as that heavenly future version realised. As Stephens writes, she is both visionary and vision: 'She is herself a vision, while – her corporeal eyes losing power of outward speculation – the heavenly visions of the New Life are revealed to the eyes of her spirit' (p. 45). It is as if she is in the act of transfiguration, or beatification, and becoming the sainted Beatrice of the title. This reading is reinforced in the painting through the effect of light in the work, which frames her hair like a halo in an almost contra-jour effect; while the bird, often interpreted as a dove, wears a halo evocative of Holy Spirit.

The work presents Beatrice using the vocabulary of the mesmeric trance state; she is depicted as a clairvoyant medium accessing the next life, whilst still physically of this one. This is reinforced in the painting at every level, from formal aspects such as

³⁴ It is interesting to note that in the 1872 oil replica of *Beata Beatrix* (Art Institute of Chicago; Charles L. Hutchinson Collection; reference number 1925.722), Beatrice is clothed in colours that relate more obviously to Dante. She wears a green garment over a red dress, which would appear to be a textual reference to Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy*, who is dressed thus: 'A lady came to me, under her green cloak / Clothed in the colour of flame' (*Purgatorio XXX, Divine Comedy*, p. 330, ll. 32-3). In the original *Beata Beatrix*, the colours are more idiosyncratic, purposefully esoteric and less referential, reinforcing that the work is a poetic interpretation of Dante and not literally or directly illustrative from Dante.

colour, treatment of light and internal composition, to aspects of content, such as potentially symbolic elements like the bridge.

Luminous Effects: The Context of Spiritualism for *Beata Beatrix*

Throughout F.G. Stephens's 1891 review of the painting he uses language that reinforces the context of nineteenth century spiritualism for the work. He refers to the 'spiritual abstruseness' of the design and the evocation of 'deathful mystery' in the work (p. 46). A key aspect of this is rooted in his interpretation of the title of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, or 'New Life', with reference to Rossetti's painting. Stephens interprets the New Life unequivocally as the afterlife: 'the heavenly visions of the New Life are revealed to the eyes of her spirit' (p.45), rather than the new life of love that is awakened in Dante when he first sees Beatrice in his 'early life' (as some translators have interpreted 'nuova').³⁵ In this Stephens reinforces a reading of the work that recasts Dante into the context of contemporary spiritualism. The indistinct city of the background – Dante's Florence in a literal level of reading – becomes in Stephens' interpretation 'the Heavenly City of the future' (p.46). Thus, through being 'absorbed in a painless ecstasy' of trance, Beatrice gains 'knowledge of the world to come' (p.46). In this Stephens seems to have taken his cue from Rossetti's own description of the 'new world' that Beatrice sees whilst in her trance.³⁶ Indeed it is important to point out that F.G. Stephens' reviews of Rossetti's paintings to some extent represent an

³⁵ In the preface to his translation of Dante's *Vita Nuova* (1861), Rossetti addresses the interpretation of the title:

A word should be said here of the title of Dante's autobiography. The adjective *Nuovo*, *nuova*, or *Novello*, *novella*, literally *New*, is often used by Dante and other early writers in the sense of *young*. This has induced some editors of the *Vita Nuova* to explain the title as meaning *Early Life*. I should be glad on some accounts to adopt this supposition [...] but on consideration I think the more mystical interpretation of the words as *New Life* [...], appears the primary one. (*New Life*, pp. xvii-xviii)

This illustrates Rossetti's poetics of translation as discussed before in the main text. His translation casts the work in a new light, opening up other points of reference and interpretation for the work. It is interesting that he favours what he terms 'the more mystical interpretation', over a more prosaic reference to Dante's age. What is crucial, however, is that he maintains that the text's meaning remains open to interpretation and concedes that the 'probability may be that both were meant' (p. xviii). This gives an insight into Rossetti's own symbolic method, which, in both his poetry and his painting, allows for a duality and a layering of meaning in his work.

³⁶ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

authorised view of Rossetti. As one of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Frederick George Stephens was one of Rossetti's inner circle, whose career as an art critic grew out of his own history as a practising artist and his close association with his fellow 'brothers', whose work he championed.³⁷ Therefore Stephens' reading of the painting using the language of spiritualism can be seen as a response to the work closely allied to Rossetti's intent for the piece: 'The true inspiration of his theme required that [...] Beatrix [...] should appear occult, [...] to affirm that she has passed the bourn from which no traveller returns' (p. 46). Stephens' article is therefore an early critical response to the painting that alludes to the context of the work.

Stephens' spiritualistic reading of *Beata Beatrix* rests predominantly on the light effects achieved by Rossetti in the painting. These are variously described by Stephens as 'a lustre at once warm and silvery' and 'a twilight of brilliance and a twilight of shadow' (p. 46); affirming once again the inferred mediumistic presence of Beatrix between the two worlds; the natural and the spiritual. Later, in a discussion of Beatrice's 'pale' features he becomes more emphatic regarding his spiritualistic interpretation: 'and this is celestial light which glances on them' (p. 46). The hazy glow of the painting, brought across by the soft sfumato brushwork employed by Rossetti, lends the work an unearthly feeling. It is the haziness of twilight when literal vision dulls, but it also suggests the potential to dissolve like a spirit body – insubstantial. The quality of this light which 'evokes the spiritual mood [...] through the tonal subtleties of the oil paint' is therefore a key element in the creation of this spiritualistic atmosphere.³⁸ As Ronald W. Johnson has recognised, once again through acknowledgement of the paradoxical situation of Beatrice being at once heavenly and

³⁷ Stephens, one of the original seven of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, became a prominent Victorian art critic. From 1861 he was art critic for the *Athenaeum* for 40 years (*Correspondence I*, p. 231, 53.10, n.1). He also wrote for other publications in a freelance capacity, including his essay on Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, published in *Portfolio* in 1891. His connection with, and promotion of, Rossetti's work is characterised to a certain extent by deference on Stephens' part. There are several letters from 1851 referring to Rossetti's attempt to place Stephens in the post of art critic for the *Daily News*, after he ceased to write for the *Critic* (*I*, pp. 176-77, 51.14 and n.1; p. 230-31, 53.10 and n.1; pp. 234-35, 53.13, 53.14 and n.2). A letter of 1871 from Rossetti to Stephens regarding *Dante's Dream* is particularly didactic and illustrates the much assumed idea that Rossetti vetted Stephens' critical writings of his work: 'I shall be glad to show you my picture, on the strict understanding that nothing is said about it in print unless you are able to write a separate article on it, couched in the most decided tone' (*Correspondence V*, p. 185, 71.184).

³⁸ Johnson, 'Dante Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* and the *New Life*', p. 551.

earthly, the use of light evokes the supernatural: 'She seems transcendent as though burning with an inner flame yet she is covered with the green and ghostly mantle of death'.³⁹

These light effects directly reference the world of spiritualism in which Rossetti was immersing himself in at this time. The general dimness of light in *Beata Beatrix* suggests the low level of ambient gaslight favoured at the majority of public séances: 'As twilight came on, a pleasant dimness fell over the room'.⁴⁰ While the quality of the glow in the painting, which is intense, yet hazy, is reminiscent of the phosphorescent lights seen at such gatherings around purported spirit manifestations in which a spirit hand or foot would apparently appear and be illuminated with a ghostly glow, such as the 'luminous hands' that move in and out of visibility at one séance held by D.D. Home, the medium (Home, p. 193). Dr. Wilkinson attended séances with Home and wrote a letter to the *Morning Advertiser* in defence of him. Home quoted this in full in his autobiography *Incidents in my Life* (1863) and in it Wilkinson describes his experiences of spiritualist phenomena at Home's séances. There are several references to spirit hands appearing: 'phosphoric fingers' emerge and other hands purportedly incarnate 'out of the vital atmospheres of those present' (Home, p. 77). A 'delicately beautiful female hand and part of the forearm, apparently of ghostly tenuity' forms and later vanishes by a 'dissipative process' (p. 81-2). The séances of medium Stainton Moses were known for particularly striking light effects, including 'masses of floating light' and 'a cylinder of luminous substance [...] giving a golden light'.⁴¹ Rossetti alludes to this 'spiritual light' manufactured during séances with the delicate yet luminous light depicted around the head of Beatrice in the first version of *Beata Beatrix*. The golden column of light behind her head that seems to emanate from it is also

³⁹ Johnson, p. 555. The paradoxical situation, which Rossetti's Beatrice embodies, of being at once on earth and in heaven, mortal and immortal, can be read as a pictorial equivalent to Rossetti's poetic motif of the paradoxical phrase, used in *The House of Life* (see Chapters 5 and 6 on *The House of Life*). In its depiction of a charged moment in which the future eternal state in heaven is accessed briefly from the mortal plane, *Beata Beatrix* represents a visual expression of phrases such as 'one dead deathless hour' (from l.3 of *The House of Life* proem sonnet) and 'evermore present' (from l.2 of the sonnet 'Love's Testament'). This indicates Rossetti's method of reinforcement through repetition, in which central thematic concerns are revisited throughout his oeuvre, such as, in this case, the finite earthly life and infinite life of the soul.

⁴⁰ Home, *Incidents in My Life*, p. 196.

⁴¹ Pearsall, pp. 90-91. See also Melechi: 'Lights rose from the floor and moved upwards through his body' (p. 237).

evocative of séance light effects. Beatrice is represented like a spirit body and becomes séance phenomenon here in addition to medium. She is a vision of what she will become after death, anticipating visually the future state she foresees.

Another séance light effect is documented by Sophia De Morgan in *From Matter to Spirit* (1863), an autobiographical account of the author's experiences as a medium. Her description of the process of mediumship forms an interesting documentary counterpart to Rossetti's image and helps to locate a direct context for the work. De Morgan suggests that during séances the mediums receive their information from the spirits through mesmeric influence. She describes the (benevolent) spirits' position during a séance as above the head of the medium, imparting spiritual information down into their mind: 'The good spirit above is throwing the influence through the higher portions of the brain, namely, the organs of veneration, benevolence, ideality, and the intellectual portion'.⁴² This mesmeric influence is described as some form of electricity or magnetism is perceived variously as a 'cloud of light' (De Morgan, p. 45), 'streams of light' (p. 45) and 'fire' (p. 49); its influence upon water forming 'a mist' (p. 46). These descriptions of the visual appearance of the spiritual mesmeric force also correspond with the representation of light in Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, which has a misty, fiery quality and takes the form of a column of light above Beatrice's head, as if she were being influenced from the spirits above. This is essentially a background detail in the painting which, due to the tilted and naive form of perspective employed, has the effect of rising straight up out of Beatrice's head, or appearing to descend into it. Thus, the background of *Beata Beatrix* works formally in two ways: it is a literal background for the 'scene' of the work in which the Ponte Vecchio can just be glimpsed, and it refers to the spiritual influence from above.

The light in séances associated with spirit manifestation was seen as similar to but 'more refined' than the earlier concept of Odylic light (Home, p. 196). Odylic, Odic, or Od-force was the name given by Karl von Reichenbach to the theoretical energy field which combined electricity, magnetism and heat. It was thought to be a kind of

⁴² De Morgan, p. 53. These are phrenological terms. There was a connection between phrenology and mesmerism during the period, in the pseudo-science of Phrenopathy, or 'Phreno-Mesmerism', which combined the two. Dr. James Braid, who coined the term hypnotism, and Dr. John Elliotson, the Rossetti family doctor and friend of Dickens, were both supporters of Phrenopathy (Spence, p. 323).

vital force emanating from all living things, akin to the mesmeric influence, and was described as resembling misty streams of fiery light. In turn this force was thought by Reichenbach to account for certain physical and chemical actions and their effect on the human nervous system. Reichenbach claimed that certain people, called 'sensitives' could perceive the force visually in the form of 'flames' or as 'a diffuse aura' emanating from and surrounding people and objects.⁴³ Rossetti paints *Beata Beatrix* as if she is emanating odylic; the hazy, fiery glow around her in the painting being reminiscent of the 'dense fiery cloud' that sensitives could perceive around dead bodies and buried bodies in graveyards: the result of the heat and chemical action generated in decomposition (Pearsall, p. 21). The results of Reichenbach's experiments with the sensitive Mademoiselle Reichel have a strong parallel with the imagery and atmosphere of the painting: 'he took her to a churchyard and she saw on a grave mound a delicate, fiery, breathing flame' (p. 21). Beatrice seems on the verge of decomposing before the eyes of the viewer.

The allusion to séance phenomena in *Beata Beatrix* through the imagery of the mesmeric trance and in the treatment of light in the work, both of which are reinforced by F.G. Stephens in his reading of the work, show Rossetti's artistic method of reinterpretation: the Dante subject of the dead beloved is translated into the language of Victorian spiritualism.

Beatrice: Spirit-Medium

That *Beata Beatrix* references spiritualism has been acknowledged briefly by Philip Hoare, who suggests that the picture's dreamlike quality can be seen 'as an evocation of Blake's visions and his own spirit drawings, as though Lizzie/Beatrice were some kind of oracle, or medium'; thereby recognising the dual depiction of spirit and medium in the painting (Hoare, p. 207). In depicting Beatrice as both visionary and vision in the painting, Rossetti fused two archetypal images from nineteenth century spiritualism: the medium and the spirit form. In uniting these two into one powerful image, Rossetti has represented a feature of the séance that was to develop considerably in the years immediately following the completion of the first *Beata*

⁴³ Winter, p. 227. See also Spence, p. 306.

Beatrix; the 'transformation' of the medium into the embodiment of their spirit guide. The séance phenomenon of spirit control, in which the spirit contacted 'often acted and spoke through an entranced medium', which effectively meant that two spirits were united in one physical being, was already an established phenomenon during the years of the painting's production (Owen, p. 45). The famous medium Florence Cook who emerged on the spiritualist scene during the later years of the production dates of *Beata Beatrix*, achieved the 'first full spirit materialisation seen in Britain' in 1873 (p. 48). Cook purportedly manifested her spirit control, or guide, 'Katie King', who would then walk around the séance room:

The phenomenon of full-form materialization did not figure prominently in Home's repertoire, but it was Cook's speciality, and her embodied control, or spirit guide, "Katie King", quickly became a familiar name in Victorian spiritualist households. (Oppenheim, p. 17)

Other young female mediums, such as Mary Rosina Showers brought the spectacle into their séance repertoire. It was noted that the spirits manifested in this way 'precisely resembled' the medium (Pearsall, p. 98). A look at contemporary photographs of both Florence Cook and 'Katie King' show that it is the same woman. Hence the medium and the spirit are one person: as in Rossetti's representation of Beatrice in *Beata Beatrix*.

It is interesting to note that as 'Katie King' Florence Cook wore her auburn hair long and loose (Owen, p. 55). This is self-conscious styling to reflect the already established archetypal image of the female spirit form, which is usually clad in tunic, or smock-like clothing, with long flowing hair. Rossetti's image, despite presenting Beatrice in generic medieval garb, alludes to this tradition: her tunic and loose auburn hair, surrounded by a ghostly glow, reflect this visual code of otherworldliness. A contemporary photograph of Florence Cook in the form of her spirit control 'Katie King' shows another point of reference between Rossetti's painting and the visual imagery of spiritualism. Katie is shown with her eyes closed – visual shorthand for supernatural vision in both images – indicating the contextual source common to both.

There are several photographs of 'Katie King' in the séance environment. What is common to all is the inclusion of white drapery and veil. This is by the 1870s an established visual symbol for spirit. In D.D. Home's autobiography, for example, there

is mention of a 'veiled female spirit' who appeared to his dying wife Sacha in 1862 which gave her spiritual comfort in her last days.⁴⁴ This would seem to lead the argument away from *Beata Beatrix*, as in the first version of the painting there is no white drapery, or veil. However, a figure referencing the veiled female 'spirit' of spiritualism is present in the oil replica of *Beata Beatrix* executed for William Graham in 1872 which contains a predella panel illustrating the meeting of Dante and Beatrice in the afterlife.⁴⁵ Rossetti presents Beatrice in illustration of Dante, with 'a white veil, crowned with olive' and dressed in 'the colour of flame' under her green cloak.⁴⁶ However, he appropriates the imagery of spiritualism in the presentation of the veiled Beatrice: her veil has the diaphanous quality of the flowing robes associated with spirit materialisation during séances, and also in contemporary spirit photographs, such as those in the 1870s by the British pioneer of spirit photography Frederick A. Hudson.⁴⁷

***Beata Beatrix*: Rossetti's Séance Diary**

Beata Beatrix is frequently regarded as a memorial to Lizzie Siddal. The inclusion of a white poppy in the painting, for example, is usually read as an allusion to Siddal's death from a laudanum overdose, indicating an autobiographical strand to Rossetti's appropriation of the Dante and Beatrice story.⁴⁸ That Siddal is the model matters only in its demonstration that Rossetti's relationship to his dead wife was inextricable from his attachment to spiritualism in the 1860s. The production dates of the original *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) span the period in which Rossetti's engagement with spiritualism increased after Siddal's death. During this stretch of time he attended a number of séances both public and private from late 1864 onwards, some of which

⁴⁴ Home, p. 216. Interestingly, D.D. Home's wife passed away in the same year as Rossetti's wife Lizzie Siddal, the model for *Beata Beatrix*.

⁴⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix* (1871-2) Oil on canvas, 87.5 x 69.3 cm; predella: 26.5 x 69.2 cm (Art Institute of Chicago; reference number 1925.722).

⁴⁶ *Purgatorio XXX, Divine Comedy*, p. 330.

⁴⁷ See for example Plate 125 in Morley, p. 96, which is typical in this respect and features a 'spirit' woman behind the sitter who is veiled in diaphanous robes, with long, flowing hair. Hudson was friendly with the medium Mrs. Guppy, whose séances Rossetti attended in the 1860s (see Pearsall, pp. 120-23). Rossetti finished William Graham's *Beata Beatrix* replica in 1872, the '*annus mirabilis* of spirit photography' (Pearsall, p. 123).

⁴⁸ See for example, Jan Marsh's reading of the work in *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, p. 216, and Mancoff, who sees the painting as 'the most compelling of all his works in its autobiographical association' (p. 76).

were recorded by William Michael in his *Séance Diary* (1865-68), a document whose own period of production runs concurrent with that of Rossetti's painting. In a number of these séances attempts were made to contact Siddal, and messages purportedly from her were received. Siddal was clearly on Rossetti's mind whilst he worked on *Beata Beatrix*: the production period of the painting also includes the exhumation of Siddal's grave in October 1869 to retrieve manuscript poems that were placed in her coffin before burial, and it has been suggested that he felt literally haunted by her presence.⁴⁹ *Beata Beatrix* is then inevitably infused with Rossetti's feelings about his late wife relating to death, haunting and the afterlife.

There are iconographic features within the painting that refer directly to Rossetti's personal experiences with spiritualism, such as those that reference séance phenomena. Rossetti's ideas concerning the afterlife, particularly reunion with the dead beloved, which show the influence of Swedenborg's ideas on conjugal love, also find expression in the picture. In representing the various aspects of Victorian spiritualism that Rossetti engaged with both intellectually and practically, *Beata Beatrix* can be seen as a visual equivalent to William Michael Rossetti's *Séance Diary*. It is Rossetti's own séance diary which documents his involvement in spiritualism and its related ideas and practices.

The Poppy and the Bird: Symbols and Apports

The Poppy

In a gesture familiar from many séances of the 1850s and 1860s the bird in *Beata Beatrix* 'drops the poppy between the hands of Beatrice'.⁵⁰ The dropping of flowers onto the laps of séance attendees was a common feature of the more theatrical séances: 'At a séance on December 14th 1866, Mrs. Guppy, then Miss. Nichol, succeeded in having the table half-covered with flowers' (Pearsall, p. 81). This refers to the type of séance phenomena known as *apports*, which are material objects supposedly manifested by supernatural means 'in the presence of a medium' (Spence, p. 33). Flowers were one of the most common apports and were usually dropped onto the table or into the laps of sitters during the course of a séance. Apports were 'one of

⁴⁹ Marsh, *Painter and Poet*, p. 300; Faxon, p. 145.

⁵⁰ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

the specialities' of the celebrated medium Mrs. Guppy; during one reported séance with her, Alfred Russell Wallace requested a sunflower from the spirits and 'a six-foot specimen complete with clods of earth fell at his feet'.⁵¹ Rossetti himself was witness to Mrs. Guppy's ability to manifest apports in the form of flowers.

In a séance with Mrs. Guppy in April 1868 Rossetti directly experienced the phenomena of the dropping of flowers. During the course of the evening's séance various flowers were produced, mostly at the request of the sitters. William Michael Rossetti, who was also present and recorded the experience in his *Séance Diary*, asked for primroses and notes that a geranium fell onto his lap instead, but conceding that later he noticed two primroses on the floor 'close to me'. Rossetti also joined in the request for flowers, as William Michael noted:

Gabriel [Rossetti] asked for hyacinth, and got it – a good-sized sprig. Violets & daffodils were also asked for & were among the flowers found when the light came. These were, I think about all. The whole lot were fresh, mostly single sprigs of flowers as if pulled off one by one. (*SD*, entry 18)

This visual imagery of floral séance apports is present in *Beata Beatrix* as a single flower – the poppy – which is about to fall into Beatrice's lap. The poppy is given to Beatrice by a 'heavenly messenger', the bird who, like the supposed spirit in a séance, conveys the object to the sitter (Stephens, p. 46). In the painting Rossetti has conflated many aspects of spiritualistic imagery, which creates an intensity of supernatural atmosphere in the resultant image. Beatrice stands in for all those present in the séance; the medium in trance, the glowing and ghostly spirit, and the sitter(s) who receive the apports. It is interesting to note that the light conditions at this séance attended by Rossetti are reminiscent of those described earlier. William relates that despite the attempt to have 'every ray of light excluded', there remained a 'faint glimmer' of light behind the curtained window – the kind of ethereal light referenced in *Beata Beatrix* (*SD*, entry 18).

The choice of flower is also significant. The poppy has long been associated in western iconographic and literary traditions with 'sleep, peaceful death, and oblivion'.⁵² Rossetti describes the bird that drops the poppy as a 'messenger of death',

⁵¹ Pearsall, p. 81; Owen, p. 54.

⁵² Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; repr. 2001), p. 161.

so it can be assumed that his inclusion of the poppy is intended to draw upon these traditional associations. However, Rossetti also states that the picture 'is not intended at all to *represent* death, but to render it under the semblance of a trance'.⁵³ Hence the poppy's other symbolic associations are exploited, and, as with the blending of spiritualistic imagery in the painting, the details of the work have layers of symbolic significance. The poppy in traditional western art historical symbolism is often associated not with the absolute of death, but rather with the related states of altered consciousness; the tradition of its use stemming from classical symbolism:

Its sleep-inducing properties were well known to the ancients. Poppies are the attribute of Hypnos, the Greek god of sleep [...], of Morpheus, the god of dreams who may be crowned with a garland, and of NIGHT personified.⁵⁴

The sleep and dream states can be seen as semi-conscious border realms which mediate between life and death. The poppy is chosen by Rossetti in recognition of these associations, which reinforce the context of spiritualism for *Beata Beatrix*. Poppies symbolise sleep and as such directly refer to the mesmerised state, which was regarded at this time as akin to natural sleep states, such as sleepwalking. Dr. James Braid's renaming (and redefining) of mesmerism to Hypnotism in 1842, after Hypnos the God of sleep, reinforces the associations between sleep and the trance state (Winter, p. 184). The term for sleepwalker, *somnabulist*, whose Latin etymological root is *somnus* (sleep), is also another term in the period for a clairvoyant medium. The term is used in this way by Seymour Kirkup in his correspondence with William Michael Rossetti, in which he refers to spirit mediums in general as 'Somnambules' (*RP*, p. 176). The Latin for dream – another 'active' sleep state is *somnium*, indicating a direct link between the idea of sleep and visions.

It has been suggested by Jan Marsh that the trance depicted in *Beata Beatrix* is a drug induced trance:

The pose and expression of the figure, who is represented as in a trance at the moment of passing from earth to heaven, strongly suggest those of an addict who is feeling the immediate effects of a fix – for which trance might be an approximate description.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

⁵⁴ James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (London: John Murray, 1996), p. 250.

⁵⁵ Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, pp. 215-16.

Marsh appears to have drawn upon the Victorian Language of Flowers, in which (in addition to 'sleep') the symbolic meaning of the white poppy is 'my bane', as it would seem to reinforce the biographical knowledge of Siddal's dependence upon, and death from, laudanum.⁵⁶ The poppy may be an oblique reference to Siddal's mode of death, but the trance depicted is not primarily a drug trance, as this would misinterpret the subject of the piece. *Beata Beatrix* is not a straight portrait of Siddal; it is a depiction of a precogniscent Beatrice as she foresees her death and subsequent new life in heaven. Rossetti specifically emphasises that the trance is a supernatural episode in which Beatrice is 'suddenly rapt from earth to heaven'.⁵⁷ Siddal's death is not the subject, but it is an inseparable facet of the presentation of that subject, as Rossetti's deeper involvement with spiritualism was prompted in part by this biographical incident.

Marsh also asserts that the colour of the poppy in the painting is symbolic of narcotic addiction: 'the white poppy, from which opium derives'.⁵⁸ However, the opium poppy - *Papaver somniferum* - can be both white and red, suggesting a possible other reason for Rossetti's choice of a white poppy. It can be seen as symbolic of spirit; it is ghostly and has a similar delicacy to the white spirit clothing of the séance environment. The poppy is highlighted with the same soft luminous glow as the 'celestial light' that illuminates the background of the painting and falls upon the sundial (Stephens, p. 46). It is consistent with the spiritual mood of the painting and glows like the spirit form of a poppy. As F.G. Stephens recognised it is a 'mystical flower in which Rossetti meant to combine the emblems of death and chastity' (p. 46). Its whiteness therefore stands for both 'the stainless life' of Beatrice on earth and the purity of spiritual rebirth into her 'New Life' after death.⁵⁹

The Bird

Apports in séance phenomena also included birds themselves: 'other objects than flowers appeared; doves, or pigeons [...] were often used by the spirits' (Morley,

⁵⁶ Beverley Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995) pp. 188-9.

⁵⁷ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

⁵⁸ Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, p. 216.

⁵⁹ Stephens, p. 46; p. 45.

p. 107). The inclusion of the bird in *Beata Beatrix* can therefore be seen, along with the poppy, as an allusion to the material phenomena associated with spiritualism. However, as with the poppy, its potential for symbolic associations lends a deeper significance to its formal presence in the work. The bird in *Beata Beatrix* is predominantly referred to as a dove in critical responses to the painting.⁶⁰ This is also F. G. Stephen's interpretation:

A dove, a heavenly messenger, of deep rose-coloured and glowing plumage, and, like the bird of the Annunciation, crowned with aureole, poises on downward wings at her knee and bears to Beatrix's hands a white poppy. (Stephens, p. 46)

With this assumption comes a host of associations. The Holy Spirit, or spirit of God, is most often symbolised by a dove in the history of western religious art and, since *Beata Beatrix* refers to Beatrice's vision of her future life in heaven, this has been the primary association. This reading is encouraged by the halo that graces the bird's head, connoting its heavenly status. To an extent, this is fitting; the references to spiritualism in the painting associate it with occult Christian beliefs regarding the afterlife, heaven and God.

The identification of the bird as a dove may also be due in part to the association with the work as a memorial to Siddal; as one of Rossetti's affectionate names for her was 'dove'. In a discussion of the 1880 oil version of the painting (in the National Gallery of Scotland collection), Paul Spencer-Longhurst combines this reading, with a conventional religious interpretation of the bird:

Beatrice sits at a balcony receiving the message of her death from a heavenly dove – symbol of the Holy Spirit but also a reference to one of Rossetti's pet names for his wife, 'the dove'.⁶¹

Jan Marsh makes a similar comparison in a discussion of the original *Beata Beatrix*: 'The gentle dove was of course Gabriel's favourite image for Lizzie's quiet, meek demeanour when he first knew her'.⁶² This is reiterated in the catalogue accompanying the recent retrospective of Rossetti's works held at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool in

⁶⁰ See for example: Johnson, p. 552; Mancoff, p. 79; Faxon, p. 143; Riede, p. 243 – to cite but a few.

⁶¹ Paul Spencer-Longhurst, *The Blue Bower: Rossetti in the 1860s* (London: Scala, 2000), p. 48.

⁶² Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, p. 216

2003, which treads familiar ground with the assumption that the bird is unquestionably a dove, and that the dove represents Siddal, who in turn is cast as Beatrice to Rossetti's Dante:

The symbolism of the picture also conflates the two stories of Siddal's and Beatrice's deaths, and Dante's and Rossetti's loves. The dove bears a white poppy, symbol of sleep or death and the source of laudanum (Siddal had died of an overdose). The dove can be a symbol either of love (it is associated with Venus, the goddess of love) or the Holy Spirit [...] Rossetti associated the dove with Siddal, as Dante associated the number nine with Beatrice.⁶³

However, this thread of argument becomes problematic when one considers that the bird in most versions of *Beata Beatrix* is not the dove of conventional religious iconography.⁶⁴ Crucially, Rossetti does not call it a dove, but rather refers to 'the bird, a messenger of death'.⁶⁵ In addition, there is no indication that Rossetti was specifically attached to the inclusion of a dove in the painting.⁶⁶ The bird in *Beata Beatrix* is, in fact, distinctively un-dovelike with its red plumage, head crest and stylised tripartite tail feathers. The bird it perhaps most resembles is the Phoenix, or firebird, which, as an emblem of 'the rebirth of the soul', is an appropriate choice of bird with which to symbolise the 'New Life' in heaven that Beatrice foresees through her trance in *Beata Beatrix* (Ferber, p. 153). Despite its roots in classical writing (and its more widespread presence in world mythology and folklore) the phoenix is also a Christian symbol, specifically associated with the idea of life after death:

⁶³ Treuherz, Prettejohn and Becker, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. 186 (see also p. 80).

⁶⁴ In a later version of *Beata Beatrix* (1877), which remained unfinished and was completed after Rossetti's death in 1882 by Ford Madox Brown, the bird is unequivocally a conventional white dove. In this version also the single white poppy is replaced by two red ones. Other significant details present in the original version, such as the ethereal light effects, Beatrice's red hair and the bird's halo are also notably absent. It is significant that this work was finished by another artist, as it shows perhaps the greatest departure from Rossetti's deliberately spiritualistic treatment in the original version. (Birmingham Art Gallery; accession number: 1891P25).

⁶⁵ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

⁶⁶ In a letter to Fanny Cornforth in 1871, the year of the painting's completion, Rossetti suggested another bird may have been suitable for his purposes: 'The other day I found a poor lapwing, or peewit, a beautiful bird that I had never seen before, and which is just the sort of bird I ought to have had to paint in that picture of Beatrice' (*Correspondence V*, p. 134, 71.136). The Peewit, or lapwing, has a crest upon its head not dissimilar to that upon the head of the painting's mystical bird.

It lived to a great age, some said five hundred years, and finally burned itself to ashes on an altar fire, from which a new, young phoenix arose. The early Christians adopted it as a symbol of Christ's Resurrection and represented it in funerary sculpture. In the Middle Ages it was commonly associated with the crucifixion, and was an attribute of chastity personified. (Hall, p. 246)

Yet the bird in *Beata Beatrix* has an intimate quality, which belies comparison to the epic mythological associations that accompany the dove and the phoenix. It is small in stature and has a domesticity, like a garden bird.⁶⁷ This combination of the potentially symbolic and experiential reality accounts partly for the compelling quality of the work (which also echoes the preoccupation with material evidence for the spirit world that characterises Victorian spiritualism). This would suggest Rossetti's intention was to present a composite, fictional mystical bird, or a spirit bird, equivalent to the spirit poppy in the painting, and is consonant with the layered use of symbolism which characterises the work.

The mystical bird of *Beata Beatrix* appears in other Rossetti paintings fulfilling a similar symbolic function. In *Dante's Dream* (1871), the bird is depicted twice in this painting; on the far right swooping downwards and on the left rising upwards. The birds frame what is essentially a scene of ascension, as Dante, in his vision, is led to the death bed of Beatrice, whose spirit is shown rising heavenward amongst 'a multitude of angels' above the canopy.⁶⁸ In the painting *Fiammetta* (1878), which illustrates Boccaccio's vision of his dead beloved Maria D'Aquino, the same bird appears above her haloed head as 'a harbinger of death'.⁶⁹ Its position at the top of the painting in a posture of ascending flight, suggests it also represents afterlife, and relates in this regard to the angel depicted in the halo that enshrines her head. The presence of the

⁶⁷ Another bird may also have fed into Rossetti's consciousness during the production of the painting. In 1869 he attached a spiritual significance to a chaffinch that crossed his path, seeing it as 'the spirit of my wife' (*Autobiographical Notes of William Bell Scott*, p. 113). The idea that Siddal's spirit could be incarnated into the chaffinch suggests, as with the symbolism of the phoenix, the idea of life after death, and together with his séance attendance, suggests the biographical engagement with spiritualism which informs the presentation of the work.

⁶⁸ This is the oil painting in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (accession number WAG3091). See *New Life*, p.46, for the passage in Dante to which it refers. The bird does not appear in the earlier watercolour *Dante's Dream* (1856) (Tate; reference number 5529), which suggests this pictorial feature is related to Rossetti's growing involvement with spiritualism in the 1860s and 1870s. It does however appear in *Golden Water* (1858) (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; accession number 2148), probably representing the mystical bird in the story of Princess Parisadé from the Arabian Nights.

⁶⁹ *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, p. 217. This painting is in the private collection of Lord Lloyd Webber.

bird in subsequent works reinforces its significance for Rossetti in *Beata Beatrix* as a symbol signifying death and transfiguration. It embodies the idea of movement from earth to heaven, and, as such, works together with the other elements of the painting to suggest the context of spiritualism that informs the work.

Reunion in Heaven: Conjugal Love and the Swedenborgian Angel

As a text informed by Swedenborgian-spiritualism, the painting *Beata Beatrix* combines elements that visually refer to aspects of Victorian spiritualism, such as the clairvoyant trance state and séance phenomena, with the visionary imagery of Emanuel Swedenborg's afterlife. This is conveyed primarily in the work through the presentation of Beatrice, who can be seen as embodying her future angelic status in heaven.

Beatrice is depicted, as the title of the work implies, in a state of blessedness, or beatitude, in formal allusion to the tradition of ecstatic saints.⁷⁰ However, there is an intimate quality, and sensuality, about the work that suggests a sexual dimension not present in traditional depictions of ecstatic saints, or in the Dante text to which it refers, which can be accounted for when the influence of Swedenborg's conjugal love is acknowledged:

Her facial expression, raised head, straining throat and parted lips are overtly sensual, and Rossetti evidently intends to suggest a connection between the sexual and the divine, between orgasm and revelation. This was a concept that had been proposed by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) in his book *Conjugal Love* (1768), a text which seems to have influenced Rossetti deeply. (*Age of Rossetti*, p. 156)

⁷⁰ The depiction of the trance state in Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* has its roots in the art historical tradition of ecstatic saints. Timothy Hilton has noted that the ecstatic pose of Beatrice in the work recalls Bernini's *St. Teresa* (*The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970; repr. 1997), p. 181). This is evident when the two images are compared; both have upturned heads, closed eyes and open mouths. Although *Beata Beatrix* is not a conventional depiction of a biblical saint, Rossetti alludes to that tradition in the work. The title which translates as 'blessed Beatrice' resonates with the Christian idea of beatification, the formal declaration of a blessing which is often the first step towards canonization or sainthood. The ecstatic pose and the reference to her as being 'rapt from earth to heaven' in echo of Dante's exalted last words of the *Vita Nuova* suggest the ecstasy of spiritual trance. Rossetti's own design *Saint Cecilia* (1857) for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems is cited as a forerunner to *Beata Beatrix* in its depiction of spiritual revelation as sexual, romantic love: her divine ecstasy is represented visually as a kiss (see Faxon, p. 97 and Johnson, pp. 548-552).

Through the fusion of spiritual and sexual imagery, the figure of Beatrice becomes a symbol for conjugal love. She is anticipating, not just her future blessed as an angel in heaven, but embodying her future state as a conjugal angel. In a reinterpretation of the Dante story, Rossetti suggests, through the image of an ecstatic Beatrice, an imagined future reunion of Dante and Beatrice in a Swedenborgian heaven, in which they join together in conjugal love, becoming one.⁷¹ As with Rossetti's poem 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), the title of the painting *Beata Beatrix* is Swedenborgian; it alludes to the state of blessedness achieved in spiritual people who experience truly conjugal love: 'every kind of blessedness, bliss, pleasure, charm [...] that the Lord the Creator could ever confer on a person are concentrated on this love' (CL 68.2, p. 71). Beatrice therefore becomes a supreme embodiment of conjugal pleasure, or 'perpetual bliss': an illustration of a Swedenborgian angel (CL, 59.2, p. 66).

This anticipation of reunion is displayed in *Beata Beatrix* as a moment of divine revelation (symbolised through the imagery of trance and the symbolism of the spirit messengers of the bird and poppy). The chastity associated with truly conjugal love, is symbolised in the painting through the white poppy, the floral symbol 'in which Rossetti meant to combine the emblems of death and chastity' (Stephens, p. 46). The poppy works together symbolically in this regard with the bird, who, as a phoenix-like mystical bird has chastity, in addition to re-birth, amongst its connotations.⁷² The two emblematic details therefore reinforce each other's potential meanings. The colours of the bird and the poppy in the painting are also significant in terms of Swedenborgian symbolism. Red and white are the two pure and primitive colours, from which all

⁷¹ Swedenborg emphasises that despite previous marriages (or indeed celibacies) upon earth, a person can be joined in conjugal bliss with their true marriage partner once they have reached the afterlife; this is their ideal spiritual partner, with whom they join together and achieve the delights of chaste sexual love in heaven (See CL, 45-56; pp. 50-63).

⁷² Hall, p. 246. The composite mystical bird presented in *Beata Beatrix* may have another possible source in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. In celestial symbolism certain birds, including doves and 'birds of paradise' are amongst the forms of animals in heaven that portray the chaste pleasures of conjugal love (CL 430, p. 403). That doves represent conjugal love, and appear throughout Swedenborg's depictions of heaven, has been addressed in the previous chapter. What is perhaps interesting as regards the mystical bird in *Beata Beatrix*, which is often interpreted as dove-like, is that on occasion the doves of conjugal love described by Swedenborg are not literal, but have a similar fantastical quality to the haloed and crested bird of Rossetti's painting: 'its head decorated with a crest as if of gold' (CL, p. 162).

others proceed in Swedenborg's colour symbolism: 'Red is the symbol of the divine love; white, the symbol of divine wisdom. From these two attributes of God, love and wisdom, emanate the creation of the universe'.⁷³ They are the colours of conjugal love, which is the union of love and wisdom embodied in the conjugal angel. The red dove, and the white poppy it drops into the hands of Beatrice, can be said to represent a visual metaphor for conjugal love, imparting foreknowledge to Beatrice of her New Life as a conjugal angel in heaven. That Rossetti is depicting Beatrice as a conjugal angel is reinforced by the formal elements in the painting, introduced for discussion previously. The two intersecting triangles that define the composition form a hexagram, or the Seal of Solomon, which, in addition to the mediation between earth and heaven, symbolises the union of male and female elements 'locked in a constant embrace' (Nozedar, p. 152).

The figure of Love in the left of the picture holds a glowing flame in his hand which has the same quality of light in the painting as a whole. The presence of this figure can be read as a reference to the passage in Dante's *Vita Nuova* in which the personification of Love appears to Dante in a vision holding a flaming heart.⁷⁴ However, Rossetti's painting does not literally illustrate the passage in which Love holds Beatrice in his arms. As with the painting as a whole, Rossetti alludes to Dante, but translates him into a new context in order to present an original work. In Rossetti's painting the figure of Love has an additional fiery radiance in the aureole of golden light that surrounds his head. The same fiery haze surrounds the head of Beatrice in visual echo of the figure of Love. Beatrice is therefore directly associated with this figure, which, as the personification of Love, may be a further reference to the idea of the conjugal angel. Dante remains in darkness, but looks towards the figure of Love, rather than at Beatrice; as if it is to this which he also aspires.⁷⁵

⁷³ From the second chapter entitled 'The Principles of the Symbolical History of Colors [*sic*]' in Frederick Portal's *The Symbolical Meaning of Colors, in Ancient Times, the Middle Ages, and in Modern Times* (translated from the French by Emma Marsh, the wife of Dr. J.J.G. Wilkinson and hand written in an unpublished, undated and unpaginated bound manuscript notebook) Swedenborg Society Library Archive, A/15.

⁷⁴ For the section of Dante's *Vita Nuova* in which Love holds a flaming heart, see *The New Life*, p. 6: 'And he who held her held also in his hand a thing that was burning in flames; and he said to me, *vide cor tuum*. ['Behold thy heart']'.

⁷⁵ F.G. Stephens reaches towards this interpretation in his labelling of the figure of Love as the '*eidolon*, or spiritual Beatrix, the celestial Love whose earthly image was the Beatrix the poet made immortal in immortal verse' (p. 47).

The treatment of light in the work refers therefore not only to the light effects of spiritualism and the séance room, but also to Swedenborgian ideas of heavenly light. This is not contradictory, but consistent with the fusion of spiritualistic imagery present in the painting. In addition to its connotations of the mesmeric influence, the golden light behind the head of Beatrice, which appears formally to the viewer as a column rising up from, or down through, her head, suggests the descent of heavenly illumination. It is a visual representation of her visionary episode: 'She, through her shut lids, is conscious of a new world'.⁷⁶ Literally it is as if her mind is connected to heaven: it is illuminated with the spiritual light that Swedenborg suggests emanates from the sphere around God; who is the sun in the spiritual world: 'The internal sight of a man, which is the sight of his mind, receives influx from the spiritual sun'.⁷⁷ This is reinforced by Rossetti in the design of the painting's frame: the decorative roundel in the top centre of the frame, which is situated directly above the head of Beatrice, features an image of the sun. The layered use of symbolic detail in *Beata Beatrix*, which is also exemplified by the poppy and the bird, is here present also in the symbolic significance of light. The work is densely symbolic, with potentiality for levels of possible applicability of meaning; as Ronald W. Johnson has acknowledged: 'It is a synthetic painting of a complex character with multiple references.' (P. 552).

Philip Hoare has also noted the Swedenborgian imagery of the conjugal angel in *Beata Beatrix*. His passing discussion of the painting focuses primarily on Lizzie Siddal, in an interpretation centred on biographical interpretation, which places her, rather than Beatrice, as the subject:

Siddal seemed haunted by her sensual mortality, as if to embody the Swedenborgian belief that sexual congress was an echo of the union of two souls in Heaven needed to form one angel. In *Beata Beatrix* she has become that angel. (Hoare, p. 206)

Although it is the character of Beatrice that is portrayed as a conjugal angel in the painting, Hoare's comments identify the part that Siddal's death plays in establishing a context that lies behind the work and informs its presentation. Rossetti's depiction of imagined reunion with the beloved in his painting *Beata Beatrix* is informed by his own

⁷⁶ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

⁷⁷ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Interaction of the Soul and Body* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1996; repr. 2001), p. 7.

attempts to communicate with Siddal after her death. This adds a personal dimension to an already established intellectual, cultural and social interest in Swedenborgian-spiritualism.

After Siddal's death in February 1862 many of the séances recorded by William Michael Rossetti include purported spirit communication with her. The last entry in the *Séance Diary* for Friday, 14 August 1868, chronicles one of many séances held at Rossetti's studio in his home at 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. It suggests aptly the context that lies behind *Beata Beatrix* and its proliferation with spiritual imagery. The entry begins with a setting of the scene in terms of light effects which represents the familiar séance glow present in the painting: 'Gas-light very much lowered, amounting to quasi-darkness'.⁷⁸ The séance initially consisted of Fanny Cornforth, Rossetti's model and housekeeper, his studio assistant Henry Treffry Dunn and his brother, William Michael, who subsequently recorded the event. Due to the 'goodish deal of rapping' that occurred, which indicated spirit contact, Rossetti (referred to as Gabriel) was then induced to join in with the séance. William Michael writes that 'Gabriel came in room afterwards, & joined in the séance upto very near its close'. Immediately the activity increases in vehemence at Rossetti's arrival: 'We had scarcely settled ourselves at the table when it began tilting & rapping, but without yielding any very definite response to any questions'. After asking for a name the group eventually receive the initials "Er" which they surmise stands for Elizabeth Rossetti (Siddal). Subsequent to this questions were asked and 'answers returned being merely by affirmative or negative tilts'. However, when Rossetti takes over the questioning, and asks: 'Are you my wife?', the spirit replies in the affirmative and the resultant 'conversation' shows Rossetti's thoughts to be filled with ideas of anticipated reunion with his own dead beloved:

Are you now happy? Yes – Happier than on earth? Yes – If I were now to join you, sh'd I be happy? Yes – Sh'd I see you at once? No. Quite soon? No. Tilt the table to the person you like best: it came to G.

This personal insight is at the heart of the significance of biography for the purposes of elucidating context. Siddal's death prompts from Rossetti a personal engagement with Swedenborgian-spiritualism which indicates his preoccupation with the idea of afterlife reunion. This is translated into his painting in the representation of Beatrice.

⁷⁸ *SD*, entry 20. All subsequent quotations in this paragraph refer to this entry.

Rossetti's experiences with spiritualism inform the painting and his ideas about reunion with the beloved are infused with a layer of personal resonance that gives *Beata Beatrix* an immediate power and authenticity. This represents a development from Rossetti's use of the same context in his poem 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), in which the idea of conjugal reunion in the afterlife was derived predominantly from an early intellectual, literary interest in Swedenborgian-spiritualism. The presentation of love in 'The Blessed Damozel' drew upon a range of sources, which included a number of possible secondary Swedenborgian sources. In *Beata Beatrix* the engagement with Swedenborgian ideas that emerged in his earlier poetical work, is deepened and drawn through personal experience. It finds its place amongst the more experiential séance phenomena of spiritualism. The result is a work whose powerful fusion of spiritualistic imagery, supported by atmospheric treatment and symbolic form, makes it a mystical masterpiece. *Beata Beatrix* therefore has a direct cultural and societal context in the specific aspect of Victorian spiritualism evinced by Swedenborgian-spiritualists, such as Dr. Wilkinson, the De Morgans and the Howitts, to which Rossetti was connected, and which included in its wider aspect, the Cowper-Temples of Broadlands who purchased this original version of the painting.

Part Three:
The House of Life

Chapter 5: *The House of Life*, 1

Part 1: *The House of Life* Sonnet Sequence

For here all the passionate and just delights of the body are declared – somewhat figuratively, it is true, but unmistakably – to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times.¹

These words from Rossetti in 1871, the year in which he completed *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), were written in defence of an early conception of *The House of Life* sonnet sequence, and identify Swedenborg's conjugal love as central to the presentation of romantic love in the work, in their insistence upon the spiritual connection that accompanies the sexual love described. As the title of an embryonic version of the work; 'Of Life, Love and Death: Sixteen Sonnets' indicates, two major themes of *The House of Life* are romantic love and the contemplation of death and the afterlife.² As with 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850) and *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), Rossetti draws upon the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism in order to present those themes, utilising particularly an interpretation of Swedenborg's conjugal love as the highest form of romantic love both on earth and after death.

The final, complete form of *The House of Life*, published in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), represents the culmination of Rossetti's achievement as a poet. Although the sonnets were written (and rewritten) over a number of years, the final form in which they appear represents Rossetti's most sophisticated engagement with the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism. The predominantly intellectual and literary interest shown by Rossetti in Swedenborgian-spiritualism, which manifests in the poem 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), and is sustained and deepened through direct experience of Victorian spiritualism – as illustrated in the painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) – is

¹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'The Stealthy School of Criticism' (*The Athenaeum*, 16 December 1871) in *CW*, pp. 329-335 (p. 330).

² This is the first embryonic version of *The House of Life* published in the *Fortnightly Review* (1869): 'Of Life, Love, and Death: Sixteen Sonnets'. The second stage of the work's development was published in *Poems* (1870). It comprised 50 sonnets and 11 lyrics, and was titled 'Sonnets and Songs towards a Work to Be Called *The House of Life*'. The final, complete sequence of 102 sonnets (including the unnumbered introductory 'proem-sonnet') was published as *The House of Life* in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881) (Lewis, p. 1).

elevated in service to a grander scheme of work for his sonnet sequence. In *The House of Life* (1881) the intellectual unites with the experiential and moves beyond both, furthering and developing the ideas and treatment found in the earlier two works.

In *The House of Life* Rossetti utilises Swedenborgian ideas in all aspects of his sonnet sequence; in the title, the structure, the subject and the imagery. This shows that Rossetti's particular adoption and interpretation of Swedenborg, as filtered through Swedenborgian-spiritualism, is central to the development of his poetic method, the importance of which must be readdressed in order to fully appreciate and understand the sonnets. The significance of Swedenborg for the project is indicated directly within the work itself as *The House of Life* contains the most explicit reference to Swedenborg of all Rossetti's works, in the 'True Woman' sonnets. 'True Woman III: Her Heaven' begins with a quotation from Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (1758): 'If to grow old in Heaven is to grow young'.³

This chapter is the first of two which discuss *The House of Life* and related works. This first chapter analyses a selection of *The House of Life* sonnets to illustrate the extent to which Swedenborgian imagery and ideas pervade the piece. *The House of Life* is considered primarily in its completed and final form, as it was published in *Ballads & Sonnets* (1881).⁴ In addition, the sonnet 'Nuptial Sleep', which was intended for inclusion but was finally omitted because of its controversial status, is discussed.⁵

³ This is an almost direct quotation from Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* 414 (HH, p. 307): 'In a word, to grow old in heaven is to grow young'. The 'True Woman' sonnets will be discussed in detail in the following chapter: *The House of Life*, 2.

⁴ Manuscript and variants of certain sonnets are consulted occasionally, in service to argument. In addition the sonnet 'Nuptial Sleep' which was published in *Poems* (1870) will be considered, but the primary emphasis in this study will be on the published version of 1881 and the form of the sonnets therein, rather than earlier, or embryonic versions such as those appearing in *Poems* (1870), or the 16 sonnets published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1869. Subsequent references to *The House of Life* (1881) in text are undated, unless pertinent to the discussion (thus also for 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850) and *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71)).

⁵ In choosing to reinstate 'Nuptial Sleep' for discussion alongside the 1881 edition of *The House of Life* published in *Ballads and Sonnets*, I am following a tradition that began with the Boston publisher Copeland and Day who included it in an 1894 edition of *The House of Life* (Lewis, p. 51). Despite withdrawing the sonnet from the 1881 *Ballads and Sonnets* edition, Rossetti let it remain in reprints of *Poems*. Following William Michael Rossetti's lead ('It was restored to HL by WMR in 1904 as VIb in his Illustrated Ed. Of DGR's poems (renumbered VIa in his 1911 Works)', Lewis, p. 51), the sonnet is now regularly placed as VIa in the sequence. For a detailed look at the printing history of the sonnet I refer to Lewis pp. 48-51, Fredeman, 'House of Life', p. 299, n.1 and 'Nuptial Sleep: Scholarly Commentary', *Rossetti Archive* [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/5-1869.raw.html>, accessed 31 August 2007].

The House of Life: Swedenborgian Raiment for the Soul

In the absence of a definitive statement from Rossetti concerning its significance, the meaning of the title 'The House of Life' remains a point for debate.⁶ Rossetti's intentions regarding the sequence however declare the symbolic function of the phrase and its attendant metaphysical associations:

I should wish to deal in poetry chiefly with personified emotions; and in carrying out my scheme of "The House of Life" [...] shall try to put in action a complete *dramatis personae* of the soul.⁷

Thus Rossetti's *House of Life* is a house of consciousness; a structure – akin to the body – in which the soul's experience is enacted or contained. It also alludes to the form of the work entire, which houses many rooms; the *stanzas* ('rooms' in Italian), being the individual sonnets, or verses, that make up the whole poem.

The nature of the phrase suggests its potential for symbolic associations and recalls Swedenborg's idea that the human form itself is analogous to a dwelling: 'Man may be compared to a house in which are numerous chambers, one of which leads into another'.⁸ That Rossetti alludes to Swedenborg in his choice of title is recognised by Walter Pater. In his 1883 essay on Rossetti, he suggests that the house of *The House of Life* is a dwelling place for the body, akin to the Swedenborgian relationship of the body to the soul:

The dwelling-place in which one finds oneself by chance or destiny, yet can partly fashion for oneself; never properly one's own at all [...] grown now to be a kind of raiment to one's body, as the body, according to Swedenborg, is but the raiment of the soul. (Pater, p. 214)

⁶ William Michael Rossetti's claim for a possible astrological source, although intriguing, appears unsupported, and a little arbitrary; it thus remains unsatisfactory:

I am not aware that any question has been raised as to the meaning of the title "The House of Life"; nor did I ever hear any explanation of it from my brother. He was fond of anything related to astrology [...] and I understand him to use the term "The House of Life" as a zodiacal adept uses the term "the house of Leo." As the sun is said to be "in the house of Leo," so [...] Rossetti indicates "Love, Change, and Fate," as being "in the House of Life"; or, in other words, a Human Life is ruled and pervaded by the triple influence of Love, Change, and Fate. (*The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 651)

⁷ *Correspondence IV*, p. 450, 70.110.

⁸ Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelsetia* (1749-56), vol. XII, 114, quoted in Hutchison, p. 7.

Here Pater is referring to Swedenborg's treatise on the soul and that which 'houses' it; *The Interaction of the Soul and Body* (1769) in which he wrote:

The body grows old like a garment, but not the soul; because this is a spiritual substance, which has nothing in common with the changes of nature, which advance from their beginnings to their ends, and are terminated at stated times.⁹

This idea of the body as a garment which houses the soul is also found in Dr. Wilkinson's 1849 biography of Swedenborg. In a section entitled 'Man and his Body-House' he makes reference to this concept in detail:

The soul [...] is the complete man; the body is his fit natural garment. The latter he puts on, by a divine necessity, to clothe the spiritual essence from the rudeness of this world, and to enable him to work amid its inclemencies, and to gather its fruits of wisdom, for a convenient season. In this case there are all the common motives for the union of the soul-man with the body-man, that there are for our union with our clothes, with our houses, and with every circumstance that we draw around us to extend our lives and build up our state.¹⁰

This shows the idea to have been established within Rossetti's Swedenborgian-spiritualist circle. Wilkinson's words represent a philosophical precedent for Rossetti's choice of the image and its attendant symbolic associations for the title of his poetic masterpiece; while Pater's early critical response reinforces the point.¹¹

The Swedenborgian significance of Rossetti's choice of title has been briefly recognised also in recent criticism by Hazel Hutchison, who argues that the actual phrase 'House of Life' is found in Swedenborg's visionary works: 'The house of the mind, sometimes tagged the House of Life, sometimes the Palace of Love, or the Temple of Wisdom, is a recurring image in Swedenborg's writing' (Hutchison, p. 6.). She recognises that Rossetti's appropriation of the image is useful for the aims of his project: 'Swedenborg's House of Life [...] becomes for [...] Rossetti a venue for personal

⁹ Swedenborg, *Interaction of the Soul and Body*, p. 21.

¹⁰ Wilkinson, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, pp. 183-4.

¹¹ Interestingly, in briefly returning to F.G. Stephens' 1891 spiritualistic reading of *Beata Beatrix*, one can see this same metaphor of the body-house emerge in relation to Beatrice: 'his Beatrice is in a rapture of approaching death, [...], having knowledge of the world to come ere her spirit quits its mortal house, so that while her features attest mortality, the fair mansion is not void of life' (p. 46). This further attests to his reading of the painting as a Swedenborgian-spiritualist work.

and artistic progression and mutation. Rooms and chambers come to represent states of mind.’ (p. 5). The metaphysical and psychological associations inherent in Swedenborg’s idea suit Rossetti’s purpose in creating a ‘dramatis personae of the soul’.¹² Thus, as with ‘The Blessed Damozel’ and *Beata Beatrix*, Rossetti intimates the Swedenborgian context which influenced his works with a significant choice of title. However, as befits the scale of the *The House of Life*, both in terms of its size and the ambition of its subject matter; its scope is grander. The ‘blessed’ reference to conjugal love found in the other two works is replaced with a more appropriately profound metaphysical metaphor.

Microcosm-Macrocosm: Swedenborgian Structure, Poetic Form

Walter Pater’s use of Swedenborgian imagery in his attempt to unravel meaning in *The House of Life* encourages an understanding of Rossetti’s sonnet sequence in those terms. However, he furthers the point and moves on to suggest that Swedenborgian theosophy may be a suitable critical filter through which one can view Rossetti’s entire oeuvre: ‘as the body, according to Swedenborg, is but the raiment of the soul – under that image, the whole of Rossetti’s work might count as a *House of Life*, of which he is but the “Interpreter”’ (p. 214). Pater therefore applies the Swedenborgian concept of ‘microcosm-macrocosm’ to Rossetti’s body of work as a whole, in which Rossetti’s sonnet sequence *The House of Life* is but a smaller expression of a larger form.

Pater’s words are apposite as the form of *The House of Life* itself reflects this idea. The completed *House of Life* contains 101 sonnets (not including the introductory sonnet) and is divided into two sections; Part 1: ‘Youth and Change’, and Part 2: ‘Change and Fate’. Part 1 contains 59 sonnets, and Part 2, 42.¹³ Developing William Fredeman’s observation that the structure of *The House of Life* as a whole echoes ‘the ratio of the octave to the sestet within the Petrarchan sonnet’; the whole work can be viewed formally as one giant sonnet, with each internal sonnet as a microcosm of that

¹² *Correspondence IV*, p. 450, 70.110.

¹³ Sixty with ‘Nuptial Sleep’ restored, as Fredeman has also acknowledged (‘House of Life’, p. 308).

template form.¹⁴ The structure of the piece therefore alludes to the Swedenborgian concept of microcosm-macrocosm, in which essential form is echoed throughout the body of a structure, from the whole down to its smallest constituent part; ‘much like a hologram or fractal’.¹⁵

Although each sonnet in the work is a complete entity in its own right, its presence within a unifying whole is central to Rossetti’s vision. His own words regarding his intentions for the work reinforce this point.¹⁶ In defence of criticism of an earlier, embryonic version of *The House of Life* published in *Poems* (1870), he suggests that in reading one constituent part, the whole should be ever in mind:

A sonnet entitled *Nuptial Sleep* is quoted and abused [...] and is there dwelt upon as a ‘whole poem’ [...] It is no more a whole poem, in reality, than is any single stanza of any poem throughout the book. The poem, written chiefly in sonnets, and of which this is one sonnet-stanza, is entitled *The House of Life* (CW, p. 330)

The concept of completeness is therefore a crucial part of Rossetti’s project.¹⁷ This is because the sonnets explore multiple aspects of the human experience brought together under the unifying form of personal consciousness; ‘a complete dramatis personae of the soul’. Indeed, when the sequence is viewed in its largest form, a thematic wholeness emerges when the very first word of the work is considered together with the last. The first word of the first sonnet is ‘I’ and the last word of the final sonnet is ‘alone’. These two words express the human condition; the essential loneliness of the individual. The sequence as a whole therefore can be read as an

¹⁴ Fredeman, ‘House of Life’, p. 308.

¹⁵ Gary Lachman, *Into the Interior: Discovering Swedenborg* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2006), p. 35.

¹⁶ This is one reason why the sequence as it was finalised for publication in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), together with ‘Nuptial Sleep’, is the version of *The House of Life* chosen for analysis in this thesis as it represents the complete form of the piece.

¹⁷ The concept of a unifying structure (formal and/or thematic) to *The House of Life* has been much debated. Most critics who engage with the sequence frequently begin their interpretations by debating the unity of the piece. See Fredeman ‘House of Life’, pp. 300–02; Kendall, p. 4; Greene, pp. 49–50. This thesis takes its cue from William E. Fredeman who identifies the structure of the whole as a sonnet form. As regards internal coherence, the sequence reflects the more interior angle that it claims to narrate. It does not contain in concrete narrative form the externals of a man’s life within his society, but tracks the internal adventures of the self as it seeks to understand its humanity and its individuality, employing symbolism, analogy and atmospheric mood. The conscious self, the ‘I’ is the unifying concept in *The House of Life*.

individual's experience of life, reflected through that individual's consciousness: the 'I alone'; the self; the soul.

As with *Beata Beatrix* a careful distinction should be made between biography and the importance of biographical experience in creating authenticity. Rossetti was careful to point out this distinction in a notebook entry regarding *The House of Life*: 'To the Reader of The House of Life. The "life" involved is neither my life nor your life, but life representative, as tripled with love and death.'¹⁸ By suggesting that the reader see the life in *The House of Life* as 'life representative', Rossetti is guiding a reading of his work away from the personal and toward the abstract, as his intention 'to deal in poetry chiefly with personified emotions' would support.¹⁹ This opens up the meaning of the piece to wider concerns about the nature of life and the individual's experience. In a letter to Alice Boyd from 1870, during a period of work towards the piece, Rossetti discussed the potential universality of the sonnets' themes: 'Surely there is nothing in any one of these subjects so limitedly personal as to present an obstacle to any reader who cares for writing that has an abstract side at all.'²⁰ The word abstract implies that a more metaphorical or metaphysical approach to the sonnets is preferable to a literal response. It is also consonant with the intended philosophical grandness of the piece; it should have personal authenticity, but universal applicability.

By invoking Swedenborgian theosophy through the form of the work, and in his choice of title, Rossetti signifies his spiritual and philosophical intentions for *The House of Life*. Swedenborg's investigations into the nature of the soul and the spiritual and material concerns of human love, life and death, provide a body of ideas and images for Rossetti that reflect the central concerns of his sonnet sequence.

Conjugal Love: A New Context for the Love Imagery in the House of Life **Sonnets**

As defined by Rossetti, one of the major themes of his sequence is love. This is a particularly recurrent theme in the first part of *The House of Life*, entitled 'Youth and Change'. As discussed previously, Swedenborg's concept of conjugal love is utilised by

¹⁸ *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. 638.

¹⁹ *Correspondence IV*, p. 450, 70.110.

²⁰ *Correspondence IV*, p. 413, 70.70.

Rossetti in his presentation of romantic love, particularly with regard to the idea of the reunion with the beloved after death, and the subsequent joining of a couple in heaven to form one being: 'For in heaven a couple are not called two, but one angel [...] they are no longer two, but one flesh' (CL 50, p. 55). Thus, in 'The Blessed Damozel', Swedenborg's words find their equivalent in Rossetti's Damozel as she anticipates that (re)union: 'We two will live at once, one life; / And peace shall be with us' (CW, p. 11, ll. 137-38). Similar imagery representing the total union of lovers recurs throughout *The House of Life* sonnets; however, the context for this union through conjugal love is transferred to an earthly setting. The love made on earth is shown as reflective and anticipatory of the ultimate joining of lovers in heaven.

The image of two lovers living 'one life' is introduced early in the sequence in the third sonnet 'Love's Testament': 'Upon his will, thy life with mine hast blent, / And murmured, "I am thine, thou'rt one with me!"'.²¹ These lines read like a poetic paraphrase of those attributed by Swedenborg to a conjugal couple in heaven, who express their love as follows: 'We are one. Her life is in me and mine is in her, so we are two bodies, but one soul' (CL 75.5, p. 76). This imagery of union, expressed as the blending of lives, or souls, is a repeated image throughout the love sonnets of *The House of Life*. Thus the lovers are 'two blent souls' in 'Youth's Antiphony' (p. 175, l. 14), and in 'The Love-Letter', the act of writing becomes a deeper communication: 'her soul sought / My soul, and from the sudden confluence caught / The words that made her love the loveliest' (p.173, ll.12-14). The image of blending is supported throughout the sequence with a number of significant words which embody a similar concept, of which 'commingled' (p. 204, l. 7), 'mutual' (p. 192, l. 8), 'consonancy' (p. 217, l. 8), 'mingles' (p. 195, l. 7) and 'interwove' (p. 194, l. 8) are but selected examples.

A similar philosophy of love is presented in 'Heart's Hope', in which the poetic voice declares the hope of the heart to be for the highest form of romantic love, expressed using imagery which alludes to conjugal love. The poetic voice desires an eternal state of blessedness in which complete union is achieved:

Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor

²¹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets* (London: Ellis and White, 1881), p. 165, ll. 7-8. All subsequent page and line references to *The House of Life* sonnets in text refer to this edition.

Thee from myself, neither our love from God (p. 167, ll. 6-8)

This is a state in which bodily pleasure *is* a spiritual experience; an idea expressed in the sonnet in distinctly Swedenborgian terms: ‘the uniting of their souls and minds is felt in their flesh, because the soul is not just the innermost part of the head, but of the whole body’ (CL 178.2, p. 179). In addition, the love desired elevates the couple to a divine state; this is the conjugal angel anticipated once again.

The theme of two beings becoming one through conjugal love is a repeated motif throughout *The House of Life*. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the sonnet ‘Severed Selves’, the octave of which repeats over and over again the image of two becoming one, stressing the idea of conjugal joining:

Two separate divided silences,
Which, brought together, would find loving voice;
Two glances which together would rejoice
In love, now lost like stars beyond dark trees;
Two hands apart whose touch alone gives ease;
Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame,
Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same;
Two souls, the shores wave-mocked of sundering seas (p. 202, ll. 1-8)

The lines read like poetical translations from one of Swedenborg’s conjugal angels: ‘so we are two bodies, but one soul’ (CL, p. 76). The title itself suggests that the lovers’ ideal state is oneness and that on the material plane they are forced into separate physical selves; their conjugal bond severed. The octave narrates the desire for the return to that state; the sestet brings it into focus, as the poetic voice laments the state of separation and longs for reunion, when the fires of love will literally be re-lit:

Such are we now. Ah! May our hope forecast
Indeed one hour again, when on this stream
Of darkened love once more the light shall gleam? (LI. 9-11)

This sonnet also contains a particular and oft-repeated image of joining, in which two bodies unite in a heart to heart embrace: ‘Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame, / Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same’ (ll. 6-7). In addition to connoting embrace, the word ‘clasp’ suggests a hinge, or a physical element that literally joins the couple. The image is one of chest touching chest; two lovers hinged

around the heart. The phrase 'Heart-shrined' formally echoes in microcosm the image presented in the two lines of poetry: it is hinged by the hyphen, joining two words into one. Similar images reappear throughout the sonnets; reinforcement through repetition of symbolic image being one of the major aspects of Rossetti's poetical method as regards the sequence. The lovers in 'Love and Hope', for example, 'Cling heart to heart' (p. 205, l. 9) in hope of their love transcending the mutable earthly life, and the lovers in 'The Kiss' are presented as similarly physically adhered: 'breast to breast we clung' (p. 168 l. 10). The imagery of bilateral symmetry inherent in these images of two beings whose postures echo, or mirror each other's is apparent through the language used: 'heart to heart'. The couple are shown to balance each other, just as the words which stand in for their physical selves are the same word, joined by the hinge word 'to', which expresses accurately their connection in its function as that which expresses what is reached, approached or touched.

The concentration upon the chest, breast, or heart area can be viewed as a further allusion to Swedenborg's conjugal love, which begins with a joining of souls and minds, and then moves into the physical body through the chest. It is the beginning of the merging of the lovers:

One love meets the other, makes itself known and instantly joins their souls, and thus their minds. From there it enters their chests, and after they are married spreads further, so becoming love in all its fullness, growing together day by day, until they are no longer two, but as if one person. (*CL* 44.6, p. 48)

At the close of Rossetti's love sonnet 'Silent Noon', the image of two bodies clasped, or hinged together around the heart leads into the last line which presents the image of two becoming one. Thus, the image of connection develops into one of union, in echo of the progression of conjugal love as described by Swedenborg:

Oh! Clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love. (p. 181, ll. 12-14)

This last line of 'Silent Noon', anticipates the first two of the later sonnet 'Separate Selves': 'Two separate divided silences, / Which, brought together, would find loving voice' (p. 202, ll. 1-2), in another example of image repetition in order to enhance

thematic unity across the sequence, which narrates a series of temporary connections which anticipate the ultimate one longed for after death.

‘Through Death to Love’: Anticipating the Swedenborgian Afterlife

Although the sequence’s setting is the earthly life, there are many instances throughout *The House of Life* in which the poetic voice contemplates death and anticipates the possibility of an afterlife, in which, as imagined in ‘The Blessed Damozel’ and implied in *Beata Beatrix*, reunion with the beloved is achieved. One of the most explicit anticipations of reunion in the afterlife occurs in the sonnet ‘Heart’s Compass’ when the poetic voice suggests that the love experience foreshadows the ultimate joining in heaven:

Sometimes thou seem’st not as thyself alone,
But as the meaning of all things that are;
A breathless wonder, shadowing forth afar
Some heavenly solstice hushed and halcyon (p. 189, ll. 1-4)

In ‘Love and Hope’, this theme is developed. The sonnet begins with the decay of the mortal, material world, ‘Full many a withered year / Whirled past us, eddying to its chill doomsday’ (p. 205, ll. 1-2). The analogy is seasonal, evoking autumnal images: ‘And clasped together where the blown leaves lay’ (l. 3). The circular imagery of ‘eddying’ and ‘whirled’ (l. 2) suggests the cyclical nature of the seasons, but also that which dominates the earthly life: the sense of time, mutability and death. The brief experience of earthly conjugal joining, appropriately likened to the birth of spring, becomes the moment of hope that offers consolation against earthly decay.²²

‘Yet lo! one hour at last, the Spring’s compeer
Flutes softly to us from some green byeway:
Those years, those tears are dead, but only they:-
Bless love and hope, true soul; for here we are (ll. 5-8)

²² The allusion to the ‘hour’ of love experienced as being the ‘Spring’s compeer’, can be read in terms of a Swedenborgian-spiritualist conception of the afterlife: in a Swedenborgian heaven everyone returns to the ‘springtime of life’ (*CL*, 115.5, p. 120). There is no earthly sense of time, or decay, in heaven; only a renewed happiness and a continual youthful vigour. Thus the hour of love described in the sonnet foreshadows this eternal blissful state.

The poetic voice then dares not to wonder if this could be eternal:

Cling heart to heart; nor of this hour demand
Whether in very truth, when we are dead,
Our hearts shall wake to know Love's golden head
Sole sunshine of the imperishable land (Ll. 9-12)

This is a return once again to the idea of heaven as a reunion of lovers. The depiction of love as the sunshine of heaven is consistent with a Swedenborgian heaven in which, as has been established hitherto in the thesis, God is the sun of the spiritual world and is the supreme embodiment of conjugal love. The uncertainty of tone in the sonnet is unsettling; it seems to articulate doubt as much as hope. However, the sonnet entire is framed by the first and last words 'Bless' and 'hope', reiterating the sentiment within the poem articulated by the twice repeated line 'Bless love and hope' (1, 8). Hope is blessed as it offers the promise of the continuation of love after death.

In 'Stillborn Love' a different situation is treated, but using similar imagery. As in 'Love and Hope' the earthly love is the 'hour' of love; it is finite and subject to time, which brings death. The love expressed in this sonnet is not consummated, or fully experienced on earth:

The hour which might have been yet might not be,
Which man's and woman's heart conceived and bore
Yet whereof life was barren (p. 217, ll. 1-3)

It bides its time, and, the poetic voice hopes, will be fully realised only after death:

But lo! what wedded souls now hand in hand
Together tread at last the immortal strand
With eyes where burning memory lights love home?
Lo! how the little outcast hour has turned
And leaped to them and in their faces yearned:-
"I am your child: O parents, ye have come!" (Ll. 9-14)

The couple become fully and truly united in the afterlife. This articulates the Swedenborgian idea that for some people they only find their true marriage partner after death and, if so, marriages are made for them.²³ That their love is likened to a child is a dramatic device used by Rossetti throughout the sonnets; the personification

²³ See *CL* 53-54, pp. 56-57.

of abstract states is a significant aspect of his poetics. However, the imagery is also consonant with a Swedenborgian reading. In heaven there are no natural, or actual, children made through the love between a couple, as there would be upon earth; instead the child of a conjugal couple is the embodiment, or effect, of their love: 'Marriages in the heavens do not lead to the procreation of offspring, but their place is taken by spiritual offspring, love and wisdom' (CL 52, p. 56).

That *The House of Life* is concerned with both the earthly life and the afterlife is suggested at the very beginning of the work in the opening lines of the proem sonnet, which establishes the sequence's concern with the immortality of the soul:

A sonnet is a moment's monument,-
Memorial from the soul's eternity
To one dead deathless hour (p. 162, ll. 1-3)

As with 'The Blessed Damozel' there is a Blakean shift in perspective between the intimate and small scale ('moment', 'hour') and the epic ('monument', 'eternity'). The sonnets represent fixed memorials to the soul's fleeting earthly experience, which make permanent, or immortal, that which is otherwise mutable and subject to change. This is expressed succinctly in the seemingly paradoxical phrase 'one dead deathless hour'.²⁴ That an hour can be both dead and deathless, both momentary and immortal, both finite and infinite, suggests that even within the earthly confines of time, a realm outside of those physical laws can be accessed. This is the realm of the soul; the essential man that outlives his body-garment. It is the 'Here and hereafter' (l. 5) referred to in the most explicitly Swedenborgian of Rossetti's sonnets 'True Woman III: Her Heaven' (p. 220).

This leads to discussion of the final sonnet of *The House of Life*, 'The One Hope', in which the poetic voice contemplates an afterlife, hoping for a peace and satiation not found on earth:

²⁴ Rossetti's poetical technique of the paradoxical phrase features elsewhere in *The House of Life*. In 'Love's Testament', for example, the phrase 'evermore present', has a typically Rossettian potentiality for several meanings. In addition to its connotations of giving, one associates 'present' with the concept of time. It has the fixed quality of immediate experience, whilst 'evermore' is associated with eternity and cannot be contained by the earthly concept of time. The phrase 'evermore present', therefore, evokes both the now and the eternity; the brief moment of total connection upon earth and the ultimate joining achieved in the afterlife.

Shall Peace be still a sunk stream long unmet,-
Or may the soul at once in a green plain
Stoop through the spray of some sweet life-fountain
And cull the dew-drenched flowering amulet? (p. 263, ll. 5-8)

The tone of the sonnet is characteristic of the second half of the sequence as a whole. It is philosophical and subdued; the Love and Hope from earlier sonnets become in this last poem 'vain desire' and 'vain regret' (l. 1). It is these, rather than the lovers that 'Go hand in hand to death' (l. 2). What earth has not made permanent, the poetic voice hopes will be found again in heaven:

Ah! When the wan soul in that golden air
Between the scripted petals softly blown
Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown,-
Ah! Let none other alien spell soe'er
But only the one Hope's one name be there,-
Not less nor more, but even that word alone. (ll. 9-14)

The 'One Hope' is for reunion with the beloved in heaven, as Rossetti himself confirms in a letter from 1870. The sonnet, he states, refers 'to the longing for accomplishment of individual desire after death'.²⁵ This is supported by William Michael Rossetti in a letter to his daughter Olivia Rossetti Agresti from 1906, regarding Romualdo Pantini's intended Italian translation of *The House of Life*. He categorically states that the intended meaning of these lines is the reunion after death with the beloved:

Pray take care that he does not blunder, as every one else seems determined to do, over the sonnet called *The One Hope*. G[abriel] here speaks of "the one hope's one name", which of course (and I presume you see it for yourself) means the name of the one *woman* whom he hopes to reunite with in eternity. And yet 2 or 3 foreign translators, and even Wm. Sharp (which would have seemed next to impossible) suppose G[abriel] to mean the mere emotion of hope – a condition of unending hopefulness! – which would be next door to nonsense.²⁶

The last few lines of 'The One Hope' are *the* last lines of *The House of Life*. They articulate the end of the soul's earthly journey as it looks forward in a leap of faith (or rather, hope) to the beginning of its eternal life: the moment when the 'I alone' moves

²⁵ *Correspondence IV*, p. 413, 70.70.

²⁶ William Michael Rossetti quoted in Lewis, p. 225.

beyond the separate self to reunite with the beloved to form one angel in heaven. If one looks closely at the last line of this final sonnet, this meaning resides within it: 'Not less nor more, but even that word alone'. The word 'alone', a singular word representing the self, and an odd number, must be made 'even'. No more, no less; but equated with: the last half of the last line therefore implies the other half that will balance, or complete the self through conjugal love.

Buchanan's Misunderstandings and Rossetti's Swedenborgian Defence

The language used in *The House of Life* sonnets which describe sexual love is often explicit, exemplified by lines such as these from 'Supreme Surrender':

First touched, the hand now warm around my neck
Taught memory long to mock desire: and lo!
Across my breast the abandoned hair doth flow,
Where one shorn tress long stirred the longing ache:
And next the heart that trembled for its sake
Lies the queen-heart in sovereign overthrow.²⁷

The sensuality of lines like these have led to accusations that Rossetti was obsessed solely with the depiction of the physical pleasures of sexual union in his sonnets. The infamous *Fleshly School of Poetry* printed in *The Contemporary Review* in 1871 is an initial and contemporary response in this vein. The essay was written in response to Rossetti's *Poems* (1870) in which a selection of sonnets destined for *The House of Life* project were published. The poet Robert Buchanan, under the pseudonym Thomas Maitland, accused Rossetti, along with poets William Morris and A. C. Swinburne, of an unwholesome degree of prurience: 'the fleshly gentlemen have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art.'²⁸ Buchanan suggested moral shortcomings that were dangerous to society's well being, calling the poets 'public offenders' and hinting at the physical corruption that could result from the perceived moral decay; 'they are

²⁷ *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), p. 169, ll. 9-14: note the breast to breast, heart to heart connection also repeated in this sonnet (ll. 13-14).

²⁸ Buchanan, Robert [pseudo. Thomas Maitland], 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti', *The Contemporary Review*, 18 (1871), 334-50 (p. 335) [<http://www.robertbuchanan.co.uk/>, first accessed 1 June 2009]

diligently spreading the seeds of disease broadcast wherever they are read and understood' (p. 336). Although he discusses 'The Blessed Damozel', 'Jenny', 'Eden Bower', 'Sister Helen' and other Rossetti poems, Buchanan saves his most vitriolic derision for the sonnets intended to become *The House of Life*. This sonnet 'Nuptial Sleep', which was originally intended for the sequence, is particularly singled out and consistently referred to throughout the review as embodying the most shockingly sexual expression.

'Nuptial Sleep' is indeed a highly sensual poem which describes the physical experience of love: 'At length their long kiss severed'.²⁹ However Rossetti denied the accusation that carnal love was the only dimension to the sonnet and felt fundamentally misunderstood; responding in a published riposte to Buchanan's assertions of animalism entitled *The Stealthy School of Criticism* (1871):

Thus much for *The House of Life*, of which the sonnet *Nuptial Sleep* is one stanza, embodying, for its small constituent share, a beauty of natural universal function, only to be reprobated in art if dwelt on (as I have shown that it is not here) to the exclusion of those other highest things of which it is the harmonious concomitant. (CW, p. 331)

Here, Rossetti's defence is twofold. Firstly, the reader is encouraged to bear in mind the importance of completeness to the project: the sonnet is but one part of a greater whole; only one room in *The House of Life*. Secondly, he is reminded that the sensual elements within the poems are contextualised by higher (spiritual) concerns.

It is clear that Buchanan in his criticisms has missed this crucial aspect; he has not grasped the fusion of the sexual and the spiritual in Rossetti's sonnet. His argument indicates a failure to recognise the Swedenborgian elements that Rossetti has drawn upon in order to convey his themes:

Here is a full-grown man, presumably intelligent and cultivated, putting on record for other full-grown men to read, the most secret mysteries of sexual connection, and that with so sickening a desire to reproduce the sensual mood, so careful a choice of epithet to convey mere animal sensations, that we merely shudder at the shameless nakedness. We are no purists in such matters. We hold the sensual part of our nature to be as holy as the spiritual or intellectual part, and we believe that such things must find their equivalent in all; but it is

²⁹ 'Nuptial Sleep', (Sonnet VIa), *CPP*, p. 130, l. 1.

neither poetic, nor manly, nor even human, to obtrude such things as the themes of whole poems.³⁰

In Buchanan's lines here, the distinction is made between the sensual and the spiritual. However, if Buchanan had understood Rossetti's particular use of Swedenborgian theosophy in the love sonnets, then he would have realised that in concentrating on sensual love, Rossetti is also describing a spiritual experience:

Now because the soul and mind are so closely attached to the flesh of the body as to be able to carry out and produce the effects they wish, it follows that the uniting of one's soul and mind with one's partner's is felt also in the body, as if they were one flesh. (*CL* 178.2, p. 179)

Thus, in Rossetti's portrayal of romantic love in the sonnets, as in these lines from Swedenborg, the soul's experience is intrinsically linked to that of the body, and the two are not separate parts, as Buchanan infers. To isolate the two and discuss only the spiritual dimension in his love poetry, Rossetti would be in effect telling half the story. Buchanan is doubly mistaken in his reading of Rossetti's sonnets. He misinterprets the authenticity of the intimate mood Rossetti creates as biographical:

In poems like *Nuptial Sleep*, the man who is too sensitive to exhibit his pictures, and so modest that it takes him years to make up his mind to publish his poems, parades his private sensations before a coarse public, and is gratified by their applause.³¹

He assumes that Rossetti recounts his own personal experience and feelings, failing to understand the abstraction, the 'life representative' and the philosophical thrust of the writing. It is psychological, not personal: concerned with the action of *a* psyche, not the poet's psyche laid bare.

In defence of his poetry against claims of fleshliness, Rossetti quoted in full the sonnet 'Love-Sweetness' as evidence of the spiritual dimension that accompanies his sensual poems.³² This is a confident choice as 'Love-Sweetness' is one of the most overtly sexual sonnets. The opening line sets the tone with an image that is particularly codified in a late nineteenth century context; the image of untied, loose, long hair:

³⁰ Robert Buchanan, 'Fleshly School of Poetry' (1871), p. 338.

³¹ Robert Buchanan, 'Fleshly School of Poetry' (1871), p. 339.

³² This sonnet remains unchanged in the final published version of the sequence.

'Sweet dimness of her loosened hair's downfall' (p. 183, l. 1). It is as if the poem begins with an image suggestive of the kind of explicitly sexual poetry that annoyed Buchanan, with words like 'loose' and 'downfall' which are evocative of the nineteenth century archetype of the fallen woman.³³

The language in the sonnet is highly sensuous and corporeal. Indeed; all the senses are evoked in the octave:

Sweet dimness of her loosened hair's downfall
About thy face; her sweet hands round thy head
In gracious fostering union garlanded;
Her tremulous smiles; her glances sweet recall
Of love; her murmuring sighs memorial;
Her mouth's culled sweetness by thy kisses shed
On cheeks and neck and eyelids, and so led
Back to her mouth which answers there for all:-³⁴

Taste is suggested through 'sweet' (l. 1, 2, 10), and through the repetition of 'mouth' (l. 6, 8), and 'kisses' (l. 6). The latter also conveys touch, as do 'her sweet hands round thy head' (l. 2). Sight is invoked: 'her glances' sweet recall' (l. 4); 'dimness' (l. 1); 'eyelids', and sound is present 'murmuring sighs' (l. 5). Scent is also suggested by the word 'sweet' and the flower imagery of the word 'garlanded' (l. 3). The sensuality is therefore overt.

³³ The nineteenth century archetype of the *fallen woman* was associated with specific imagery in art and literature that signalled her status. Long loose hair was one such symbol, suggesting sexual liberation, but also connoting intimacy of context and relationship, as in this sonnet. One is reminded of William Holman Hunt's painting *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) (Tate; reference number T02075) in which the kept woman's luxuriant hair is a distinctive feature, and also the image of the literally 'fallen' prostitute from Rossetti's *Found* (1854) (Delaware Art Museum, Bancroft collection). Both paintings suggest the possibility of redemption in different ways, through spiritual rebirth in the former and the faint hope for the reconciliation of true love in the latter, suggesting the purity that a spiritual dimension can bring to the body's experiences. Rossetti's *fallen woman* poem 'Jenny' was published alongside the sonnets intended for *The House of Life* in *Poems* (1870) and was also denounced as 'fleshly' by Buchanan, likewise contains the archetypal image of long untied hair. It is interesting to consider whether Buchanan's response to the sonnets as 'fleshly' was influenced by having read them alongside 'Jenny'. One wonders whether Buchanan would have had the same response had he read the sonnets in their complete context in the finalised 1881 sequence. This conjecture is not wholly speculative as Buchanan did later retract his earlier criticisms of Rossetti's poetry, going so far as to state: 'I make full admission of Rossetti's claims to the purest kind of literary renown; and, if I were to criticize his poems *now*, I would write very differently' (Buchanan quoted in *Family-Letters*, I, p. 301).

³⁴ 'Love-Sweetness', p. 183, ll. 1-8. This is the same as version in 1870 quoted by Rossetti in his riposte to Buchanan (CW, p. 330).

This is the language of natural, sexual love: 'tremulous smiles' (l. 4). However, the message conveyed in the sonnet is that the physical, sexual pleasures are empty ones if not matched with 'the swift beat/ And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing' (ll. 11-12). The sestet of 'Love-Sweetness' ennoble the sensuality described in the octave, by presenting the context for the bodily pleasures; a connection of souls:

What sweeter then these things, except the thing
In lacking which all these would lose their sweet:-
The confident heart's still fervour: the swift beat
And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing,
Then when it feels, in cloud-girt wayfaring,
The breath of kindred plumes against its feet? (ll. 9-14)

This elevates the love described to a status greater than mere physical sensation.

After quoting the sonnet in full in *The Stealthy School of Criticism* (1871), Rossetti wrote the following, which stands both as a defence against claims of fleshliness by Buchanan and as a manifesto for his intentions for the sequence as a whole:

Any reader may bring any artistic charge he pleases against the above sonnet; but one charge it would be impossible to maintain against the writer of the series in which it occurs and that is, the wish on his part to assert that the body is greater than the soul. For here all the passionate and just delights of the body are declared – somewhat figuratively, it is true, but unmistakably – to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times. (CW, p. 330)

Here Rossetti is defending his poems with what is essentially a Swedenborgian view of love: the physical love that Rossetti is alluding to in the sonnets is chaste sexual love, it is the joining of souls and bodies and hence is not animalistic, or grossly sensual.

The octave of 'Love-Sweetness' is literally chastened by the sestet and the whole sonnet becomes a symbolic presentation of conjugal love, which is 'chaste sexual love' (CL 55.2, p. 58). This pattern is embodied in microcosm within the sonnet, through Rossetti's careful and sophisticated use of the paradoxical phrase. As with the poem's sonnet's 'one dead deathless hour', this technique presents a striking juxtaposition of seemingly opposing words in order to express economically and powerfully a pertinent theme. The sonnet's most crucial line 'The confident heart's still fervour' (l. 11), which announces that which makes the love chaste, incorporates the

paradoxical phrase 'still fervour'. Fervour, a dynamic word embodying intensity; literally hot and glowing, is paired with 'still', which is by contrast a calm, steady and quiet word connoting cooler associations.³⁵ United, the words together imply the heights of passion and physical desire, but tempered with a sense of constancy. Fervour represents sexual love with all its associated fire, but is literally made 'chaste', or chastened by the word which precedes it: still. The whole phrase evokes chaste sexual love and represents, in microcosm, the theme of the sonnet as a whole, and reflects Rossetti's statement that the passionate 'delights of the body' are nothing if not in combination with the soul.

Rossetti's choice of 'Love-Sweetness' as a defence may also be due to its title and to the repetition of 'sweet' (and variants), a word which, amongst other potential interpretations, is an oft-repeated word throughout Swedenborg's *Conjugal Love*, which signifies the pleasures of truly conjugal love in heaven that the angels enjoy: 'Since it is the height of loveliness, we in heaven call it the sweetness of heaven' (55.3, p. 59). That the word 'sweet' signifies the aspiration towards the ultimate sweetness of conjugal love is supported by its use across the sequence as a whole.³⁶ In *Conjugal Love* (1768) Swedenborg speaks of the joys of truly conjugal love, which are felt in the body, mind and soul; the pleasures exceed mere sexual bodily enjoyment and are sacred: 'In these circumstances sexual love lasts, becoming chaste, yet sweeter than

³⁵ The word 'still' appears throughout the sonnet sequence like a thematic thread. It connotes calm and silence suggesting the spiritual peace achieved only momentarily on earth. However, the word's potential to express multifaceted meaning, is exploited by Rossetti. For example, the first sonnet, 'Love Enthroned' has 'Life, still wreathing flowers for death to wear' (p. 163, l. 8) and in 'Heart's Haven' (p. 184) the lover's face is showered with 'still tears' (l. 3). In 'The Lovers' Walk' (p. 174) they pass the 'Still glades' (l. 3), and in 'Winged Hours' (p. 187) every hour until the lovers meet is likened to a bird that flies from the soul whose song 'Still loudlier trilled through leaves more deeply stirr'd' (l. 4). All uses of *still* are exploited by Rossetti, but through repetition – another favoured poetic device – reassurance is conveyed: the calm of spiritual peace has the potentiality to continue (after death) in the sense of the word as it means 'even now, yet'. Thus, there is both continuity *and* pause. The layered use of symbolism, and the potentiality for multiple meanings that Rossetti uses in his painting *Beata Beatrix*, is also evident in his choice of words throughout his sonnet sequence; of which 'still' is just one example.

³⁶ The word 'sweet' is repeated throughout the sonnets, signalling the presence of conjugal love. For example in 'The Portrait' the beloved has 'sweet glances' and a 'sweet smile' (ll. 6-7, p. 172) and in 'The Love-Letter' the note is a 'Sweet fluttering sheet' (l. 5, p. 173). In 'Youth's Spring-Tribune' both the beloved's head and the bank on which it lays are 'sweet' (l. 1, p. 176); in 'Winged Hours' the love song of the metaphorical bird of time has a 'sweet strain' (l. 7, p. 187). Here Rossetti is using his technique of reinforcement through repetition to create mood and to establish one of the major subjects of the sequence; the highest form of romantic love which is both sexual and spiritual.

before to those who have truly conjugal love.’ (p.108). The pattern of love described in Rossetti’s sonnet follows this template.

In consideration of these elements it becomes clear why Rossetti chose this sonnet as an example with which to counter Buchanan’s criticisms of animalism.

Part 2: The Kiss in the *House of Life* Sonnets

In the pamphlet of 1872 entitled *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day*, Buchanan expanded upon his arguments in ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti’ (1871), reiterating his distaste following Rossetti’s own published defence. One feature of Rossetti’s poems that prompts a particularly hostile response from Buchanan is the nature and frequency of his kiss imagery. In a section responding to *The House of Life* sonnets he writes: ‘Mr. Rossetti is never so great as on “kisses”’.³⁷ Despite his derisory tone, Buchanan has identified ‘a central gestural motif in Rossetti’s poetry’.³⁸ The erotic or ‘love kiss’ is a key image in both Rossetti’s written and artistic work. It is a significant aspect in his representation of romantic love and is a prime example of the layered use of symbolism that characterises his work. It has personal intimacy which is suggestive of the natural man and actual human experience, but it is also an idealised symbol of love; a signifier of high romance.

The image of the kiss as a recurrent motif throughout *The House of Life* and in certain pictorial designs is central to Rossetti’s portrayal of the fusion of lovers which occurs through conjugal love.³⁹ It functions on several levels. It is literally a kiss, and the physical meeting point of two bodies (and can therefore be seen as the first stage of the fusion of body and soul associated with conjugal love). The kiss is also utilised as a metaphor for full sexual relations. As an image it therefore articulates joining and represents the coming together of two into one. This section addresses the significance of the kiss in the portrayal of conjugal love in *The House of Life* sonnets. It begins by tracing examples of the kiss in several sonnets and introducing related

³⁷ Buchanan, Robert, *The Fleshly School of Poetry and other Phenomena of the Day* (London: Strahan, 1872), p. 62 [<http://www.robertbuchanan.co.uk/>, first accessed 1 June 2009]

³⁸ Ernest Fontana, ‘Rossetti’s Representations of the Kiss’, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Studies*, 1.1; 2 (1988), 80-88 (p. 81).

³⁹ See Chapter 6: *The House of Life*, 2 for discussion of related pictorial images.

themes such as: two becoming one through sexual union; the figure of Love personified; the use of the musical metaphor and the significance of the eyes and mouth in the representation of conjugal love. It therefore establishes key points in anticipation of the subsequent sections which examine in more detail 'The Kiss', 'Nuptial Sleep' and the 'Willowwood' sonnets.

The image of the kiss is a key feature of 'Love-Sweetness', the sonnet quoted in full by Rossetti in *The Stealthy School of Criticism* (1871) as an illustrative defence against charges of animalism. As discussed previously, the sonnet's octave employs a characteristic directness of tone and ends upon an image of a sexual kiss:

Her mouth's culled sweetness by thy kisses shed
On cheeks and neck and eyelids, and so led
Back to her mouth which answers there for all (p. 183, ll. 6-8)

In these lines the kiss image functions on several levels. It is an actual erotic kiss described and represents an experience of greater significance. As the feature of the culminating line of an octave that clearly describes sexual love ('her sweet hands round thy head [...] Her tremulous smiles [...] her murmuring sighs' (ll. 2-5)), the kiss becomes a metaphor for the full act of love. There is also a deeper significance suggested, as the kiss conveys more than just a physical sensation; it 'answers there for all'. This anticipates the sestet which narrates the soul connection that characterises the conjugal union described. Thus the sonnet turns on this image; the kiss embodies as a symbol the union of sexual and spiritual love, and the connection between the lovers. The kiss as a motif which symbolises the conveyance of a deeper truth, recurs in 'Secret Parting', as the octave ends on a similar moment of profound love connection in which the physical kiss is infused with a spiritual dimension: 'And as she kissed, her mouth became her soul' (p. 207, l. 8).

Rossetti's use of the kiss image has been seen as a development of a Renaissance literary allegory, in which it represents the union of the human soul with God.⁴⁰ Rossetti's kiss however, although signifying a profound spiritual experience, is grounded firmly in the context of romantic sexual love between man and woman:

⁴⁰ See Drew, pp. 88-94; Fontana, pp. 80-88.

Rossetti revives the kiss as significant gesture, but instead of employing it as an emblem of the loving union of human and Divine, the union of the human soul with God, he emphasizes it as the climactic gesture in the lovers' narrative, their spirits thus achieving temporary union.⁴¹

As has been established, in order to present this union, Rossetti draws upon elements of Swedenborg's concept of conjugal love. His utilisation of the kiss emblem allows Rossetti to convey the fusion of sexual and spiritual love which conjugal love embodies.

The kiss as both an intimate physical act of love, and as a conveyor of spiritual truth, is an idea found in Swedenborg's writing, suggesting a progenitor for its appearance as conjugal love motif in Rossetti's work. In *Conjugal Love* (1768) Swedenborg recounts a conversation he has during a vision with the wives of conjugal love in heaven. Swedenborg learns of the purity of conjugal love and wishes to convey this to those on the earthly plane. The wives encourage Swedenborg to spread the truth, but at the same time acknowledge that this kind of knowledge cannot always be conveyed and understood through logical persuasion, but through a more profound source: the spiritual wisdom that is gained directly through the personal experience of a conjugal partnership. As one of the wives expresses, the kiss is a more effective form of communication than speech: 'So reveal this if you like, yet husbands will still not hang on your lips, but on those of the wives whom they kiss' (*CL*, 208.5, p. 209). The husbands will listen to their wives because from their lips they have received the wisdom of conjugal love through the kiss, which symbolises the physical and spiritual bond between man and wife in a conjugal partnership.

Rossetti develops this idea in *The House of Life*, presenting the kiss as a direct form of communication between two bodies and souls, which conveys a fundamental truth purer and more direct than words. Thus, in many of the sonnets, the kiss supersedes the lovers' initial connection of mind and intellect, symbolised frequently in the sonnets by looks and speech. Thus, the sonnet 'Youth's Antiphony' begins with an exchange of loving words and communication through speech, which can be seen as representative of a mental connection between the lovers. Through the interchange of conversation the sense of flowering excitement and sexual arousal emerges: the growing anticipation of becoming one through sexual contact. The verbal interchange

⁴¹ Fontana, p. 81.

preludes the physical interchange of sexual love: “My love grows hourly, sweet.” “Mine too doth grow, / Yet love seemed full so many hours ago!” (p. 175, ll. 6-7). Love seems inexhaustible here, as if the lovers touch the infinite through their love connection. What begins as a meeting of minds, progresses to the physical by the end of the octave; ‘Thus lovers speak, till kisses claim their turn’ (l. 8). The kiss claims its turn once the interior connection is established. Following a pattern employed by Rossetti in other sonnets, such as ‘Love-Sweetness’, the sonnet’s sestet qualifies with a philosophical tone that this love is exalted in nature: ‘Ah! Happy they to whom such words as these / In youth have served for speech the whole day long’ (ll. 9-10). It is a love which surpasses other worldly noble pursuits (‘Work, contest, fame’ l. 12) because it invokes that which is eternal; the soul. By the end of the poem a truly conjugal union is described: ‘What while Love breathed in sighs and silences / Through two blent souls one rapturous undersong’ (ll. 13-14).

The choice of ‘undersong’ (a chorus, refrain, or accompanying strain) signifies, through its musical associations, harmony and rhythm, thereby reinforcing the oneness that is achieved by the lovers through their conjugal joining. The title of this sonnet; ‘Youth’s Antiphony’, has set this musical metaphor in place. An antiphon is a hymn or psalm (a suitably spiritual choice of song form) sung by two people (or choirs) in alternation. One begins and then the other responds, in an analogy with the act of love. In the octave lines 2, 3 4 and 6 are physically split into the two halves of the lovers’ speech in formal echo of antiphony (the sonnet’s division into two parts can also be seen as a kind of antiphony, making the musical metaphor even more pertinent). By the sestet the separate halves become united formally as two voices give way to one poetic voice, and the sense of immediacy in the octave moves into one of wistful pondering in the sestet. The sonnet’s resolution narrates the moment of union achieved. The ‘one rapturous undersong’ that flows through the souls in union is the breath of love/Love. It is as if the lovers sing in antiphony accompanied throughout by the uniting musical strain of love – the undersong. The antiphony moves to monophony as the souls blend in the last line and all ‘sing’ the same tune; that of the undersong, which is love. The tune is ‘rapturous’ signifying the lovers are rapt, or seized in spirit, and taken momentarily to heaven. It is the ecstatic state of conjugal

love described once more.⁴² Love breathes in *both sighs and silences*. Both words are auditory, suggesting sound and absence of it, and further the musical language used. Both can also be sexual, suggesting the love described has two aspects; that associated with 'sighs' and those associated with 'silences'. The 'sighs' suggest the physical and material experiences of the body; whereas 'silences' connotes interiority, and is consequently suggestive of the hushed reverence and contemplation associated with spiritual experience. Together they allude to both the physical and spiritual aspects of the sexual experience described which exist concurrently in Rossetti's portrayal of idealised love in the sonnets. This can also be read as a reflection of Swedenborg's natural and spiritual man. The presence of a spiritual dimension to the love described is reinforced by the phrase 'remote from the world's throng' (l. 11) which suggests, not only privacy, but that the love transcends the worldly. The double meaning of the word *undersong* – which can also suggest a subordinate or underlying meaning – is chosen with typical care by Rossetti. It once again encourages a symbolical method of reading, which acknowledges the layering within his work. As signalled through the use of capitalisation, the 'Love' between the lovers is a personification of their union.

The personification of Love in this sonnet is a device used by Rossetti throughout *The House of Life*.⁴³ It is a technique also used by Dante in the *Vita Nuova* which Rossetti had translated, along with selected poetry from Dante's contemporaries, in *The Early Italian Poets* (1861). The personification of Love by Rossetti has been seen predominantly as homage to Dante: '*The House of Life* borrows not only the general idea from the Italian but also specific details, such as the appearance of the figure of Love himself'.⁴⁴ It is an obvious first point of reference, but Rossetti's Love personified is not Dante's and represents a synthesis of influences; neither is it the only personification present in *The House of Life*. Love is one of many

⁴² 'Rapt' and its variant form, *rapturous*, is a Rossettian word associated with his version of Swedenborg's conjugal love. It conveys the idea of ultimate bliss achieved through conjugal love (either in heavenly reunion), or on earth, in which context it also signifies the temporary conveyance of the soul to that state in anticipation of the future afterlife. Rossetti describes *Beata Beatrix* as 'suddenly rapt from earth to heaven' and in a textual variant of 'The Blessed Damozel' from 1876, the angels in heaven have 'rapturous new names' (see Conclusion for further discussion of the different versions of 'The Blessed Damozel').

⁴³ The image of Love personified also appears in various artworks, including the different versions of *Beata Beatrix* and *Dante's Dream* (1856, 1871). See Chapter 6: *The House of Life*, 2 for further discussion of the personification of Love.

⁴⁴ Rees, p. 128.

personified states throughout the sonnets, and, together with Hope and Truth, is introduced in the first sonnet of the sequence. In this first sonnet Rossetti 'introduces what will be in effect a cast of characters for the series'.⁴⁵ The sonnet, entitled 'Love Enthroned', sets out the importance of love within the sequence as a whole. Love is set above the cast of personifications that also include Life and Death, showing its supreme power to transgress the temporal limits of both:

Love's throne was not with these; but far above
All passionate wind of welcome and farewell
He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of (p. 163, ll. 9-11)

There is something timeless, permanent about Love in the sonnet; it exists in a place untouched by winds of change. Once again there is the equation of Love/love with something beyond the earthly concerns of mutability; it lives in 'breathless bowers', away from the physical world. This is clearly a reference to love outlasting life and surviving death. Taken together with the final sonnet 'The One Hope', in which the hope is for reunion in the afterlife with the beloved, this first sonnet anticipates this state in the figure of Hope, which, although below Love, has its 'eyes up-cast' (l. 2) towards it. Rossetti's Love personified therefore, as in the painting *Beata Beatrix*, can be seen as an embodiment of the conjugal angel; a representation of conjugal love, which is an expression of the divine qualities in microcosm.

This technique of personification alerts the reader to the symbolic aspects of the sequence, as it moves the work to a metaphorical level above the directly personal. It reminds the reader that Rossetti is portraying 'life representative', and that his intention 'to deal in poetry chiefly with personified emotions' has been realised. Personified Love in 'Youth's Antiphony' is particularly made earthly as it 'breathes'. This is clearly an example of what Pater referred to as Rossetti's 'grotesque materialising of abstractions' (p. 209). It is this concreteness, the material manifestation of love into a bodied image, which reinforces the fleshly aspects of Rossetti's work. From this perspective it would seem that Rossetti does promote the material over the spiritual. However, it is done within the context of a structure which emphasises interiority, that of the poetic voice's consciousness. Therefore, despite the 'vividness [...] of his personifications', it is clear that Rossetti is dealing with 'the

⁴⁵ Greene, p. 50.

symbolic and dramatic relationship between internal qualities'.⁴⁶ In addition to the figure of 'Love', the sequence contains many references to 'love' in its abstract and esoteric form as a quality or feeling. Thus both the concrete and the abstract co-exist in the sequence.⁴⁷ This is akin to the duality of the material (body) and the spiritual (soul) that exists in the representation of love in the sonnets, which itself is an acknowledgement of the two realms in Swedenborg's writings.⁴⁸

Love personified also appears in the sonnet 'Lovesight'. It is one of several personifications throughout the sonnet, all signalled by capitalisation and all embodiments of the key themes of the sequence; 'Love' (l. 4), 'Life' (l. 12) and 'Death' (l. 14). This develops the idea of Love as a deity figure which is introduced at the beginning of the sequence in sonnet I 'Love Enthroned', and is repeated also in sonnets II and III which precede 'Lovesight' (sonnet IV). In 'Lovesight' the presence of Love as a deity is signalled by the use of recognisably religious imagery, in which romantic love is equated with Christian ritual. This both 'morally and sacramentally' sanctions the presence of the sexual love described, and reminds the reader of the sacredness of the experience which brings the lovers closer to God.⁴⁹ Through the experience of conjugal love, the beloved becomes a conduit for an experience of the divine and her face becomes an altar – a place of worship, with all the connotations of sacrifice and offering:

When do I see thee most, beloved one?
When in the light the spirits of mine eyes
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
The worship of that Love through thee made known? (p. 166, ll. 1-4)

The religious imagery in 'Lovesight' is a continuation of the religious theme of the previous sonnet in the sequence, 'Love's Testament', the last lines of which lead thematically into 'Lovesight' with the imagery of true sight, which sees beyond the

⁴⁶ Pater, p. 208; Greene, p. 51.

⁴⁷ This is also the case in Rossetti's use of 'lady' and 'Lady', throughout the sequence; suggesting both the earthly lover and her exalted heavenly counterpart.

⁴⁸ See Swedenborg, *Interaction of Soul and Body*, p. 5: 'It has thus been made evident to me that there are two worlds, distinct from each other; one, in which all things are spiritual, whence it is called the spiritual world; and the other, in which all things are natural, whence it is called the natural world: and also that spirits and angels live in their own world, and men in theirs'.

⁴⁹ Holmes, p. 27.

physical and into the essential body of the person, the soul: 'And there dost work deliverance, as thine eyes / Draw up my prisoned spirit to thy soul' (p. 165, ll.13-14). The soul is imprisoned by the individual body; released only when the couple are joined and the expression of fullness is accessible and achieved. In 'Lovesight' the poetic voice goes on to ponder whether he *sees* his love more truly through his worshipping gaze, or when he truly knows her through conjugal love:

Or when in the dusk hours, (we two alone,
Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies
Thy twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,
And my soul only sees thy soul its own? (Ll. 5-8)

As in 'Love-Sweetness', and other sonnets, the peak of love, or achievement of spiritual and physical connection, occurs at the end of the octave when the 'Close-kissed' lovers achieve a true connection of souls. The kiss functions again as a metaphor: the hyphenated 'Close-kissed' works together with 'lies' and 'we two alone' to suggest sexual intimacy. The hyphenated word is chosen with care; it is a conjoined word, symbolising in its very form, the conjugal love described.⁵⁰ The 'lovesight' is deeper than the physical organ of sight. This sight sees into the eternal, beyond the enjoyment of physical form (he cannot see her face, it is 'twilight-hidden') and into the world of spirit. Here the distinction between the couple is blurred as they achieve oneness through conjugal love: the soul recognises itself in the other, they are the same. 'Lovesight' is not just seeing, therefore, it is re-cognition. It is seeing the beloved through knowing her intimately.

Both ways in which the lover perceives his beloved are mystical; both also have Swedenborgian overtones. The phrase 'the spirits of mine eyes' (l. 2), is reminiscent of the true sight that Swedenborg claims accompanies a conjugal love partnership. He recounts what the wives of conjugal partnerships told him regarding that love: 'Consequently you gaze at your husbands continually from morning to evening with the eyes of your spirits, trying to deflect and guide their minds towards being wise' (CL 294.2, p. 282). In 'Lovesight' Rossetti turns this around ('spirits of mine eyes') and

⁵⁰ Hyphenated, or conjoined words are a poetical feature repeated throughout *The House of Life* sonnets; there are only 17 sonnets out of the total 101 (not including 'Nuptial Sleep'), which do not contain at least one. Their presence formally reinforces one of the central themes of the sequence; connection through conjugal love. In this sonnet alone, there are three such conjoined words: 'Close-kissed' (l. 6), 'twilight-hidden' (l.7) and 'ground-whirl' (l.13).

narrates this from the male point of view. In a conjugal love relationship the lovers literally only have eyes for each other: 'The wife sees nothing she loves more than her husband, and the husband nothing more than his wife' (213, p. 213). As the sestet moves toward conclusion the poetic voice panics and forgets the eternal bond it has achieved through love. It fears death and physical parting:

O love, my love! if I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,-
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death's imperishable wing? (LI. 9-14)

The language returns to the earthly and the physical with the seasonal sense of decay, 'ground-whirl of the perished leaves' and darkness, descent; 'Life's darkening slope'. It is the mingling of moments of epiphany and spiritual certainty with such moments of doubt and earthly mutability that create the characteristic poignant mood that pervades much of *The House of Life*.

Similar imagery also appears in Sonnet X, 'The Portrait', which is often suggested as the poetic equivalent of the painting *Beata Beatrix*. As in 'Lovesight' (and indeed *Beata Beatrix*), the beloved's eyes and mouth are lingered upon, almost as a fetish, as if the beloved's face (and the portrait painted of her) was an object of devotion worshipped for its own sake. This raises the tension again between the poetic voice's sensual enjoyment of form and the atmosphere of 'visionary power' suggested by the mystical furniture of words like 'shrine' and 'foresee'. The 'shadowed' eyes in 'The Portrait' see with the visionary nature of inner sight, as the true sight experienced by the poetic voice in 'Lovesight' is awakened in the 'dusk hours':

The mouth's mould testifies of voice and kiss,
The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.
Her face is made her shrine.⁵¹

⁵¹ *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 172, ll. 10-12. The imagery used by Rossetti here is double edged. The language evokes the language of creation with words such as 'mould', suggesting 'to form' and also 'remember', which can be read as 're-member' or re-form, and suggests what the painter is actually doing in the act of immortalising his beloved. The imagery also reflects Rossetti's preoccupation with death and immersion in spiritualism. The 'shadowed eyes remember' suggests the indistinct form of a spirit and ghost forming in front of the beloved; she reforms. The mouth's 'mould' sounds like organic mould, in an image of death and decay.

The poetic voice in 'The Portrait' also wishes to see and know his beloved in both a physical and spiritual way. He seeks to 'show [...] her inner self' (ll. 3-4) and 'know / The very sky and sea-line of her soul' (ll. 7-8). Here the eyes are seen as signifying the intellectual activity of mind: 'remember and foresee', and the mouth the sensual: 'voice and kiss', as once again aspects representing the spiritual and the physical sides of a full love connection are evoked alongside each other.

The eyes and the mouth appear elsewhere throughout the love sonnets in recognition of this duality within conjugal love. For example, in 'Equal Troth': 'thine eyes and lips' (p. 194, l. 9), and 'Life in Love': 'Not in thy body is thy life at all / But in this lady's lips [...] and eyes' (p. 198, ll. 1-2). In the second sonnet 'Bridal Birth', which uses the metaphor of birth in the octave to describe the realisation of conjugal love, both vision; 'gaze' (p. 164, l. 3) and the sensuality represented by the mouth ('voice', l. 7) are seen as necessary components in the development of love. Rossetti's preoccupation with the eyes and mouth in this sonnet has been seen, once again, as homage to Dante: 'This Dantean phrase draws attention to the eyes and lips of the beloved which, as the pathways of joy, are the organs through which love is revealed'.⁵² Indeed, it is an acknowledged pattern in Dante that love 'begins with sight and proceeds to the verbal greeting', and that Rossetti's concentration upon the eyes and voice appear to echo this, encouraging a critical response in this vein.⁵³ However, Dante (specifically the *Vita Nuova* and the relationship between Dante and Beatrice) provides an unsatisfactory template for the kind of love described in the sonnets. There is no love kiss between Dante and Beatrice, no overt erotic element. Hence critics have been troubled by what is often seen as a simultaneous evocation of and departure from this aspect of Dante: unable to account for the conflation of what Joan Rees has described as the 'polar opposites of [...] mystic vision and sensual appetite' in his work (p. 139). The separation of platonic and physical love in Dante is not evident in Rossetti, who is clearly expressing the Swedenborgian notion of the sacredness of

It is interesting to note that the sonnet was probably written c.1868 (see *CW*, p. 495) a year before Rossetti had the manuscript poems retrieved from the grave of Lizzie Siddal – a period also in which he was working on *Beata Beatrix* (c.1864-71) and was attending séances.

⁵² Drew, p. 39.

⁵³ D. M. R. Bentley, "'La Bocca Mi Bacio': The Love Kiss in the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti", *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 16 (2007), 31-44 (p. 32).

sexual love. There is no doubt that Dante provides an artistic template for Rossetti, but to see his work only in those terms is to narrow it and deny the complexity of sources that provide inspiration for Rossetti's work. Rossetti draws upon Swedenborgian imagery in order to qualify and further Dante, in order to present a love more suitable to the modern sensibility of his fellow late Victorians.

By using the eyes to represent a soul-mind connection and the mouth to represent a bodily one, Rossetti is signalling to the reader that the love is both sexual *and* spiritual. The two also represent the facets which form conjugal love: Love and Wisdom. In Swedenborgian theosophy, 'the male is by birth a creature of the intellect' and the female is a creature of will, whose desire is to unite herself with that intellectual wisdom in the male, through 'the love of that wisdom'. Truly conjugal love between wife (representative of *love*) and husband (representative of *wisdom*) unites these qualities of body and mind:

When love approaches wisdom or joins itself to it, it becomes real love; and when wisdom in turn approaches love and joins to it, it becomes real wisdom. Truly conjugal love is nothing else but the linking of love and wisdom. A married couple between whom or in whom that love is together shared are models and a visible form of it.⁵⁴

Divine love is symbolised by fire for Swedenborg, and divine wisdom by light; the two qualities are given by the sun, which symbolises the eminence of God, who embodies both qualities.⁵⁵ Eyes, representing the faculty by which light (wisdom) is perceived, therefore feature alongside the mouth (which feels the heat of human touch and passion and through the kiss – or sexual contact – receives love). The couple achieve wholeness through their union, and Rossetti's sonnets concerning love articulate this.

Sometimes the physical kiss in the sonnets follows the intellectual faculties, seeming to trump them, and embodying in itself the achievement of love: 'Thus lovers speak, till kisses claim their turn' ('Youth's Antiphony', p. 175, l. 8). However, the physical does not take precedence; it is the completing factor which seals the union. This progression also appears in 'Love's Lovers' in which Love personified kneels in a familiar position of worship: 'all-anhungered of / Thine eyes' (p. 170, l. 12); yet, it is

⁵⁴ *CL* 32-33, p. 37; 65, p. 69.

⁵⁵ See Swedenborg, *Interaction of the Soul and Body*, p. 8: 'God, who is love itself: hence the sun of the spiritual world'; p. 10-11: 'Divine Love is expressed by fire [...] Moreover, everyone knows that spiritual heat is love and spiritual light is wisdom'.

the mouth that signifies the divine and infinite nature of love: 'Seals with thy mouth his immortality' (l. 14). As in other sonnets, the eyes can predict, or foresee, but cannot experience. The physical is the final step in the act of love which completes the soul connection. The souls completely unite when the physical and spiritual combine and an eternal connection is formed. The love of mind and soul is first invoked and then literally 'sealed with a kiss'; in a manner which appears to paraphrase Swedenborg's words: 'Truly conjugal love is [...] a love of the spirit leading to love of the body' (CL 44.5, p. 47).

The Sonnet 'The Kiss'

Sonnet VI, 'The Kiss', expresses the idea of the kiss as the prelude to, and symbol of, full joining, both sexually and spiritually. The octave concentrates upon the kiss and on the moment of physical love ennobled. It takes the lovers temporarily out of the material world in which decay and death inevitably follow, and into the realm of the soul:

What smouldering senses in death's sick delay
Or seizure of malign vicissitude
Can rob this body of honour or denude
This soul of wedding-raiment worn to-day?
For lo! even now my lady's lips did play
With these my lips such consonant interlude (p. 168, ll. 1-6)

In these lines the Swedenborgian idea of the body as raiment for the soul emerges, but within the context of romantic love; it is thus a 'wedding-raiment'. The inclusion of the word 'denude' suggests the body in its naked state; the true wedding garment. That the sonnet describes conjugal love is suggested by this phrase which defines the chaste context for the sexual love. This is reinforced by 'body of honour', which, in addition to conveying dignity, respect and chastity, evokes the traditional wedding vow 'With my body I honour you'. This clarifies further the chaste context in which the love kiss is exchanged, by reference to Christian ritual. In addition, as a conjoined word, the phrase 'wedding-raiment', suggests through its form the joining together of two into one. The language used also recalls Swedenborg words: 'For when two minds are

joined in wedlock, these thoughts spiritually kiss each other, and there breathe into their bodies their strength or potency' (CL 112, p. 117).

The kiss which symbolises the complete joining of the lovers is invested with a power that even Orpheus with his poetry and entrancing music would envy:⁵⁶

For lo! even now my lady's lips did play
With these my lips such consonant interlude
As laurelled Orpheus longed for when he wooed
The half-drawn hungering face with that last lay (Ll. 5-8)

Described as a 'consonant interlude', the kiss has a deeper resonance than merely the literal, physical act. 'Consonant', from the Latin *con-sonare*, means to 'sound together'. It therefore ties in with the musical associations of 'play', 'lay' (a short lyric or poem meant to be sung, which also references the courtly love tradition) and the lyre playing of Orpheus. In its suggestion of harmony, 'consonant' also reinforces the imagery of joining already established with 'wedding-raiment' (harmony itself means to join together: greek *harmonia*, meaning joining or concord, from *harmos*: 'joint'). The etymology of 'conjugal' means to come together: to join, showing the word to be an appropriate choice with which to symbolise conjugal love. The words and their potential associations are chosen with care by Rossetti, the layering of meaning possible in many of the words and phrases demand an equally considered reading. This is made evident when one discovers that the phrase '*consonant* interlude' (l. 6), which appears in this final published version of the sonnet, replaces the '*jubilant* interlude' of earlier manuscript versions, showing an evolution towards a more Swedenborgian use

⁵⁶ Orpheus is a fitting mythological character to invoke in *The House of Life* sonnets. Orpheus, the son of Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, is associated with both poetry and music. He traditionally carries a lyre, symbolic of song and verse, and in this respect links to the figure depicted in a design Rossetti executed in 1880 to illustrate the sequence's proem sonnet (see Chapter 6: *The House of Life*, 2 for further discussion of this design and Fig. 14, p. 282 for an image). Orpheus has mystical connotations which are relevant here: he is sometimes portrayed as an augur, or seer, a suitable association in light of the Swedenborgian influence. Love and death are central to his mythical story, and his pursuit of Eurydice into the underworld has direct resonance with Rossetti's adventures into spiritualism after the death of his wife, and with the theme of the dead beloved in his work. Rossetti's choice of Orpheus as a point of reference locates his sonnet within the wider aesthetic of symbolist art of the period (in which can also be located his painting *Beata Beatrix*, c.1863-71). Orpheus was a favourite subject of painters in this period such as Gustave Moreau (*Orphée*, 1865; Musée D'Orsay) and G.F. Watts (*Orpheus and Eurydice*, c.1872-7; Watts Gallery), who painted Rossetti's portrait in 1871 (National Portrait Gallery; number PG 1011), as well as a series of works called *The House of Life* (*Age of Rossetti*, pp. 167-68).

of language: 'consonant' being a more suitable word to express the unity and harmony of conjugal love.⁵⁷ Another characteristic of Rossetti's poetic method is the duality present in particular words, illustrated in this sonnet by 'lay', meaning a song, but also implying the sexual connotation 'to lie with'. 'Interlude' likewise has dual connotations. As a musical term it has a relationship to the other musical imagery in the sonnet. As Latin for 'play' *ludus*, has both musical and sexual associations; the interlude can be read as the interplay between the two lovers. Interlude can also mean a pause, or break between. Thus, the phrase 'consonant interlude' describes a harmonious concordance or joining that reaches beyond even Orpheus's powers. At this moment of connection there exists a pause in which the material plane is left behind and the divine is temporarily accessed. This is the moment of epiphany in which conjugal love is experienced, the rapt *Beata Beatrix* returning once again, embodied in and symbolised by the kiss.

The portrayal of love as analogous to harmonious music is a recurrent theme in the sonnets. In addition to 'The Kiss' and its Orphic metaphor, there are many sonnets in which the idea of music as symbolic of love is evoked, including 'A Day of Love'; 'sweet confederate music' (p. 178, l. 8) and 'Heart's Compass'; 'Whose unstirred lips are music's visible tone' (p. 189, l. 5). The aforementioned 'Youth's Antiphony' is an example of the fusion of the musical metaphor with the image of two becoming one, in order to present harmonious union: 'Through two blent souls one rapturous undersong' (p. 175, l. 14). Rossetti's poetic technique of reinforcement through repetition emerges with this image, which reappears in similar forms, as the last line also of two other sonnets: in 'Silent Noon' it becomes 'When twofold silence was the song of love' (p. 181, l. 14), and in 'Heart's Haven'; 'Our answering spirits chime one roundelay' (p. 184, l. 14).

Rossetti appears to have drawn upon Swedenborgian imagery once again, as beautiful music represents conjugal love in Swedenborg's depiction of heaven:

I once heard from heaven the sweetest music. There were wives there together with girls, who were singing a song. Its sweetness was like the affection of some love, pouring forth in a harmonious stream. Songs in heaven are nothing but affections in audible form, that is, affections expressed in modulated

⁵⁷ See Lewis, pp. 47-48.

sounds, for just as thoughts are expressed by speaking, so are affections by singing. (CL 55, p. 58)

Within this passage, in which Swedenborg listens to the sweet singing of the wives and girls in heaven, he makes the distinction between the chaste and unchaste and the different receptions of the music that they those states would induce: 'Those who looked on women chastely heard the singing as harmonious and sweet. But those who looked on women unchastely heard it as inharmonious and depressing' (55.2, p. 58). Thus, in a Swedenborgian reading, the musical metaphor adopted by Rossetti in 'The Kiss', and other sonnets, reinforces the idea that it is conjugal love that is described.

The sestet of 'The Kiss' narrates the ascent to divine that is achieved through sexual and spiritual joining (as symbolised by the kiss):

I was a child beneath her touch, – a man
When breast to breast we clung, even I and she, –
A spirit when her spirit looked through me, –
A god when all our life-breath met to fan
Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardours ran,
Fire within fire, desire in deity. (ll. 9-14)

The separate lovers, 'I' and 'her', come together through the physical, sexual act, 'breast to breast', which is accompanied by a concurrent spiritual connection: 'A spirit when her spirit looked through me'. This then progresses to a complete union: 'our life-breath'; 'Our life-blood'. This is the one life of conjugal love, symbolised once more using conjoined words. That the soul connection is supported by a sexual one is reinforced through the suggestion of the essence of each; 'life-breath' is met with 'life-blood'. It is at this point that their love becomes an expression of the divine, hence; 'A god when all our [...]'. The last lines suggest the attainment of divinity which their rival echoing passions achieve. As a word which suggests mirroring, 'emulous' represents the symmetry inherent in the images of joining: 'breast to breast' (l. 9), 'A spirit when her spirit' (l. 11), 'Fire within fire' (l. 14). Earlier textual variants of line 13 of the sonnet reinforce this idea of conjugal joining. The various alternatives considered by Rossetti for 'Love's emulous ardours' include 'the confluent ardours', 'interfluent ardours' and

most pertinently '*the immingling ardours*': all descriptive of two beings merging into one through love.⁵⁸

These last lines of Rossetti's sonnet, with their description of the growth of physical desire; 'when all our life-breath met to fan / Our life-blood', culminating in the peak of passion; 'Fire within fire', seem to paraphrase the following passage from Swedenborg, which describe the effects of love upon a man:

That such fire has heat proceeding from it appears plainly from the effects of love: thus a man is set on fire, grows warm, and becomes inflamed, as his love is exalted into zeal [...] The heat of the blood [...] proceeds solely from love.⁵⁹

This further reinforces that Swedenborg's conjugal love provides for Rossetti a source for the imagery in his love sonnets, and that for him the kiss is a symbol of conjugal connection.

The complexity of the sonnet 'The Kiss', and Rossetti's particular utilisation of Swedenborgian imagery in order to present the sacredness of the physical relationship described, is missed by Robert Buchanan in his critical response, published in *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day* (1872). Buchanan quotes the sestet of the sonnet in full and proceeds to suggest: 'Let the reader examine this passage phrase by phrase and word by word, dwelling particularly on the descriptive animalism of last three lines' (p. 59). He fails to acknowledge the symbolic complexity of the language, however, ignoring the mystical overtones which accompany the physical language used, and the chaste context in which the sexual love is presented. The sophistication of Rossetti's poetic language is reduced to the literal by Buchanan, who dismisses the phrase 'consonant interlude' as 'the Fleshly for "kiss"' (p. 59).

The Sonnet 'Nuptial Sleep'

The sonnet originally intended to follow 'The Kiss' in the sequence was 'Nuptial Sleep', the one reserved for the most vitriolic attack from Buchanan when it was published in 1870 as part of the work towards *The House of Life*, and the one subsequently removed from the final 1881 version. That 'Nuptial Sleep' was intended

⁵⁸ See Lewis, pp. 47-48.

⁵⁹ Swedenborg, *Interaction of the Soul and Body*, p. 10.

to follow 'The Kiss' makes sense in terms of sequential thematic continuity and narrative flow: 'The Kiss' clearly describes the sexual act, with 'Nuptial Sleep' continuing almost immediately with a post-coital scenario.⁶⁰ The sonnet therefore addresses similar themes to 'The Kiss', concerning the fusion of (physical) sexual and spiritual imagery.

'Nuptial Sleep' begins with a dramatic image of separation 'At length their long kiss severed, with sweet smart'.⁶¹ Here, as elsewhere, the 'kiss' referred to in Rossetti's sonnet stands both literally as a kiss and works metaphorically to indicate full sexual union: the 'long kiss' is therefore the sexual act. The phrase 'At length' has a temporal quality, suggesting the act of love itself, but also implying the involvement of the whole body, or being: the kiss extends beyond a mere mouth to mouth connection. The words 'severed' and 'smart' imply physical violence and pain, as if the lovers have literally become one and must be cut apart, indicating the natural tendency to union described by Swedenborg in *Conjugal Love* (1768):

The male's masculinity pervades the whole and every part of him, and likewise a female's femininity; and the impulse to be joined is present in every detail down to the smallest. Since that impulse to be joined was implanted from creation and is therefore continually present, it follows that the one desires the other and longs to be joined to the other.⁶²

After the opening line the sonnet's octave continues, introducing an atmosphere of softness and quiet intimacy which is suggested through the alliteration of 's', reminding the reader of the privacy and exclusivity of the relationship described:

⁶⁰ The sonnet's original title of 'Placatâ Venere' emphasises the post-coital subject and as McGann has pointed out extends the narrative to include more explicitly the act of love itself, which is assumed, in terms of temporal structure, to have occurred prior to the onset of the sonnet: 'It is an ablative absolute and stands to the text of the poem as a kind of loose first line; so that the meaning (literally rendered) runs something like: "Venus having been satisfied, At length their long kiss..."' ('Nuptial Sleep: Scholarly Commentary', *Rossetti Archive*).

⁶¹ 'Nuptial Sleep', (Sonnet VIa), *CPP*, p. 130, l. 1. All subsequent line references to the poem in text refer to this edition.

⁶² *CL* 37, pp. 39-40. The recurring motif of separation and joining between lovers present in *The House of Life* is also something which Rodger Drew has discussed: 'A large proportion of Rossetti's poetry is an exploration of the twin themes of separation and restoration' (Drew, p. 97). Drew sees the wound of sundering or severing in sonnets such as 'Nuptial Sleep' as representative of the 'the psychic wound of the Fall' (p. 97) which is healed through love, specifically through the kiss, recognising the importance of the motif in Rossetti's sonnets: 'The motif of the kiss is an important one, because the union it signifies counters the state of severance that would otherwise exist' (pp. 96-7).

And as the last slow sudden drops are shed
From sparkling eaves when all the storm has fled,
So singly flagged the pulses of each heart. (Ll. 2-4)

The 'pulses' of the heart are echoed by the rhythm of lines two and three, which is simple and steady, because predominantly monosyllabic. The fourth line: 'So singly flagged the pulses of each heart' has the steadiness of conventional iambic pentameter. It echoes the regularity of the heartbeat as the vigour of arousal calms. This line is an important one, as it succinctly expresses the conjugal love that the lovers experience. As earthly lovers they cannot fully achieve the unity that they will in the afterlife. Their individual physicality, a state introduced at the start of the sonnet through the image of severance, is reinforced here by 'singly' and 'each heart'. However, in a typically Rossettian potential for duality, the word 'singly' also suggests the very unity of conjugal love. It therefore speaks of both the material individuality of the lovers separate bodies, and the connection that binds them as one in spirit; their spiritual hearts continue to beat as one.

The couple's physical separateness is furthered in the next line, with another graphic image:

Their bosoms sundered, with the opening start
Of married flowers to either side outspread
From the knit stem (Ll. 5-7)

Here the sonnet relates to the previous one: the phrase 'breast to breast we clung' from 'The Kiss' is an image of connection around the heart, whilst the reverse is designated in 'Nuptial Sleep' ('Their bosoms sundered'), showing a movement from total togetherness in the former sonnet to a degree of physical separateness in the latter.⁶³

⁶³ The description of the lovers' poses presents a graphic image of the letter Y, and reminds of the esoteric symbol the 'Y of Pythagoras', in which the two prongs symbolise the two paths of 'earthly wisdom' to the left and 'divine wisdom' to the right. Although traditionally it represents the choice made by the traveller on the path of life (i.e. which path will the traveller choose) the single line down, that unites the two forks, can be seen as the convergence of the two and is therefore a suitable pictorial symbol with which to represent conjugal love. Certainly the meeting of the earthly and the divine within the image makes it an appropriate symbol for the fusion of sexual and spiritual love. It is interesting to speculate that given Rossetti's deliberate use of symbols in his design work, he may well have been aware of this as

The phrase 'married flowers', in addition to evoking the natural purity of the human sexual relationship, signifies that the sexual union is within a chaste context, reinforcing the 'Nuptial' of the title. The term 'married' evokes Swedenborg's word 'conjugal', which is derived from *conjugalis* 'marriage' rather than the more used form of 'conjugal', which stems from *conjux* 'a married partner', thereby inferring the oneness achieved within the marriage state rather than the just the relationship of one partner to the other.⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that the word 'married' was added to the sonnet at a late proof stage. It seems to have been included in an attempt to reinforce the 'Nuptial' of the title, which itself was included to present a less pagan tone than the original title of 'Placatâ Venere', in order to help the sonnet 'stand fire' from anticipated negative critical response.⁶⁵ These changes are alluded to by Roger Lewis, who suggests that Rossetti 'presumably thought that Patmorish marital imagery would be less likely than Swinburnian pagan symbolism to draw on him the abuse that was heaped upon Swinburne after he published *Poems and Ballads*'.⁶⁶ However, it might be more accurate to suggest that, through his particular adoption of Swedenborgian imagery, Rossetti navigates a third path between these two perceived extremes, as 'Nuptial Sleep' is not the only sonnet in which the sacrament of marriage

a graphic counterpart image. Intriguingly, there is a similar image found in Christina Rossetti's poem *Goblin Market* (1862) when sisters Laura and Lizzie sleep in each other's arms: 'Like two blossoms on one stem' (l. 188) (*Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*, ed. by R.W. Crump (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 10). Although a comparable simile, the language of Christina's poem has none of the overt erotic sexual imagery of 'Nuptial Sleep', being about sisterly love and reinforcing their virginal state (they are likened to both 'snow' (l. 189) and 'ivory' (l. 190)). However, the passage does represent two figures bound together as one, in strikingly similar imagery to Rossetti's sonnet: 'Cheek to cheek and breast to breast / Locked together in one nest' (ll. 197-98). Rossetti's illustration for the frontispiece of Christina's book, which refers to this section of the poem, entitled 'Golden head by golden head' (c.1861) emphasises the earthy, sensual aspects of Christina's poem, and depicts distinctly womanly counterparts in the place of the girlish sisters. If this is the case Rossetti's illustration of Christina's lines may have morphed into a kind of prototype for the further eroticising of the image in 'Nuptial Sleep' (composed c.1869).

⁶⁴ See John Chadwick's 'Translator's Introduction', *CL*, pp. vi-vii.

⁶⁵ *Correspondence IV*, p. 263, 69.146. Rossetti appears to have added 'married' at the same time as the title change to 'Nuptial Sleep' (at Proof State No.4) in order to reinforce the chaste context of the sexual scene (See Lewis, p.50-51 for details of the variant versions and revisions of the sonnet). These are presumably the revisions referred to by Rossetti in a letter to his brother from September 1869, in which he also alludes to having changed the opening line (from; 'So their lips drew asunder', to; 'At length their long kiss severed') that Lewis details as occurring also at Proof State No.4 (p.51) (See *Correspondence IV*, p. 263; 69.146). Further revisions are detailed in subsequent letters to William (See *IV*, 69.154; 69.168).

⁶⁶ Lewis, p. 8.

is invoked in order to present idealised sexual love. The presence of words such as 'nuptial', 'bridal', 'married' and 'wedded' (and of course the phrase 'wedding-vestment' from 'The Kiss'), even when not applied directly to the lovers, sanctions the sexual love described, suggesting it is ennobled by the spiritual dimension of the religious marriage ceremony, and can be read as shorthand for chaste sexual union.⁶⁷ Although Rossetti's love sonnets do not necessarily portray, or are overly concerned with, conventional marriage, they frequently present a love relationship as a true marriage of souls. Looked at in this way 'nuptial' can be seen as a Rossetian equivalent for Swedenborg's 'conjugal'.

The changes made to 'Nuptial Sleep' were not necessarily considered by Rossetti as a compromise of his artistry. In the same letter that he claims the title change to have been a deliberate policy to help the sonnet stand critical fire, he also writes that he 'improved some lines in it', implying those changes better express his intentions for the sonnet.⁶⁸ What Rossetti achieves with these changes is a clearer sense of chaste sexuality in the sonnet. One alteration particularly makes the poem more explicitly Swedenborgian. The introduction of the word 'sweet' in the opening line; 'At length their long kiss severed, with sweet smart', which originally read 'fierce smart' reminds of Swedenborg's description of conjugal love as 'the very model of heavenly sweetness'.⁶⁹

However, even without the explicit inclusion of key words such as 'married', 'Nuptial' and 'sweet', the sonnet clearly articulates a conjugal joining as the two have experienced unity. Certain phrases which appear unchanged throughout the majority of proofs, illustrate this. The phrase 'knit stem', for example, is sexually suggestive and implies a bodily contact which continues beyond the act of love. Its initial tone is fleshly and suggests a wound that has healed, perhaps the wound of severing. However, it also implies a mingling of the two lovers that is fundamentally intimate and literally conjugal, or conjoined. The 'knit stem' is the point at which the two are as one. The stem can be seen as the essential person, the spirit or soul of a being (Swedenborg's 'spiritual man') and the flower its bodily clothing, or outer projection or expression (Swedenborg's 'natural man'). In the sonnet the couple share the same

⁶⁷ See also for example 'nuptial', l. 13, from 'Bridal Birth' (p. 164); 'wedded souls' (p. 217, l. 9); 'wifely' (p. 219, l. 9).

⁶⁸ *Correspondence IV*, p. 263, 69.146.

⁶⁹ Lewis, p. 50; *CL* 44.3, p. 47.

stem, or are fundamentally one, despite their apparent separateness (they are 'flowers', not 'flower') in the material world. The 'married' state is an outward reflection in the material world of their true unity of soul.

A discussion of the elemental imagery used in 'Nuptial Sleep', particularly in the sestet, illustrates that elements of Swedenborgian symbolism are present, irrespective of the inclusion of words such as 'Nuptial' which indicate chaste sexual union. The likening of the passion of sexual love to a storm in the sonnet, 'And as the last slow sudden drops are shed / From sparkling eaves when all the storm has fled' (l. 2, 3), suggests a climatic as well as a climactic image. Again there is a connection with the sonnet that originally preceded it, through the continuation of natural and elemental imagery. In 'The Kiss' the element is fire and the flames of passion are fanned, the fire of love grows and a climax is reached: 'Fire within fire' (p. 168, l. 14). The idea of tumult and (potential) destruction is inherent in fire and indeed storm, and suggests Rossetti's intention is to define love as an equally powerful, natural force. The tumultuousness has subsided within the post-coital scenario of 'Nuptial Sleep' and water imagery dominates in this sonnet, indicating the quenching of physical desire: 'storm'; 'drops'; 'sparkling eaves'. This is also reinforced by the repetition of the 's' sound, which, in addition to the softness of whispers, suggests the hiss of rain. However, the fire of sexual love is not entirely extinguished in 'Nuptial Sleep'; it remains in a gentler form in 'sparkling' (l. 3) (connoting a small particle of fire – a spark) and through the softer suggestion of burning embers: 'yet still their mouths, burnt red, / Fawned on each other where they lay apart' (ll. 7-8), which aptly expresses the flushed state of sexual arousal. The past tense 'burnt' implies post-coital and works together with the images of wounding ('smart'; 'severed'; 'sundered') as it suggests the image is branded upon them, evoking the language of pain. Their love was forged in fire at the closing of 'The Kiss': 'Fire within fire, desire in deity' (l. 14). There is something of permanence in the image, as if the couple are forever bonded, which ties in with the image of 'knit stem'.

The sestet describes the nuptial sleep that follows the heat of passion, and here the fire imagery is left behind, together with bodily experience, and water imagery dominates in this landscape of mind and soul:

Sleep sank them lower than the tide of dreams,

And their dreams watched them sink, and slid away.
Slowly their souls swam up again, through gleams
Of watered light and dull drowned waifs of day (Ll. 9-12)

The sonnet describes a kind of esoteric interiority delineating firstly a psychological space; 'the tide of dreams', and then one more profound as the lovers sink lower to a place beyond the dream state.⁷⁰ This place is therefore deeper even than individual cognitive experience. It is at this point that Rossetti introduces the word 'soul', indicating that the lovers have accessed their most deep and essential nature. This sonnet is in balance once again with its original predecessor as the image of sinking is in direct opposition to the image of ascension toward climax that characterises the sestet of 'The Kiss'. However, it is at the very point of sinking that the essential nature is accessed in 'Nuptial Sleep' and the lovers can rise again: 'Slowly their souls swam up again' (l. 11).

The water has immensity like the ocean, rather than the climactic storm imagery referred to in the octave, and there is the same potential danger; 'sank', 'sink', 'slid away', 'drowned' (ll. 9-12). There is also the shadow of oblivion as they fall below the level of consciousness as if to fall away completely: 'And their dreams watched them sink, and slid away' (l. 10). This suggests the profundity of the experience. However, the lovers are not destroyed, but reborn, and the imagery is consistent with the very beginnings of life and birth. It is also suggestive of the Christian ritual of baptism, or a new life in the Lord. Water 'signifies natural truths' by correspondence in Swedenborg's writings.⁷¹ The lovers' souls swim like fish through the symbolic water, which also represent truths or knowledge in Swedenborg's symbolic system:

⁷⁰ There is a similar image in the sonnet 'Last Fire' (p. 192) that describes a calmer, less dramatic post-coital scenario in which the lovers sink into sleep, which in this sonnet provides another place for the spiritual oneness achieved through conjugal love to continue:

Awhile now softer let your bosom heave,
As in Love's harbour, even that loving breast,
All care takes refuge while we sink to rest,
And mutual dreams the bygone bliss retrieve. (Ll. 5-8)

The poetic voice becomes contemplative in the sestet as it understands the rarity and purity of the love experience described and the sonnet as a whole is altogether more wistful than the directness and physicality of 'Nuptial Sleep': 'This day at least was Summer's paramour/ Sun-coloured to the imperishable core/ With sweet well-being of love and full heart's ease' (ll. 12-14).

⁷¹ Swedenborg, *Interaction of the Soul and Body*, p. 44.

The water in which fishes live is a representative of a natural atmosphere of thought relating to the world and to practical life in it [...] water, in its best sense, as the water of baptism, represents truth by which the practical life is cleansed – truth which distinguishes between right and wrong in act [...] it is an atmosphere of physical truth concerning the world with all its products and phenomena.⁷²

Fish signify what Swedenborg terms ‘memory-knowledges’ which are learned by man through the senses, representing wisdom gained through perception when he lives in the body.⁷³ Thus the sestet of ‘Nuptial Sleep’ treats symbolically what has been learnt through the experience of love in the material world. A reconnection with the essential self is achieved through the access to the divine state achieved through conjugal love. This knowledge manifests in the metaphoric watery realm, which can also be seen as a state of mediation between heaven and earth, where the knowledge acquired through both can be realised. This is reinforced by the fact that the symbolic water the souls swim through is also the realm of light, ‘through gleams / Of watered light’ (ll. 11-12) (and by association, vision also: ‘watched’ (l. 10). Light and sight represent enlightenment, or the acquisition of wisdom for Swedenborg: ‘light flows into his [man’s] understanding, and produces the truth of wisdom’.⁷⁴ As the sestet refers to light, the octave referred to heat (‘burnt’; ‘sparkling’). The language of heat suggests a warming of the body and has corporeal, rather than cerebral associations, therefore evoking the sense of touch and bodily sensation. Fire itself, as discussed earlier, represents love in a Swedenborgian reading. Therefore the two essential qualities present in Swedenborg’s concept of the divine are evoked in both the content and the form of the sonnet ‘Nuptial Sleep’: love (represented by heat and touch) defines the octave and wisdom (represented by light and vision), the sestet, with the whole sonnet as an expression of the union of the two:

Love and wisdom are the two things proceeding from the Lord, because these are the Lord and so come from him [...] Natural heat corresponds to spiritual heat, which is love; natural light corresponds to spiritual light, which is wisdom. (CL 60, p.67)

⁷² John Worcester, ‘Fishes of the Bible’ (1875), *The Science of Correspondences* [www.scienceofcorrespondences.com/fishes-of-the-bible-2.htm, accessed 12 September 2008].

⁷³ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelsetia* (1749-56), vol. I, 42, *The Science of Correspondences* [<http://www.scienceofcorrespondences.com/fishes.htm>, accessed 12 September 2008].

⁷⁴ Swedenborg, *Interaction of the Soul and Body*, p. 13.

These qualities are also united in a conjugal love partnership, which signifies that the lovers represent the divine in microcosm.

The last two lines of 'Nuptial Sleep' end with the individual's experience and a moment of philosophical reflection: 'Till from some wonder of new woods and streams / He woke, and wondered more: for there she lay' (ll. 13-14). The physical separateness of the couple is expressed and they have become 'un-knit' by the end of the sonnet: 'He' and 'she' are separated physically as words in the line, with one at each end, emphasising that conjugal love can only be experienced rarely on earth, and therefore the divine accessed only temporarily, in a faint anticipation of the oneness and proximity achieved by the angels in heaven. However the profound knowledge garnered from the experience is retained. There is the now familiar duality of meaning in 'He woke', suggesting a literal waking from physical sleep, but also an awakening to a new level of consciousness. Streams represent the 'flowing of truth' in Swedenborg's science of correspondences: 'a mind full of earnest affection for good holds the truth received from heaven as a good soil does the rain, giving it forth slowly and steadily in useful springs and streams of truth'.⁷⁵ It is therefore significant in the sonnet that the reader is told; 'He woke' from 'some wonder of new woods and streams'. It is from this heightened perception that the male lover understands what has provided the access to this: the female who completes him, and the awe felt through the mystical experience of conjugal love is expressed: 'He woke, and wondered more: for there she lay' (l. 14).

The Willowwood Sonnets

The image of the kiss is present in the four 'Willowwood' sonnets (numbers XLIX, L, LI, LII of the sequence, pp. 211-214). These sonnets narrate a kind of fantastical dream or trance state in which divided lovers are 'momentarily reunited by the longing fancy'.⁷⁶ Despite the unusual tone of the sonnets which are more dreamlike and overtly supernatural than the rest of *The House of Life*, the sonnets encompass all the

⁷⁵ John Worcester, 'Streams' [n.d.], *The Science of Correspondences* [<http://www.scienceofcorrespondences.com/streams.htm>, accessed 12 September 2008].

⁷⁶ Rossetti, 'The Stealthy School of Criticism' (1871), *CW*, p. 332.

poetic motifs hitherto introduced, including Love personified, the musical metaphor, the use of water imagery, and the image of the kiss.

The poet-lover sits upon and looks into the waters of a 'woodside well' (XLIX, p. 211, l. 1). The figure of Love personified plays a note upon his lute, the sound of which transmutes into 'The passionate voice' (l. 8) of his lost beloved. Love then becomes the beloved in a ghostly transubstantiation:

And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers;
And with his foot and with his wing-feathers
He swept the spring that watered my heart's drouth.
Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair,
And as I stooped, her own lips rising there
Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth. (LI. 9-14)

The first sonnet therefore ends on an image of the kiss that forms between the poem's narrator and his longed for, imagined lover who appears as literal reflection in the water. In the visual image of mirroring created here, the imagery of symmetry associated with Rossetti's presentation of conjugal love is combined with the emblem of the kiss. In the second sonnet, the temporarily united lovers become surrounded by the ghosts of images of their past selves:

They looked on us and knew us and were known;
While fast together, alive from the abyss,
Clung the soul-wrung implacable close kiss (p. 212, ll. 9-11)

The lovers are 'fast' or 'clung' together around the point of connection; the kiss. The kiss symbolises the continued power of the love despite their earthly separation; it is 'implacable', and the phrase 'soul-wrung' implies the love's depth. When the song of love dies in the last sonnet, the kiss – its physical symbol – unlocks and the connection is lost. The poetic voice then ponders in uncertain tone the possibility of reunion in the afterlife:

So when the song died did our kiss unclose;
And her face fell back drowned, and was as grey
As its grey eyes; and if it ever may
Meet mine again I know not if Love knows. (p. 214, ll. 5-8)

The sonnets end with the knowledge learned (as symbolised by the water imagery which represents natural truths by Swedenborgian correspondence) that despite his uncertainty as to future reunion, the momentary meeting was an authentic experience of connection for the lover; one that quenches his love's thirst and nourishes his soul:

Only I know that I leaned low and drank
A long draught from the water where she sank,
Her breath and all her tears and all her soul (Ll. 9-11)

It is akin to a baptism of the soul, something which is anticipated by the phrase 'the new birthday' (l. 4) from the second 'Willowwood' sonnet, suggesting the afterlife, but also the new life that the poet enters after the experience which has been described as 'a kind of epiphany'.⁷⁷ The final lines end with an image symbolic of the blessing that Love has given the poet-lover in temporarily uniting him with his dead beloved:

And as I leaned, I know I felt Love's face
Pressed on my neck with moan of pity and grace,
Till both our heads were in his aureole (Ll. 12-14)

The image of the two heads within the halo (Love's and the poet-lover's) also serves to remind the reader of the mirrored image of the lovers' heads united in a kiss: Love's face replaces the lost lover. It therefore anticipates the future blessed state of the lovers that the poet-lover longs for, but cannot yet *know*. The aureole, a disc of golden light is symbolic of God, associated with the sun; it prefigures the angelic state that echoes the divine in microcosm that the lovers have temporarily achieved (the Swedenborgian angel) and this image at the close of the 'Willowwood' sonnets acts as reassurance in the absence of firm hope.

⁷⁷ Robillard, p. 6. Douglas J. Robillard's article on the Willowwood sonnets concentrates on the structural significance of the sonnet group, which come in the middle of the sequence in the unfinished 1870 selection, but 'still occupies the center [*sic*] of the stage' in the final 1881 publication (p. 7). Robillard contemplates the group's position as a kind of structural 'pivot' and by extension he then seeks to investigate the concept of formal unity in *The House of Life* as a whole (p. 6). Although he also suggests that they are 'central as well to the pattern of the work' and provide a kind of moment of epiphany (p.6). This is true in so far as they provide a dreamlike centre – a nexus between youth and experience, the earthly and heavenly realms, hope and doubt: in those terms the 'Willowwood' sonnets are thematically central. In the final form of *The House of Life* (1881) the pivotal role, structurally and thematically is occupied by the three 'True Woman' sonnets (LVI, LVII, LVIII). See Chapter 6: *The House of Life*, 2 for further discussion.

In the 'Willowwood' sonnets, therefore, Rossetti combines the kiss motif with the imagery of symmetry which symbolises the union of lovers to create a strongly visual template for the depiction of conjugal love. This image appears elsewhere in Rossetti's poetry. A particularly striking example is in 'The Song of the Bower' (1870) in which a love union is longed for and imagined by the poetic voice and is described in the middle of the poem (verse 3 of 5: the physical hinge, or heart, of the poem with two verses either side) representing the climax of desire anticipated:

What were my prize, could I enter thy bower, [...]
My hand round thy neck and thy hand on my shoulder,
My mouth to thy mouth as the world melts away.⁷⁸

The kiss motif, with all its attendant associations, combines with the symmetrically expressed image of connection that was previously used to depict a heart to heart bond: 'breast to breast we clung' (p. 168, l. 10); 'Cling heart to heart' (p. 205, l. 9). The resultant visual motif is of both, 'My mouth to thy mouth' (l. 24), and has its equivalent in several pictorial images by Rossetti. These images, comprising paintings and designs, echo their verse equivalents in terms of themes, imagery and treatment and are discussed in the next chapter.

⁷⁸ CW, p. 245, lines 17, 23, 24.

Chapter 6: *The House of Life*, 2

Passion in her is
A glass facing his fire, where the bright bliss
Is mirrored, and the heat returned.¹

This chapter furthers ideas introduced in the previous chapter regarding the kiss, the images of symmetry and the figure of Love personified that are associated with the representation of conjugal love in *The House of Life* sonnets. Selected paintings and designs by Rossetti are discussed, showing that the lovers in the sonnets have their visual counterparts elsewhere in Rossetti's body of work. The imagery of conjugal love appears predominantly in images of courtly love, showing that Swedenborg's ideas on love are absorbed by Rossetti as part of the romantic tradition. In consideration of the pictorial imagery, discussion returns to the influence of William Blake upon Rossetti's particular utilisation of Swedenborgian ideas of love, but this time with regard to his art and design work. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the most explicitly Swedenborgian of all Rossetti's works; the 'True Woman' sonnets from *The House of Life*, included for discussion at the close of the two *House of Life* chapters as they incorporate all the elements discussed hitherto, and represent an important culmination of Rossetti's use of Swedenborgian imagery.

Part 1: Pictorial Images of Conjugal Love

The Symmetry of Lovers and the Kiss

The imagery of symmetry between lovers described in *The House of Life* sonnets is also found in several pictorial images by Rossetti. The kiss reappears as the hinge that joins the two lovers: the physical linking factor that symbolises the connection achieved through conjugal love. Two paintings associated with the genre of courtly love, *King René's Honeymoon* and *Roman de la Rose* (both produced in

¹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'True Woman, II: Her Love', ll. 2-4, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 219.

1864), represent this.² In each painting the figures are placed in approximate bilateral symmetry around an off-centre diagonal, with their faces meeting in a 'mouth to mouth kiss' in visual counterpart to similar imagery in the sonnets, and other poems, such as the aforementioned 'The Song of the Bower' (1870); 'My mouth to thy mouth as the world melts away'.³

In the formal arrangement of both *King René's Honeymoon* and *Roman de la Rose* an off-centre diagonal is used as a divisional compositional technique. This is also employed by Rossetti in several of his earlier 1850s watercolours which depict various subjects that reference the courtly tradition, such as *The Tune of Seven Towers* (1857) and *The Wedding of St. George and Princess Sabra* (1857), which both feature a deliberate, yet notional, line that moves across the canvas in this way. Thus in the paintings the pictorial plane is divided and its flatness emphasised. The formal qualities of line and shape are given precedence and 'Patterns are enclosed by firm lines in disregard of traditional perspective'.⁴ This lends the works *King René's Honeymoon* and *Roman de la Rose* a stylised quality and suggests a symbolic, rather than a literal or realistic approach. One instead reads the careful and deliberate composition and the arrangement of figures and space as significant in another way. This geometric characteristic reflects the imagery of symmetry that Rossetti also uses in his love sonnets to signify conjugal love. The figures within each painting are arranged around this divisional compositional line; their similar postures echo each other in approximate symmetry and their faces meet in a kiss which, despite other textual references, becomes the real subject of each work.

In *Roman de la Rose* the symmetry of the lovers' postures is especially pronounced, and is reinforced through other graphic elements. The lovers' faces in

² Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Roman de la Rose* (1864) Watercolour on paper, 34.3 x 34.3 cm (Tate; reference number N04089; Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *King René's Honeymoon* (1864) Oil, 52.7 x 34.3 cm (Private Collection; Mrs. Virginia Surtees). See Figs. 8 and 9, p. 280. Following this first mention of these works, the production dates shall not be given in the text. This is a significant production date as Rossetti had begun work on the first version of *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71). It signifies a period in which he was becoming more personally interested in Swedenborg and spiritualism.

³ Bentley, 'Love Kiss' p. 36. Bentley's article discusses these images and similar imagery in *The House of Life* sonnets, but sees them predominantly as part of Rossetti's engagement with Dante: 'Perhaps Rossetti never had or never would come closer to putting on paper or canvas his own thoroughly Dantean yet deeply personal vision of the eyes as the beginning and the mouth as the end of love' (p. 40). For 'The Song of the Bower', see *CW*, p. 245, l. 24.

⁴ Fuchs, pp. 3-4.

particular become almost like one face as they meet in a kiss. Each face is in profile and forms half of the whole image: one eye each is shown and in the meeting of mouths, the nose and mouth seem as one. Their faces are joined through the kiss which symbolises both physical and spiritual union. Their bodies are joined in clasped hands which are held together at chest height, in a 'heart to heart' connection, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, also symbolises conjugal joining. Through the suggestion of bilateral symmetry in the painting, the lovers are depicted as two halves of one person, in literal echo of the Swedenborgian idea that a married couple form one angel in heaven.

The lovers in these paintings anticipate visually similar imagery in *The House of Life* sonnets, such as 'Severed Selves': 'Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame, / Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same' (p. 202, ll. 6-7). It is interesting to note that in an earlier manuscript version of this sonnet, called in 1874 'Between Meetings', these lines depict instead the kiss as the point of connection: 'Two mouths which, as two fire-flakes of one flame, / Would, meeting in one kiss, be made the same'.⁵ In the image of two faces becoming as one in a kiss, these lines illustrate perhaps more distinctly the visual relationship between the imagery in these 1864 paintings and that of the 1881 version of the sonnet. They certainly indicate a similar emblematic approach to the depiction of romantic love in each case. This is Rossetti's technique of reinforcement through variant repetition, taken oeuvre wide. The kiss and the imagery of symmetry immediately convey that the subject of the work is the highest ideal of romantic love, irrespective of the medium, context or textual source the image may reference.

The paintings *Roman de la Rose* and *King René's Honeymoon* express the union of lovers achieved through conjugal love. They are visual reflections of Swedenborg's concept of the conjugal principle of symmetry inherent in all living things. This principle works on every level of the individual human form: two halves 'marry' together to produce the complete function, as well as being present in the union of man and woman:

⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'Between Meetings' (1874), lines 6-7, "Kelmscott Love Sonnets" The Bodleian Notebook (I) (MS. Eng. Poet.d.43), p. 33.

The conjugal principle is present in the tiniest details of each human being, both male and female, but still it is different in the male and in the female. The male's conjugal principle is designed to be linked with the female's and *vice versa*, even in the tiniest details. [...] This enables it to be seen that every substance, even the smallest, contains this conjugal principle, [...]. The reason for this duality is that one belongs to the will, and the other to the intellect, and they work together so wonderfully that they act as one. So the two eyes produce single vision, the two ears single hearing, the two nostrils one sense of smell, the two lips one speech, [...]. But the male and the female, when united by truly conjugal love, make one fully human life. (CL 316.4, pp. 306-07)

This idea of the conjugal principle lies at the heart of Rossetti's presentation of idealised romantic love. It is the 'two become one' imagery of the sonnets, reinterpreted in pictorial form. In *Roman de la Rose* the bodies of the lovers mimic each other and there is a large degree of symmetry between the form of their faces and hairstyles. There is mirroring and balance in the pose of the figures, but also difference: the male kneels in a classic position of worship associated with the courtly love tradition. The clothing of each lover is similar, and even in the differences there is balance: each sleeve seems to echo the main costume of the other figure. This is the '*vice versa*' of the conjugal principle. The couple complement each other in terms of colour and design, which is conveyed in *King René's Honeymoon* through the use of complementary colours. The deep green of the lady's dress works formally against its complementary - the red in the costume of her lover, and her creamy-white headdress is offset by the dark tones of his hair. This complementariness reflects Swedenborg's writings on conjugal love and the balance achieved between man and woman, who retain their individual qualities, despite their connection and interdependence. Man and woman are not the same, but complement one another in equal, fundamental balance because they ultimately form one being: 'In short, they have no similarity, and yet every detail has the impulse towards union' (CL 33, p. 38). Swedenborg emphasises this idea of balance in the complementary natures of man and woman many times in *Conjugal Love*:

Conjugal love is the product of the marriage of good and truth. [...] The linking of good and truth is in every single created thing; and linking is impossible unless it is reciprocal, since a one-sided link not balanced by one on the other side falls apart of its own accord. [...] Truth coming from good, is to be found in the male, and constitutes his masculinity; and good of truth, that is, coming

from truth, is to be found in the woman, and constitutes her femininity. These two are linked in the marriage union. (CL 61, p. 67)

The compositional symmetry used by Rossetti in the paintings shows his adoption of Swedenborgian imagery in the presentation of the love relationship: the differences in detail in the depiction of each figure represent the differences between the sexes that are essential in an interrelationship dependent upon reciprocity.

The similarity between the visual imagery used in these paintings and in selected sonnets from *The House of Life* lends the works an inter-textual relationship. In echo of Rossetti's deliberate method of dual expression in both painting and poetry in subjects such as *Astarte Syriaca* and *Fiammetta*, a sonnet's narrative seems to describe its pictorial forerunner, or the paintings resemble illustrations of the sonnets.⁶ The rural summer setting of *The House of Life* sonnet 'The Lovers' Walk', for example, recalls that of *Roman de la Rose*:

Sweet twining hedgeflowers wind-stirred in no wise
On this June day; and hand that clings in hand: –
Still glades; and meeting faces scarcely fann'd; –
An osier-odoured stream that draws the skies
Deep to its heart; and mirrored eyes in eyes: –
Fresh hourly wonder o'er the Summer land
Of light and cloud; and two souls softly spann'd
With one o'erarching heaven of smiles and sighs (p.174, ll. 1-8)

The imagery of symmetry between the lovers, which continues in the sestet, once again symbolises their union and describes it in conjugal terms:

whose bodies lean unto
Each other's visible sweetness amorously,–
Whose passionate hearts lean by Love's high decree
Together on his heart for ever true (LI. 9-12)

The lines 'and two souls softly spann'd / With one o'erarching heaven of smiles and sighs' (ll. 7-8) from the octave recall the presence of the angel in the painting, whose

⁶ These titles refer to two, out of a significant number, of dual works by Rossetti in which he expressed his vision in both painting and poetry. *Astarte Syriaca* (1877); Oil, 185 x 109 cm (Manchester City Art Gallery; accession number 1891.5), and *Fiammetta* (1878); Oil, 146 x 88.9 cm (Collection of Lord Andrew Lloyd-Webber), have their poetical equivalents in the sonnets entitled 'Astarte Syriaca (For a Picture)' and 'Fiammetta (For a Picture)' published in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), pp. 331, 329.

wingspan overarches the lovers, and signifies what they will 'by Love's high decree' become in heaven (l. 11). This is suggested by the potential double meaning of 'Summer land' (l. 6); it is the literal landscape the lovers occupy, but can also be read as an oblique reference to heaven.

The musical references in sonnets such as 'Silent Noon' chime suitably with *King René's Honeymoon* in which the female figure plays upon an organ as she is kissed by her lover:

Oh! Clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love. (p. 181, ll. 12-14)

The oil painting *King René's Honeymoon* was taken from an original design done for the decoration of a cabinet, of which Rossetti's, entitled 'Music,' was one of ten panels depicting imagined scenes from the honeymoon of King René of Anjou.⁷ In its fusion of the imagery of music and love, the 'consonant interlude' (p. 168, l. 6) of the sonnet 'The Kiss' has its precedence in the visual motif in *King René's Honeymoon*, in which lovers play together on a double sided instrument whilst united in a kiss. Once again, the sonnet seems to narrate the picture: 'For lo! even now my lady's lips did play / With these my lips such consonant interlude' (ll. 5-6). There is also resonance between this painting and the sonnet 'Youth's Antiphony' in which the lovers speak their words of love in turn, in echo of musical antiphony, and are united by the end of the sonnet in 'one rapturous undersong' (p. 175, l. 14) just as the lovers are formally linked by the musical instrument in the painting. This is reinforcement through repetition across media.

Love is also made analogous with music in *Roman de la Rose*, in the figure of the angel in the background who plays upon a stringed instrument, seeming to accompany the kissing lovers. An earlier oil painting, *Love's Greeting* (1861), appears to be a prototype for *Roman de la Rose* and depicts lovers kissing in poses that echo one

⁷ *King René's Honeymoon cabinet* (1861) now in the V&A (Museum number W.10:1 to 28-1927) was made by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. It depicts scenes from the life of the Medieval King René of Anjou, as imagined in Walter Scott's novel *Anne of Geierstein* (1829). The cabinet features designs by other Pre-Raphaelites, including Ford Madox Brown, whose own panel 'Architecture' depicts a demure kiss on the cheek, in contrast to Rossetti's mouth to mouth erotic kiss. These two designs, plus a further two by Edward Burne-Jones, were translated into stained glass panels (*Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, p. 84).

another.⁸ It also contains the musical metaphor, with an angel figure strumming a stringed instrument. Both paintings are visual interpretations of the medieval French classic of courtly love literature *Roman de la Rose* (c.1225–1278), an allegorical poem in which the art of love is set down in the form of a dream narrative. Rossetti's images relate particularly to the earlier section of the text executed between 1225 and 1230 by Guillaume de Lorris which takes place in a garden setting. Rossetti translated a small section of the verse in 1850 that describes the lady Beauty, one of a series of allegorical personifications of aspects of the beloved's character from the text.⁹ It is interesting to note that the poem *Roman de la Rose* is full of personifications of abstract states as is Rossetti's *The House of Life*, suggesting that the medieval text is one influence upon this aspect of the work, in addition to being the inspiration for the two paintings. As in Rossetti's sonnet sequence and in Dante's works, the figure of Love is one such personification.

The two images represent an interpretation of the text however, rather than a direct visual translation, or outright illustration. The image depicted by Rossetti has no direct textual equivalent. It does however allude to it. There are references to kisses in the Guillaume de Lorris section of *Roman de la Rose*, from which Rossetti's translation comes, but there is no kiss reference in the translated lines specifically, suggesting Rossetti's pictorial interpretations incorporate his own ideas about the nature of love.¹⁰ The two main sections which reference kissing occur when the lover enters the 'Garden of Pleasure'. The first is when the lover watches the various personifications dancing:

Two very charming maidens with their hair in a single braid and dressed only in their tunics were led into the dance by Pleasure, [...] I need not say how beautifully they danced: one would approach the other very elegantly, and

⁸ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Love's Greeting* (1861) Oil on panel, 57 x 61 cm (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; accession number P1w8). Following this first mention of the work, the production date shall not be given in the text.

⁹ See 'Love's Greeting, Alternatively Titled: Lines from the Roman de la Rose: Scholarly Commentary', *Rossetti Archive* [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/9-1850.s126.raw.html>], accessed 4 June 2009]. See also *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (1911), p. 537.

¹⁰ This is the approach also used by Rossetti in the painting *Beata Beatrix*, which alludes, but does not directly illustrate, the text to which it refers; Dante's *Vita Nuova*.

when they were close together, their lips would touch in such a way that you might have thought they were kissing one another's faces.¹¹

The other section details the lover's quest to kiss the 'rosebud', or his desired beloved: 'Wasting no more time, therefore, I immediately took from the rose a sweet and delicious kiss' (p. 53). The text concentrates on the active lover who pursues his modest beloved, evoking traditional ideas of chastity: 'If your body remains in thrall, at least take care that your heart loves me' (p. 61). In the paintings *Roman de la Rose* and *Love's Greeting* Rossetti depicts the symbolic episode of the kissing of the rose literally, showing the lover and beloved kissing directly and with equal desire. Traditional chastity is overturned as the lover's sexual desire is physically reciprocated. In order to present an image which refers to text, yet presents his own ideas about the sacred nature of sexual love, Rossetti allegorizes on his 'own hook', and incorporates symmetrical imagery in the depiction of the lovers, which evokes a Swedenborgian ideal of chaste sexual love.¹² The resultant image is Rossetti's interpretation of idealised love: an innovation influenced by factors other than the original text.

The two paintings therefore have wider significance than mere specific textual reference. They represent an engagement with the tradition of courtly love literature in general. This is borne out by the fact that both works stem from earlier cover designs for his translations of the Early Italian poets, published 1861.¹³ As this was for a different text, it suggests that Rossetti saw the image of the kissing couple as applicable rather than specific, and could be appropriate for other works which treat of idealised romantic love. The treatment becomes more important than the subject it purports to illustrate; in this case, Rossetti's treatment is informed by his own interpretations of idealised romantic love in which he utilises Swedenborgian imagery. This is reinforced through the relationship between the paintings' imagery and that used in *The House of Life* sonnets. The motif of lovers kissing whose poses echo one

¹¹ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. by Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 13. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

¹² *Correspondence II*, p. 7, 55.4. Rossetti's description to William Allingham of his own illustration technique, regarding the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems: 'I shall try [...] those where one can allegorize on one's own hook on the subject of the poem, without killing, for oneself & everyone, a distinct idea of the poet's'.

¹³ Title page design, *The Early Italian Poets*, trans. by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861), *Rossetti Archive* [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/img/1-1861.yale.title.jpg>, accessed 22 November 2008].

another represents idealised romantic love for Rossetti, whether depicting a contemporary love experience, as in *The House of Life* sonnets, or alluding to the tradition of courtly love literature in the paintings discussed above.

The Significance of the Rose Garden

In the watercolour design *Roman de la Rose*, and also its oil forerunner *Love's Greeting*, the lovers are placed within a rose garden. This has both specific textual reference (the allegorical love poem *Roman de la Rose*, takes place in a garden filled with roses), and associations with courtly love literature in general. It also has symbolic significance in the larger context of the Western literary and artistic tradition. The rose garden connotes in a wider sense a garden of love; roses being traditionally associated with romantic love. The rose is the flower of Venus and as such symbolises sexual love. The rose has also been the flower of Bacchus, with its heady perfume symbolising the sensual pleasures. Conversely, the rose is representative of Christian martyrdom and self-sacrifice – and indeed Christ himself. Through this association it is also the flower of the Virgin Mary (most usually when white) and so has associations of purity and chastity.¹⁴ The rose therefore has both Christian and pagan associations and stands for natural *and* spiritual love. The rose itself can also symbolise woman, in addition to love: 'Almost any flower can represent a girl, but the rose has always stood for the most beautiful, the most beloved' (Ferber, p. 173). This is its dual function in the medieval text *Roman de la Rose*, in which the desired beloved is symbolised by a rose; and her virginal status signified by a rose-bud. The garden that surrounds her signifies both her charms and her chastity: 'The roses were enclosed and surrounded by a hedge, as was proper, but I would gladly have penetrated the enclosure for the sake of the rose-bud that smelled sweeter than balm' (p. 43). One is reminded of the *Hortus Conclusus*, or enclosed garden; the traditional attribute of the Virgin Mary in devotional art, which signifies her chastity.¹⁵ Certainly this reading is emphasised in the Guillaume de Lorris section of *Roman de la Rose* as the rose garden is itself surrounded by a high wall, only accessible by invitation through a small door. However, the rose garden in the text (and in Rossetti's painting) has other connotations too. It is called

¹⁴ Ferber, pp. 174-75; Hall, p. 268.

¹⁵ *Guide to Art*, ed. by Shearer West (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 515.

the 'Garden of Pleasure' in the text and in this guise is more akin to a *locus amoenus*; a 'pleasant place', or idyllic setting of trees and shaded lawn, in which a romantic encounter takes place. This reading is confirmed as the section from the text in which the lover watches the personifications dance concludes with 'most of the dancers went off with their sweethearts to make love in the shade of the trees' (p. 20).

The rose garden setting in Rossetti's paintings *Roman de la Rose* and *Love's Greeting* incorporates both readings; it is the place of the sacred sexual encounter. The dual associations of the rose and rose garden, which convey both the sensual, natural pleasures of love (the sexual) and the higher, spiritual joys (chaste love of God) make it a fitting symbol for the representation of conjugal love, which engages with both the natural and the spiritual dimensions of love. In Swedenborg's *Conjugal Love* both the rose and rose garden are referred to as signifying chaste sexual love in heaven. In his visionary text Swedenborg recounts several meetings in heaven with the wives of conjugal love. The settings for the meetings are rose gardens which symbolise by correspondence the charms of conjugal love. The wives are sitting by a spring in a rose-garden, 'engaged in a conversation about the delights of conjugal love'. They tell Swedenborg that the spring 'stands for the truth of wisdom and the rose-garden [...] stands for its delights'. A 'garland of roses' is woven by one of the wives and it also has the same meaning.¹⁶

Roses feature also in the design for *The House of Life* proem sonnet, which includes a rose bush in bloom.¹⁷ The reader/viewer is encouraged to read the inclusion of the rose in a symbolic, as well as decorative way, as the design features other symbolic elements. These include the traditional hourglass (for time) and the *ouroboros* (the serpent eating its own tail, representing the eternal return, or cycle of life) entwined with the Alpha and Omega, signifying the beginning and end (and sometimes symbolic of Christ or God).¹⁸ The winged angelic figure would seem to be a

¹⁶ *CL*, 293, p. 279; 293.6, p. 281; 293.7, p. 282.

¹⁷ This illuminated design was produced in 1880 and given as a birthday gift to Rossetti's mother. It was first published in 1882 as the frontispiece to William Sharp, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study* (London: Macmillan, 1882; repr New York: AMS Press, 1970). See Fig. 14, p. 282.

¹⁸ See Nozedar, pp. 133-34, 511. The *ouroboros* is an apt symbol for *The House of Life* as it can represent both the earthly and the spiritual: 'The serpent is a creature of the Earth, close to the ground. The circle is a symbol of completion and spiritual perfection, and in this sense, the *ouroboros* demonstrates a union of opposites, Heaven and Earth working in harmony' (Nozedar, p. 134). Interestingly, Rodger Drew suggests that Rossetti may have accessed the

reference to the muse of erotic poetry Erato, who carries a lyre. However, Rossetti gives her the epithet *Anima* ('soul') which is reinforced by the butterfly also present in the design; a traditional symbol for the human soul.¹⁹ The brief life of the butterfly works together with the *ouroboros* (the two are placed within spheres and set next to each other) to suggest the ephemeral alongside the eternal, which characterises much of the sequence.²⁰ Her sensuality is chastened by her epithet *Anima* which follows, thereby representing visually Rossetti's defence of his sonnets and his creative intention:

For here all the passionate and just delights of the body are declared – somewhat figuratively, it is true, but unmistakably – to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times. (CW, p. 330)

It is appropriate then that the rose bush also is read with similar complexity. The roses remain colourless because of the graphic nature of the design, however, considering Rossetti's recurrent use of duality in meaning, their colourless state suggests their potential to be both white and red, depending on context, or indeed, any other colour.²¹ Behind the rosebush are seven stars, which crown it, and 'provide a link with *The Blessed Damozel*', who wears seven stars in her hair.²² In addition, one of the painted versions of *The Blessed Damozel* (1871-8) features pictorially the reunion of lovers in heaven that the poem describes; they are depicted embracing in a rose garden setting, suggesting imagery common to both designs.²³ The symbolic significance of the combination of seven stars and roses can be found in Swedenborg's visionary writings. In the rose-garden there are *seven* wives of conjugal love, because,

symbol of the *ouroboros* from 'such sources as alchemy, Swedenborg, and Blake' (Drew, p. 304).

¹⁹ Ferber, pp. 37-8; Hall, p. 54.

²⁰ The hourglass also can be seen as symbolising the infinite (as well as the idea of finite time), as its shape suggests the sign representing infinity. This shape, known as a *lemniscate* is one of the sinusoidal spirals. Rather pertinently, in a discussion of Swedenborg's scientific studies, Frank W. Very, suggests that Swedenborg intuited this shape in his theories regarding particle motion (Very, p. 195-6).

²¹ In *Conjugal Love* Swedenborg describes one of the rose-gardens as being full of rainbow coloured roses (294.1, p. 282).

²² Drew, p. 35.

²³ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-78) Oil, 212.1 x 133 x 8.9 cm (Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums; accession number 1943.202). See Fig. 4, p. 278.

as has been established previously; 'the number seven [...] signifies holy'.²⁴ It is a number associated with conjugal love and is therefore appropriate for *The House of Life* introductory sonnet design, as it signifies, together with the roses, that one of the sequence's major concerns is love. The rose garden setting in Rossetti's designs therefore shows the incorporation of Swedenborgian imagery into the framework of the courtly love tradition; providing Rossetti with a suitable vocabulary with which to present the highest form of romantic love.

In *The House of Life* sonnets there are references, both direct and suggested, to the *locus amoenus* as the place of love. In 'Youth's Spring Tribune' the lovers lie together in a rural setting amid 'newborn woodflowers' (l.3) in Spring's 'bowers' (l.8) and the sonnet 'Silent Noon' paints a similar scene of lovers secreted away in their 'nest' (l.5) of 'fresh grass' (l.1) and 'golden kingcup-fields' (l.6).²⁵ There are references in the sequence to other archetypal secluded places of love such as the *bower* ('Love's Lovers', 'Newborn Death ii', p. 262, l. 4) and the *grove* ('Secret Parting' p. 207, l. 13). The sonnet 'Bridal Birth', which likens the birth of love in the soul to the birth of a child, who grows to adulthood to become Love personified in the sestet, has for its setting another variant manifestation of a *locus amoenus*:

Now shadowed by his wings, our faces yearn
Together, as his fullgrown feet now range
The grove, and his warm hands our couch prepare (p. 164, ll. 9-11)

As Rodger Drew has also noted, the imagery 'recalls Rossetti's watercolour paintings *Roman de la Rose* and *Love's Greeting*. But here the mediaeval Rose Garden has been replaced by something altogether older, the grove' (p. 40). However, for Rossetti the rose garden, the bower and the grove are interchangeable, in so far as they all signify a natural, yet sacred, place of love: a romantic *locus amoenus* which foreshadows the paradise gardens of heaven that the lovers will eventually achieve. This is reinforced in the sonnet 'Bridal Birth'; the grove is but a temporary stage in the lovers' story, which culminates in their eternal union in the afterlife: 'Till to his song our bodiless souls in turn / Be born his children' (ll.12-13).

²⁴ Swedenborg, quoted in Very, p. 190.

²⁵ *Ballads and Sonnets*, pp. 176, 181.

Love Personified

The figure of Love personified described in the sonnet 'Bridal Birth' has angelic qualities; the lovers are 'shadowed by his wings' (l. 9). This image manifests visually in the painting *Roman de la Rose*, in which the kissing couple appear sheltered by the wing of the angel figure who looks upon them from the background of the scene. This is Love, signalled by his quiver full of arrows (reminiscent of Cupid) and the roses upon his robe. This is also a specific textual reference to the poem *Roman de la Rose* as Love Personified appears in the verse with the epithet 'God of Love':

In appearance, the God of Love was [...] of rare beauty. [...] His robe, [...] was made not of silk but rather of tiny flowers, and fashioned by courtly loves. It was decorated all over with diamond and shield shapes, birds, lions, leopards and other animals, and was made of flowers of various colours. (p. 15)

In the text too Love is described as angelic: 'He seemed to be an angel come straight from heaven' (p. 15). However, Rossetti departs from text in his depiction. Love's costume is simpler in the painted interpretation and he is not 'entirely covered by birds' as in the text (p. 15). In addition he wears a crown, rather than a 'chaplet of roses' (p. 15). These differences indicate that Rossetti is departing from text and applying his own imagery in his depiction of Love. In the earlier painting *Love's Greeting*, Love is more simply attired, his gown is plain and he wears no quiver. There is greater intimacy in this version, as Love stands to the side of the couple, his wings seem in the process of encircling the lovers, as if to enfold them. The figure of Love in each painting plays a harp-like instrument that resembles a zither, or medieval psaltery. These musical instruments are from the same family as the lyre, which is significant as they suggest not only the musical metaphor for love that Rossetti uses in *The House of Life*, but also symbolise poetry directly: Apollo, God of Poetry carries a lyre, as does Erato the muse of lyric love poetry who is depicted in *The House of Life* poem sonnet design. The musical instruments therefore reinforce the relationship between the sonnets and the images.

The figure of Love personified that appears throughout *The House of Life* sonnets and in the *Roman de la Rose* images, appears elsewhere in Rossetti's art; most usually in his subjects from Dante. The decorative panel entitled *Dantis Amor* (1860) in

the Tate collection and the paintings entitled *Dante's Dream* are key examples.²⁶ As this is a technique also used by Dante this is the source usually suggested for Rossetti's use of it, but there are other potential antecedents, such the French medieval text *Roman de la Rose*. The figure of Love personified in *The House of Life* sonnets has also been read as a reference to Jesus: 'He corresponds to Christ as God of Love'.²⁷ However, Rossetti's Love personified, although described in *The House of Life* sonnets, as in Dante, as a 'he', the figure as it appears in the paintings *Roman de la Rose* and *Love's Greeting*, is clearly more feminine. This suggests that Rossetti's Love personified is androgynous, and as such can be seen as a representation of the love between a couple; a blend of the masculine and feminine properties. This quality, when paired with the figures' obvious angelic qualities, suggests that they are representations of the conjugal angel, who, with their outstretched, enclosing wings, prefigure visually what the couple will form in heaven.

In returning to *The House of Life* sonnet 'Bridal Birth', it becomes clear that Love personified is informed by Swedenborgian imagery. The octave describes the birth of Love: 'at her heart Love lay / Quickening in darkness' (p. 164, ll. 6-7). Love is likened to a 'newborn child' (l. 2) and its birth is described in Swedenborgian terms. As with conjugal love, it begins in the soul:

As when desire, long darkling dawns, and first
 The mother looks upon the newborn child,
 Even so my Lady stood at gaze and smiled
 When her soul knew at length the Love it nurs'd. (ll. 1-4)

In the sestet Love has matured and the couple begin to come together as one:

Now, shadowed by his wings, our faces yearn
 Together, as his fullgrown feet now range
 The grove, and his warm hands our couch prepare (ll. 9-11)

²⁶ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Dantis Amor* (1860) Oil, 74.9 x 81.3 cm (Tate; reference number N03532). There are actually three versions of *Dante's Dream*. One is a watercolour dated 1856 (Tate; N05229). There are two oil replicas. The first is dated 1871 and is currently in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (accession number WAG3091). The second oil version is a smaller replica done for William Graham in 1880 (Dundee City Museums and Art Galleries; catalogue number 004/49). All versions contain the compositional feature of Love leading Dante by the hand into the bedchamber of the dying Beatrice and kissing her, thereby physically uniting the two lovers.

²⁷ Drew, p. 37.

The phrase 'our faces yearn/ Together' (ll. 9-10), has visual resonance with the depiction of the kiss in the paintings, as the lovers faces come together in an image of unity which symbolises their conjugal ties. It aptly suggests both an eager strength of desire and a tender longing: they yearn to be as one. The last few lines of the sonnet complicate the metaphor and Love becomes parent to the lovers as they enter a new state of existence and their souls continue together in the afterlife:

Till to his song our bodiless souls in turn
Be born his children, when Death's nuptial change
Leaves us for light the halo of his hair. (ll. 12-14)

The true wedding of the couple happens after death ('Death's nuptial change') when they can experience conjugal love and become as one in the angelic state. (As discussed before, Rossetti's word 'nuptial' can be read as his version of Swedenborg's 'conjugal'). The image at the close of the sonnet is doubly powerful because Rossetti has two transitional states operating at once: through the process of dying the lovers are reborn into a new life, and they are born the children of Love.

The angelic Erato/*Anima* figure in *The House of Life* proem sonnet design is similarly informed by Swedenborgian ideas. It can be seen as a representation of the conjugal angel, suggestive of the eternal life of the lovers in one being. Her epithet *Anima* (soul) and her position amongst the rosebushes of love and the symbols of eternity (the ouroboros; the alpha and omega) reinforce that the figure represents that to which the poetic voice aspires in the sonnets; the 'One Hope' to which the final sonnet alludes: 'the longing for accomplishment of individual desire after death'.²⁸ This is the conjugal angelic state; the eternal life of the completed soul. Rossetti embodies in this figure the three fundamentals states which form the subject of *The House of Life*: 'life representative, as tripled with love and death.'²⁹ Rossetti's Love personified is informed by a synthesis of influences, of which the Swedenborgian conjugal angel is a major element which has hitherto remained critically unacknowledged.

The Influence of Blake upon Rossetti's Images of Conjugal Love

²⁸ *Correspondence IV*, p. 413, 70.70.

²⁹ *Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (1911), p. 638.

The beginnings of Rossetti's pictorial use of the mouth to mouth kiss motif, which features in *Love's Greeting*, *Roman de la Rose* and *King René's Honeymoon* can be traced to his painting *Paolo and Francesca da Rimini* (1855).³⁰ In this work, Rossetti depicts two key moments from the narrative of the adulterous lovers from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. The painting's form echoes that of a triptych, with three panels, each depicting a separate image. The left panel depicts the lovers on earth, in their moment of transgression as they kiss and seal their fate, and in the right panel they are shown in their eternal damned state in the perpetual whirlwind of the circle of the lustful. The central panel depicts Dante and Virgil who look sorrowful at the lovers' plight, in echo of the textual source.³¹ Although the painting does not share the same degree of bilateral symmetry used in the 1860s paintings, it does show a movement towards this. Both depictions of the lovers in the work concentrate upon moments of union. In the left panel the couple are clasped together breast to breast and united in a kiss; their faces meeting in near profile. In the right panel, which depicts their eternal damnation bound together in hell, Rossetti moves beyond the confines of his Dante subject and applies a romantic colouring. Their perpetual punishment is cast as eternal union as they float clasped tightly; their faces mirroring each other and moving towards a kiss.

It is in this aspect that Rossetti's image relates to William Blake's depiction of the lovers. In *The Circle of the Lustful (The Whirlwind of Lovers)* (c.1826), Blake also depicts Paolo and Francesca twice.³² Choosing to ignore the earthly kiss episode, Blake instead refers to them twice in the afterlife. There are 'two representations of the lovers, one showing them being sucked back into the whirlwind and the other, a bare outline in a radiant, sun-like orb, showing them in the act of kissing'.³³ This latter

³⁰ Rossetti's painting is, as D.M.R. Bentley has also recognised, a turning point for Rossetti away from demure images of courtly love, such as *Carlisle Wall* (1853), in which the lover kisses his beloved's hand, and towards a series of images both pictorial and poetic (including *The House of Life* sonnets) which deal with the erotic kiss. See Bentley, 'Love Kiss', pp. 35-39. See also Fontana, pp. 82-3.

³¹ The episode detailing Paolo and Francesca's story is in Canto V of the *Inferno* from *The Divine Comedy*. Dante is overcome with pity for Francesca's plight and faints cold: 'out of pity, / I felt myself diminish, as if I were dying, / And fell down, as a dead body falls' (*Divine Comedy*, p. 69, ll. 140-42). Rossetti composed a poetic translation of the episode entitled 'Francesca da Rimini' in 1862 to accompany a painted replica of the 1855 watercolour also done in that year (*CPP*, p. 409).

³² William Blake, *The Circle of the Lustful (The Whirlwind of Lovers)* (c.1826) Pen, ink and watercolour over pencil, 37 x 52.3 cm (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery; accession number 1919P2).

³³ Bentley 'Love Kiss', p. 33.

interpretation is a striking Blakean innovation, influenced by Swedenborgian ideas of conjugal love. The image of a male and female figure entwined within the sun is an obvious reference to the conjugal love joining as expressive of the qualities of the divine (the union of Wisdom and Love), who is represented by the sun for Swedenborg: 'God, who is love itself: hence the sun of the spiritual world'.³⁴ Here Blake has departed from Dante's narrative and projected his own ideas about love onto the image. He seems to be suggesting that the love has a blessed quality, despite its damned state, by incorporating such a divine image within Dante's Inferno. Their love therefore appears more celebrated than damned. It is precisely this quality that Rossetti has inherited from Blake in his depiction of the lovers; he 'transforms Dante's kiss of sinful idolatry into a kiss of sacramental union. Dante's hell becomes a state of blessed, dreamlike reunion.'³⁵ In addition Blake's lovers kissing in the sun seem to be a prototype for Rossetti's images of symmetry as representative of idealised romantic love in his paintings and *The House of Life* sonnets. It is likely that Rossetti was aware of, and influenced by, this image through his interest in Blake.³⁶

The lovers depicted within the sun have the symmetry associated with conjugal love, and is an example of Blake's interpretation of Swedenborgian ideas.³⁷ That Blake intended the image as a depiction of idealised love becomes apparent when

³⁴ Swedenborg, *Interaction of the Soul and Body*, p. 8.

³⁵ Fontana, p. 83. Fontana recognises the kiss imagery in Rossetti's work as symbolic of sacramental union. However, his essay stops short of considering the potential sources for Rossetti's use of the image.

³⁶ In an endnote in his essay on the 'Love kiss' in Rossetti's works, Bentley admits the following: 'While there is a faint resemblance between Blake's depiction of the tormented lovers and Rossetti's, there is no external evidence to confirm that the engraving was known to Rossetti' (p. 41). Other writers have also noticed the similarity between the designs, including Kerrison Preston in *Blake and Rossetti*, pp. 63-4. An exploration of Rossetti's collected letters shows no direct evidence that he was familiar with this image particularly. However, by the time of the second version of *Paolo and Francesca* (1862), one can infer that he was familiar with the image, as he was involved with the production of Alexander Gilchrist's biography of Blake after Gilchrist's death in 1861. The book, first published 1863, makes reference to the design in the 'List of Works in Colour' in the Appendices: 'Virgil's head is fused into the light of the visionary disc representing the kiss of Francesca and Paolo' (Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1880; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), II, section 123, subsection (j), p. 228).

³⁷ To clarify, Bentley discusses Rossetti's images of mouth-to-mouth kisses, such as *King René's Honeymoon* and *Love's Greeting* ('Love Kiss' p. 36) and refers to the image of kissing lovers in Blake's version of *Paolo and Francesca* (p. 33). However, he does not mention any other designs by Blake which contain similar images, or make reference to Swedenborg, or the use of Swedenborgian imagery by Blake or Rossetti, which can account for the symmetrical imagery in Rossetti's depiction of the kiss.

it is compared with another design featuring an embracing couple, who come together to form one balanced and approximately symmetrical image, entitled *Two Lovers in a Lilly*; the heading for Chapter ii of *Jerusalem* (1804). The lily represents pure love for Blake and the design itself, which 'signifies the ecstasy of newly-married love', suggests it is an image representing conjugal love.³⁸ The two designs are very similar in concept, indicating a common symbolism that has its roots in Swedenborg. It is more than likely that Rossetti was also aware of Blake's *Two Lovers in a Lilly* design and its conjugal connotations, as his own poem 'Love-Lily', the first of a series of Songs published in *Poems* (1870) originally intended for *The House of Life*, suggests a similar ideal of love.³⁹ In Rossetti's poem the beloved is conflated with the symbolic flower-bed of Blake's picture; in place of the lovers being born together in blissful union between the petals of the lily, the love is born in the beloved in Rossetti's poem:

Between the hands, between the brows,
 Between the lips of Love-lily,
 A spirit is born whose birth endows
 My blood with fire to burn through me (CPP, p. 172, ll. 1-4)

The kiss as the point of connection for 'full psychic and sexual communion' returns as an image here, in place of Blake's pictorial depiction.⁴⁰ The poem continues with reference to Love personified as a spirit with 'tremulous wings' (l. 12) and culminates in lines which express the desire for the fusion of sexual and spiritual love that is conjugal:

Ah! Let not hope be still distraught,
 But find in her its gracious goal,
 Whose speech Truth knows not from her thought

³⁸ *Blake Dictionary*, p. 240. See also Fig. 11, p. 280 for the design *Two Lovers in a Lilly*.

³⁹ Written in 1869 (consonant with *Beata Beatrix*'s period of production), this poem's Swedenborgian, or even potentially Blakean qualities have not been discussed. The poem is rarely discussed in depth in critical responses, with perhaps the recent exception of Jerome McGann and Rodger Drew, but even then, briefly, with McGann noting a fusion of biblical, Dantesque and Shelleyan imagery, and a reference to E.T.A. Hoffman's 'Fire-Lily' (CPP, p. 388, Game, p.117), and Drew seeing the poem as a development of Dantesque ideas (p. 40) and the likening of the beloved to the lily and the rose as reference to the Canticles (p. 298).

⁴⁰ Fontana, p. 87. In his article Fontana discusses the kiss imagery in selected Rossetti pictures and poems, but does not mention Blake's influence. He does however come close to intuiting a Swedenborgian use of imagery, without explicit recognition. In a discussion of 'Youth's Spring Tribute' from *The House of Life*, he writes: 'Both kisses carry energy: male energy is seen as material, natural; female as spiritual' (p. 86).

Nor Love her body from her soul. (Ll. 21-4)

Blake's *Two Lovers in a Lilly*, signifying conjugal ecstasy, is transmuted in Rossetti's work, emerging in the poem 'Love-lily' through the Swedenborgian imagery of fusion (and conveyed through the conjoined words of the title), and manifesting pictorially in the symmetrical and kiss imagery in his depictions of lovers in *Love's Greeting*, *Roman de la Rose*, and *King René's Honeymoon*.⁴¹

There are other examples of the symmetrical depictions of lovers in Blake's designs, which suggest their influence upon Rossetti's pictorial depictions of love. As with Rossetti's designs, the couples are usually connected by a kiss, or embrace. For example the design entitled *Satan Watching the Caresses of Adam & Eve* (1808), an illustration of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which depicts Adam and Eve kissing; their naked bodies in symmetrical harmony expressing their role as the first conjugal couple.⁴² As with Rossetti's images of lovers kissing, the faces are depicted in profile and look like two halves of a whole, with one eye each showing and their mouths joining as one. Blake's design also effectively suggests Eve's creation from Adam's rib by placing her figure slightly lower than Adam's, as if she has grown out of his side. The masculine and feminine spaces are symbolically delineated, with the right side belonging to Adam, represented by sunlight, whilst Eve on the left is positioned by a moon; her secondary status within the first couple symbolised by the reflected light of the moon. This makes an interesting contrast with Rossetti's rose garden images in which both figures are clothed and the male figure kneels lower than his beloved, his face upturned in a more conventional depiction of courtly romance. However, the similarity between Rossetti's designs and Blake's, as regards the symmetry of the kissing faces is striking. This design is catalogued in Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863), which Rossetti helped complete upon the authors death, showing that he was definitely familiar with this image.⁴³

⁴¹ Like 'Nuptial Sleep', 'Love-Lily' was criticised for 'extreme fleshiness' by Robert Buchanan in *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day* (1872), p. 48.

⁴² William Blake, *Satan Watching the Caresses of Adam and Eve* (Illustration to Milton's *Paradise Lost*) (1808), Pen and watercolour on paper, 50.5 × 38 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; accession number 90.96). See Fig. 10, p. 280.

⁴³ See *Life of William Blake*, 2, p. 219; 'List of Works in Colour', number 90 (d). In addition, a design by Blake from the same year, entitled *The Reunion of the Soul and the Body* (1808) Watercolour (Private Collection), has this same quality of symmetry, and by its title suggests

Blake's *The Vision of the Last Judgement* (1808) may also have been an influence upon Rossetti's depiction of heaven as a reunion of lovers.⁴⁴ The design depicts pairs of lovers at the right hand side of Christ (left side of the picture) reuniting in embraces. The quality of symmetry is again present suggesting the influence of Swedenborg's theory of the conjugal principle. As Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang have noted 'Human couples united in loving caresses represented the highest ideal for Blake'.⁴⁵ This must clearly represent an antecedent for Rossetti's presentation of the same idea. For Blake, the embrace representing the joining of man and woman is an image of the eternal bond of friendship between true lovers; their union *is* their heaven:

Also on the right hand of Noah a female descends to meet her lover or husband, representative of that love called friendship which looks for no other heaven than their beloved and in him sees all reflected as in a glass of eternal diamond.⁴⁶

Rossetti would have been familiar with this passage by Blake on his *Last Judgement* picture. It featured in his notebook, which was acquired by Rossetti in 1847 and is now termed the Rossetti Manuscript. As McDannell and Lang have indicated the embracing figures in the background of Rossetti's painting of *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-8) are reminiscent of Blake's *Last Judgment* figures (pp. 252-256).⁴⁷ In his painting Rossetti has depicted visually, what the Damozel imagines in the poem 'The Blessed Damozel': heaven as a reunion of lovers. The motif of the embracing couple is repeated across the design, and the image of symmetry is used to express their union as conjugal angels. Here, one sees Blake's *Two Lovers in a Lilly*, with their all encompassing

Swedenborgian concerns, depicting the full human person (material body plus essential soul) as being formed from the combination of male and female.

⁴⁴ William Blake, *The Vision of the Last Judgement* (1808) Pen and watercolour, 51 x 39.5 cm (Petworth House, Sussex, National Trust).

⁴⁵ McDannell and Lang, p. 238.

⁴⁶ *Verse and Prose by William Blake* (transcribed by Rossetti (c.1850), Manuscript notebook), p. [86v], *Rossetti Archive* [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/3-1862.blms.rad.html>, accessed 8 March 2013]

⁴⁷ This is the version of *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-8) that is in the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. Although a comparison is made between the embracing couples in Rossetti's painting *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-8) and Blake's Swedenborgian influenced images of lovers in *The Vision of the Last Judgement* (1808) in Chapter 8 'Love in the Heavenly Realm' of McDannell and Lang's *Heaven: a History* (2001), no reference is made to *The House of Life* sonnets, or other pictorial images by Rossetti. Neither is there an explicit statement that Rossetti was using Swedenborgian imagery.

conjugal embrace, made multiple, and placed instead amongst the rose gardens of a Swedenborgian conjugal paradise. The similarity between Blake's designs and Rossetti's use of the imagery of conjugal symmetry in *his* pictures suggests that Rossetti has inherited Blake's interpretation of Swedenborgian ideas about love.

A Note on the *Platonic Androgyne*

The imagery of bilateral symmetry used to depict lovers as two halves of one whole being, used by Rossetti in his paintings *Roman de la Rose* (1864) and *King René's Honeymoon* (1864) (and indeed by Blake in his images) can be seen as a reference to the Platonic androgyne. Taken from the speech of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, the myth embodies the notion that man and woman were originally one androgynous being, who was literally cut into two by Zeus as punishment for an attack on the gods. It is this separation from the other half that has since implanted in each the desire to re-find their partner:

Since their original nature had been cut in two, each one longed for its own other half and stayed with it. They threw their arms round each other, weaving themselves together, wanting to form a single living thing. [...] That's how, long ago, the innate desire of human beings for each other started. It draws the two halves of our original nature back together and tries to make one out of two and to heal the wound in human nature. Each of us is a matching half of a human being, because we've been cut in half like flatfish, making two out of one, and each of us is looking for his own matching half.⁴⁸

Rossetti's *House of Life* sonnet 'Severed Selves', which articulates a desire for union, and a completion of self ('Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame, / Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same' (p. 202, ll. 6-7)), has likewise been seen as a reference to the Platonic androgyne.⁴⁹ The title of the sonnet does seem to reinforce this. In addition, the sonnet 'The Birth-Bond', which articulates the idea of the lover as soul-mate, appears to exemplify the Platonic idea of the hermaphrodite soul:

Even so, when first I saw you, seemed it, love,

⁴⁸ Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. by Christopher Gill (London: Penguin, 1999; repr. 2003), p. 24.

⁴⁹ See Drew, p. 97, pp. 100-01.

That among souls allied to mine was yet
One nearer kindred than life hinted of.
O born with me somewhere that men forget,
And though in years of sight and sound unmet,
Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough! (p. 177, ll. 9-14)

However, as might at first appear to be the case, the acknowledgement of Neoplatonic imagery does not necessarily contradict a Swedenborgian reading of Rossetti's sonnets. The two are not mutually exclusive. Despite an undeniable element of Platonic androgyne imagery in these sonnets, it does not follow that this negates their Swedenborgian aspect, as the conjugal angel may have its roots in an esoteric tradition of spiritual-romantic love which includes Plato's myth of the Platonic androgyne:

Swedenborg's ideas about love anticipated the Romantic infatuation with Woman as the 'eternal feminine' that would overrun Europe in the early 19th century. The idea of the 'soulmate', initiated in Plato's Symposium, and carried on by the troubadours and the chivalric tradition, reached a height with the Romantics.⁵⁰

Swedenborg's writings may therefore constitute a furtherance of certain Platonic ideas regarding love, as he was well versed in Neoplatonic theory. The Platonic androgyne may well have informed Swedenborg's theosophy, as he was most certainly educated in Neoplatonism at the University of Uppsala:

The hermetic tradition touched Swedenborg in his university studies as well. The professor he chose to preside over his graduation thesis lectured, among other things, on Pythagoras, Plato and Plotinus, an important triumvirate in the esoteric canon. Along with much dry Lutheran theology, a mystical stream ran through the curriculum, and traces of the emanationist metaphysics of the neoplatonists can be found in Swedenborg's scientific and spiritual writings.⁵¹

Thus Swedenborg's occult writings can be seen as a kind of continuance, or synthesis of earlier occult theories, gleaned from both his education and from a 'combination of arcane scholarship and mystical lore' to which he was intellectually exposed by his

⁵⁰ Lachman, *Into the Interior*, p. 66.

⁵¹ Lachman, *Into the Interior*, p. 14. See also Lars Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret: A Biography* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2005), pp. 22-23, p. 133, pp. 279-80, for Swedenborg's education and neoplatonic reading.

peers.⁵² Swedenborg's romantically biased heaven is therefore part of a wider tradition of romantic love in Western cultural thought, in which human romantic love itself is deified and man and woman are seen as two halves seeking the idyllic unity associated with a mythic past:

The myth of love, which structured the romantic heaven, assumed that in a perfect world (such as Milton's paradise or Swedenborg's heaven) male and female are drawn together in sweet conversation, friendship and conjugal bliss. Man and woman, rather than being distinct and whole human characters, are basically fragments of a once primordial whole. The Judeo-Christian tradition supported this perspective by describing how God pulled Eve out of the side of Adam. Male and female thus seek to unite so that the two separated souls become one. From the classical tradition Plato's *Symposium* was used, in which the playwright Aristophanes recalled how men and women, once unified whole beings, were tragically separated. Love is the yearning for that half of ourselves we are missing.⁵³

It can be said then that there is a shade of the Platonic androgyne in the Swedenborgian angel and the concept of conjugal love, which accounts for its presence in Rossetti's sonnets:

Love taken by itself is nothing but a desire and hence an impulse to be joined; conjugal love is an impulse to be joined into one. For the male and the female of the human species are so created as to be able to become like a single individual, that is, one flesh; and when united, then they are, taken together, the full expression of humanity. If not so joined, they are two, each being as it were a divided person or half a person. (*CL* 37, p. 40)

Rossetti's sonnets 'Bridal-Birth' and 'Severed Selves' can therefore be read from a Swedenborgian angle as the soul's recognition of the need to complete itself in order to become an expression of the divine. It is man recognising woman as his other half and a desire to enter the angelic state, which was predestined in their physiological

⁵² Katz, p. 87. Katz suggests that this mix of mystical influences present in Swedenborg may be accounted for by his having lived for a time with his brother in law Eric Benzelius (1675-1743), whose intellectual acquaintances included a collection of philosophers and kabbalists. Certainly, when Swedenborg's work turned from the material subject of the science of mining, towards the esoteric concerns about the nature of the divine in his 1734 book *The Infinite*, it was to Eric Benzelius that he dedicated the text, indicating his importance as Swedenborg's mentor: 'it was at your instruction that I took up these studies. I hope therefore that you will recognise the truth in this fruit of my, perhaps imperfect, mental power – a result which in some part belongs to you' (quoted in Bergquist, p. 121).

⁵³ McDannell and Lang, p. 234.

and spiritual make up. The Platonic androgyne in *The House of Life* (and the paintings *King René's Honeymoon* and *Roman de la Rose*) is a Swedenborgian angel, which itself is a concept informed by Platonic theory. By the time the image is evoked by Rossetti in the late nineteenth century, it had evolved to include different versions of the same basic idea.

Part 2: Conjugal Love Embodied: the *Vesica Piscis* and the 'True Woman' Sonnets

The *Vesica Piscis*: Rossetti's Symbol for Conjugal Love

Images of symmetry, used by Rossetti to suggest a conjugal love relationship in both *The House of Life* sonnets and the paintings previously discussed, are also found in his design work. The geometric quality inherent in the imagery of bilateral symmetry lends itself to graphic representation and Rossetti utilised this, translating the imagery into a design symbol which expresses visually the properties of conjugal love; this is Rossetti's version of the *Vesica Piscis* of sacred geometry. Versions of the symbol are featured as decorative motifs in various graphic designs, such as book covers and frames.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See Fig. 16, p. 282 for an image of the symbol. Rossetti used versions of this symbol in two book binding designs. One design for the poet A. C. Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) features two intersecting circles on the left of the front cover, which recall the *Vesica Piscis* in form (Rossetti Archive, [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/sa121.rap.html>, accessed 8 March 2013]). Another is for a book jacket of Shelley's verse, designed 1876 (Rossetti Archive, [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/sa342.rap.html>, accessed 23 September 2008]). This design features two interlocking circles that, although not geometrically accurate, suggest the *Vesica Piscis* symbol. Although attribution of the design is debated, it does appear likely that it is by Rossetti as it contains key elements associated with his use of design and symbolism; for example, the motifs of the bird and butterfly, traditional symbols of the soul used by Rossetti throughout his oeuvre. The interlocking circles show the heavens, as symbolised by the sky, sun, interlinking with the earth, from which flowers are growing; a sunflower and a rose (both flowers feature also in the painting *Love's Greeting*). The central section contains a sunflower, which moves from the earth circle towards the heavenly circle. The sun-flower can be seen as a manifest, material representation of the more esoteric association as God as the sun.

There is also a reference to the *Vesica Piscis*, as both a symbol for conjugal love and as nexus between heaven and earth, in the frame of *The Salutation of Beatrice* (1859) Oil on two panels, 101 x 202 x 10.9 cm (National Gallery of Canada; accession number 6750.1-3). Love

The *Vesica Piscis* is formed from two intersecting circles, each crossing through the centre of the other. This fundamental image underlies much historical and metaphysical thought. It is the basic Pythagorean symbol of duality, representing visually the moment of two forming from one:

As the initial circle (Unity) projects itself outward in a perfect reflection of itself there is an area of overlap defined by the two centres (points *A* and *B*) and the intersection of the two circumferences. This area and shape is known as the Vesica Piscis.⁵⁵

The circle (or, sphere) represents unity, or God. The second circle is formed out of the first, and there remains an area of overlap shared by both circles; a third delineated area. Its form 'signifies the mediation of opposites and is associated in Christian symbolism with the Trinity' and it is in this sense that it is most utilised as a pictorial symbol.⁵⁶ The central overlap section is usually referred to in art historical terms as a *mandorla* (almond in Italian, connoting its shape). As it symbolises 'Christ Incarnate' as mediator between heaven and earth, it is often used in depictions of Christ in Western Christian art and as a decorative feature on religious buildings.⁵⁷ Rossetti was clearly aware of the traditional use of this image, and its spiritual connotations, as he used the *mandorla* symbol in a design for a sculptured panel, possibly for his Llandaff Cathedral

personified appears in the frame within a mandorla shape evocative of the central section of the *Vesica Piscis* (it is squashed in shape, but a look at the paper design for the image shows it as a conventional mandorla; see Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Accession Number 1904P386). The figure of Love provides a compositional link between the two panels, which show two episodes selected from the narratives of Dante's love for Beatrice; one on earth, in the left panel (the salutation of Beatrice), and in the right as the two meet in Paradise. Their love, symbolised by Love personified in the central portion of the frame is what connects the two episodes.

⁵⁵ Robert Lawler, *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982; repr. 2003), p. 32.

⁵⁶ Rachel Fletcher, 'Musings on the Vesica Piscis', *Nexus Network Journal*, 6.2 (2004), 95-110 (p. 95).

⁵⁷ Fletcher, p. 97. The mandorla appears first in early Christian art. It represents the 'aureole or blaze of glory' which surrounds Christ most obviously in depictions of his Transfiguration and Ascension, and also in scenes of the Harrowing of Hell and the Last Judgement (West, p. 599). The proportions of the *Vesica Piscis* are also found in architecture; in the Gothic arch, for example (Fletcher, p. 97; Lawler, p. 34-5; Hall, p. 197).

triptych.⁵⁸ The *mandorla* has also been associated with femininity and goddess worship, signifying both womb and vagina and from a Christian viewpoint: 'the womb of the Virgin from which Christ emerges'.⁵⁹

However, it is its function as a symbol which expresses the 'mediation of two distinct entities; the complementariness of polar opposites, as when two extremes complete and depend upon one another to exist' which is of particular interest to Rossetti.⁶⁰ This can be applied philosophically to the two genders, with one circle representing man, and masculinity, and the second, woman, and femininity. (In fact, as the second circle is formed from the first, the *Vesica Piscis* symbol can be viewed as a visual expression of the Adam and Eve myth, with Eve formed from the rib, or side, of Adam). The definite space of mutuality in the *Vesica Piscis*, the overlap, or central area is key here. This area remains an expression of unity; it is common to both circles. Drawing also upon the *Vesica's* associations with deity, this area suggests a divine space; the point of connection, or conjunction between the aspects of masculine and feminine principles. The *Vesica Piscis* therefore becomes a useful geometric symbol with which to illustrate conjugal love, and the joining of genders to form a complete whole. It can be seen as a visual representation of the Swedenborgian angel, which is both two and one. The central area becomes then the essence of the conjugal angel; or Love personified (this fits nicely with its association with Christ as God of love). In looking back briefly at *The House of Life* sonnets, the symbol is evoked through Rossetti's use of language in the sonnets, in the geometric resonances implicit in the images of symmetry which express the conjugal union of lovers. The sonnet 'The Kiss' contains word forms which relate visually to the geometric composition of the *Vesica Piscis*. The phrases 'breast to breast' and 'even I and she' (p. 168, l. 10), recall both the separate areas delineating each gender ('breast', 'breast'; 'I', 'she') and the central overlap, which is expressed in the word that connects, or hinges the two ('to', 'and'). The conjoined word 'wedding-raiment' (l. 4) can also be said to reflect this form.

⁵⁸ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Pelican with Young; design for sculptured panel* (c.1860) 27 x 18.2 cm, *Rossetti Archive* [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/f73.rap.html>, accessed 27 September 2008]. The Pelican, traditional Christian symbol of self sacrifice, is featured inside the mandorla; both are traditionally associated with Christ (Hall, p. 238, p. 197). The design appears to be connected to the Llandaff cathedral project, which included Rossetti's triptych *The Seed of David* (c.1858-64), as another drawing of a pelican has been attributed as a study for the sedilia in Llandaff cathedral.

⁵⁹ Fletcher, p. 97. See also Nozedar, pp. 196-7.

⁶⁰ Fletcher, p. 96.

When one considers Rossetti's use of the symbol, it becomes clear that he most readily associates it with the mediation of masculine and feminine properties. In a design for a watch face (c.1850s), for example, Rossetti uses two intersecting circles – a variant *Vesica Piscis* image – to symbolise masculine and feminine properties. The two circles combine personified images of the sun and moon, represented visually by a man's and woman's head in each. The decorative design is based around the symmetry of the imagined axis line from 12 to 6.⁶¹ The association of the sun and moon with the *Vesica Piscis* forms part of the symbol's history of meaning and use: 'Some vernacular cultures combine images of sun and moon in the form of a vesica piscis. [...] Together, the sun and moon convey complementary polarities'.⁶² Rossetti also uses the *Vesica Piscis* in this way in his painting *Astarte Syriaca* (1877).⁶³ The work depicts the love goddess Astarte in a traditional *venus pudica* posture. The *Vesica Piscis*, in the form of the sun and moon combined, is shown in the background behind the head of Astarte, as if connoting a traditional halo, or aureole. The combination of masculine and feminine principles is expressed in her powerful, almost androgynous, presence. This is Rossetti's Love personified – or deified: the conjugal angel evident once again in his work. This image therefore draws upon traditional connotations of deity, in addition to Rossetti's particular association of the symbol with romantic love.

The *Vesica Piscis* symbol is utilised by Rossetti for both its decorative and philosophical qualities on a sofa he designed for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. (later Morris & Co.), made in 1862.⁶⁴ The sofa features a design centred on the subject of love. The sofa, which was kept in Rossetti's sitting room at 16 Cheyne Walk, implying its personal importance, contains three decorative roundels, or rather ovals, in the back rest. The ovals are reminiscent of the *mandorla*, formed from the central overlap section of the *Vesica Piscis*. Each oval medallion contains a figure. The left panel features a male figure inscribed with 'Amans', Latin for 'lover', the right panel has a female figure 'Amata' ('beloved') and the central image features a winged angel

⁶¹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Designs for Engraving on the Back and Face of a Watch* (c.1860-70) pen and ink on buff tracing paper, 15.2 x 6.8 cm (Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery; accession number 1904P323).

⁶² Fletcher, p. 97.

⁶³ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Astarte Syriaca* (1877) Oil, 185 x 109 cm (Manchester City Art Gallery; accession number 1891.5).

⁶⁴ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Sofa and Cushion* (Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. Settee) (c.1862) Wooden frame with painting and gilding, furnished with dark green velvet, 82.6 x 199.1 x 66 cm (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; accession number M/F.1 & A-1918). See Fig. 12, p. 281.

carrying the traditional bow and arrow accompaniments of cupid, who is revealed as 'Amor' or Love; that which unites, or connects the two. These are the three characters found throughout Rossetti's sonnets, with Love personified as the linking factor between the lovers: the physical embodiment for Rossetti of the conjugal angel. The ovals alone show only an abstracted interest in the *Vesica Piscis*. However, there are decorative roundels on the front frame of the sofa seat, plus three stylised depictions of the *Vesica Piscis*, which correspond in position to the three ovals about love in the back rest. That the symbol is definitely intended to be taken from the *Vesica Piscis* becomes clear when the designs for the sofa, produced c.1860, are viewed.⁶⁵ The roundels depict female heads in different aspects and the *Vesica Piscis* designs contain stylised depictions of sinuous flowers that anticipate *Art Nouveau*. The image of woman and flowers as central to the theme of love is a central motif in Rossetti's oeuvre. This suggests that Rossetti addresses similar themes in his designs, as he does in his written work and fine art, which emphasises the importance of the subject of romantic love. It also indicates that Rossetti associated the *Vesica Piscis* image with Love, and lovers.

Blake's Use of the Vesica Piscis

Rossetti's use of the *Vesica Piscis* as a design feature may have its origins in the pictorial designs of William Blake. Blake used the image of the *Vesica Piscis* in one of his watercolour designs illustrating Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The image entitled *Dante and Beatrice in the Constellation of Gemini* (1824-7) features Dante and Beatrice within the *Vesica Piscis*; they are positioned symmetrically within the central *mandorla* section.⁶⁶ This is Blake's interpretation of a passage from Dante's *Paradiso* in which Dante and Beatrice are surrounded by spheres of redeemed spirits.⁶⁷ However, Blake specifically interprets this as a *Vesica Piscis* shape. The blue sphere around Dante mixes with the reddish colour of Beatrice's to form the central purple section: a

⁶⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Designs for Sofa Roundels* (c.1860), Pencil on paper, 20.2 x 19.8 cm (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery; accession number 1904P321). See Fig. 13, p. 281.

⁶⁶ William Blake, *Dante and Beatrice in the Constellation of Gemini* (1824-7) Graphite, chalk, pen and ink and watercolour, 35.5 x 51 cm (The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). See David Bindmen, Stephen Hebron, Michael O'Neill, *Dante Rediscovered: From Blake to Rodin* (The Wordsworth Trust, 2007), catalogue number 67, pp. 188-89. See Fig. 15, p. 282.

⁶⁷ Bindmen et al (2007), p. 188.

secondary colour made from the mixing, or blending of two primaries. The colour patterning suggests that Blake has applied his own ideas about the love between Dante and Beatrice, recasting them as archetypal lovers. The colours can be seen to represent the genders; the mandorla, where the two come together, represents union. The essence of conjugal love is therefore expressed in the image, implying that Blake may have applied Swedenborgian ideas in his representation of the couple. Blake's use of the symbol suggests that it may be a precedent for Rossetti's use of it in his design work. In addition it can be said to inform Rossetti's particular treatment of Dante images, such as *Beata Beatrix*, in which he draws upon Swedenborgian ideas in his representation of the love between Dante and Beatrice. In Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863), on which Rossetti worked after Gilchrist's death, the work is listed as 'Beatrice and Dante in Gemini, amid the Spheres of Flame' showing that Rossetti was almost certainly aware of this it.⁶⁸

Swedenborgian Spheres and the *Vesica Piscis*

Although Swedenborg does not make reference to the *Vesica Piscis* symbol explicitly, the way in which he describes conjugal love between a man and a woman is highly visual and evokes the form of the symbol. This is the idea that every being has an aura-like projection around itself. These are called 'spheres', which interact with one another in a conjugal relationship:

The sphere of love emanating from the wife, and the sphere of intellect emanating from the husband are constantly flowing, so making their linking more perfect, and it surrounds them with its pleasant aura and unites them. (*CL* 321. 3, p. 313)

The imagery inherent in this description evokes the *Vesica Piscis* and is equally applicable to Blake's image of Dante and Beatrice. The concept of spheres may account for Blake's choice of the symbol as a graphic representation of conjugal love.

⁶⁸ *Life of Blake*, II, 'Lists of Works in Colour', 125 (d), p. 234. Also present in *Life of Blake*, I, p. 239) is a description of the pictorial designs associated with Blake's Jerusalem. Detailed is a facsimile of Blake's design of 'intersecting circles'; a sketch of a decorative frieze, which incorporates angels into the circles. Although, not strictly a series of *Vesica Piscis* symbols; the design clearly alludes to the motif, and may be a possible precedent for Rossetti's use of it.

This leads us back to Rossetti's *The House of Life* and, in particular, the sonnet 'Mid-Rapture' in which the imagery of union is employed. The mirroring and symmetry between the two lovers, which emphasises their two halves, which once joined, complete each other, is brought across using the familiar imagery of the 'kiss' and the 'clasp'. The sestet of 'Mid-Rapture' expresses this, and, in addition, makes reference to the Swedenborgian concept of the 'sphere' of conjugal love:

What word can answer to thy word, - what gaze
To thine, which now absorbs within its sphere
My worshipping face, till I am mirrored there
Light-circled in a heaven of deep-drawn rays?
What clasp, what kiss mine inmost heart can prove,
O lovely and beloved, O my love? (p. 188, ll. 9-14)

The future joining of the couple in the afterlife is evoked through the word 'absorbs' and the phrase 'Light-circled in a heaven'. The religious imagery reappears with words such as 'heaven', and 'worshipping' and the sonnet ends on a trinity of Loves: 'O lovely and beloved, O my love?', which connects thematically back to Rossetti's sofa design, which also features a trinity of loves.

The imagery of two parts connected by a nexus, or membrane, such as that expressed graphically by the *Vesica Piscis*, appears in Swedenborg's writings about heaven, in which the dwellings of conjugal couples reflects their relationship. Swedenborg relates an episode in *Conjugal Love* (1768) in which he visits the *Temple of Wisdom*, which contains smaller temples each housing (and being an extension of) a wise man. The men explain to Swedenborg that without women they are not truly, or fully wise – as the male is only literally half the story: "I am not alone," he said, "my wife is with me, and though we are two, we are still not two, but one flesh' (56. 2, p. 61). The man is wisdom, the woman is the love (or the life) of that wisdom; she is the element that completes him, forming an expression of conjugal love: 'While he spoke, we could perceive in his words the life of wisdom coming from his wife, for her love was present in the sound of his speech' (56. 5, pp. 62-3). In the temple the man who speaks thus is separated from his wife by a 'crystal wall', described by Swedenborg thus: 'the building was divided into two, though still one. It was cut in half by a transparent wall, but being of the purest crystal its transparency made the room

appear to be one' (p. 62). The angels' housing therefore symbolises in macrocosm the dynamics of interaction of their individual spheres.

An interesting parallel can be seen in Rossetti's sonnet structure in *The House of Life*, in which the 'transparent' space so deliberately created by Rossetti's splitting of each sonnet into two halves, can be seen as akin to a 'crystal wall' separating the male part of the sonnet, the octave, from the female sestet which resolves it and fully imparts its wisdom. The two are separate but also part of the same whole. Looked at in this way Rossetti's sonnets resemble such an expression of divided unity. They echo the conjugal principle; the ultimate wisdom of man and woman – or the masculine and the feminine – joined together by a 'transparent wall' which signifies the fundamental connection of their union. Thus the sonnet form itself can be represented by a vertical form of the *Vesica Piscis*, with the nexus representing the pause between octave and sestet. In a further allusion to microcosm-macrocosm, the template might be a way in which to see Rossetti's sonnet sequence entire. Rossetti's titles for each half of the sonnet sequence echoes this: 'Youth and Change' and 'Change and Fate'. 'Change' is the overlap; the connecting membrane that is common to both and the two titles could be represented visually by the *Vesica* symbol. This is reinforced by one of the philosophical ideas that the symbol is said to convey; that of the two aspects associated with the concept of 'change': the changeable and the changeless. The *Vesica Piscis* is traditionally associated with the mediation of the two factors:

One of the ways to view the *Vesica Piscis* is as a representation of the intermediate realm which partakes of both the unchanging and the changing principles, the eternal and the ephemeral. Human consciousness thus functions as the mediator, balancing the two complementary poles of consciousness.⁶⁹

These are the concepts of the mutable and the fixed that appear throughout *The House of Life*; for example in the paradoxical phrase from the proem sonnet 'one dead deathless hour' (l.3).

The applicability of the *Vesica Piscis* symbol to the Swedenborgian elements within Rossetti's *The House of Life* is also relevant when we consider the mediating aspect to the symbol. The central section is a nexus point, a bridge between the world

⁶⁹ Lawler, p. 32.

of spirit and the world of matter. This is one of the central motifs of *The House of Life*, which discusses both the 'Here and Hereafter' ('True Woman, III: Her Heaven', l. 5).

The *True Woman* Sonnets

These three sonnets are the most explicitly Swedenborgian in Rossetti's *House of Life*, and indeed perhaps his entire body of work, as, included in the third sonnet 'True Woman: Her Heaven' is a reference to Swedenborg himself, and his ideas regarding the afterlife:

If to grow old in Heaven is to grow young,
(As the Seer saw and said,) then blest were he
With youth for evermore, whose heaven should be
True Woman, she whom these weak notes have sung. (p. 220, ll. 1-4)

The reference to the 'Seer' was explained by Rossetti in a letter to Jane Morris in 1880, two years before his death: 'The *seer* in the sonnet is Swedenborg, and the saying a very fine one' (Bryson, p. 168). The opening line paraphrases Swedenborg's lines from *Heaven and Hell* (1758): 'They who are in heaven are continually advancing to the spring-time of life, [...]. In a word, to grow old in heaven is to grow young'.⁷⁰ The 1880 letter to Jane Morris also indicates that the sonnets were written at this latter stage of Rossetti's career, showing that they represent a culmination of those ideas which relate to the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism that informs his work. Significantly Rossetti locates his use of Swedenborg within that wider context, by referring to him as a 'Seer'; emphasising the importance of the clairvoyant trance in his oeuvre.

These sonnets represent the most consistent use of Rossetti's interpretation of Swedenborg. Their central theme is woman, and the love of that woman as the path to eternal life. The sonnets therefore include the imagery of conjugal love, and represent a culmination of all the Swedenborgian aspects discussed hitherto across the two *House of Life* chapters. References to love, heaven and to the soul abound, and the sonnets also include the imagery of symmetry between lovers, fire as symbolic of love, the musical metaphor, the rose garden setting, Springtime, 'sweet'ness, and they end

⁷⁰ *HH*, 414, pp. 306-07.

with an image of the kiss. They also include reference to woman as the 'flower of life' (p. 218, l. 8); a shape in sacred geometry that is formally related to the *Vesica Piscis*.⁷¹

The first of the three sonnets, entitled 'Herself' describes the beauty and mystery of 'True Woman'.⁷² A sense of the earthly woman is conveyed through the evocation of the world of sensory experience that the poetic voice likens her to, but which it also suggests she surpasses:

To be a sweetness more desired than Spring;
A bodily beauty more acceptable
Than the wild rose-tree's arch that crowns the fell;
To be an essence more environing
Than wine's drained juice; a music ravishing
More than the passionate pulse of Philomel:—
To be all this 'neath one soft bosom's swell
That is the flower of life:— how strange a thing! (p. 218, ll. 1-8)

In a characteristic use of Rossettian duality the language functions both to remind the reader of the physical beauty of the earthly woman, but also, through the use of familiar imagery that conveys conjugal love, the promise of the next world is foreshadowed. As discussed previously, regarding other *House of Life* sonnets; in addition to its sensual connotations, the language used signifies aspects of a Swedenborgian heaven of truly conjugal love: 'sweetness' (l. 1), 'music' (l. 5), 'rose-tree' (l. 3) and 'Spring' (l. 1). However, this true height of her beauty the poetic voice cannot yet fully know. He is left to ponder the mystery of her essential nature, which lies "neath one soft bosom's swell" (l. 7). She remains an enigma, 'a sacred secret!' (l. 10), which he anticipates can only be fully revealed after death;

How strange a thing to be what Man can know
But as a sacred secret! Heaven's own screen
Hides her soul's purest depth and loveliest glow;
Closely withheld, as all things most unseen (ll. 9-12)

⁷¹ See Nozedar, p. 74: 'The Flower of Life design [...] consists of a series of evenly spaced interlinking circles [...] The most obvious symbols inherent within the Flower of Life are the circle [...] and the vesica piscis'.

⁷² The phrase 'True Woman' may itself be a significant term in terms of a Swedenborgian reading. Similar language is used by Mary Howitt, who, in a passage quoted in D. D. Home's *Incidents in My Life* (1863), described Home's late wife Sasha, who was a spiritualist and a sensitive to spirit presence in her last weeks, as having a 'true woman's heart' (p. 218), showing a similar use of the term amongst Rossetti's wider Swedenborgian-spiritualist circle.

This is in accordance with Swedenborg's words. In the same passage from *Heaven and Hell* to which Rossetti refers in his sonnet, Swedenborg writes of the beauty achieved by good women in heaven:

Women [...], if they have lived in faith in the Lord, [...] and in happy marriage love with a husband, come with the succession of years more and more into the flower of youth and early womanhood, and into beauty which exceeds all idea of beauty ever perceivable by our sight. (*HH* 414, p. 306)

The realisation of this afterlife state is anticipated in the third and final sonnet of the group; 'Her Heaven', which, in its assertion that heaven is reunion with 'True Woman' (l. 4), alludes to a Swedenborgian heaven.

The opening line of 'Her Heaven'; 'If to grow old in heaven is to grow young' (l. 1), which relates the idea that in Swedenborgian heaven, everyone returns 'to the springtime of their youth' is anticipated by the opening line of the first sonnet 'Herself', in which the woman is 'To be a sweetness more desired than Spring' (l. 1).⁷³ This is the sweetness of conjugal union and heavenly eternal youth. The poetic voice laments the decay of the material world in which even 'the noblest troth / Dies here to dust.' (l. 10-11), but looks forward, in the final lines of 'Her Heaven' to 'The One Hope' narrated in the final sonnet of the sequence of the same name, which is reunion in the afterlife with the beloved:

Yet shall Heaven's promise clothe
Even yet those lovers who have cherished still
This test for love:- in every kiss sealed fast
To feel the first kiss and forbode the last. (p. 220, ll. 11-14)

This is the immortality of the unified Love soul or Swedenborgian angel, as signified through the kiss: 'in every kiss sealed fast / To feel the first kiss and forebode the last.' (ll. 13-14). The 'test of love' (l. 13) is whether the love between lovers is truly conjugal, and will therefore survive into the next life to become even more glorious. The suggestion in the octave is that it is. The love bond, both 'Here and hereafter' (l. 5), is described as truly conjugal, as it is of the soul, and of both body and mind; as signified by the symbolic reference once again to the eyes and mouth:

⁷³ *CL* 44.9, p. 49.

Here and hereafter, – choir-strains of her tongue,-
Sky-spaces of her eyes, – sweet signs that flee
About her soul’s immediate sanctuary, –
Were Paradise all uttermost worlds among. (LI. 5-8)

In between the two framing sonnets of ‘Herself’ and ‘Her Heaven’ there is the middle sonnet, entitled ‘Her Love’. This sonnet describes conjugal love, the love experienced between true lovers upon earth which lasts into eternity in the afterlife. The octave opens with a phrase in which love literally, or linguistically, unites man and woman: ‘She loves him’ (p. 219, l. 1). This is followed immediately with; ‘for her infinite soul is Love’ (l. 1), which describes the immortality of conjugal love. The infinite soul of the ‘True Woman’ is her ‘married’ soul; the Swedenborgian angel (or, ‘Love personified’ – hence it’s capitalisation).

The remainder of the octave describes the dynamics of love in Swedenborgian terms, in which ‘pure love’ is symbolised by fire:⁷⁴

Passion in her is
A glass facing his fire, where the bright bliss
Is mirrored, and the heat returned. (LI. 2-4)

The sonnet describes love as both light and heat, which are both symbolic properties of conjugal love, and correspond to wisdom and love. In a conjugal partnership these two are united. The interaction of the sexes described in the sonnet echoes Swedenborg’s ideas, in which the light of a man’s wisdom is reflected back as the heat of the wife’s love: ‘We speak of a woman feeling the delights of her heat in her husband’s light’ (CL 189, p. 193). Once again Rossetti uses the imagery of mirroring associated with conjugal love.

After the pause between octave and sestet; in a now familiar pattern, the sestet opens with an image of absolute union, as the two (‘She’ and ‘him’) become one; the conjugal angel:

Lo! they are one. With wifely breast to breast
And circling arms, she welcomes all command
Of love, – her soul to answering ardours fann’d:
Yet as morn springs or twilight sinks to rest,

⁷⁴ *Interaction of the Soul and Body*, p. 18.

Ah! Who shall say she deems not loveliest
The hour of sisterly sweet hand-in-hand? (Ll. 9-14)

There is a return to the image of symmetry and connection around the heart centre that characterises Rossetti's portrayal of conjugal love. The phrase 'circling arms' is reminiscent of the visual depiction of heaven as a romantic reunion in the painting *The Blessed Damozel* in which the motif of embracing lovers, whose arms encircle one another, is repeated in the background, suggesting a language of love common to both Rossetti's visual and literary work.⁷⁵ The sonnet closes with conjoined words, reinforcing once more the imagery of conjugal joining with its internal balance and symmetry: 'hand-in-hand' (l. 14).

This central sonnet ('Her Love'), both formally and with regard to its content, represents the linking factor between the first; 'Herself' and the last sonnet, 'Her Heaven'. It represents a bridge between earth (in which the woman is 'what Man can know / But as a sacred secret!') and heaven (where immortality of the conjugal soul is achieved; 'then blest were he /' [...] whose heaven should be / True Woman'): the 'Here and hereafter' mentioned in 'Her Heaven'. The experience of conjugal love is what connects the earthly love with a state of immortality in the afterlife. The form of the three sonnets recalls the geometric symbol of the *Vesica Piscis*; the central section is the overlap common to both of conjugal love.

The three 'True Woman' sonnets come at the close of the first section of the sonnet sequence 'Youth and Change' (followed by the last sonnet that meditates on 'Love's Last Gift' (p. 221)).⁷⁶ As a set of three they look back to youth and change, and narrate earthly delights, but anticipate the next section of the sequence; 'Change and Fate'; the last one, 'Her Heaven', anticipates the final sonnet of the sequence 'The One Hope', as it narrates that one hope of eternal union. The sonnets as a group are therefore also that which bridges the two parts of *The House of Life* as a whole; the formal pattern of the entire sequence in microcosm.

As with the opening and closing words of the *The House of Life*, the opening and closing words of the three 'True Woman' sonnets act as a framing device which

⁷⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-78) Oil, 212.1 x 133 x 8.9 cm (Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums; accession number 1943.202). See Fig. 4, p. 278.

⁷⁶ The letter to Jane Morris indicates Rossetti's original intention was 'to wind up the first part of the House of Life' with the three True Woman sonnets (Bryson, pp. 167-8).

heralds the underlying message of the sonnets, and the sequence as a whole: the hope for immortality through conjugal union. The opening word of Sonnet I: 'Herself' is 'To', and the closing one of Sonnet III: 'Her Heaven' is 'last'; read together they narrate the 'one hope' for immortality of the soul: 'To last'.

Rossetti's 'True Woman' sonnets represent the culmination of his use of Swedenborgian ideas and imagery, as drawn through the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism. The sonnets also illustrate Rossetti's poetic technique of reinforcement through repetition, as the imagery relates to, and recalls that used throughout *The House of Life*. As a body of three, they symbolise both earth and heaven – and the nexus, or bridge, between those two states. In this, and their use of imagery, they relate to both 'The Blessed Damozel' and *Beata Beatrix* which also feature these three states. The 'True Woman' sonnets represent Rossetti's most personal, direct and original expression of these ideas because, unlike the former two works, he has moved out fully from the template of Dante, and developed his own poetic voice, shedding also the mediation of Blake's and Poe's Swedenborgianism, to achieve what is truly Rossettian. It is therefore significant that these sonnets were both written and published towards the end of his life, suggesting that his achievement as mystical poet-artist had been realised.

Conclusion

In considering primarily three major works by Rossetti; 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71) and *The House of Life* (1881), this thesis has traced Rossetti's engagement with Swedenborgian-spiritualism, through primarily, consideration of his use of imagery and symbolism, but also his choice of form, in both his written and artistic work. It has looked at Rossetti's response to that context in every aspect of his oeuvre, through poetry, fine art and graphic design. The three works represent his changing relationship with the context, from the early poem of 1850, through to his final published work of 1881, and correspond to three distinct stages of creativity.

The form of the thesis has reflected this tripartite structure, through its division into three main parts, in acknowledgement of the three main works addressed, and the three phases of engagement with context identified in the thesis. The first part established a background for the works considered in the two subsequent parts. This contained the review of literature and the revisionist historical chapter which reintroduced a context for Rossetti's work, in order that it can be fully understood. The second part, entitled *The Dead Beloved*, featured the two works which address this theme; containing a chapter on the poem 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), followed by one which looks at the painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71). *The House of Life*, which contains two chapters, addressed Rossetti's sonnet sequence *The House of Life* (1881), in addition to related paintings and examples of design work.

In doing this, the thesis also reflects the tripartite form of the *Vesica Piscis*; the three 'True Woman' sonnets and the engagement with earth, heaven and the connection point between the two, in the three main works considered. The thesis thus acknowledges Rossetti's own expressive techniques of symbolic patterning, reinforcement through repetition, and allusion to microcosm-macrocosm.

In addition, the three main works discussed in the thesis echo the form that Rossetti used in his *House of Life* sonnet sequence: 'Youth and Change'; 'Change and Fate'. The first version of 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850) represents 'Youth'; a youthful engagement with supernatural themes, drawing mainly on secondary sources of Swedenborgian-spiritualism (Blake, Poe) and influenced by his father's esotericism.

Beata Beatrix (1863-71) represents that context pulled through the experiential side of Victorian spiritualism, after the death of Lizzie Siddal, and coinciding with the height of production of Swedenborgian-spiritualist texts. This is 'Change'; that which converts the youthful intellectual and literary approach into something more profoundly personal. *The House of Life* (1881) sonnet sequence thus represents 'Fate': it is a body of work that presents itself from an 'inner standing-point' and wears the cloak of autobiography, but narrates from the viewpoint of a representative, abstracted 'soul'.¹ This work, formulated ultimately towards the end of Rossetti's career, represents the most philosophical and layered use of Swedenborgian-spiritualism, combined as it is with other influences (which this thesis does not explore, but does acknowledge as present). It therefore signifies Rossetti's final and most sophisticated use of the context.

This pattern is not only applicable to the three major works addressed in the main analytical body of the thesis, but is illustrated in microcosm, by the different published versions of the poem 'The Blessed Damozel', the first published version of which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. 'The Blessed Damozel' and its rewrites represent Rossetti's consequent engagement with the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism. It was rewritten and republished at times coincident with the three identified stages in Rossetti's production. The first version, published in 1850, was influenced predominantly by secondary sources, representing a more intellectual response by Rossetti to an esoteric literary tradition which manifested in Blake and Poe. The 1871 published version has a more direct relationship to Rossetti's involvement with Victorian spiritualism, and relates to how the context manifests through a more experiential engagement. It therefore can be viewed as embodying a similar treatment to the original version of the painting *Beata Beatrix*, which was also completed in 1871. The 1881 version of 'The Blessed Damozel', consonant with *The House of Life* (1881), represents a more emphatic evocation of heaven as a reunion of lovers, representing a simpler and more idiosyncratically confident utilisation of Swedenborgian ideas regarding love and the afterlife, coinciding with the writing of his

¹ CW, p. 332. This is Rossetti's own philosophical phrase describing his poetic and artistic method, which he uses in explanation of his work in 'The Stealthy School of Criticism' (1871); the published riposte to Robert Buchanan's negative criticism of his *Poems* (1870).

most explicitly Swedenborgian work; the 'True Woman' sonnets (written 1880) and published in *The House of Life* (1881).

Later Published Versions of the 'The Blessed Damozel' and how they Reflect the Changes in Approach to Context

In his creation of 'The Blessed Damozel' Rossetti drew upon Swedenborgian ideas regarding the continuation of romantic love in heaven from a variety of sources, both primary and secondary. What began as a predominantly intellectual response to literary prototypes in the 1850 version, progresses into a more emphatic evocation of heaven as sexual reunion with the beloved in later versions of the work. The changes made to the poem show a more explicit and consistent use of Swedenborgian imagery by Rossetti, and indicate the changing nature of his response to and use of Swedenborgian-spiritualism.

Spiritualism as a Context for the Poem

The republication of 'The Blessed Damozel' in *Poems* (1870) results from the period of Rossetti's life in which he was engaged most deeply with spiritualism; the 1860s.² This deepens the significance of the work from an exercise predominantly in literary esotericism (that includes reference to Swedenborg), to a piece which is representative of a social-cultural context (the particular manifestation of Swedenborgian ideas present in Victorian spiritualism). In this regard it can be viewed

² It follows the variant version of 1856 published in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. This version will not be discussed; however, it is worth noting that some of the manifest changes that indicate a more determined Swedenborgianism appeared in this variant prior to the 1870 version. By the late 1850s spiritualism was well established in London, and those connected with Rossetti became involved. It is not unlikely that this had a decorative effect upon his work (for example the context manifests in his *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1853), as discussed in Chapter 4, p. 132). However, there were further changes between 1856 and 1870 and so all changes will be considered in a discussion of the 1870 version, as this published version is consonant with other key works at the time, which show a response to the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism, including *Beata Beatrix* (1863-71) and the embryonic *House of Life*. Further changes manifest in the final published version of the work from the revised edition of *Poems* in 1881 (editions between 1870 and 1881 will not be considered). Therefore, in terms of variant texts which succeed the first published *Germ* version, discussion will centre on the first and final *Poems* editions published in Rossetti's lifetime.

as one of a number of works resulting from the context of a specific brand of Swedenborgian-spiritualism, as espoused by those in Rossetti's literary circle, such as those by William Howitt and D.D. Home, and of Rossetti's own major work that results from this context, *Beata Beatrix* (1863-71).

Due to the poem's supernatural subject matter, even earlier versions of 'The Blessed Damozel' indicate Rossetti's predisposition to spiritualism. The active presence of the dead beloved in the poem – she is both mourned for and *mourning* – suggests existence beyond death. There are moments of connection indicative of attempted spiritualistic communication across the two worlds in the 1850 poem. The Damozel looks to earth with intense intent, as if she could make contact with her earthbound beloved: 'Her gaze still strove, / In that steep gulph, to pierce / The swarm' (l. 57-9).³ The bracketed stanzas, which narrate the thoughts of the earthly lover, are suggestive of contact beyond the grave. The first bracketed stanza, in which the lover thinks he feels the presence of his dead beloved, has a conventional ghostly quality:

(To *one* it is ten years of years:
..... Yet now, here in this place
Surely she leaned o'er me, – her hair
Fell about my face.....
Nothing: the Autumn-fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.) (ll. 19-24)

The poem progresses from this first bracketed stanza, to the final two bracketed interjections, which hint that connection is made. The second to last stanza ends with 'and she smiled' (l. 144), and is followed immediately with the opening of the final stanza '(I saw her smile)' (l. 145). This pattern is repeated in the last two lines, so that the poem ends with a fleeting sense of contact: 'And laid her face between her hands, / And wept. (I heard her tears.)' (ll. 149-50). The fragmented nature of her presence suggests the partial visibility – and audibility – of spirits in the séance room.

An additional stanza appears in the 1870 *Poems* version (which had appeared in a similar form, but different location, in 1856),⁴ which suggests a greater emphasis

³ The line references refer to 'The Blessed Damozel' (1850), *CW*, pp. 8-11. All subsequent line references to the 1850 version refer to this edition.

⁴ The same stanza in 1856 version reads as follows:

(Ah sweet! Just now, in that bird's song,
Strove not her accents there

on spiritualism as a context, and a subsequent further detachment from a more catholic spirituality as exemplified by Dante and the Early Italians, evident in the very earliest versions of the poem:

(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird's song,
Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be hearkened? When those bells
Possessed the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair?)⁵

The last two lines were changed for the 1870 publication to produce a greater sense of the earthly lover's longing to connect with his dead beloved. He imagines her eagerness to bridge the gap between the worlds and connect again with her earthly beloved. The further repetition of 'strove', combined with its earlier use to describe the Damozel's 'gaze', which also 'strove' to reach him (l. 51), reinforces the sense of desperation to make contact.⁶ In this reading the Damozel is imagined by the lover to be in the spirit world; his earthly perspective is narrated from a spiritualistic standpoint, whereas those seen from the viewpoint of the Damozel locate her very much in a Swedenborgian heaven, awaiting his arrival.

'The Blessed Damozel' (1870): A More Emphatic Depiction of Conjugal Love

The position occupied by this stanza in the 1856 poem is filled with a new stanza in the 1870 version, which illustrates a more emphatic use of Swedenborgian

Fain to be hearken'd? When those bells
Possess'd the midday air,
Was she not stepping to my side
Down all the trembling stair?)

The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, No. 11, (November, 1856), p. 175, *Rossetti Archive* [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/ap4.o93.1.November.rad.html#p713>, accessed 13 December 2012]

Its position is further on in the poem, than its equivalent in the 1870 version; it follows the stanza that begins 'And I myself will teach to him,' (Stanza 15 in 1850 and 1856). The verse was moved forward in the 1870 poem to become stanza 11. See also Fredeman, 'The Blessed Damozel', p. 265 for details of this stanza in the 1856 published version.

⁵ 'The Blessed Damozel' (1870), ll. 61-6 (*CW*, pp. 12-15). All subsequent page references to the 1870 version of the poem refer to this edition.

⁶ The lines in the 1856 version that these supersede lack power, by contrast: 'Was she not stepping to my side / Down all the trembling stair?' (ll. 95-6).

imagery. This new stanza also replaces two bracketed stanzas that begin with 'Alas' from the 1850 version, which convey a sense of spiritual doubt in the projected thoughts of the earthly lover, and counter the Damozel's faith in reunion: 'Alas for lonely Heaven! Alas / For life wrung out alone! (ll. 95-6). A hint of this uncertainty is retained in the 1870 version; however, the language used to describe the lover's longing is Swedenborgian in its imagery, and more hopeful in tone:

(Alas! We two, we two, thou say'st!
Yea, one wast thou with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
To endless unity
The soul whose likeness with thy soul
Was but its love for thee?) (ll. 97-102)

This represents a significant shift, as the earth bound lover's words are made consonant with a Swedenborgian-spiritualist perspective. The sentiment conveyed in these lines mirrors that expressed by the Damozel in the 1850 version, when she envisages her future as conjugal angel: "'We two will live at once, one life; / And peace shall be with us.'" (ll. 137-8). These lines are not present in the 1870 version; instead the anticipated state of 'endless unity' is imagined by the earthly lover. The Damozel's desire for unity is therefore answered in her lover's hopes in the 1870 poem.

David G. Riede has also noted this change, but regards the emphasis on the continuation of romantic love as a negation of God:

Similarly, the earthly lover had pondered, in 1850, his worthiness in the eyes of the Lord, but in 1870, at the same point in the poem, he recognises explicitly that he loves not God, but the Damozel. (p. 84)

The tone of the new stanza, however, is more hopeful than previously. There is an implicit acceptance of God, who is not mentioned by the lover in the 1850 poem. In addition, despite fears of unworthiness, the earthly lover recognises that the love bond that was forged on earth ('one wast thou with me' (l. 98)) is primarily spiritual ('The soul whose likeness with thy soul' (l. 101)). This represents an amendment to the poem which makes clearer its Swedenborgian aspect. Conjugal love is primarily a

'spiritual cohabitation' because it 'links two souls and minds into one' (CL 158.2, p.167).

When conjugal love is accepted as a theme in the work, then it becomes apparent that the love experienced by the couple on earth, and that aspired to in heaven, is essentially the same: Rossetti uses Swedenborg's ideas to suggest a sacred love partnership which is achieved on earth and continued in heaven. Once this aspect is understood then it accounts for elements in this stanza that have troubled critics such as Riede who remain disconcerted by Rossetti's apparent conflation of the earthly and heavenly in his poem:

The hope in these lines for the bare possibility that earthly love may be continued after death has little to do with any Christian heaven, but it places the poem thematically with poems written in 1869 and 1870.⁷

Despite viewing the changes as problematic, regarding the subject of heaven as a reunion of lovers, Riede's comment does acknowledge that the changes bring the version in line with other works from the same period. The changes are indicative of the development of Rossetti's work; they align the poem, as regards its subject and treatment with the first version of *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), which embodies a similar mix of Swedenborgian ideas and imagery from practical spiritualism, such as the séance room. The idea of unity and the inherent balance in the line 'The soul whose likeness with thy soul' also makes the 1870 version of 'The Blessed Damozel' poem resonate with the imagery of symmetry which Rossetti also uses his paintings of courtly love, such as *Roman de la Rose* (1864) and *King René's Honeymoon* (1864).

⁷ Riede, p. 84. In this vein of response, Riede is anticipated by John Dixon Hunt, who also finds this aspect of the 1870 poem disturbing: 'The love which the Damozel desires would surely be found blasphemous by Christians; although the shrine the lovers will frequent is; 'Occult, withheld, untrod', their conduct smacks too severely of earth to be imaginable in even a poetic heaven' (p. 79). The charge that the idea of the continuation of romantic love in the afterlife 'has little to do with any Christian heaven', or is blasphemous to Christians, is also refuted when one acknowledges the Swedenborgian elements. A Swedenborgian heaven is a Christian heaven, albeit of an esoteric cast, to which Swedenborg's words on conjugal love attest:

The reason why this love is a treasure-house of Christian religion is that this religion makes one with that love and lives with it. For it has been shown that only those who approach the Lord and [love] the truths of His church and do his good deeds can come into possession of that love and continue in it [...]. Likewise it was shown that the Lord is the sole source of that love, so that it is only possible among those of the Christian religion. (CL 458, p. 424)

Despite the absence in 1870 of the lines from the 1850 poem which most articulate the conjugal reunion anticipated by the Damozel, ‘We two will live at once one life / And peace shall be with us’ (ll. 137-8), the poem retains its vision of a continued sacred love union. In 1870, stanza 23 in the 1850 poem (of which these are the closing lines) is merged with the preceding stanza 22, which expresses the Swedenborgian notion of the state of blessedness achieved through conjugal love:

There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:-
To have more blessing than on earth
In nowise; but to be
As then we were, – being as then
At peace. Yea, verily. (1850, ll. 127–32)

This becomes one stanza in the 1870 version which is more explicit in its suggestion of heaven as an eternal romantic union:

There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:-
Only to live as once on earth
With Love, – only to be,
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he. (1870, ll. 127–32)

The lines given to the Damozel here echo those given to the earthly lover earlier in the poem (and referred to previously), in their suggestion of the heavenly state of love as a continuation of the conjugal love experienced briefly on earth:

(Alas! We two, we two, thou say’st!
Yea, one wast thou with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
To endless unity
The soul whose likeness with thy soul
Was but its love for thee?) (1870, ll. 97-102)

The two stanzas closely mirror each other, which has the effect of reinforcing the image of unity in the 1870 poem. The conjugal angel envisaged by the Damozel in 1850 is imagined and hoped for by both the Damozel in heaven and her lover on earth in 1870. Both stanzas in effect represent two halves – two desires that will be satisfied at some point outside of the narrative of the poem. This serves to repeat the main

thematic thrust of the work; the desire for the re-attainment of unity: the two become one motif that characterises this and other Rossetti works. From this aspect Rossetti has successfully united heaven and earth in the work, by showing them as two sides to one hope: the 'one hope' referred to in the last *House of Life* sonnet, which is heavenly reunion.⁸ In the case of the earthly lover it is hope tinged with fear and doubt, but for the Damozel it is hope reinforced by faith. These two stanzas in the 1870 poem therefore embody the lines which exist in all versions of the poem:

'I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come,' she said. [...]
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?'⁹

A further minor, yet significant, change appears in later versions of the poem, which indicates a more consistent adoption of Swedenborgian imagery. The handmaidens who weave robes for the newly dead have 'bound locks / And bosoms covered' (l. 109-110) in 1850. Their association with the wives of conjugal love has been furthered by 1870; they sit 'with bound locks / And foreheads garlanded' (l. 109-110).¹⁰ One of the seven wives of conjugal love, whom Swedenborg meets in one of the rose-gardens of heaven, weaves a 'garland of roses', which, worn upon the head, symbolises the 'delights of intelligence' (*CL*, 293.7, pp. 281-2).

Critical Responses to the Changes

Though the changes from the 1850 to the 1870 versions of 'The Blessed Damozel' have been discussed in critical responses to the work, the nature of the

⁸ Rather pertinently, 'The One Hope' was written in 1870 and first published in *Poems* (1870) as part of the group of poems entitled 'Sonnets and Songs, towards a Work to Be Called The House of Life' (Lewis, p. 1, p. 223), which locates the work in a contextual relationship with 'The Blessed Damozel' (1870). Robert D. Johnston has also recognised an inter-textual relationship between the two works: 'In this sonnet the wish of the Damozel in "The Blessed Damozel" is repeated in the lover's wish that he may find after death "the one Hope's one name"' (Johnston, p. 55).

⁹ 1850, ll. 61-2, 65; 1870, ll. 67-8, 71. The lines are the same in 1850 and 1870 and remain largely unaltered in variant versions (See Fredeman 'The Blessed Damozel', p. 266 for details).

¹⁰ This alteration was made for the 1856 Oxford and Cambridge version of the poem, and was retained in the 1870 (Fredeman 'The Blessed Damozel', p. 267).

revisions and the reasons for them have been explained in various terms.¹¹ A common theme across the range of critical responses is the implication that autobiography, or authorial personal biography, is a significant influential factor upon the changes to the work. William E. Fredeman refers to this tendency in his essay on 'The Blessed Damozel':

Various critics have suggested that he attempted in later revisions to update the poem, both aesthetically and biographically – to transform the accidental anticipatory element in its narrative situation to make it conform to the actuality of his personal tragedy following the death of Elizabeth Siddal.¹²

This response can be traced across the decades. K. L. Knickerbocker, writing in 1932, alludes to the 'train of circumstances which [...] linked Elizabeth Siddal with the figure of "The Blessed damozel"', and asserts that 'this poem which had its inception as a form of poetic exercise, had by 1869 become freighted with biographical details.'¹³ This argument is repeated by Robert D. Johnston in 1969: 'What in 1847 is romanticized becomes a deeply felt experience in 1870' (p. 55), and, with subtle modifications by David G. Riede in 1983:

The revisions were mostly for the sake of structural coherence or stylistic felicity, but some change the meaning and tone of the poem radically. [...] The general effect of the revisions and additions was to change the "Dantesque heavens", as Leigh Hunt called them, to heavens of more fully human love, to incorporate autobiography, and to add sorrow. (p. 83).

¹¹ Elizabeth K. Helsinger, for example, recognises that some of the 'most significant additions were to the parenthetical words of the lover' and that these are largely responsible for the change in tone in the work from the 1850 to the 1870 (p. 46). Her conclusion is that the new stanza in which the lover questions whether he will be worthy of reunion, 'But shall God lift / To endless unity [...]?' (1870, ll. 99-100), widens the gap between the Damozel and her lover, which for Helsinger has implications for Rossetti's poetics across a number of works; the gap then becomes a metaphoric one as regards the differences between the simplicity of medieval art that the poem evokes and the sense of a sophisticated, questioning modern poet-narrator: 'the representation of the unbridgeable distance between the past art and any possible modern art, or poetry, of presence' (p. 49). It is worth noting that whether or not the reader interpretation here is that the gap between the lovers widens, and whatever the implications for the resultant position of the posited medieval setting versus the modern framework, that the changes represent an incorporation of additional Swedenborgian imagery, which accounts in part for the deliberate esotericism employed by Rossetti in the work.

¹² Fredeman 'The Blessed Damozel', pp. 239-40.

¹³ Knickerbocker, pp. 498, 500.

Whilst it must be acknowledged that the poem's development from 1850 to its 1870 incarnation is indicative of a movement away from a more theoretical use of Swedenborgian ideas, and towards a more emphatic and consistent use of Swedenborgian imagery, as deepened through exposure to spiritualism, a distinction must be made between autobiography and the context that lies behind it. Rossetti's personal biography is important in so far as it elucidates the context which inspired the changes made to the work. Rossetti's experiences with spiritualism in the 1860s and 70s, which include attempts to contact Siddal in the afterlife, are reflected in the changes made to the work, and locate it amongst other texts that reflect a particular engagement with Swedenborgian ideas concerning heaven and the spirit world. Rossetti's experiences, both intellectual and actual, relating to the supernatural therefore affected the development of his work artistically; this is distinct, however, from the suggestion that the changes are directly indicative of his personal belief or biography. Rossetti has not retrofitted the poem to incorporate aspects of his own life, but it can be said that his personal experiences have altered the work.

'The Blessed Damozel' (1881): The Final Published Version of the Poem

Between the 1870 and 1881 versions there is only one major alteration, but it represents one of the most significant in terms of the tone of the work, and one which is in accordance with the conjugal love imagery present in *The House of Life* sonnets, also published 1881. In the 1881 edition this is stanza 7, which describes the heavenly communities, and represents the most altered stanza across the various versions of the poem. Tracing the changes in this stanza, from its original published form as stanza 8 in 1850, through to its final 1881 incarnation, successfully illustrates Rossetti's poetic development; in adopting progressively overt Swedenborgian imagery, his work becomes actually fully Rossettian. In the 1850 version, stanza 8, lines 43–46 read:

Heard hardly, some of her new friends,
Playing at holy games,
Spake, gentle-mouthed, among themselves,
Their virginal chaste names;

As has been discussed in the Blessed Damozel chapter, even at this early stage these lines can be said to represent the conjugal love partnerships to which the Damozel aspires, as Swedenborg writes that ‘conjugal love is chaste, pure and holy’ (CL 51, p. 56). However, there is retained in this version perhaps a trace of an earlier Anglo-catholic Christianity, which is decidedly altered by 1870, in order to depict heaven as a continuation of romantic love:

Heard hardly, some of her new friends,
Amid their loving games,
Spake evermore among themselves
Their virginal chaste names (1870, ll. 37-40)

This is a much clearer reference to conjugal love which is ‘chaste sexual love’ (CL 55.7, p.60); hence the heavenly lovers remain ‘virginal’ despite their ‘loving games’. Also alluded to in these lines is Swedenborg’s term for the growth of conjugal love between partners; ‘heavenly nuptial games’ (CL, 183.7, p. 188).

A further textual variant of this stanza is written upon a drawing dated 1876, which relates to the painting *The Blessed Damozel* (1875–8), in which the motif of embracing couples is featured in the top portion of the work, behind the head of the Damozel, expressing visually her anticipation of romantic love reunion in heaven.¹⁴ In this version of the stanza, the line, ‘Their virginal chaste names’ is replaced with ‘Their rapturous new names’.¹⁵ This slight textual change, coupled with the image depicted in the drawing of couples embracing in heavenly reunion, enhances the sexual quality of the image, with its connotations of ecstatic delight. Rossetti’s choice of word here indicates the work’s close relationship with *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71), which also draws upon the same context, as Rossetti’s description of that painting uses similar vocabulary: he writes Beatrice is ‘suddenly rapt from earth to heaven’, enhancing the ecstatic associations of conjugal love.¹⁶

¹⁴ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-78) Oil, 212.1 x 133 x 8.9 cm (Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums; accession number 1943.202). See Fig. 4, p. 278.

¹⁵ ‘The Blessed Damozel (first sketch for background): Included Text’, *Rossetti Archive* [<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s244g.rap.html>, accessed 8 March 2013]. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel (First sketch for Background)* (1876) Black, red, and white chalk on green wove paper, 39.9 x 93 cm (Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums; accession number 1943.750). See Fig. 5, p. 278.

¹⁶ *Correspondence V*, p. 42, 71.43.

In the 1881 version the stanza is altered further to depict heaven as eternal romantic union:

Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remembered names;¹⁷

Crucially this revised edition was written towards the end of Rossetti's life when his mind was again 'much occupied with spiritualism, and [...] immortality'.¹⁸ Swedenborg was clearly on Rossetti's mind at this time, as evidenced by the reference to Swedenborg in the *House of Life sonnet* 'True Woman III: Her Heaven', written in 1880 and published in 1881: 'If to grow old in Heaven is to grow young, / (As the Seer saw and said,)'.¹⁹ This brings the final published version of 'The Blessed Damozel' in line with the most explicitly Swedenborgian of all Rossetti's works.

In tracing the changes to this stanza of 'The Blessed Damozel' in particular, it becomes clear that the work, which had always been informed by Swedenborgian-spiritualism, illustrates the changing nature of Rossetti's engagement with that context. It represents not, as D. M. R. Bentley has suggested, Rossetti's 'urge to secularize his early poems', but rather shows a fuller exposition of a Christian afterlife that does not negate romantic sexual love; one informed by Swedenborgian ideas.²⁰

His interest in Swedenborg's visionary presentation of romantic love and ideas on the afterlife, gave Rossetti the opportunity as a poet to move out from the shadow of Dante and the Early Italians, and to express, with greater originality and confidence his own vision of sacred sexual love, and re-present the theme of the dead beloved with greater resonance and relevance for his contemporary readership. His experiences with spiritualism, which deepened his engagement with Swedenborgian ideas, gave greater power and authenticity to his presentation of love and the afterlife. The supernatural themes he found inspirational as a young poet in the writings of Blake and Poe have been absorbed and developed by Rossetti's response to the Swedenborgian-spiritualism of those in his circle, and through his own direct

¹⁷'The Blessed Damozel' (1881), *CPP*, p. 4, ll. 37-40.

¹⁸*Family-Letters*, I, p. 381.

¹⁹*Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 220, ll. 1-2.

²⁰Bentley, 'Damozel', p. 33.

experiences and interest, into a presentation which lends a personal gravitas to a romantic, one might even suggest fantastic, subject. In doing so, Rossetti has furthered the very esoteric tradition, as exemplified also by Blake – that other poet-artist – that proved so inspirational to him in the first place. It is this engagement with the context of Swedenborgian-spiritualism which has established Rossetti's own work, and life, within this same tradition.

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***[All works of art referred to are referenced in footnotes in the main body of the thesis]**

Illustrations



Fig. 1

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
The Raven (c.1846)**

Ink and wash on paper, 23 x 21.6 cm
(Whitwick Manor, Wolverhampton)



Fig. 2

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
The Raven (c.1847)**

Pencil, pen and brown and black ink, and ink
wash on paper, 22.2 x 17.5 cm
(Birmingham Museums and Gallery;
accession number 1904P268)



Fig. 3

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Raven* (c.1848)

Pen and brown ink on light-brown paper, 22.9 x 21.6 cm
(Victoria and Albert Museum; museum number E.3415-1922)



Fig. 4

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-8)

Oil on canvas, 174 cm × 94 cm

(Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums;
accession number 1943.202)



Fig. 5

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel (First sketch for Background)* (1876)

Black, red, and white chalk on green wove paper, 39.9 x 93 cm

(Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums; accession number 1943.750)



Fig. 6

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1853)

Watercolour on paper, 42 x 61 cm

(Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; bequeathed Thomas Combe 1894)



Fig. 7

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix* (c.1863-71)

Oil on canvas, 86.4 x 66 cm (Tate; reference number N01279)



Fig. 8
Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
Roman de la Rose (1864)
 Watercolour on paper, 34.3 x 34.3 cm
 (Tate; reference N04089)



Fig. 9
Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
King René's Honeymoon (1864)
 Oil, 52.7 x 34.3 cm
 (Private Collection; Mrs. Virginia Surtees)

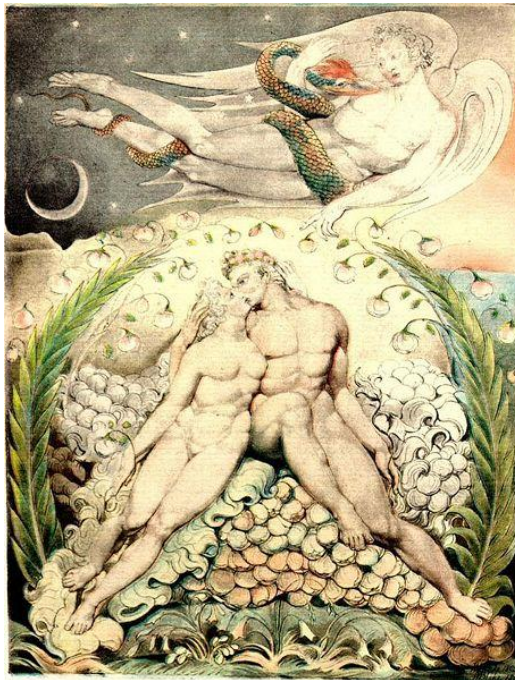


Fig. 10
William Blake, Satan Watching the
Caresses of Adam and Eve
(Illustration to Milton's Paradise Lost)
(1808)
 Pen and watercolour on paper,
 50.5 x 38 cm
 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston;
 accession number 90.96)



Fig. 11
William Blake,
Two Lovers in a Lilly; the heading for
Chapter ii of Jerusalem (1804)



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Fig. 12
(above)

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
*Sofa and Cushion (Morris, Marshall,
Faulkner & Co. Settee) (c.1862)***

Wooden frame with painting and gilding, furnished with dark green velvet, 82.6 x 199.1 x 66 cm

(Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge;
accession number M/F.1 & A-1918)

And detail of the panels (left)



Fig. 13

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Designs for Sofa Roundels (c.1860)*

Pencil on paper, 20.2 x 19.8 cm

(Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery; accession number 1904P321)



Fig. 14

Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
Illuminated text design for *The House of Life* introductory sonnet (1880)



Fig. 15

William Blake, *Dante and Beatrice in the Constellation of Gemini* (1824-7)

Graphite, chalk, pen and ink and watercolour, 35.5 x 51 cm

(The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

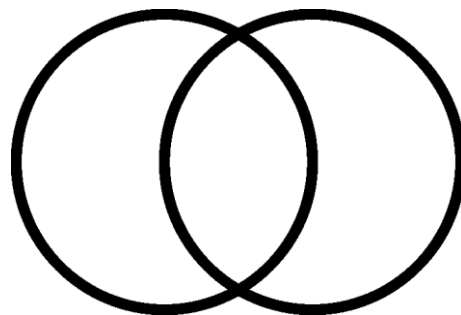


Fig. 16

The Vesica Piscis