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**Christina Rossetti
and
the Aesthetics of the Feminine**

by

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Abstract

The act of contextual recovery that motivates New Historicist readings of Christina Rossetti's poetry has its own validity, but the consequence of recovery is often to posit a fully intentional, strong, and subversive subject position. An alternative critique is offered which interprets subjectivities as endlessly oscillating between positions of presence and absence, subject and object, silence and speech, here and elsewhere, and between the text and (impossibly) outside the text. This dynamic allows for a subtle matrix of collusion with, resistance to, and evasion of the representational system. I read this matrix as the product of Rossetti's biographical and poetical subject positions conventionally encoded as the superlatively and excessively feminine, and thus as both the basis of nineteenth-century gender ideology and its blind spot. The various discursive pressures on Rossetti's poetry — specifically Pre-Raphaelitism, Tractarianism, and Aestheticism — produce an unstable poetic that both avows and rejects the aesthetic of the feminine.

The Introduction traces the implications of the aesthetic of the feminine for feminist readings of nineteenth-century gender ideology. The first three chapters then explore specific interactions between Rossetti and the aesthetic: Chapter 1 analyses biographical constructions of Christina Rossetti as a trope for the feminine and for representation itself; Chapter 2 explores D. G. Rossetti's manuscript revisions of her poetry and her collusions; and Chapter 3 critiques his two earliest

paintings for which she sat as a model for the Virgin Mary and also critiques her own poetic responses which expose the repressed alterity beneath her brother's gender ideology. The following chapters move on to suggest how other discourses bear the aesthetic of the feminine: in Chapter 4, Italy and the maternal; in Chapters 5 and 6, the Tractarian doctrines of analogy and reserve.

Each chapter explicates the problematics of contextual recovery: the poetry is shown not merely to reflect or inscribe particular ideological positions that New Historicist readings have interpreted as thematically radical, such as the adoption of public devotional genres to evade a submissive feminine position. Rather, her poetry admits a gap between belief in a transcendental signified and praxis. In the final chapter, this gap is seen not to encode failure, but to gesture towards endless possibilities for re-figuring the feminine as the mark of a subject-in-process, located in the interstice between belief and praxis, between the Word and words.

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Abbreviations and Conventions

For the sake of clarity, quotations taken from an added or deleted portion of a revised poem are not identified by line numbers. In these cases, the reader is referred to Crump's textual notes, which contain the text of the amendments.

The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti, ed. by R. W. Crump, 3 vols, (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979-1990), is indicated by C, followed by volume and page number.

PW: CR *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, ed. with a Memoir and Notes by William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1904; repr.1906)

CW: DGR *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 2 vols ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis and Scrutton, 1886)

DGR: FL *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters*, 2 vols, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1895)

CR: FL *The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Brown, Langham & Co., 1908)

RP *Rossetti Papers, 1862-1870*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Sands, 1903)

R: R: P *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism: Papers 1854 to 1862*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: George Allen, 1899)

Introduction

In a review of W. M. Rossetti's 1904 edition of his sister's poetry, Paul Elmer More offers a characteristically nineteenth-century opinion of the value her poetry:

for page after page we are in the society of a spirit always refined and exquisite in sentiment, but without any guiding and restraining poetic impulse; she never drew to the shutters of her soul, but lay open to every wandering breath of heaven.¹

As More continues to describe the qualities of Rossetti's poetry, he insists on her passive renunciation of earthly life along with the ethereal and spiritual nature of her thought. This otherworldliness More repeatedly defines as 'feminine': 'as pure and fine an expression of the feminine genius as the world has yet heard' (p. 816), 'the purely feminine spirit of her imagination' (p. 816), 'her feminine disposition' (p. 816), her 'feminine mind' (p. 818), 'feminine genius' (p. 818, p. 819), and 'feminine heart' (p. 820). The article's litany of the 'feminine' discloses its value as a trope of passivity, ethereality and the non-material: in fact, 'utter womanliness' (p. 819). In this rhetorical move, the cultural construction of femininity collapses into the biological category female while denying that the feminine in its most perfect manifestation has any investment in a bodily existence. More comments: 'this womanly

¹Paul Elmer More, 'Christina Rossetti', *Atlantic Monthly* 94 (December 1904), 815-21 (p. 815).

poet does not properly renounce at all, she passively allows the world to glide away from her' (p. 816). The non-materiality even extends to her poetic voice, which at its most feminine does not even speak at all: 'am I misguided in thinking that in this stillness, this silence more musical than any song, the feminine heart speaks with a simplicity and consummate purity?' (p. 820).

Throughout More's analysis, Christina Rossetti is compared to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who is castigated as not feminine enough: 'so much of Mrs. Browning — her political ideas, her passion for reform, her scholarship — simply carries her into the sphere of masculine poets where she suffers by an unfair comparison' (p. 818). He finds Barrett Browning 'irritating' because of her transgression into the masculine sphere 'for which she was not fitted' (p. 818). The rigidity by which the feminine is equated with female and masculine with male exposes an aesthetic of representation, a gender ideology by which poetry is prescribed and predicated on the sex of the poetic signature. More thus sets up the masculine and the feminine as a binary pair whose rigid separation is policed by the aesthetic. More's reiteration of 'feminine' and his moral castigation of Barrett Browning, however, suggest an anxiety that the gender demarcation may not be so stable as he claims. He acknowledges as much in the comment that women readers may not agree with his valuation of the two women poets, for: 'women will judge a poetess by the inclusion of the larger human nature, and will resent the limiting of her range to the qualities that we look upon as peculiarly feminine' (p. 818). Men are, by contrast, 'interested more in the traits and limitations which distinguish her from her masculine complement. They care more

for the *idea* of woman, and less for woman as merely a human being' (p. 819).

More predicates his evaluation of Rossetti upon the aesthetic of the feminine, a conventional set of requirements that determines the vocation and output of women poets and the position of the feminine in the representational system. This set of rules is both disparate and sketchy, yet it is an androcentric ideology by which women were culturally defined by their difference from men, and which appropriates the feminine as its other.² And thus it is an ideology based upon repression.

Kathy Alexis Psomiades explores the logic of repression behind Victorian gender ideology as it is reformulated in Aestheticist constructions of the feminized male poet. The instability of the masculine/feminine demarcation is, according to both psychological and Marxist readings of Victorian culture, transposed to the feminine's difference within itself and manifested by the whore/virgin dichotomy. But Psomiades argues that this model of repression, while it formulates 'the difference within femininity as both the locus of patriarchal control and the locus of resistance to that control', has a problematic application to the critique of women's poetry:

the logic of repression provides a good way of detailing women's subjugation through gender ideology on the one hand and the precarious nature of that ideology on the

²Carol Christ's critique of gender ideology works from the same assumption but approaches it in terms of male authored subject matter, not a feminine speaking agent. See 'The Feminine Subject in Victorian Poetry', *ELH* 54 (1987), 385-401. Dorothy Mermin considers the implication of the Victorian symbolic investment in the feminine as the passive damsel to women poets, but argues that the answer is to escape gender, to aim for an impossible androgynous ideal. Thus, both Rossetti and Barrett Browning could not leave behind gender ideology, and were only able either to reverse gender roles or 'retreat into feminine submissiveness and self-suppression.' See 'The Damsel, the Knight, and the Victorian Woman Poet', *Critical Enquiry* 13 (1986-87), 64-80 (p. 80).

other, but it works less well to explicate women's participation in this ideology and the fact that, despite its precariousness, it does not, after all, crumble to bits.³

Instead of offering a double figure of acceptance and resistance to patriarchy, Psomiades suggests that the feminine functions as a figure of containment, which shores up political instability while it also potentially allows for political disruptions to be figured in an apolitical private space (p. 39).⁴

More's assessment of Rossetti identifies her poetry (and therefore, in the logic of the aesthetic, Rossetti herself) as firmly feminine, but he does so in order to locate the poetic subject beyond the material realm. Here, the feminine subject is figured as so excessively private, interior, and non-material that it is erased from the text and also, simultaneously, endlessly posited as the exemplary female. But the speaking subject in Rossetti's poetry is not so much the representative female as the superlatively feminine: always inherently posthumous and yet speaking from beyond death, caught in the act of vanishing, and positioned beyond the text. The figure of feminine containment does surface in Rossetti's poetry in the image of the grave and the secretive heart, but the process whereby feminine subversiveness is made safe has not been completed and stabilised.

This dynamics of repression that I am claiming for Rossetti's poetry is produced by the 'uneven' work of various

³Kathy Alexis Psomiades, 'Beauty's Body: Gender Ideology and British Aestheticism', *Victorian Studies* 36.1 (1992), 31-52 (p. 38, p. 39).

⁴For a further development of this argument in relation to Christina Rossetti, see Psomiades, 'Feminine and Poetic Privacy in Christina Rossetti's "Autumn" and "A Royal Princess"', *Victorian Poetry* 31 (1993), 187-202.

inter-connected ideologies: Romanticism, Tractarianism, Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism.⁵ The result is a poetical subject caught within conflicting discursive practises. In critical convention, two extremes of Victorian women poets are represented by Elizabeth Siddal and Barrett Browning: the former a sign for masculine creativity, the latter transgressive and political who wrote directly of women's issues. Giving a voice to Siddal as the silenced woman poet by recreating her contexts is a double edged sword which may merely re-inscribe the stereotype that positioned her as a sign in the first place.⁶ Margaret Reynolds points out that to reclaim poetic contexts as 'a universal female experience of oppression' in order to explicate poetry is misguided, and subscribes to the nineteenth-century tendency to read women's poetry as an autobiographical reflex.⁷ Similarly, Psomiades points out that: 'because modern feminism has its roots in nineteenth-century constructions of gender, it is [. . .] more than likely, that in the course of recovery nineteenth-century ideologies may be replicated, rather than subjected to scrutiny.'⁸ In my readings, Christina Rossetti's own absence — the failure of the biographies to offer an historical personage and the poetic subject's oscillation between presence and absence — is not stabilised in terms of historical, cultural or sociological context. Instead, I keep in play the dynamic

⁵The phrase 'uneven' is taken from Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 3.

⁶Chapter 1 contains a discussion of the historical and textual recuperation of Siddal.

⁷Critical Introduction to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. by Margaret Reynolds (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), p. 11.

⁸"Material Witness": Feminism and Nineteenth-Century Studies', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 31.1 (1989), 13-18 (p. 14).

encoded within the feminine subject position as both subject and object, presence and absence, submissive and subversive.

The work of Dolores Rosenblum is my significant precursor here. Rosenblum, in *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance*, gives an engaging and sustained analysis of Rossetti as both model and artist. The critique, however, assumes an intentional and fully completed subversion of the patriarchal objectification of women, resulting in a re-mythologised Rossetti which keeps in play a biographical trope and the assumption that women's art is autobiographical: '[her] strategies engage patriarchal tradition in ways that make it usable for female experience, and that provide a critique of male objectification of women in art.'⁹ Further, Rossetti is seen to forge a 'consistent and authentic female myth' (p. 20). Rosenblum argues that Rossetti can transform otherness into subjectivity in, for example, the figure of the witness who, as an exemplary figure, is alienated from the spectacle and yet transforms her position into that of the visionary (p. 6). This critique belongs to a particular Anglo-American feminist tradition, exemplified also by Nina Auerbach's study *Woman and the Demon*.¹⁰ Angela Leighton offers a more sophisticated reading of Rossetti which suggests her acceptance and disavowal of the aesthetic: 'the myth of the lovelorn improvisatrice is both lived, outwardly, and disbelieved, inwardly, and the combination is the key to her startling

⁹*Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. xv.

¹⁰*Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

originality and richness as a poet.’¹¹ Again, however, biographical data emerges as a critical dilemma. Leighton’s critique suggests an uneasiness with this approach, for each discussion of Victorian women poets is prefaced by a section devoted to retelling the biographical facts, which has the formal effect of separating context from poetry. In the Introduction she refers to the uneasy doubleness in feminist studies between ideology and aesthetics and argues that the structure of each chapter is designed to keep the tensions in play (p. 5). The danger is, of course, that such an artificial separation over-determines the biographical account as a myth to be re-presented, and the poetical analysis as an over-playful ‘matter of endlessly intertextual style’ (p. 6). In my account of Rossetti’s poetry, I do not aim to resolve what is in its very nature an unresolvable process, but rather to acknowledge the interrelation of aesthetics and ideology.

The uncanniness of Rossetti’s poetry exposes the workings of gender ideology, as the feminine subject is both known and unknown, both ground and vanishing point in the Freudian narrative of sexuality. Although this repression is not wholly contained or translated into otherness, as Psomiades suggests is the case with the ideology of Aestheticism (see above), the oscillation of the subject does more than expose the uncertain boundaries of same and other. In Rossetti’s poetry, the feminine is also posited as a proto-modernist space, suggested in the signification of a text rather than the thematics. It gestures to a site of endless mediation between differences that

¹¹ *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1992), p. 119.

leaves over a supplement, figured finally as the tautological act of loving in *Verses* (1893), the intimation of a new economy.¹²

Current Rossetti criticism, however, does its best to translate the uncanniness of her poetry into stable, knowable, and coherent contexts. The project of recovery is politically motivated, but unfortunately replaces her within Victorian gender ideology by collapsing her experience (of fallen women, of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, of the Oxford Movement) directly into her poetry. On the contrary, the recovery of ideological forces confirms interpretation as insistently problematic.

In Chapter 1, I establish Christina Rossetti's position within the aesthetic, showing that the biographies explicitly refuse an historical personage and instead convey a paradigmatic feminine trope. This is exemplified by the circulation and reiteration of similar (and even identical) material through the genealogy of biographies. In particular, the suggestion in nineteenth-century accounts that Rossetti was twice diagnosed as an hysteric is critiqued as an important textual moment in which her place in the feminine aesthetic comes under stress.

¹²The chapters following engage with the feminine aesthetic as a multiple and fluid category, but it would be useful here to summarise my relation to contemporary theories of the feminine, in particular to French philosophy which has dominated recent debates. Although, like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, I maintain that the feminine is assigned to the position of death, of the other, and that the repressed feminine may be recuperated, I also hold that Rossetti's specific ideological pressures mean that the process of repression is ongoing and never completed: the feminine subject is not entirely banished from the text, for she speaks out of the cultural aporia, symbolically beyond death. The semiotic, as analogous to the repressed feminine, may intimate these moments as it disrupts the Symbolic order. In this way I open up a tentative mediation between the apparently contradictory theories of Cixous, Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. For further comments on the relation between what has been termed the 'holy trinity' of French theorists, see Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 175-77. The introduction to Chapter 4 elaborates this *unheimlich* process of speaking out of the aporia.

Further, the biographical texts themselves suggest a discursive practice commensurate with hysterical discourse as posited by contemporary gender theory. The biographical subject 'Christina Rossetti' is thus seen to be positioned within the representational system as a sign for the feminine and a sign for that meaning process itself. Finally, the account of her death-bed scene suggests the extent to which the trope signifies the decontextual, the absent, and death itself.

A way of negotiating contextual recovery is offered in the following chapter. D. G. Rossetti's revisions of his sister's poetry are interpreted as an attempt to re-define and stabilise her subject position within the aesthetic. D. G. Rossetti's changes, in the form of the alteration of titles, the erasure of references to other poets, the regularization of the verse patterns, and the deletion of stanzas, make for a poetry that at once becomes more conventional and more explicitly experiential than the original versions. The analysis suggests a reason for Christina Rossetti's collusion with her brother in the revisions, aside from the question of her desire to be published. The collusions can be explained in terms of the poetic subject, which is already exiled from the text and positioned elsewhere (the grave, the heart, the afterlife). This excessive objectivity does not, of course, fully erase the feminine speaking subject as an active agent. In fact, the uncanniness of the poetry is precisely because the subject speaks and yet is projected elsewhere. The contextual recovery of her brother's revisions are thus not read as a simple case of neutralising a radical poetics, but an overbalancing of the oscillation within the poetic subject

between presence and absence into the position of symbolic death.

In Chapter 3, I offer another reading of the artistic exchange between D. G. Rossetti and Christina Rossetti. The *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, D. G. Rossetti's two earliest paintings for which his sister sat as a model for the Virgin Mary, position Christina Rossetti as superlatively feminine in order to stabilise the alterity of his verbal/visual doubles. Christina Rossetti's response in two sonnets explicitly referring to his art suggests the doubleness and duplicity of the feminine position and include and intimation of an alternative representational axiom that relocates and recuperates the subject beyond the text. Again, this is an incomplete process and a utopian desire, not a revolutionary poetics.

The remaining chapters move from a consideration of feminine identities to a more explicit concern with the position of the subject. Chapter 4 interprets Italy as the focal point for issues of the other, the maternal, and the homeland. Read symbolically, Italy functions as a trope of exile, and it transpires that the subject is exiled not just from Italy or paradise (its symbolic counterpart), but from itself.

Following from this, Chapter 5 again posits a way of reading Rossetti's ideological position, in this case her poetry's investment in the Tractarian doctrine of analogy. The fissure between belief and poetical praxis exposes a space of alterity which a historicist reading cannot account for. In this space is positioned the desire of the feminine subject, in between belief and poetry, subject and other, type and antitype.

'Goblin Market' exposes a similar dynamic, and in Chapter 6 I suggest that the critical tradition, in order to make safe and contain the ambivalences of the poem, mis-reads and mis-represents the conflicting moral and fairy-tale discourses. The intimation of an intersubjective representational axiom in the poem, as the product of de-stabilising gender and genre categories is, however, not wholly successful. The analysis of 'Goblin Market' suggests a way of recuperating this feminine space that resists giving the poem a coherent meaning, while offering a tentative interpretation of the signifying practise of the feminine signature in terms of the aesthetic of representation.

The final chapter continues the concern with the position of the feminine subject in relation to Rossetti's final volume of poetry. The intense desire for dialogue with Christ results in poems whose thematics would efface gender and the personal in order to write within public masculine devotional discourse. But rather than achieving an androgynous subject position, the poetry radically unsettles gender and genre demarcations. A subject-in-process is intimated as a tentative and non-oppressive identity within the androcentric aesthetic that cannot expel the denotation 'feminine' as the repressed other of androcentrism, but which instead gestures to a more proto-modernist feminine poetics through musicality, generic hybridity, and through endless mediation. This final chapter I offer in place of a conclusion, resisting the urge both to conclude my analysis and to force closure on a poetics that enjoys the multiple possibilities of its uncanny oscillations.

Chapter 1

History, Hysteria, Histrionics: Biographical Representations

If only my figure would shrink somewhat! For a fat poetess is incongruous especially when seated by [t]he [sic] grave of buried hope!
—Christina Rossetti to D. G. Rossetti, 4 August 1881¹

Wrapt in fire, indeed, was that pure and perfect spirit,
that disembodied soul of song.
—William Sharp on Christina Rossetti²

Who was Christina Rossetti? The biographies — all dependent upon W. M. Rossetti's management of his sister's posthumous affairs — and reminiscences present us with a character at once enigmatic and prosaic but always inherently contradictory. Dichotomies ascribed to Rossetti — passion/repression, aestheticism/asceticism — define for Georgina Battiscombe, and for most of Rossetti's biographers, what is distinctive in her life: 'outwardly, Christina Rossetti's life was an uneventful one; inwardly, it was a continual conflict.'³ W. M. Rossetti authorised

¹ *The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Brown and Langham, 1908), p. 95. Subsequent references will be denoted CR: FL.

² William Sharp, 'Some Reminiscences of Christina Rossetti', *Atlantic Monthly* 75 (June 1895), 736-49 (p. 749).

³ Georgina Battiscombe, *Christina Rossetti* (London: Constable, 1981), p. 13. Valerie Ross suggests that the outside/inside distinction is a feature of the genre within academe: 'being about the unruly "inside" that must be kept "outside" of institutional discourse, biography, I argue, facilitates and provokes the construction, consolidation, and reinforcement of professional identity and

this interpretation with his comment on his sister's limited sphere of activity:

It does not seem necessary, in this brief Memoir, to dwell upon any of the other incidents in her life — all in themselves insignificant. It was a life which did not consist of incidents: in few things, external; in all its deeper currents, internal.⁴

The mythically constructed split character of Christina Rossetti allows the biographer to move the normal goal posts of the genre. Instead of presenting a factual account of the life of an historical personage, the subject for the biographer becomes a wholly interior life, an emotional drama. With this shift of arena, the biographical subject is still presented as an historical personage, but this has become an ambiguous position; for with the shift comes an insistence that the personage is also ahistorical, that she is removed from history by virtue of living an entirely emotional life and acquiring a status as a feminine ideal, a saintly poetess. This doubleness — the insistence upon an historical subject and the concurrent insistence that the subject is ahistorical — agitates the stability and presence of the biographical subject.

Conventionally depicted as a devout spinster whose lyrical poetry directly transcribes her unrequited love, the biographical representation of Rossetti subscribes to the aesthetic construction of femininity while attempting to place such an

authority,' 'Too Close to Home: Repressing Biography, Instituting Authority', in *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism*, ed. by William H. Epstein (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991), pp. 135-65 (p. 138).

⁴*The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti* edited with a Memoir and Notes by William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1904; repr. 1906), p. lviii. Further references to this edition will be denoted *PW: CR*.

operation under erasure. Writing about the surge of biographical interest at the centenary of Rossetti's birth (5 December 1930), Virginia Woolf begins to explore the problems of biography as a genre:

As everybody knows, the fascination of reading biographies is irresistible. [. . .] Here is the past and all its inhabitants miraculously sealed as in a magic tank; all we have to do is to look and to listen and to listen and to look and soon the little figures — for they are rather under life size — will begin to move and to speak and as they move we shall arrange them in all sorts of patterns of which they were ignorant, for they thought when they were alive that they could go where they liked.⁵

Woolf expresses dissatisfaction with the biographical mode that positions and frames people and events in artificial patterns, while she also relishes the various Rossetti anecdotes. An apocryphal anecdote is recounted of a tea party at which, possibly in response to some remark about poetry, ‘suddenly there uprose from a chair and paced forward into the centre of the room a little woman dressed in black, who announced solemnly, “I am Christina Rossetti!” and having so said, returned to her chair’ (p. 240). The anecdote might well have the same source as that offered by Ellen Proctor in her *Brief Memoir of Christina G. Rossetti*. During a tea party, Proctor spoke at length to a lady whom she was later surprised to learn was Christina Rossetti:

I turned to my late companion, and said, ‘Are you Miss Rossetti?’ ‘Yes’, she said cheerily, ‘I am’. ‘Miss

⁵Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: Second Series* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 237.

Christina Rossetti?' I continued. 'Christina Rossetti at your service!' was the reply. She was smiling now, and her face seemed to say, 'What a wonder you make of me!'⁶

For Woolf, Christina Rossetti's name denotes something more than a name: it signifies a poetess trapped and framed by the biographies but nevertheless removed from cultural, social and historical shapings: 'years and the traffic of the mind with men and books did not affect you in the least' (p. 242). Proctor, however, tells of how Rossetti's use of her own name undermines the value Proctor herself has put on it. By inscribing into her account the supposed puncturing by Rossetti of the significance of her own name, Proctor insists upon the actual historical existence of Rossetti, rendered as her prosaic ordinariness, while also constructing her name as a signifier for something more than a name. The signification process whereby the name exceeds its own designation as a name bears within it the attempted erasure of this process, the mask of its operation. The presentation in the biographies of a complete and unified historical personage emerges plainly as a fallacy, an illusory by-product of the text. To critique this fallacy, furthermore, is to see that 'Christina Rossetti' as understood in the biographies is a trope.

For a woman who lived to be sixty-four and was associated with a literary and artistic coterie, there are surprisingly few anecdotes about Rossetti in circulation. The source of much information is the first full length biographical and critical study, by Mackenzie Bell, which utilises explicitly the

⁶Ellen A. Proctor, *A Brief Memoir of Christina G. Rossetti* (London: S.P.C.K., 1895; repr. 1978), pp. 44-5.

information given him by W. M. Rossetti and from which subsequent biographers have taken much of their detail.⁷ Across the biographies the material is retold in a similar pattern and the same incidents are repeated with an almost tedious regularity.⁸ We are told of Rossetti's impressive vocabulary as a child, illustrated on the occasion when, less than six years old, she remarked to a visitor that: 'the cat looks very sedate'; the young poet's first verse: 'Cecilia never went to school / Without her gladiator' (Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, p. 8); and her canary dream, told to D. G. Rossetti (who planned to paint it) and passed down by William Sharp, in which Christina Rossetti saw a yellow cloud of escaped canaries converging over London rooftops and later returning to their cages (*PW: CR*, pp. xlix-l; Bell, p. 11). There are other, more apocryphal anecdotes: her unwillingness to step on a scrap of paper on the street in case it had written upon it the Holy Name;⁹ her habit of carrying her cat, Muff, on her shoulders around the house in Torrington Square;¹⁰ finally, her method of dealing with a young poet who

⁷Mackenzie Bell, *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1898). In the preface to his edition of Rossetti's collected poems, W. M. Rossetti admits supplying Bell with much of his information but denies censoring him, except in a few instances (*PW: CR*, pp. ix-xi).

⁸Groundbreaking work on the representation of Pre-Raphaelite artists in literary biography has been undertaken by Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock. In 'Patriarchal Power and the Pre-Raphaelites', *Art History* 7.4 (December 1984), 480-95, they expose the reminiscences of the Brotherhood as historically and culturally determined and not simply a window to the past. Similarly, in 'Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddall', *Art History* 7.1 (June 1984), 206-27, representations of 'Elizabeth Siddal' are separated from the historical personage Elizabeth Siddall (see below for a fuller discussion of this essay). Both articles also point to the circulation of similar material in biographical texts. The latest biography of Rossetti by Jan Marsh admirably attempts to reconstruct and recover Rossetti as an historical personage, but cannot escape confusing historical personage with representation — the unavoidable sin of the genre.

⁹Katherine Tynan Hinkson, 'Santa Christina', *The Bookman* (London) LXLI (Jan. 1912), 185-190 (p. 187).

wished to discuss his work with her: upon seeing the manuscript in his pocket, Rossetti denounced modern poetry so vehemently that he was terrorised from producing it (Jones, p. 206).

Following Elizabeth Cowie's influential work on the semiology of 'Woman',¹¹ Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock have analyzed the representation of Elizabeth Siddall in Pre-Raphaelite literature so as to expose the extent to which she functions as a sign for masculine creativity. Cherry and Pollock distinguish between her historical and semiotic construction and they postulate restoring Siddall as an artist and as an historical personage. Both procedures fail, the first because 'attempting to restore Elizabeth Siddall in this empirical and monographic manner cannot effect the necessary alteration of the gendered discourses of art history' ('Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature', p. 211), particularly in view of the fact that Siddall's work has been predominantly placed relative to D. G. Rossetti's. The second strategy breaks down due to a lack of information and because, as Cherry and Pollock emphasise, archives are themselves historically shaped and cannot be employed 'as a transparent window to the past' (p. 212). Instead, they explore the textual construction of Elizabeth Siddall. Cherry and Pollock's work has implications for the study of representations of Christina Rossetti. Although more is known of her than of Siddall, there is only a limited historical record of Rossetti. The Rossetti family's habit of destroying material made possible their control of information in the tropic

¹⁰Kathleen Jones, *Learning Not to be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 224.

¹¹Elizabeth Cowie, 'Woman as Sign', *m/f* 1.1 (1978), 49-63.

construction of Rossetti.¹² Although, like Elizabeth Siddall, Rossetti is represented as a trope, she is also, due to her status as a poetess, more historically (or, rather, factually) recoverable. In effect, whereas Siddall's artistic output was never perceived to be more than an extension of D.G. Rossetti's oeuvre, Christina Rossetti is a producer of meanings. Because she is a relatively independent figure, the value of the fallacy of historicism increases in importance. Historical accuracy is masked as pleonasm, in excessively prosaic and excessively repetitious anecdotal material across the biographies. Mackenzie Bell was criticised by contemporaries for his attention to commonplace detail, and he is reported as defending himself to Godfrey Bilchet thus:

Bell told me [. . .] that he gave so much prosaic matter of Christina Rossetti's because he wished to bring out her [. . .] absolutely practical everyday mind combined with the gift of the visionary, artist & poet; & Bell said his father had found the same combination in the Italians in the Argentine.¹³

¹²The Pre-Raphaelite circle displayed a general tendency to destroy or control personal material. Christina Rossetti had a habit of destroying letters addressed to her upon receipt. She also requested that her letters to her long-term intimate friend Charles Cayley be destroyed at his death. See Lona Mosk Packer, *Christina Rossetti* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 362. At D. G. Rossetti's death, she helped W.M. Rossetti select letters that were suitable for publication (ibid., pp. 354-56). All the Rossettis, but Christina perhaps more than any, were acutely aware of their literary persona; certainly the dearth of historical information about her life is a result of the deliberate construction of her mythical and idealised image. 'Christina Rossetti complicates but never disentangles herself from attendant men's angelic dream of her' (Auerbach, pp.115-16).

¹³James A. Kohl, 'A Medical Comment on Christina Rossetti', *Notes and Queries* 213 (Nov. 1968), 423-24. Felicita Jurlaro's biography is motivated by the same concerns. She explains the organisation of her book thus: 'to discover the "Universale", i. e., the significance and genius of the Rossettis, the "particolare" is introduced [. . .] with short additional sections entitled, "Quei piccoli particolari. . . !!! or . . . anecdotes and homely sketches." The aim is to examine and analyse the simple events of everyday life,' *Christina Georgina Rossetti: The True Story* (London: Excalibur, 1991). Rossetti's Anglo-Italian heritage is also perceived here to be the key to her identity. Jurlaro quotes from Olivia Rossetti Agresti, Rossetti's niece, who provides much of the 'authoritative' anecdotal information (and hence

As Bell seems to have suggested, anecdotal information is inserted as part of a wider tropic concern: here, Rossetti is portrayed as an Englishwoman who is quintessentially Italian, a duality widely presented as a facet of her characteristic ambivalence. The inclusion of so much detail is equivalent to what Elisabeth Bronfen terms an attempt to parenthesise subjectivity: the biographical subject as an 'accurate' historical personage is present but as an empty shell, bracketed or displaced to 'make room for the concept it is used to signify'. Consequently, 'the body is deprived of history [and] changed into a gesture'.¹⁴ This presence-in-absence is fundamental to the mythological construction of the Christina Rossetti personage. The trace of displaced subjectivity, the notional inclusion of an emptied trope (Rossetti as an historical personage), is rendered biographically as her 'divided life', a duality of 'inner' and 'outer' lives, between 'natural' passion and imposed repression, between asceticism and aesthetics. Her 'outer' life, or historical existence, is seen as a cover for her 'inner' turmoil. As Cherry and Pollock conclude in relation to Elizabeth Siddall, ultimately only a textual analysis of the biographical subject, rather than a recovery of the historical personage, can expose the construction given as 'Christina Rossetti'.

the 'true story'): 'Christina Rossetti! The name is musical and the thoughts it arouses in all familiar with her poetry are quite other than those of a Bloomsbury Square [and her] dowdy mid-Victorian dress. [. . .] The fire was there, the passionate heart was there [. . .] the deep and tender family affections so characteristic of her Italian ancestry were there, but all under strict control, all mastered and repressed by the puritanical conventional strain inherited from the quarter of English blood that came to her from the Pierces' (p. 75).

¹⁴Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity, and the aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 228.

As a fragmentary narrative which must have, in order to work, an epiphanic moment, the biographical anecdote discloses the cultural constructions of femininity behind its operation in a biographical text. The disclosures are most fruitful when the very point of the anecdote — its epiphanic moment — is explicitly in question. This example signposts an elision of data that agitates the binary construction (inner/outer, passion/repression) of the subject's supposed identity, when an ambivalent textual silence seems to expose the gap between sign (the person labelled 'Christina Rossetti') and signified (Rossetti as trope). Mackenzie Bell's biography and W.M. Rossetti's memoir cautiously describe Rossetti's adolescent crisis and last illness. In 1845, when she was fifteen, Rossetti's health became delicate. Bell briefly mentions that at this time she was attended by Dr Hare, whose opinion of Rossetti's beauty and filial love is recounted, but not his diagnosis (pp. 20-21). No further details are offered as to the cause of her illness, which later biographers tend to interpret as a form of breakdown which transformed her from a vivacious child into a solemn and sickly adult. In his memoir, W. M. Rossetti is also vague in his description of his sister at this period:

Christina was, I think, a tolerably healthy girl in mere childhood; but this state of things soon came to an end. She was not fully fifteen when her constitution became obviously delicate. [. . .] There was angina pectoris (actual or supposed), of which, after some long while, she seemed cured; then cough, with symptoms which were accounted ominous of decline or consumption, lasting on towards 1867; then exophthalmic bronchocele (or Dr. Graves's Disease), which began in 1871, and was truly most formidable and prostrating. [. . .] All these maladies were apart from her last and mortal illness, of which I must say a few words in its place. I have

naturally much more reluctance than inclination to dwell upon any of these physical ills; but any one who did not understand that Christina was an almost constant and often a sadly-smitten invalid, seeing at times the countenance of Death very close to her own, would form an extremely incorrect notion of her corporal, and thus in some sense of her spiritual, condition.

(*PW: CR*, p. 1)

W. M. Rossetti does not name the illness that began in 1845, but Bell's friend, Godfrey Bilchet, transcribed the following note in the back of his copy of Bell's book: 'The doctor who attended Christina Rossetti when she was about 16-18 said she was then more or less out of her mind (suffering, in fact, from a form of insanity, I believe, a kind of religious mania)' (Kohl, 'A Medical Comment', pp. 423-24). Around 1845 the family were in great financial difficulty owing to the ill health of the father Gabriele, and preparations were made for Christina Rossetti to take up a post as a governess. It is also known, from her manuscript notebooks, that she was continuing to write poetry at this time. It seems likely that the contemporary diagnosis of the mysterious illness, which W.M. Rossetti and Bell would be naturally reluctant to mention, was hysteria.¹⁵

It is necessary to distinguish between definitions of hysteria. As Elaine Showalter argues in *The Female Malady*, the symptoms and cultural meaning of hysteria changed from era to era. For the Victorians, hysteria was a disorder of the womb and a sign of dysfunctional femininity for which the prescribed cure

¹⁵Mary Poovey points out that hysterics were seen to pose a threat to the doctor's authority because they crossed the border between somatic and psychological diseases (pp. 45-47). There was therefore an anxiety attached to diagnosing and curing the hysteric, which perhaps also accounts for the elliptical biographical narrative of Rossetti's disorder.

was rest, marriage, or motherhood.¹⁶ The Victorians, in a much documented ambivalence, also construed women's illness as an affirmative sign of femininity; hysteria then becomes a sign of excess which challenges this cultural code, a sign for extremes of emotion and of physical symptoms. The significance of hysteria has subsequently evolved through the work of Freud and Breuer, and feminist readings of their *Studies on Hysteria* and Freud's *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*¹⁷ which develop its designation as a neurotic illness communicated through the hysteric's body into a gender ambivalence that emerges in the hysteric's discourse. Thus, hysteria as the excessive sign for what the Victorians understood as 'feminine' becomes in hysterical discourse a vacillation between masculine and feminine, both an acceptance and refusal of the feminine position as dictated by society. The biographical representation of Christina Rossetti emerges as an illusory historical personage presented as both historically accurate and removed from the workings of history; the suggestion and biographical suppression of her hysteria helps unravel this paradox.

As Kathleen Jones notes in her recent biography of Rossetti, hysteria would almost certainly have been mentioned as a cause of her illness: she was seen by a gynaecologist and one symptom was described as a suffocating sensation, typical of psychosomatic illness (pp. 19-20).¹⁸ W. M. Rossetti's comment

¹⁶See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), Chapter 6 and also, for an overview of the history of hysteria, the Introduction to *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism*, ed. by Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (London: Virago, 1985).

¹⁷See Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition*, vols 2 and 7 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953). Hereafter, *SE*.

¹⁸Marsh's biography also gives attention to hysteria. She argues that is symptomatic of sexual trauma, and that Rossetti was a victim of paternal incest. Marsh acknowledges that this theory cannot be proved conclusively. See pp. 257-

that to understand that his sister was an invalid is to understand her 'corporal, and thus in some sense her spiritual, condition' (see above) suggests that illness is both the sign of a suffering saint and the outward sign of a psychical or spiritual malaise, two different notions attesting to the Victorian ambivalence towards illness and femininity. At a time when she had extreme reluctance to become a governess¹⁹ and an increasing poetic output, we witness in the seminal biographies intimations of hysteria when her behaviour could not be presented in line with nineteenth-century concepts of femininity. The suggestion of hysteria is even more pertinent when one considers the contemporary interrelationship of writing, motherhood, and disease, for both literary output and nervous illness were thought to originate in the womb.

Another relevant passage occurs in Bell in an uncharacteristically explicit description of Rossetti's last illness, breast cancer, which caused her much pain and distress:

Her brother has said to me, and wishes me to mention, that about 'a couple of years' before her death Dr. Stewart told him 'she was very liable to some form of hysteria'. For a while in her final illness, though appreciably less in her last fortnight of life, such symptoms were apparent, particularly during semi-consciousness, chiefly manifesting themselves in cries, not so much, as far as could be observed, 'thro' absolute pain' as thro' some sort of hysterical stimulation.
(p.170)

64. As I argue below, the point is not that Rossetti can be diagnosed as a hysteric, but that the diagnosis in the biographies has a particular and telling discursive effect.

¹⁹She later so confessed in letters to Swinburne and W.M. Rossetti. See Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p. 21.

Bell's tentative reference to hysteria, which W.M. Rossetti refuted (Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, pp. 397-98, and Jones p. 223), is further amplified by a previously unpublished letter quoted in Packer's biography, in which a neighbour complains of Rossetti's 'distressing screams that sound clear from her drawing-room to mine' (p. 399). To label her understandable distress during the closing stages of her illness hysteria *and* to suppress this diagnosis indicate another incident when her behaviour could not be accounted equivalent to the assigned 'character' of Christina Rossetti.

Furthermore, it is possible to apply contemporary theories of hysteria to the biographical texts themselves. By both fetishistically stating and refuting the diagnosis that Rossetti was a hysteric, these texts appropriate the other they wish to deny — the trope 'Christina Rossetti' as historically constructed. To include and withdraw the designation of Rossetti as an hysteric (in the sense understood by the Victorians) is to intimate an ambiguity and vacillation of sexual identity — particularly in the insistence that a saintly asexuality and a perpetual sickness is concurrent with her femininity. The texts thus refuse the 'ordering' of a sexuality construed as normal: the classic symptom, the classic failed repression, of the twentieth-century's definition of hysteria. The ensuing uncanny duplicity is both a denial and an affirmation not only of the diagnosis of hysteria, but also of the biographical subject as a feminine subject. As Bronfen asserts, the hysterical textual voice is a function of the cultural equivalence of femininity and death:

The hysteric's is a superlatively uncanny position, and as such another aspect of death's figure in life. Precisely because of the hysteric's doubleness between self and image and her oscillation between sexual signifiers, she uses her body to collapse the difference between opposite terms like masculinity/femininity, object/agent of spectatorship, confirmation/disclosure of cultural values, only to pose undecidable questions.
(p. 282)

The biographical *representation* of an alleged clinical hysteric subscribes to the same operation; the textual appropriation of the included and refuted hysterical feminine subject positions the text within an hysterical discourse.

In a discussion of Levi-Strauss's analysis of woman as a commodity for exchange within culture (which also concerns Elizabeth Cowie), Bronfen notes that 'Woman-as-sign', 'also marks a self-reflexive moment within the process of signification to become a signifier for exchange itself'. She is both body and trope, and her historical existence and subjectivity are different from the way she is spoken of 'in figure' (p. 225). Thus, 'Woman' comes to represent in herself the meaning process she is part of. This semiotic function is inherently associated with the feminine subject represented within a discourse that positions the subject as hysterical, for by definition the hysterical symptom is histrionically somaticised and dramatised by the subject in an enactment of the self-doubling that comes with the resistance to gender identity and the disjunction inscribed into the textual position. The explicitly unknown and unknowable trope of Christina Rossetti in the biographical texts emerges as both a figure of represented 'Woman' and a figure for the actual process of

representation, for the self-enacting and histrionic nature of the trope.

That Christina Rossetti is a sign for representation is suggested most forcefully in a recurrent biographical anecdote of her stay at Penkill Castle, the home of Alice Boyd in Ayrshire, in the summer of 1866. Quotation from five of the principal biographies will suggest not only a tendency of the authors to repeat similar material and even similar phrases but also a tendency to literally and figuratively frame Rossetti as object and as trope.

Mr. Arthur Hughes, in the course of conversation, has described to me in a very vivid manner the little four-cornered window of Christina Rossetti's bedroom at Penkill, which commanded a view over an old-fashioned garden, and in which, according to Miss Boyd, as quoted by my informant, she used to stand, leaning forward, 'her elbows on the sill, her hands supporting her face' — the attitude in which she is represented in Dante Gabriel's drawing of 1866, just alluded to. 'The little window exactly framed her', added Mr. Hughes, 'and from the garden she could be seen for hours meditating and composing'.
(Bell, p. 51)

At Penkill the room assigned to the shy, dark haired lady from London looked out upon an old garden and has a little four-cornered window at which that lady used to stand for hours together, 'her elbows on the sill, her hands supporting her face', lost in meditation. How she must have looked standing there we may guess from Dante Gabriel's chalk drawing made about this time and used by Mr. Mackenzie Bell as the frontispiece to his monograph. [. . .] The wistful look of the earlier Christina has given place to an aspect at once passionate and austere. Here is the image of the woman who wrote:

My heart goes singing after swallows flown
On sometime summer's unreturning track.²⁰

From the old-fashioned garden below, Christina was often seen standing in front of the little four-cornered window which, Arthur Hughes tells us, 'exactly framed her'. Her habitual position was to lean forward, 'elbows on the sill, hands supporting her face', and she could be seen for hours 'meditating and composing'.

But she could see as well as be seen. Her room commanded a view of the garden with its sundial, moss-covered stone benches, and lattice arbours overarched by roses, of the dark leafy depths of the glen, of Girvan stretching out into the distance, and further, beyond the town, the sea and Ailsa Craig.

(Packer, p. 222)

In spite of these occupations, however, much of her time was spent alone in her room, the topmost one in the tower, and originally known as 'the ladies' bower'. From its windows she could see the distant sea and the rocks of Ailsa Craig. She would stand for hours on end, her elbows on the window-sill, her chin cupped in her hands, looking out over the garden and the more distant landscape, 'meditating and composing'.

(Battiscombe, p. 126)

Alice told Arthur Hughes that it [Rossetti's room at Penkill] had a 'little four-cornered window . . . which commanded a view over an old fashioned garden . . .' where Christina stood leaning on the sill for hours at a time 'meditating and composing'. Or so Alice Boyd thought. It was more than likely that Cayley was the object of her thoughts. At Penkill she wrote another haunting, allusive lyric.

(Jones, p. 139)

The repetition of a 'little four-cornered window' at which Rossetti was to be seen is highly suggestive of the frame of a portrait, as if Rossetti was herself a living 'framed' picture,²¹

²⁰Dorothy Margaret Stuart, *Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 79-80. The lines quoted are from 'From Sunset to Star Rise' (C.i.192).

²¹The actual window of her bedroom at Penkill Castle does indeed resemble a picture frame. On the cover of a Penkill Foundation newsletter, *The Order of the*

for she both looks out and is seen. The tropic construction that yokes representation of 'Woman' and the sign for representation as 'Woman' becomes also in these descriptions part of the contemporary discourse of the creative female as both object and subject, as both surveyed and spectating. Both Bell and Stuart follow their description of Rossetti at the turret window with a reference to D. G. Rossetti's 1866 drawing of his sister to provide an index to how she actually appeared at the window (see Plate 2). As Cherry and Pollock have shown with reference to Elizabeth Siddall, representations of Pre-Raphaelite women cannot be taken as simple reflections of their appearance. Such a myth of the accuracy of Pre-Raphaelite representation does, however, prevail in the biographies and was instigated principally by W. M. Rossetti's memoir in the posthumous edition of his sister's *Poetical Works* where he explains the extent of the likeness of each portrait of Rossetti to the model. Significantly W. M. Rossetti declares the 1866 coloured chalk drawing (which Bell and Stuart refer to) to be the best of all the portraits:

This is a beautiful drawing, showing a face very chaste in outline, and distinguished in expression; it would be hard for any likeness to be more exact. I have seen it stated somewhere (and I believe it à propos of this very drawing) that one cannot trust Rossetti's likenesses, as he always idealized. Few statements could be more untruthful. Certainly he aimed — and he succeeded — at bringing out the beauty and the fine expression of a

Owl 3.1 (1987), is a photograph of a woman dressed as Rossetti sitting at the window (see Plate 1). The frame of the window has a triple stone border, the middle section resembling lattice work; it uncannily suggests a painted portrait of Rossetti (the photograph itself makes this point by "picturing" a Rossetti double looking out of the window). For a general survey of representations of women at windows, see Elaine Shefer, 'The Woman at the Window in Victorian Art and Christina Rossetti as the Subject of Millais's *Mariana*', *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Studies* 4.1 (1983), 14-25.

face, rather than its more commonplace and superficial aspect; but his likenesses are, with casual exceptions, very strict transcriptions of the fact.
(*PW: CR*, p. lxiv)

To confuse actual appearance and representation, sign and signified, at the very site where Christina Rossetti watches and is herself watched suggests the process by which the iconic image of Rossetti is mistaken for that which it represents. To present Rossetti at a window in an act of composition and contemplation is also to involve her poetics in the trope of representation, for poetry here becomes an act of perceptual cognition, a reflex of sight. The biographies compound this trope by giving a description of the view that Rossetti would have seen.

Interestingly, contemporary commentators claim that her poetry describes an identifiable locale.²² Edmund Gosse writes:

Unless I make a great mistake, she has scarcely visited Italy, and in her poetry the landscape and the observation of Nature are not only English, they are so thoroughly local that I doubt whether there is one touch in them all which proves her to have strayed more than fifty miles from London in any direction.²³

Arthur Symons declares that her style is 'sincerity as the servant of a finely touched and exceptionally *seeing* vision' (Bell, p. 33). Bell also quotes W. M. Rossetti's analysis of his sister's poetics: 'there is no poet with a more marked instinct for fusing the thought into the image, and the image into the thought: the fact is always to her emotional, not merely

²²Compare chapter 2, which demonstrates how D. G. Rossetti's revisions to his sister's poetry replace the feminine subject with a locale and gives priority to the experiential over the imagination.

²³Edmund Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats* (London: Heinemann, 1896), p. 139.

positive, and the emotion clothed in a sensible shape, not merely abstract' (p. 328). We are presented with a poetess whose work is believed to constitute a direct collapsing of thought into image, perception into poetry. What Lynne Pearce terms the Victorian anxiety over the 'slipperiness' of signification²⁴, or the difficulty of fixing sign to signified, manifests itself as a sequence of mirrorings of life into art and of sight into poetry.

The object of the gaze is also the subject of his/her own gaze upon others, and, hence, that which is objectified by the gaze bears within itself the potentialities for subjectivity. The doubleness in the representation of Christina Rossetti at the window is thus apparent not only in the fact that the gazer seeing through the window may also view herself reflected in the pane, but also in the very status of the gazer who both sees and may be seen. Lacan defines the gaze as an excess of seeing, as desire and not just a perceptual mode. To the subject (defined as that which is capable of being seen and shown), the possibility of being seen has primacy over the recognition that a reciprocal gaze is possible. Thus, the potential for subjectivity emerges as only a trace: this is apparent in the suggestion that Rossetti's gaze (delimited already within the aesthetics of feminine representation) is secondary to and predicated on the spectacle of viewing her.²⁵

²⁴Lynne Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 38.

²⁵See Elizabeth Grosz's entry under voyeurism/the gaze in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis. A Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 448-49, in which Lacan's stress on the primacy of the subject's possibility of being seen is distinguished from Sartre's notion of the reciprocal gaze. See also Jacques Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), pp. 182-83.

Over an analysis of the Victorian construction of the feminine subject always falls the shadow of the Lady of Shalott, reformed by the Pre-Raphaelites into their own parable for feminine transgression: an attempt to reinstate displaced subjectivity into the signification process is an attempt that ends in death.²⁶ Rather than being a critical dead-end, however, this topos of death is highly pertinent to an interrogation of the representations of Christina Rossetti: death as both a literal threat (Rossetti as an almost constant invalid from her adolescence, rendering her position literally in-valid) and figural (death as non-existence, a no-place from which the subject of Rossetti's poetry is predominantly positioned).

The highly ambivalent subject position of the trope Christina Rossetti emerges from the concept of 'Rossetti' as both a sign of the representation of 'Woman' and a sign for that signification process itself. This self-reflexive doubleness blurs the distinction between the socio-economic and semiotic functions of the trope, and the resultant indeterminacy becomes one of the signifieds of the sign. 'Woman' may thus turn into the subject and producer of this operation, thereby blurring the difference between active and passive.²⁷ The dualism of Rossetti as an historical personage and as a sign for representation emerges in the depiction of Rossetti as a living saint, as dead before her death; thus the subject is always already posthumous

²⁶Andrew Belsey and Catherine Belsey, 'Christina Rossetti: Sister to the Brotherhood', *Textual Practice* 2.1 (1988), 30-50 (p. 45). Julia Saville makes an important clarification about the realm of Camelot which the Lady of Shalott yearns to enter, and enters to die: it is the hub of chivalric fiction which the Lady, and many readers, mistake for 'real life'. Thus Camelot is by definition a site for a dominantly masculine discourse, the chivalric tradition. See Julia Saville, "The Lady of Shalott": A Lacanian Romance', *Word & Image* 8.1 (1992), 71-87 (pp. 77-78).

²⁷See Bronfen, pp.225-28.

and conceptually disembodied. The dichotomy is apparent in the descriptions of her appearance, which posit her as both 'real'/historical and outmoded (or always outmoded and thus ahistorical). There is a widespread biographical interest in her unfashionable appearance (and thus non-contemporary, not of her time and therefore situated outside of her historical context), and in her illnesses which are inscribed in the text to re-figure Rossetti as trope, to present her as literally equivalent to the subject position of death that the trope occupies. Emphasis is placed upon her manner of dressing, particularly in her later years when she was heralded as a virginal suffering saint. Max Beerbohm's cartoon wittily presents the ambivalence of Rossetti as a Pre-Raphaelite heroine and as an old-fashioned plain dresser (Plate 3). Rossetti, dressed in black, is remonstrated with by D. G. Rossetti for her dowdiness, and he offers other, more fashionable material, declaring: 'What *is* the use, Christina, of having a heart like a singing bird and a water-shoot and all the rest of it, if you insist on getting yourself up like a pew-opener.'²⁸ She is distinctive by virtue of her inappropriate dress (her face could be that of any female, whereas D. G. Rossetti is clearly identifiable) — if she was to wear the cloth he offers, she would no longer be identifiable as Christina Rossetti. Katherine Tynan Hinkson tells how she was initially disappointed with Rossetti's appearance:

I remember that it was something of a shock to me to receive at my first sight of Christina an impression of short-petticoated sturdiness. [. . .] Doubtless it was a mortification of the flesh or the spirit to wear, as she

²⁸Christina Rossetti's reply to her brother is both meek and ironical: 'Well, Gabriel, I don't know, I'm sure, you yourself always dress very simply' (Battiscombe, p. 18).

did, thick boots and short rough grey skirts. As far as they could they made her almost ugly, for the spiritual face, with the heavy-lidded eyes, had nothing to do with those garments fit for a ten-mile walk over ploughed fields. [. . .] Something of a death-in-life, it seemed to the girl coming in from the outside, to be shut up in an ill-lit house in Torrington Square, with two or three old ladies getting up their centuries.
(p. 186)

William Sharp recounts the story of his first encounter with Rossetti during his visit to the home of friends. As he sat in the twilight he was conscious of a laughing, musical voice which attested to the right to prefer London to the countryside. A servant entered announcing the arrival of a guest and bearing a light, and the woman who had just spoken swiftly and mysteriously covered her face with a veil and left (pp. 736-38). The reclusiveness and preference for the anonymity of twilight is explained in Rossetti's correspondence as the result of Graves' disease, which dramatically altered her appearance. Most noticeable was a darkening of the skin and protruding eyes along with other distressing unseen symptoms (Bell pp. 52-53; Jones p. 54). Rather than representing her as disfigured, however, the change in appearance is taken by biographers and commentators to signify spiritual beauty in suffering. Sensitivity to her symptoms would doubtless explain the use of the veil, but it also becomes part of the enigma of Rossetti as an idealised feminine figure in a play between what is seen and what is elusively covered up. Rossetti belongs comfortably to the twilight and must veil the visual signs of her illness. In physical suffering she is represented as supremely non-physical. The descriptions of her debilitating illness, and her own documented acute

awareness of and attempts to conceal it, enact the nineteenth-century aporia of illness as the superlative sign of the feminine and illness as a sign of spiritual malaise.

Other references to Rossetti's appearance emphasise her unfashionable plain dress (which W.M. Rossetti comments was a family tradition; *PW: CR*, p. xlvii, and Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, p. 72), the link between her clothes and separation from the outside world (which Hinkson aptly terms 'death-in-life'), and the correlation of her dress with domestic and pious passivity. All serve to construct Rossetti as a saint — dehistoricised, decontextualised — and, as a saint that is alive yet also posthumous, to posit her intrinsic identification with death.²⁹ Roland Barthes in 'The Iconography of the Abbé Pierre', declares: 'the saint is first and foremost a being without formal context; the idea of fashion is antipathetic to the idea of sainthood.' He comments upon the ambivalent haircut of the Abbé Pierre, which seems to be neutral, unfashionable, 'a sort of zero degree of haircut', but concludes that 'neutrality ends up by functioning as the *sign* of neutrality, and if you really wished to go unnoticed, you would be back where you started'.³⁰ An attempt to exempt oneself from fashion becomes a statement about fashion. For representations of Christina Rossetti, her unfashionable clothes do not simply decontextualise her but also place her relative to her context and become a statement about her difference, her spirituality, her asexuality and saintliness;

²⁹Letitia Elizabeth Landon was also, Glennis Stephenson argues, decontextualised by her critics in their contribution to the construction of L. E. L. See 'Letitia Elizabeth Landon and the Victorian Improvisatrice: The Construction of L. E. L.', *Victorian Poetry* 30 (1992), 1-17 (p. 14).

³⁰Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected and transl. by Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), p.53.

her dress becomes an excessive sign, one that theatricises her, renders her histrionic. This ambiguous attempt to decontextualise is also true of depictions of Rossetti as an invalid, which seem to be a figure for the process whereby she is immobilised, fixed semantically and socio-historically as an identity: reclusive poetess, devoted daughter, pious spinster. The essence of feminine purity is couched ahistorically, beyond outside influences, and the feminine identity of Rossetti is constructed in terms of the fallacy that it transcends history.³¹

The biographical hysterical discourse insists on the body as a site of signification, and the body as physical entity and as presence is thus re-presented as a literal or actual portrayal in order to disembody Rossetti conceptually. Emphasis upon her literalness is ironic, for the inclusion of details supposedly attesting to her historical identity only serves to dehistoricise. It is significant that the literal serves a special purpose. Comments upon Rossetti's thought processes — her analysis of the Scriptures, her non-intellectual faith, her spontaneous and 'natural' poetry — all serve to construct her thought as literal,

³¹ Many feminist critiques are concerned with the dominant Victorian representational system's denotation of the feminine as private, in opposition to the masculine as public. Most pertinent here is Psomiades, 'Beauty's Body'. See also her 'Feminine and Poetic Privacy'. At issue here is the removal of the feminine from capitalist production; in representations of 'Rossetti' as a biographical subject this removal extends to an effacement of social and historical contexts that produced such representations. Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986) argues that Rossetti's lyrics witness to a female psyche deliberately defiant of the social in order to forefront the psychological (chapter 5). I would argue that, rather than an *intentional* attempt to erase contexts, the poetry is largely predicated by the aesthetic which equated female poetry with the feminine subject position constituted within the realm of privacy, domesticity, and the a-contextual. Until quite recently, criticism of Rossetti continued to be affected by this representational discursive practice, and insisted on divorcing the poet from her various social contexts. With Jerome McGann's reassessment, and the developing trend in New Historicism, Rossetti's social, literary, and economic contexts are now being reclaimed. See Jerome McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

feminine, and non-participatory in masculine literary tradition and masculine symbolism. In contrast, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's public and political poetry was interpreted by contemporaries as a transgression of the scope of women's poetry, and she was denounced by some as a hysteric and as masculine.³² The biographies widely claim Rossetti's literalness in her interpretation of the Scriptures³³ and circulate the anecdote of how she disapproved of cremation because of her literal notion of the Resurrection (Bell, p. 155). They also recount the anecdote given in Rossetti's *Time Flies* of how her sister Maria would not visit the Mummy Room at the British Museum because 'it would be very unseemly if the corpses had to put on immortality under the gaze of mere sightseers (Bell p. 62, and Woolf p. 238).

The significance of assigning the literal as inherent to femininity is explored by Lacan. The mother is connected, in Lacanian semiotics, to the literal and the absent referent: both the feminine and the literal in language are always located elsewhere and represented in terms of displacement. Thus to conceptualise literalness as inherent to femininity becomes part of the tropic construction of 'Woman' as the sign for representation itself, and 'Woman' in this way figures the subject displaced in the aesthetic into a position which is constantly fading.³⁴ To construct Christina Rossetti's mode of thought and poetry as non-participants in a dominant masculine

³²D. G. Rossetti refers to Barrett Browning derogatively with masculine imagery: 'modern vicious style', 'falsetto muscularity' (quoted in *PW: CR*, p. 460).

³³For example, see W. M. Rossetti, *PW: CR*, p. lxvii.

³⁴For a fuller explanation of this, with its implications from women's poetry, see Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), chapter 1.

signification process and her physical entity as actual and literal is to reposition her as already posthumous: a fading and elusive presence-in-absence. There is, of course, an irony: Victorian biographies are conventionally written after the subject's death, but Christina Rossetti's death is the crescendo of her representations.

The complex and paradoxical nature of such representations is suggested by Mackenzie Bell's account of Rossetti's deathbed, in which the literal and the abstract become confused.³⁵ Bell narrates how he arrived one afternoon at 30 Torrington Square to find that Rossetti had died earlier that day. He is told of the events of her last hours and is shown upstairs to see the body:

As I entered what had formerly been Christina's drawing room I thought how unchanged yet how changed was the room. All the pictures, and well-nigh all the pieces of furniture, even to the miscellaneous articles which stood usually on the large drawing-room table, were in the same places as I had been in the habit of observing them. This, paradoxical as it may seem at first sight to say so, added vastly to the sense of impressiveness, just as the contrast between the commonplace — almost the prosaic — details and the supernatural element indissolubly linked with the poem, adds to the impressiveness of that lyric by Christina which her brother Gabriel named for her 'At Home'.
(pp. 74-5)

When Bell enters Rossetti's home after her death he describes in that feminine and (literally) private sphere a paradoxical

³⁵As an appendix to the collection of his sister's letters, W.M. Rossetti gives extracts from his diary from 1871-95, which frequently mentions her illnesses and chronicles her last days. (pp. 207-22). He acknowledges in the preface that many of the entries deal with such matters but mentions that many more have been omitted (pp. xii-xii).

emotion that exposes the uncanniness of the biographical feminine subject. He aligns the strangeness of the house — ‘changed and yet unchanged’ — with the *unheimlich* juxtaposition of the commonplace and the supernatural in ‘At Home’,³⁶ and in this way transposes Rossetti’s text onto his own in a rhetorical move that abducts his subject.³⁷ The repetition of ‘impressiveness’ recalls Freud’s technique in the treatment of the clinical disease, whereby the hysteric was pressed — and literally pressed on the forehead — in order to overcome the block in articulation that constitutes the malaise.³⁸ Here, the biographical subject’s intrinsic identification with death is re-enacted *at* the subject’s death. This critical scene of recognition puts pressure on the discourse and exposes the aporia of the posthumous subject within representational axioms and also the subject’s uncanny otherness from Bell, which he counters by abducting the subject through her text.

The site of abduction is, aptly, also accomplished via a citation of D. G. Rossetti’s artistic appropriation of his sister’s poem, which he revised for publication in *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) by changing the title from ‘After the Pic-

³⁶Linda Marshall discusses the mixture of the literal and mystical in ‘Goblin Market’, as identified by Arthur Symons, in “‘Transfigured to His Likeness’: Sensible Transcendentalism in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market’”, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 63.3 (Spring 1994), 429-50 (p.434-36). See also chapter 4.

³⁷William H. Epstein describes this as a phenomenon of the genre: ‘traditional biographical narrative habitually re-enacts the scene of an abduction because, in order to discursively repair the biologically irreparable fracture (the alterity, the otherness, the discontinuity) between any two human individuals (reified generically as biographer and biological subject), biography recesses the broken parts and causes the gaping of a wound.’ Thus, the attempt to heal the gap between the biographer and subject exposes the gap and undermines the biographical project. See ‘(Post) Modern Lives: Abducting the Biographical Subject’, in *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991), pp. 217-36 (p. 218).

³⁸SE 2, 270-1.

nic', a re-location of the poem to an interior, domestic space.³⁹ Bell then continues to describe the room and again uses D. G. Rossetti as a medium for articulating and appropriating the subject: 'With the sharpening of the perceptive faculties that comes to us sometimes, at moments like these, I thought I had never before seen Dante Gabriel's large chalk drawing of his sister — that drawn in 1866 — appear so lovely' (p. 175). He then describes the face:

I saw that, though slightly emaciated, it was not greatly changed since the last time I had beheld it in life. Perhaps I was hardly so much struck with the breadth of her brow — I mean in regard to its indication of intellectual qualities — as I had often been when conversing with her, but on the other hand I was struck more than ever before both by the clear manifestation of the more womanly qualities and by the strength of purpose shown in the lips. [. . .] My spirit was moved by the contrast I felt between the holy — almost the saintly atmosphere of the house and its commonplace surroundings.
(p. 175)

The juxtaposition of spiritual and prosaic and the collapsing of poetry and portrait into life which dramatise and negotiate the rhetorical impasse, suggests that death itself signifies Christina Rossetti's feminine biographical subject position.

Rossetti's face in death, in fact, is acknowledged as the 'true' representation and a figure for feminine purity. As the epitome of absence, the corpse of Rossetti is the ultimate trope for displaced subjectivity and for a disembodied historical

³⁹D. G. Rossetti advised the change in a letter to his sister, 28 January 1861. See William Michael Rossetti, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters*, 2 vols (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1895), vol. 2, p. 164. Further citations to this edition will be identified *DGR: FL*. The poem is an apt choice for Bell, for it speaks from the position of the posthumous subject as it describes the return after death of the speaker's spirit to her house (*C.i.28*).

personage. Under the guise of an authoritative chronicle, Bell's account, prompted by W. M. Rossetti and repeated through the genealogy of Rossetti biographies, subscribes to cultural notions of femininity which insist upon the absence of subjectivity and historical identity, but it nevertheless purports to place Rossetti within the framework of historical reference. In Bell's description of the deathbed scene, the attempted repression of historical identity is epitomised by the inert figure of Rossetti. The biographical subject, only precariously inhabiting the world in which it is a female paragon, now comes fully to be that which it has represented — the disembodied, denatured, and ideally feminine.

* * * * *

The inability to obtain an historical purchase on Rossetti suggests an unbreachable gap between the historical personage and the textual subject, and the gap is figured as absence or loss *per se*, or, in other words, the feminine. William E. Epstein argues that *all* biography marks the absence of the subject: 'as an expression of difference, the biographical subject has no metaphysical presence in the ordinary sense; rather, it occupies the epistemological gap between presence and absence, singular and plural, self and other' ('(Post) Modern Lives', p. 224). Christina Rossetti's superlative position in the representational axioms — specifically, as a Pre-Raphaelite muse, model, and artist in her own right — makes the problematics of her biographical representation more acute. This is not a reason to elide the genre in an analysis of Rossetti's poetry, but in fact it

exposes the need to critique the biographical representation as a producer and product of the feminine aesthetic.⁴⁰

In chapter 3 I go on to suggest that the scopic is the site at which Rossetti herself contests the aesthetic of the feminine. In representations of Rossetti the unknowable nature of the historical subject is most forcefully brought home, as Bell's account of Rossetti's deathbed suggests, in visual apprehensions. In fact, visual representations of Rossetti were marketed in such a way as to control the circulation of her image and also to contain the unknowable nature of the 'Rossetti' subject, as the following example illustrates. In 1877, aged forty-seven D. G. Rossetti depicted his sister in a chalk drawing which reproduces the familiar Pre-Raphaelite iconography (see plate 4). In the same year, Christina Rossetti had a studio photograph taken (plate 5), which, W. M. Rossetti reports, she 'was accustomed to call "the idiot", and indeed it is sufficiently vacant-looking' (*PW: CR*, p. lxxv). I would not claim, as W. M. Rossetti does with reference to an 1856 photograph, that this medium gives us unproblematical access to how Rossetti actually looked, by virtue of 'the irrefutable evidence of the sun' (*PW: CR*, p. lxxiii). The difference between the two representations suggests, however, how a particular image of Christina Rossetti has been circulated as a Pre-Raphaelite icon in contrast to the

⁴⁰Recent biographical criticism has confronted the problematics of (specifically women's) representation in the genre and has made some tentative suggestions for experimental writing. See Sharon O'Brien, 'Feminist Theory and Literary Biography,' in *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism*, ed. by William E. Epstein (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991), pp. 123-33. To date, there has been very little critical enquiry into biographical representations of Rossetti; the only exception to this is Janet Gray's analysis of the problematics of narrating an anecdote. See 'The Sewing Contest: Christina Rossetti and the Other Women', *a/b: Auto/Biographical Studies* 8.2 (1993), 233-57.

photograph, reproduced for the first time in Frances Thomas's biography in 1992.⁴¹ Of the portrait, W. M. Rossetti notes: 'Anything more close than the drooped head to the features and the sentiment of my sister's face in her advanced years [. . .] cannot well be imagined' (*PW: CR*, p. lxxv). That Rossetti was herself aware of the commodity value of her image is suggested by a comment made in a letter in 1853 concerning the submission of the manuscript of her short story 'Nick' to a publisher, in which she humorously suggests that the volume would have a far greater success if published with her portrait.⁴²

Like the posthumous speaker of 'At Home', the subject's presence-in-absence hovers over the biographical representations and, to the extent that women's poetry was conceived as experiential and autobiographical, has fed into nineteenth and early twentieth-century critiques of Rossetti's poetry. In the following chapter I suggest ways in which Rossetti negotiated and evaded the aesthetic in a specific confrontation: her brother's revisions of her poetry for publication. The uncanniness of the subject means that the representational system is not wholly disabling, and Rossetti's poetry subverts even as it reproduces the aesthetic in a doubleness that motivates and speaks from the position of alterity reiterated through the biographies.

⁴¹Frances Thomas, *Christina Rossetti: A Biography* ([London (?): Self Publishing Association, 1992; repr. Virago, 1994), p. 317.

⁴²Quoted in *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, ed. by Jan Marsh, (London: Everyman 1994), p. 286.

Chapter 2

Defining the Feminine Subject: Manuscript Revisions

In a copy of *Goblin Market*, dated December 7 1893, Christina Rossetti notes her obligation to D. G. Rossetti for his assistance with *Goblin Market and Other Poems* and *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*: 'and here I like to acknowledge the general indebtedness of my first and second volumes to his suggestive wit and revising hand' (C.i.234).¹ In an unpublished letter five years earlier, she insisted: 'in poetics my elder brother was my acute and most helpful critic.'² The extent of D. G. Rossetti's revisions to his sister's manuscripts is now fully apparent with Rebecca Crump's recently completed variorum edition of the poems. Christina Rossetti's poetry has come down to us as a series of textual ellipses, for the canon conceals significant deletion of stanzas and changes to titles and has been enshrined by W. M. Rossetti's posthumous 1904 edition.³ On occasion these

¹*Goblin Market and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1862), *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1866).

²Quoted in Antony H. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1988), p. 10.

³The editorial role of W. M. Rossetti is also clarified by Crump's edition, and analysed by Gwynneth Hatton's 'An Edition of the Unpublished Poems of Christina Rossetti, with a critical introduction and interpretative notes to all the posthumous poems', St. Hilda's College, Oxford, B.Litt. thesis, 1955. Most significantly, Hatton lists W. M. Rossetti's editorial errors, which include the silent addition of his own titles and cancellation of stanzas (pp. xxxvii-xlvi). The extent to which he concealed revisions — although his notes do occasionally refer to certain manuscript changes — is suggested by his comment in the memoir that prefaces his edition: 'her habits of composition were entirely of the casual and spontaneous kind. [. . .] It came to her (I take it) very easily, without her meditating a possible

can be directly attributed to D. G. Rossetti, either by his handwriting on the manuscript or by cross-referencing a manuscript change with suggestions made in correspondence with his sister; for others there is indirect evidence of his amendments where changes correspond to the pattern of his identifiable alterations. The configuration of D. G. Rossetti's revisions to the first two volumes, and to the second edition of *Goblin Market* (1865), suggests the imposition of an aesthetic upon Christina Rossetti's work and the revised poetry consequently is predicated on his definition of the feminine.⁴

The revisions are crucial to an understanding of Rossetti's relation to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and in particular her relation to the work of her brother, for they assign to (or 'superscribe' upon) her work the aesthetic of the feminine which, in turn, obscures and diminishes the poetry's own exploration of and responses to this dominant Victorian patriarchal discourse. In fact, the revisions dramatise Rossetti's

subject, and without her making any great difference in the first from the latest form of the verses which embodied it; but some difference, with a view to right and fine detail of execution, she did of course make when needful. [. . .] What she wrote was pretty well known in the family as soon as her impeccably neat manuscript of it appeared in one of her little notebooks; but she did not show it about as an achievement, and still less had she, in the course of her work, invited any hint, counsel, or co-operation", *PW: CR*, pp. lxxviii-lxxix. Compare George W. Bethune: 'the prominent fault of female poetical writers is an unwillingness to apply the pruning-knife and the pumice-stone. They write from impulse, and rapidly as they think. [. . .] As the line first came to the brain, so it was written; as it was written so it was printed,' Preface to *The British Female Poets* (1848), quoted in the Critical Introduction to *Aurora Leigh*, ed. by Margaret Reynolds (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), n. 20, p. 56. In the preface to his edition of Walt Whitman's poems, W. M. Rossetti is explicit about his editorial practises in this instance, and defends his revisions (rearrangement and categorisation of poems, addition of titles, suppression of 'offensive' poems) for literary and moral reasons. See *Poems by Walt Whitman* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1895), pp. 16-19. The silent revisions to his sister's poems maintain the posthumous biographical trope of the poet, described in chapter 1 and returned to in later chapters.

⁴David G. Riede argues that D. G. Rossetti's revisions to a volume of his own poetry, the *Poems* of 1870, systematically removes any indication of religious faith. See David Reide, 'Erasing the Art-Catholic: Rossetti's *Poems*, 1870', *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 1.2 (1987), 50-70 (p. 50).

entrenchment within the representational system, for they demonstrate the various ideological pressures that constitute the poetic subject: both the power relations behind the production of the poetry and the manoeuvring of the subject within those relations. Rossetti's aesthetic and artistic affinity with the Pre-Raphaelites has been extensively documented but there has been no analysis to date of the patterns of D. G. Rossetti's alterations to her poetry.⁵

I do not offer this contextual recovery, however, as a paradigmatic new historicist voicing of the silenced mechanics of literary production. As later chapters demonstrate, one of the potential dangers of revisionary historicist readings is to align the text to a stable coherent context, in the assumption that each illuminates, determines, and even constitutes the other. This betrays the same rhetorical tendency as that of nineteenth-century autobiographical readings of women's poetry, which, in a self-sustaining circularity, produce the life as evidence for textual interpretation and the text as evidence for biography. Rossetti's collusion with her brother's alterations offers a paradigm for reading contextual information, for it suggests a poetic subject that desires to elude the text altogether in an anti-literary urge towards self-deletion. This impossible desire to re-locate the subject outside of the text produces poetry that oscillates uncannily between presence and absence and between affirmation and denial of the feminine aesthetic, just as the fact of revisions and power relations behind the textual production do not merely inscribe D. G. Rossetti's signature onto

⁵The most sustained analysis of Rossetti's affinity with Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics is in Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, chapter 3.

the text of a poetic subject that has already become less than a subject. This does not propose an abandonment of new-historicist interpretations, which have so dominated Rossetti studies, but a more sophisticated and self-conscious understanding of the way in which context signifies in a text.

* * * * *

The aesthetic that subordinates the feminine subject to the masculine, in particular to a masculine creator, is exemplified in Christina Rossetti's work by emblematic female figures that carry echoes from D. G. Rossetti's poetry. The paradigmatic figure is Jeanie in 'Goblin Market', Laura and Lizzie's enigmatic precursor whose deadly encounter with the goblin men is invoked at moments of crisis:

'Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met them in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
Plucked from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours?
But ever in the moonlight
She pined and pined away.'
(C.i.15, ll. 145-59)⁶

After tasting their wares and adorning herself with their flowers Jeanie dwindles and dies. Above the grave — typically a Rossettian site for regeneration and renewal — no grass grows. Jeanie has become an object for the goblin men and forfeits all autonomy; consequently her status as a subject is diminished,

⁶Jeanie is also mentioned in ll. 312-19 and l. 364.

paralleled in her physical decay. She is a figure for the dangers of masculine objectification.

Jeanie is kin to the prostitute in D. G. Rossetti's 'Jenny', the first version of which probably predates 'Goblin Market'.⁷ In 'Jenny', the male speaker has an ambivalent relation to the reposing figure of the prostitute. She is made secondary to his monologue and is seen only in relation to him:

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,
The woman almost fades from view.
A cipher of man's changeless sum
Of lust, past, present, and to come
Is left.
(ll. 288-83)

Jenny is presented here as a non-autonomous 'cipher', an object within the speaker's discourse. Such objectification is sustained by her actual passiveness: during her rest and her sleep the speaker conducts his monologue. The speaker thus embarks on a process of self-definition which is a function of Jenny's unconsciousness, her absence, so that he can even penetrate her mind: 'Ah, Jenny, yes, we know your dreams' (l. 367). And yet her status as an object is *precariously* dependent upon her unconsciousness: she may fully awaken at any moment and cut short the poetic act. The speaker recognises that in this way she exists beyond and independently of his perception of her and that, consequently, the feminine as a subject threatens his creativity. Although appropriated as a cipher of men's desires, she fades from his view in a reminder of her independent

⁷The *Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti, 2 vols (London: Ellis and Scrutton, 1886), vol. 1, 83-94. Further references will be denoted *CW: DGR*. See also *DGR: FL*, vol. 1, p. 166. Note the reference to 'goblin sun' (l. 208) and 'golden coins' (l. 344) in 'Jenny': also echoed in 'Goblin Market'.

subjectivity. Jenny's threat is inscribed and held by virtue of a reflexive doubling within her figure: she is both an object and a sign for the feminine object subsumed by the text, and so the figure of Jenny doubles back upon itself as both a representation of the prostitute and a denotation of the meaning process she is part of.⁸

You know not what a book you seem,
Half read by lightening in a dream!
How should you know, my Jenny?
(ll. 51-53)

What if all this to her were said?
Why, as a volume seldom read
Being opened halfway shuts again,
So might the pages of her brain
Be parted at such words, and thence
Close back upon the dusty sense.
(ll. 159-64)

Jenny is represented as a text, but this becomes an explicit misrepresentation: she is only half-read. Her full meaning is acknowledged but not assigned.

Whilst on the one hand the subject matter of 'Jenny' is daring and courageous in its Victorian context, it suggests how women were objectified by D. G. Rossetti as a function of masculine creativity. Andrew and Catherine Belsey's article, 'Christina Rossetti: Sister to the Brotherhood', contains a useful discussion of feminine subjectivity within Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics and its relation to Christina Rossetti's poetry. They

⁸Amanda S. Anderson argues that the poem oscillates between the speaker and Jenny, and that this female 'other' has an explicitly subversive effect on the speaker's monologue: 'moves to *fix* the other are unbalanced by reversals that locate agency in Jenny'. The poem: 'displays the way in which the presence or fact of another consciousness not only produces moves to stabilise or foreclose but also continually thwarts such moves'. See 'D. G. Rossetti's "Jenny": Agency, Intersubjectivity, and the Prostitute', *Genders* 4 (1989), 103-21 (p. 119).

describe a 'double lack' endowed by patriarchy upon unmarried women, 'the double displacement, the double uncertainty of a woman's hold on subjectivity in a world where women were barely subjects', which penetrates Rossetti's poetry to the effect that she 'seeks instead to repudiate subjectivity itself, to become less than an object' (p. 31). The trace of the feminine as subject is, however, necessarily always present:

If it is the inability of the subject to be fully present to itself that generates desire, the double displacement of women from the symbolic order, their construction as doubly lacking, has the effect of reinforcing their desire. But if desire is ultimately the desire for presence, to be the thing you speak of, then patriarchy itself, precisely by withholding subjectivity from women, in practice impels them towards it. Resistance is inseparable from the patriarchy which forbids it.
(p. 46)

D. G. Rossetti's aesthetics suggest this awareness that the feminine as less than a subject includes the acknowledgement of displaced subjectivity, of the feminine subject as a trace and fully present subjectivity as a female desire. His representation of female figures at times employs a mirror to play with the figure as both subject and object. In 'Body's Beauty', from the *House of Life* sonnet sequence (*CW: DGR*, vol. 1, p. 216), Lilith (Eve's precursor and the primordial woman) is 'subtly of herself contemplative' and, it is implied, this self-reflection both attracts and destroys male onlookers, for it, 'Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave, / Till heart and body and life are in its hold' (l. 6, ll. 7-8). In the corresponding painting *Lady Lilith*, however, the woman's hand glass is held so as to conceal this dangerous image; Lilith's self-contemplation and

possession of her own mirror-image is presented so that the sign of her status as a subject is repressed.⁹ J. Hillis Miller sees the projected mirrorings of the male gazer upon female object, of the female upon herself, of text upon painting, and of poetic tradition upon poem as a series of mismatchings, so that 'the mirrored image undoes what seeks its image there'.¹⁰ Within this series of reflection and distortion, the mirror-image of a woman is figured as a false sign of her presence, a misrepresentation. This is a symptom of the male gazer's anxiety, intensified when the woman is engaged in self-contemplation, for it suggests that the woman is in possession of her own image and is independent from masculine perception. Hillis Miller asks (although with an unfortunate critical complicity: he does not speculate on the consequence of a female viewing the/an other gazing into a mirror): 'why is it that when we men contemplate not ourselves in the mirror but our incongruous other self, a desirable woman contemplating herself, our own integrity is mutilated, destroyed?' (p. 334). To D. G. Rossetti, this seeming independence, the woman's possession of her own image, is, by implication, an assertion of her status as an autonomous subject and a challenge to the masculine creator. In 'Jenny' there is a telling passage in which the speaker defensively positions the prostitute's mirror image as firmly relative to his own perception and transcription of that image:

⁹Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 116-17, and vol. 2, plate 293.

¹⁰J. Hillis Miller, 'The Mirror's Secret: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Double Work of Art', *Victorian Poetry* 29 (1991), 333-65 (p. 333).

And yonder your fair face I see
Reflected lying on my knee,
Where teems with first foreshadowings
Your pier-glass scrawled with diamond rings.
(ll. 321-24).

A description of her mirror image is not given, but we have instead the suggestion of its mysterious distortion by virtue of the scrawl 'superscribed' upon the glass.¹¹ The image of Jenny is depicted as an adjunct of the speaker and is overlapped by the text upon the mirror.

The secret of the mirror's various (mis)matchings of the subject and its reflection is, J. Hillis Miller argues, that there is no secret, that there is instead a sign of loss behind images of difference (pp. 336-37). The mirror does, however, hold an unarticulated and unrepresentable secret, an intimation of the 'double lack': that of the woman as subject.

* * * * *

¹¹ See "A Superscription" (one message written on top of another) from *The House of Life* (CW: DGR, vol. 1, p. 225):

Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.
(ll. 5-8)

Christina Rossetti's awareness of the dangerous implications (for the soul and the poetic subject) of the mirror is suggested in her short story 'Folio Q'. As W. M. Rossetti relates: 'it dealt with some supernatural matter — I think, a man whose doom it was not to get reflected in a looking-glass [. . .] but unfortunately it turned out to raise — or *seem* as if it were meant to raise — some dangerous moral question; and, on having her attention directed to this, my sister, who had been unconscious of any such matter, destroyed the MS. on the spot' (DGR: FL, vol. 2, p. 162).

The feminine subject thus has a precarious position, subordinated to masculine creativity within Pre-Raphaelite discourse and also positioned beyond that discourse, repudiated and also inhabiting the text as a trace or fleeting presence. It is this delicate and provisional position that is unsettled by D. G. Rossetti's revisions of his sister's poetry. In his revisions and suggested revisions, D. G. Rossetti attempts to mould Christina Rossetti's literary persona and poetry to his requirements in an effort to redefine her poetic form, style, metre and subject matter. Ultimately, it is the status of the feminine subject that is in question.

This is apparent in 'Seeking rest', which first appeared in W. M. Rossetti's 1896 edition as a poem in five stanzas (*PW: CR*, p. 296).¹² Crump's textual notes indicate that the original version numbered eleven stanzas and that the revisions were almost certainly D.G. Rossetti's. The first four stanzas are deleted after which is written 'Begin here', in, according to Crump, 'what appears to be D.G. Rossetti's hand' (C.iii.429). Two further stanzas are deleted, that following line twelve, and the last stanza. As W. David Shaw puts it, the final version seeks 'the greater objectivity of the ballad' in its reduction of the poem into a dialogue between the speaker's Mother and Sisters, followed by the speaker's own lament.¹³ The Mother, in the first stanza of this version, describes the speaker as a child whose 'inward joy' has animated her:

¹²*New Poems*, ed. by W. M. Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1896). Appendix A gives the text of both versions of the poem.

¹³W. David Shaw, *Victorians and Mystery: Crises of Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 255.

My Mother said: The child is changed
That used to be so still;
All day long she sings, and sings,
And seems to think no ill.
(Revised version; C.iii.180, ll. 1-4)

The subject has become animated into an inspired lyrical female, but her song is not transcribed. In the following stanza the Sisters urge the speaker to reveal to them the secret which has prompted this change from inertia, but a revelation is not forthcoming. Succeeding this is another transformation, again indicated by the Mother, from joy to sorrow:

My Mother said: What ails the child
Lately so blythe of cheer?
Art sick or sorry? nay, it is
The Winter of the year.
(ll. 13-16)

The images of illness are pertinent, for the speaker — who enters the poem only in the last stanza — describes herself, in a continuation of the winter metaphor, as solitary, silent, and forever in ‘the Winter of the year’:

My Spring will never come again;
My pretty flowers have blown
For the last time; I can but sit
And think and weep alone.
(ll. 27-30)

Thus the revised poem ends in a reification of the speaker’s total surrender to the unarticulated secret. This version positions the poem as lyrical-confessional, but in this mode the speaker is expelled in a catalogue of elisions — the Mother’s relation of the speaker’s song of joy, the speaker’s exclusion

from the dialogue between the Mother and Sisters, the mysterious withheld secret. The poem culminates with a sense of loss: 'I can but sit / And think and weep alone'. What had once caused her to sing now renders her a figure for death-in-life; the speaker is portrayed as an inspired lyrical female but in the non-specific and impersonal balladic framework her song is silenced. The poem thus inscribes the conventional role of a poetess whilst also deleting her song. Further, throughout the simple balladic structure of the final version the speaker is objectified as merely a function of the missing referent which silences and alienates her. As Shaw asserts, balladic objectification has been attained, but it is at the hand of D.G. Rossetti.

The original poem may be reconstructed from Crump's textual notes (C.iii.429). It is far more complex and unsettling than the revised poem.¹⁴ The deleted stanzas are part of a fragmented and disjunctive first person narrative in which, it is suggested, the secret has a wholly interior existence:

There was a hope I cherished once,
A longing, a vain dream:
I dreamed it when I thought that men
And things were what they seem.

A lost belief in the literal seems implied here, in the truth of 'seemings', in a correspondence between signifier and signified, 'When the clouds had no gloom for me, / No chill the pale moon-beam'. Such a belief allows the joy of the secret to be experienced passively, 'I never questioned my own heart'. The secret is portrayed as further entrenched in the heart than is

¹⁴As Shaw notes, pp. 256-58.

suggested by the final version, and so further removed from identification:

But evermore I kept my joy
Hidden in mine own heart;—
I could not show them my life's life:—
So now I bear the smart
Of disappointment; and I strive
To hide it with vain art.

This stanza was originally inserted after the Sisters' first speech as part of the transition between the speaker's joy and sorrow, but the transition is ambiguous. The 'So' in the fourth line may imply that the consequence of interiorising the secret is the speaker's sorrow, or that the sorrow itself must be hidden because the joy was not shared. Such ambiguities are typical of the fragmented narrative that unsettles the reader's sense of the figurative, for nouns such as Mother, Sister, Winter, and Spring seem to oscillate between literal and figurative denotations. But it is the secretive heart that is most suggestive of this linguistic ambiguity.

As in 'L. E. L.' (which D. G. Rossetti also revised), the heart is again given as the locale of the secret, a locale whose secret must 'with vain art' be concealed.¹⁵ The secret is, however, also 'my life's life': vague, reflexive, circular, and enigmatic.¹⁶ Paradoxically, we are invited to define that which is portrayed

¹⁵W. M. Rossetti notes that: 'the "enormous improvement" which Dante Gabriel effected in L. E. L. consisted in making lines 1 and 3 of each stanza rhyme - which they do not in the original MS.', *Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Sands, 1903), p. 97. Subsequent references to this edition will be denoted *RP*. As discussed below, this is another instance where the manuscript revision regularises the verse form.

¹⁶'My life's life' is similar in its reflexivity to what Rossetti elsewhere calls her 'I am I', the manifestation of her 'Poet Mind', Christina Rossetti to D.G. Rossetti, 13 March 1865. See *The Three Rossettis: Unpublished Papers to and from Dante Gabriel, Christina and William*, ed. Janet Camp Troxell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), p. 142.

as beyond definition. The invitation to decode the 'vain art' is also to entice a lyric-confession reading and so to see the secret as an actual experience or event. The very opacity of 'my life's life', however, suggests the missing referent is non-experiential. In the deleted stanzas of 'Seeking Rest', the Mother becomes Mother Earth, in which the speaker longs to reside and thus transpose the heart's secret to the grave, in an echo of Chaucer's Pardoner: 'She knocked at the Earth's greeny door: / O Mother, let me in'. The vague 'greeny door' and the Earth as Mother suggests a wish to further displace the subject into a vague and liminal place, a non-experiential realm. The heart is a suggestive locale that prefigures this realm, for it is both an actual 'place' and traditionally a site for femininity and emotion. It is also depicted as the place of a semantic secret: the missing referent, the textual ellipsis which is protected, by virtue of its very absence, against objectification. Further, the heart is the place of a linguistic secret, for it implies that the withheld referent is beyond articulation: it is a 'vain dream', a 'vision', a 'secret store / Of unimagined bliss'.

Angela Leighton's *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* analyses the metaphor of the heart as a product of the relation between female creativity and cultural and aesthetic constructs which delimit that creativity: 'Victorian women's poetry [. . .] grows out of a struggle with and against a highly moralised celebration of women's sensibility. [. . .] The attempt [is] to overcome that dissociation by writing not from, but against the heart' (p. 3). Leighton sees the implications of emotional self-betrayal as also, 'the story of imaginative creation, which is, very often for Victorian woman, a death

story, as well as the story of fantasy, invention, dream' (p. 6). Following from Jerome McGann's statement that Rossetti 'employs the symbol of the personal secret as a sign of the presence of individuality', Leighton suggests that the secret, as an intimation of individuality, either may or may not be disclosed by Rossetti for it implies in the poem 'a self fully in control of its own game'.¹⁷ In the full version of 'Seeking Rest' the heart's secret is the sign whose signified is 'my life's life', which may be translated as a trope for the displaced feminine subject, depicted as one move away from the experiential and estranged from the text. It is not a party to what Leighton terms 'a world of sceptically disordered moral and linguistic reference' (p. 3). Its very displacement from the text, however, implies that it can never be fully present and, rather than being a function of the poet's will, the secret can never be wholly disclosed. For all the speaker's seeming coquetry, the secret — as a sign whose signified is feminine subjectivity — never fully inhabits the text. The suggestion that the withheld secret denotes the feminine subject is also implicit in the parodic self-reflexivity of 'Winter: My Secret' (C.i.47) and, as in 'Seeking rest', the speaker plays with the possibility of disclosure: 'I tell my secret? No indeed, not I: / Perhaps some day, who knows?' (ll. 1-2). The conditions upon which the speaker may reveal the secret are endlessly modified and withdrawn:

Perhaps some languid summer day,
 When drowsy birds sing less and less,
 And golden fruit is ripening to excess,
 If there's not too much sun nor too much cloud,

¹⁷Jerome McGann, 'Christina Rossetti's poems: a new edition and a revaluation', *Victorian Studies* 23 (1980), 247; quoted by Leighton, p. 154. McGann's article is reprinted in *The Beauty of Inflections*.

And the warm wind is neither still nor loud,
Perhaps my secret I may say,
Or you may guess.
(ll. 28-34)

The emphasis is constantly upon the conditional nature of the secret and the speaker's possession of the (absent) referent: 'Only, my secret's mine, and I won't tell' (l. 6), 'Suppose there is no secret after all, / But only just my fun' (ll. 8-9). The very existence of the secret is in question and, as a trope for the feminine subject, the secret is neither fully present in the text nor wholly absent.

The traditional balladic and lyric-confessional framework of the revised version of 'Seeking rest' arouses conventional expectations that a female poet directly transcribes personal experience. The sentimental tradition, which Rossetti works within, specifies this experience as failed love. Despite the suggestion in the original version of 'Seeking rest' that the secret is non-experiential, in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critiques the missing referent in the revised poem is traditionally read as an actual event in Rossetti's life, the concealment of her cherished love for James Collinson.¹⁸ The sign of the personal secret located in the heart is taken to signify love relations which, in turn, signify a representation of an actual event. Upon Rossetti's poetry is thus 'superscribed' a lyric confession. W. M. Rossetti, in his notes to the 1904 edition, is everywhere at pains to give the poetry a relation to an actual event. He categorises the poems as 'Personal Experiences and Emotions' and, when the evidence seems to be against assigning

¹⁸For example, Jones, p. 46. Packer argues that the poem suggests an illicit love, the married William Bell Scott, rather than Collinson (*Christina Rossetti*, p. 54).

biographical data to a poem, W. M. Rossetti suggests his knowledge may not be comprehensive. For example, of 'A Birthday', he writes,

It is, of course, possible to infer that the *Birthday* is a mere piece of poetic composition, not testifying to any corresponding emotion of its author at the time; but I am hardly prepared to think that.

(*PW: CR*, p. 481)

Furthermore, D. G. Rossetti's revisions to the first two volumes in general attempt to transpose his sister's poetry into the realm of the experientially knowable. In particular, his identifiable title changes impose a suggestion of stasis and place where, in the original, the subject is stressed. The titles 'After the Pic-nic', 'A Peep at the Goblins', and 'A Yawn'¹⁹ — all indicative of the presence of a subject — become at his hand, respectively, 'At Home' (C.i.238)²⁰, 'Goblin Market' (C.i.234), and 'By the Sea' (C.i.298). The subject has thus become an object in relation to something else. Similar changes (although there is no direct evidence that they were all at her brother's instigation) are made to 'Something Like Truth', 'A Fight over the body of Homer', and 'Nonsense', which become 'Sleep at Sea' (C.i.262), 'The Lowest Room' (C.i.301), and 'Winter: My Secret' (C.i.247), all of which transfer the subject in the title to an actual locale. Paradigmatic of the subject's exclusion from the titles is another title change suggestive of D. G. Rossetti's influence, but

¹⁹Christina Rossetti, in a letter to D. G. Rossetti dated April 1865, concedes his change: '*By the Sea* has superseded *A Yawn*, for which however I retain a sneaking likeness' (*RP*, p. 99). In its transformation to a nature poem from an expression of ennui, the original loses three stanzas, which suggests once again the 'revising hand' of D. G. Rossetti. The poem was first published in *Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1875).

²⁰The title change is suggested by D. G. Rossetti in a letter to Christina Rossetti dated 28 January 1861 (*DGR: FL*, vol. 2, p. 164).

for which no direct evidence exists: 'What happened to me' is changed to 'Shut Out' (C.i.252). Of 'Something Like Truth', D. G. Rossetti writes:

Maria showed me the other day two poems of yours which are among the best you have written for some time: only the title of one — *Something like Truth* — seems 'very like a whale.' What does it mean? The latter verses of this are most excellent; but some, which I remember vaguely, about 'dreaming of a lifelong ill' (etc. etc. *ad libitum*), smack rather of the old shop. I wish you would try rendering either of narrative or sentiment from real abundant Nature, which presents much more variety, even in any one of its phases, than all such 'dreamings'.²¹

The advice is to locate the poem in the knowable, in the natural, and to omit imaginative 'dreamings'. The subject is thus to be erased and replaced by reflections of 'real abundant Nature'. To 'shut out' the subject is to replace it with an feminine figure whose subjectivity is put into question. The aesthetics of the feminine, however, posit the objectified figure as deanimated:

The construction of masculinity and of the masculine artist is made not only in opposition and in precedence to a feminine body caught in the process of fading, but also in opposition and in precedence to absent femininity, because the feminine figure functions as a sign whose signified is masculine creativity.
(Bronfen, p. 174)

Commentators have detailed the revisions to *The Prince's Progress*, for which much of the direct evidence exists in the correspondence between D. G. Rossetti and his sister.²² D. G.

²¹D. G. Rossetti to Christina Rossetti, 8 November 1853 (*DGR: FL*, vol. 2, pp. 119-20).

²²The correspondence is published variously in *RP, The Rossetti-Macmillan Letters*, ed. Lona Mosk Packer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 37-56; and Troxell. In their biographies of Christina Rossetti, Lona Mosk

Rossetti advised, cajoled and bullied in his attempt to influence the selection of poetry and its arrangement. The following poems were omitted from *The Prince's Progress* on his advice: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills' (Christina Rossetti's favourite; *Rossetti Papers*, p. 99), 'To-morrow',²³ 'By the Waters of Babylon', 'Last Night', 'Margery', and 'Three Nuns' (*Rossetti Papers*, p. 98-9). She also requests: 'please don't throw away what pieces you turn out of vol. 2., but kindly preserve them for me' (Troxell, p. 144). D. G. Rossetti also supervised the proof reading and oversaw the physical form of the volume (including colour of the cover, the designs and illustrations), and also the negotiations with the publisher.²⁴ Crump's edition of the poems, however, reveals direct manuscript evidence for D. G. Rossetti's intervention in the earlier *Goblin Market* volume, evidence which is suggestive of the more systematic process of revision in *The Prince's Progress* whereby the manuscripts were either directly altered by him,²⁵ or his suggested changes implemented. Instances of revision also appear as a change unattributable in

Packer (chapter 10) and Jan Marsh (chapter 24) give the fullest account of D. G. Rossetti's interventions.

²³D. G. Rossetti evidently disapproved of an allusion to Barrett Browning's 'My Heart and I', which she disputed. If he persists, she writes, in seeing the likeness: 'I could easily turn my own "heart" into "wish", and save the little piece, for which I have a kindness' (*RP*, p. 81).

²⁴See Gail Lynn Goldberg, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Revising Hand": His Illustrations for Christina Rossetti's Poems', *Victorian Poetry* 20 (1982), pp. 145-59. Goldberg's analysis assumes a harmonic correspondence between illustrations and text, an integration of different perspectives: 'the conflation and conversion of poem into picture may be regarded as a change in medium but not meaning' (p. 158).

²⁵As in the case of the title change to 'Cousin Kate' from 'Up and Down' (C.i.239), and in 'From House to Home' where, apparently to obscure the reference to Tennyson's 'The Palace of Art', 'palace' is changed to 'mansion' on l. 13 (C.i.263). W. M. Rossetti gives a note pencilled by D. G. Rossetti on the manuscript notebook: 'this is so good it cannot be omitted; but could not something be done to make it less like *Palace of Art*?' (*PW: CR*, p. 461). Crump makes no reference to this note. Evidently, D. G. Rossetti also thought that stanza 11 of 'A Royal princess' echoed Keats, but Christina Rossetti refused to omit it (*RP*, p. 99).

the manuscript but for which other suggestions of his influence exist, such as the title 'Goblin Market' which was changed from 'A Peep at the Goblins' and the deletion of the original title of 'At Home'.

The general tendency of these revisions is towards an imposition of a more regular verse form, metre and rhyme. In his earlier attempts to find a champion for her verse to ensure its publication, D. G. Rossetti approached Ruskin, who famously dismissed 'Goblin Market' as irregular:

no publisher — I am deeply grieved to know this — would take them, so full are they of quaintness and other offences. Irregular measure (introduced to my great regret, in its chief wilfulness, by Coleridge) is the calamity of modern poetry. [. . .] Your sister should exercise herself in the severest commonplace of metre until she can write as the public like. Then if she puts in her observation and passion all will become precious. But she must have the Form first.²⁶

Despite his disagreement with Ruskin's analysis, D. G. Rossetti's revisions to Christina's manuscripts²⁷ suggest an attempt to soften what he terms the 'metric jolt', 'screech', her 'queer rhyme' and 'groan' (*Rossetti Papers*, p. 77, p. 93, pp. 99-100). He forges simpler poetic forms out of more complicated unsettling poems, such as the construction of a ballad from 'Seeking rest'. There are also other examples: the reduction of 'There remaineth

²⁶*Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism: Papers 1854 to 1862*, ed. W.M. Rossetti (London: George Allen, 1899), pp. 258-59. Further citations to this volume will be identified *R: R: P*.

²⁷As well as consulting her brother during the composition and compilation of *The Prince's Progress*, the manuscript was sent to Macmillan through him and there is some evidence that he may have also revised proofs: 'may I hope that you will again look at my proofs as they go through the press? If so, you had better have them before they come to me: and then I think I shall send them home for lynx-eyed research after errors, before letting them go to press.' Letter to D. G. Rossetti, 3 March 1865 (*RP*, p. 82).

therefore a rest' to the simple dirge of 'The Bourne' (see below); 'A Yawn' is turned into a brief description of the sea in 'By the Sea'; and, at his instigation, a dirge is turned into a narrative poem, 'The Prince's Progress' (*PW: CR*, p. 461).

D. G. Rossetti disapproved of certain kinds of contemporary women's poetry, especially poetry which encroached upon the masculine public and overtly political sphere, and suggested that such writing was an inappropriate model for Christina Rossetti to follow:

A real taint, to some extent, of modern vicious style, derived from that same source [Mrs. Browning] — what might be called a falsetto muscularity — always seemed to me much too prominent in the long piece called *The Lowest Room*. This I think is now included for the first time, and I am sorry for it. [. . .] Everything in which this tone appears is utterly foreign to your primary impulses. [. . .] If I were you, I would rigidly keep guard on this matter if you write in the future; and ultimately exclude from your writings everything (or almost everything) so tainted.²⁸
(*PW: CR*, pp. 460-61)

'The Lowest Room' (C.i.200-7) attempts to formulate a feminine heroic ideal using literary history as a model. Originally entitled 'A fight over the body of Homer', the poem presents two versions

²⁸Compare W. M. Rossetti's systematic attempt to change Christina Rossetti's indentation into a regular pattern, as he had done in *New Poems*. In the 1904 edition he claims this task was contemplated and then rejected as impossible, owing to his sister's irregular line lengths (*PW: CR*, p. viii). A comparison is also relevant with the textual history of Emily Dickinson's poetry. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, whom Dickinson first approached with a sample of her work in 1862, found the irregular rhyme and spasmodic metric beat, her 'lack' of form and unusual figural language rendered the poetry unpublishable. Later, after Dickinson's death, a selection was prepared for publication, but as Thomas H. Johnson describes in the introduction to his edition which attempts to restore the poetry to its original form: 'Higginson was apprehensive about the willingness of the public to accept the poems as they stood. Therefore in preparing copy for the printer he undertook to smooth rhymes, regularise the metre, delete provincialisms, and substitute "sensible" metaphors. Thus "folks" become "those", "heft" became "weight", and occasionally line arrangement was altered' (*Emily Dickinson: The Complete Works*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (London: Faber, 1970; repr. 1975), p. ix).

of the feminine role. The speaker desires a life of Homeric action, for 'A shame it is our aimless life' (l. 81). Her sister, however, is content with the contemporary definition of a woman's place. D. G. Rossetti's objection seems directed towards the speaker's wish to overturn contemporary feminine roles and the implicit relation such attempts bear to the function and vocation of contemporary women poets. Christina Rossetti wrote to D. G. Rossetti on 13 March 1865:

Lowest Room pray eject if you really think such a course advantageous, though I can't agree with you: still it won't dismay me that you should do so; I am not stung to obstinacy even by the Isa [Craig] and Adelaide [Ann Proctor] taunt in which I acknowledge an element of truth.

(Troxell, p. 142)

Finally in the poem, the wish to revise gender roles is superseded by a desire for the afterlife which will overturn the unsatisfactory hierarchy of the poem's present social time. The speaker is portrayed twenty years later as a spinster, now 'content to take the lowest place' (l. 271) whilst she also, in typical Rossettian fashion, awaits the Second Coming, 'When all deep secrets shall be shown, / And many last be first' (ll. 279-80). W. M. Rossetti's notes to the poem register surprise at his brother's reading, for he interprets the revisionary metaleptic deferral of perfection in the speaker as 'the final acceptance [. . .] of a subordinate and bedimmed position — [which] is clearly the very reverse of "falsetto muscularity"' (*PW: CR*, p. 461).

The radical poetic strategy, whereby aesthetic constructs of the feminine are both included in the poetry and evaded, is suppressed in both brothers' readings of the poem. D. G.

Rossetti's wish that his sister avoid the 'modern vicious style', that she omit all stylistic commerce with her contemporary women poets, is part of his wider attempt to re-feminize her poetry and to revise its place within literary and social time in accordance with his ideal of the feminine. His title change to 'Goblin Market' suggests a similar pattern. The original title 'A Peep at the Goblins' was, as Rossetti herself states in a note in a volume of the poems, 'in imitation of my cousin Mrs. Bray's "A Peep at the Pixies"' (C.i.234). The poem in manuscript, as the note also states and as Crump verifies, 'was inscribed to my dear only sister Maria Francesca Rossetti herself long afterwards the author of "A Shadow of Dante."' There is no evidence that D. G. Rossetti also deleted this dedication, but the erasure of the references to two literary women is significant. The pattern of manuscript changes attributable to her brother suggests that Rossetti's relation to a female literary tradition is at stake.

In another poem subject to multiple revisions and also using for part of its title the keyword 'rest', there are marks made upon the manuscript by Christina, W. M. and D. G. Rossetti, who all indicate their rearrangement of the original.²⁹ 'There remaineth therefore a rest' is published in *The Prince's Progress and other Poems* as 'The Bourne'. This version is D. G. Rossetti's, for on the manuscript in his handwriting is written 'Take two stanzas' and he numbers those he wishes to make up his version.³⁰ W.M. Rossetti also denotes with the letters 'a' to 'e'

²⁹Appendix A gives the text of all the versions to the poem.

³⁰D. G. Rossetti persuaded his sister in vain to omit this poem from *The Prince's Progress*, after it had been revised and published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in March 1863 (RP, p. 99).

those stanzas he published in his 1896 and 1904 editions.³¹ Finally, we are left with the original version and with the poet's own indication on the manuscript of the two final stanzas she was to publish in *Verses* (1893) as 'There Remaineth therefore a Rest to the People of God' (C.iii.226-8, 448). The original poem may be seen as a linguistic attempt to apprehend the subject and to articulate self-autonomy, but such an attempt, the poem suggests, is a necessarily doomed poetic venture within the aesthetic and cultural discourses available to Rossetti. 'There remaineth therefore a rest' begins with an attempt to describe the last resting place: 'Very cool that bed must be / Where our last sleep shall be slept' (ll. 1-2). Starting with a definite locale ('that bed') and a definite event ('our last sleep'), the whole process of the poem is to undo stable and fixed denotations and locales.³² Social hierarchies are meaningless: 'In the grave will be no space / For the purple of the proud' (ll. 16-17), and 'High and low and rich and poor, / All will fare alike at last' (ll. 26-27). The very place of the grave, 'Underneath the growing grass' (l. 6), becomes vague as boundaries and limits are rendered opaque and elusive. The first seven stanzas slowly lead us into this liminality in which all margins are unstable and dissolve into the dreams of the sleeping soul:

There no laughter shall be heard,
Nor the heavy sound of sighs;

³¹W. M. Rossetti explains his version as the salvaging of previously unpublished stanzas: 'in the notebook this composition numbers twelve stanzas; two of them, under the title *The Bourne*, were eventually published ('Underneath the growing grass,' etc.). The remaining ten were not unworthy to pair with those two, but I thought it best to use only five of them' (*PW: CR*, pp. 470-71).

³²Harrison's discussion of 'The Bourne' comments upon the poem's play with physical form and the spiritual. Artistic autonomy is, however, ascribed to Christina Rossetti and no account is taken of D. G. Rossetti's influence in the revisions (*Christina Rossetti in Context*, pp. 9-10).

Sleep shall seal the aching eyes;
All the ancient and the wise
There shall utter not a word.
(ll. 31-35)

In the eighth stanza, however, fragments of the material world suddenly enter the text.

Yet it may be we shall hear
How the mounting skylark sings
And the bell for matins rings;
Or perhaps the whisperings
Of white angels sweet and clear.
(ll. 36-40)

The sounds of the skylark and matin-bell enable the perception of the material to be transfigured into a glimpse of the afterlife for the sleeping soul, which then may witness the angelic voices. The inclusion of the seemingly literal, which allows the afterlife to be perceived, is followed by an increasing misalignment of signifier and signified as words veer towards opaque meanings beyond their capacity.

Sun or moon hath never shone
In that hidden depth of night;
But the souls there washed and white
Are more fair than fairest light
Mortal eye hath looked upon.
(ll. 41-45)

The misalignment is, paradoxically, semantically enabling. Comparatives — ‘sun or moon’ — and superlatives — ‘more fair than fairest light’ — struggle to convey this vision of the afterlife which remains unclassifiable and shapeless precisely because it bears no relation to the empirical. The linguistic blockage is a triumph: not only is it a dramatic struggle of

representation, not only does it indicate what W. David Shaw terms Rossetti's 'skeptical conviction that meaning is always in excess of anything she can say' (*Victorians and Mystery*, p. 266), but it also suggests how the poetic subject is located beyond the linguistic bounds of the text.

Furthermore, the final stanzas show that such a relocation of the subject rests on the authority of belief, not experience:

Fear and hope and chastening rod
Urge us on the narrow way:
Bear we still as best we may
Heat and burden of the day,
Struggling panting up to God.
(ll. 56-60)

The poetic subject is spiritually transfigured and thus beyond possible articulation. In a seeming anti-literary act, the event is anticipated in which true autonomy will be attained; thus Rossetti turns from poetess to prophetess. By locating subjectivity outside of the text, the text itself is made secondary to its own linguistic aims.

The heavy reliance upon belief over experience, furthermore, deftly evades the trap of the lyric-confessional mode by which much nineteenth-century women's poetry was interpreted. In D. G. Rossetti's version, however, two stanzas are taken from the first portion of the poem which, out of its original context, suggest that the subject is bounded, inert, dead:

There a very little girth
Can hold round what once the earth
Seemed too narrow to contain.
(*'The Bourne'*, ll. 8-10)

'The Bourne' ends thus with an image of the speaker bounded by death when once life could not contain her. Christina Rossetti's originally radical poetics are thus repositioned into an unresisting equivalence with conventional notions of femininity. In this way the process whereby Rossetti negotiates and evades these conventions is obscured.

Antony H. Harrison employs the term 'poetics of conciseness' to denote her poetry's terseness, the absent referents, the brevity, deceptive simplicity, dense literary allusions, deletions of stanzas and emphasis upon style over subject matter. Conciseness, he also argues, informs the aesthetics of the poetry (*Christina Rossetti in Context*, pp. 10-11, and chapter 2). Harrison's detailed account of the poetry's context and intertextuality, however, assumes an unproblematic commerce between D. G. Rossetti and Christina Rossetti and assumes the latter's total artistic autonomy, without an acknowledgement of the power structure that informs the revisions, and which informs in particular the aesthetic of the feminine, the discourse within which the poetry of both Rossettis operates. Christina Rossetti was not unwilling to submit her work for revision. Her letters to her publisher show an active concern with the preparation for publication, and the surviving letters to her brother reveal that she resisted some changes and forcefully argued over others.³³ The extent of her submission to D. G. Rossetti's advice suggests something more than the attempt to shape a poetic identity within an artistic

³³She threatens, in a letter to D. G. Rossetti dated 23 December 1864, 'amongst your ousted I recognise several of my own favourites, which perhaps I may adroitly re-insert WHEN publishing-day comes round. Especially I am inclined to show fight for at least one *terza-rima*, in honour of our Italian element' (*RP*, p. 69).

circle; it suggests, in fact, a complicity with dis-figuring the feminine subject that lies at what she herself terms the 'heart' of her poetry. (It is, of course, a paradoxical centrality in a poetics that undermines all notions of a centre, of placement, of locale). D. G. Rossetti's critique of 'Under the Rose', later titled 'The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children', is based (so far as Christina Rossetti's reply indicates) on the premise that the speaker's experience of illegitimacy is foreign to Christina Rossetti's own experience, thus assuming her poetics could be only confessional, could only reflect experience. She replied to this criticism:

As regards the unpleasant-sided subject I freely admit it. [. . .] But do you know, even if we throw *U. the R.* overboard, and whilst I endorse your opinion of the unavoidable and indeed much-to-be-desired unreality of women's work on many social matters, I yet incline to include within female range such an attempt as this. [. . .] And whilst it may be truly urged that unless white could be black and Heaven Hell my experience (thank God) precludes me from hers, I yet don't see why 'the Poet Mind' should be less able to construct her from its own inner consciousness than a hundred other unknown quantities.

(Troxell, p. 143)

Juxtaposed with the assertion that meaning may be generated beyond the sphere of experience is her acceptance of D.G. Rossetti's wish to remove unspecified flaws in the poem, for the above plea is prefixed with '*U. the R.* herewith [. . .] I meekly return to you, pruned and rewritten to order' (p. 143). Her paradoxical stance may be explained by reading D. G. Rossetti's deletions and revisions as further displacing and estranging the subject from the text. This is diminishment taken to the

extreme, an act of textual and self-deletion at another's hand, a function of the 'double lack' (see above). Rossetti's poetry always suggests that the subject resides, or is fully present, elsewhere. The text is superfluous to its own ends, and the revisions merely further inscribe this self-protective strategy into the poetry.

Indeed, in her own rearrangement of the poems for the *Verses* volume (1893), only those stanzas suggestive of a metaleptic deferral of signification and projection of the feminine subject into perfection in the afterlife are reproduced.³⁴ Rossetti herself sees fit to present, for a devotional volume, only the fruits of her exploration of subjectivity, giving the subject a firmly non-empirical locale in a realm that perfects gender relations by transforming them into divine love, such as in 'As a king, . . . unto the King', which, out of a poem originally seven stanzas long, preserves only the final two stanzas (C.iii.248, 426).

The irony of the poetry's confrontation with the aesthetics of the feminine is that the resulting figure of the speakers as mute self-contemplative women who anticipate a fully present subjectivity in some future time mimics the contemporary stipulation that women must be still, inert, silent.³⁵ Christina Rossetti's collusion with her brother's attempt to re-define the feminine in her early publications was however far from a submission. The linguistic operation of the poetry works to position the feminine subject as less than an object, a

³⁴Chapter 7 continues this analysis of the revisions to *Verses*.

³⁵For example, see W. M. Rossetti's reading of 'The Lowest Room' above. Glennis Stephenson notes that Letitia Elizabeth Landon also combines submission to and subversion of contemporary notions the feminine in her own construction of 'L. E. L.' (p. 3).

displacement beyond the text into the amorphous realm of the sleeping soul, itself an anticipation of the Second Coming. This doubleness — the speaker's desire for Soul Sleep and the Sleeper's desire for the Resurrection — eludes the revisions that would re-inscribe Rossetti's text within Pre-Raphaelite feminine aesthetics and obscure her parodic mimicry of that discourse.

The urge towards self-erasure displaces the subject beyond the text, and the subject is left as a trace, as presence-in-absence. This uncanniness makes the poems in the early volumes disruptive of social norms, for the subject refuses to be located in a fixed position, and thus eludes definition and identification (despite D. G. Rossetti's efforts to re-feminize the poetry), even as this mimics nineteenth-century feminine attitudes. This double within the feminine, as both known and unknown, within and beyond, produces poetry at once conventional and subversive. The poetry thus lends itself to a reading not of determined identities but of positionalities; not *who* is the subject, but, as later chapters ask, *where* is she.

Chapter 3
The Uncanny Subject:
D. G. Rossetti's Verbal/Visual Aesthetics
and Positions of Alterity
in Christina Rossetti's Poetry

Where a discourse appeals directly to an image, to an immediacy of seeing, as a point of its argument or demonstration, one can be sure that all difference is being elided, that the unity of some accepted vision is being reproduced.

—Stephen Heath¹

In an article published in 1893, Edmund Gosse praised Christina Rossetti as one of the 'obscure group of boys and girls who called themselves Preraphaelites' (*Critical Kit-Kats*, p. 146), for:

association with men so learned and eager, so daring in experiment, so well equipped in scholarship, gave her an instant and positive advantage. By nature she would seem to be of a cloistered and sequestered temper, and her genius was lifted on this wave of friendship to heights which it would not have dreamed of attempting alone. On the other hand [. . .] critics have taken for granted that she was a satellite, and have been puzzled to notice her divergences from the type.
(pp. 147-48)

¹Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *Screen* 19.3 (Autumn 1978), p. 53.

Two years after her death in 1894, Gosse felt it necessary to add an anecdote at the end of this article in preparation for its publication in *Critical Kit-Kats*, in which he implicates himself in the same ambiguity that he notes in other critics in the perception of Rossetti as both within and without the Brotherhood. Gosse describes how he found her style of dress, when he first met her around 1870, deeply disappointing:

She is known to the world, and very happily known, by her brother's portraits of her, and in particular by the singularly beautiful chalk drawing in profile, dated 1866. [. . .] But, as I suppose, an ascetic or almost methodistical reserve caused her to clothe herself in a style, or with an absence of style, which was really distressing. [. . .] The high stiff dress ended in a hard collar and plain brooch, the extraordinarily ordinary skirt sank over a belated crinoline, and these were afflictions hard to bear from the high-priestess of Preraphaelitism.
(pp. 257-58)

The difference between Rossetti in her later years and the Pre-Raphaelite feminine icon, as also suggested by contradictions in visual depictions in Rossetti (see chapter 1), represents the critical ambiguity of her relation to the Brotherhood. Both associated with and excluded from the masculine Brotherhood, Rossetti's historical position is one of alterity.

Contemporary reviews tend to inscribe the alterity by employing visual language in the assessment of her poetry. Whilst this annexes her uncomfortably with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, it is also associated with contemporary notions of women's poetry as a direct and spontaneous reflex of experience, or sight. The unsigned review of the *Goblin Market* volume in *The*

Athenaeum (26 April 1862), suggests the visual artlessness of Rossetti's poems:

These lays by Miss Rossetti have the charm of a welcome surprise. They are no mere reflections and echoes of previous beauty and music, but, whatever their faults, express both in essence and form the individuality of the writer. To read these poems after the laboured and skilful, but not original, verse which has been issued of late, is like passing from a picture gallery, with its well-figured semblance of nature, to the real nature out-of-doors, which greets us with the waving grass and the pleasant shock of the breeze.

(*Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, p. 460)

The *Saturday Review's* comments on *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (23 June 1866) also compares the poetry to the visual: 'all her visions of social and moral truths seem to come to her through pictures, and to stay in her mind in the pictorial shape. Instead of analysing her ideas, she embodies and dramatises them' (*Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, p. 461). Similarly, Arthur Christopher Benson responded to the 'haunting sense of locality in which the mood dreams itself out', as distinct from a purely descriptive pictorial poetry:

Christina Rossetti's *mise-en-scène* is a place of gardens, orchards, wooded dingles, with a churchyard in the distance. The scene shifts a little, but the spirit never wanders far afield; and it is certainly singular that one who lived out almost the whole of her life in a city so majestic, sober, and inspiriting as London, should never bring the consciousness of streets and thoroughfares and populous murmur into her writings. She, whose heart was so with birds and fruit, cornfields and farmyard sounds, never even revolts against or despairs of the huge desolation, the laborious monotony of a great town.²

²Arthur Christopher Benson, 'Christina Rossetti', *The National Review*, 26 February 1895, pp. 753-63 (p. 753).

Benson's appreciation is caught in the aporia that, conventionally, female poetry is experiential and descriptive of nature, but as a city dweller, Rossetti's experience of nature was minimal. William Sharp describes a social gathering at which Rossetti was asked if her inspiration came from the country, to which she reportedly replied:

Oh dear, no! I know it *ought* to be so. [. . .] I don't derive anything from the country at first hand! Why, my knowledge of what is called nature is that of the town sparrow. [. . .] And, what is more, I am fairly sure that I am in the place that best suits me. After all, we may enjoy the magic and mystery of ocean without ever adventuring upon it.
(‘Some Reminiscences’, pp, 737-38)³

As I argued in Chapter 1, the biographical subject of Christina Rossetti is represented as having a wholly interior existence, which enables any tension between her experience, her poetry, and the conventions of women's writing to be attributed to the spontaneity of her spiritual and imaginative existence.

Rossetti's poetry does, as the language of the reviews implicitly suggests, have an important correspondence with Pre-Raphaelite visual aesthetics, but the effect is not merely to reiterate their conventions. Jerome Bump has suggested that, whilst the Brotherhood by its very appellation excluded Christina and Maria Rossetti, the former was fully qualified in

³For a further discussion of the use of nature in nineteenth-century reviews of women poets, see the Introduction (Part Two) to Paula Day's 'Nature and Gender in Victorian Women's Writing: Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti', Ph.D., The University of Lancaster, 1990.

her artistic concerns and productions to be a Pre-Raphaelite.⁴ Such a re-assessment aims to restore through historical revisionism Rossetti's place in a movement from which she was excluded by virtue of her gender. The danger with this critical praxis is the erasure of the alterity which, far from being debilitating, enables a subtle exploration of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics from a superlative subject position in the representational axiom.⁵

Rossetti engages most obviously and directly with D.G. Rossetti's visual aesthetics in two sonnets, 'In an Artist's Studio' (1856) and 'An Echo from Willowood' (date of composition unknown; published 1890). Her poem 'The Queen of Hearts' (1863) may also refer to his two *Regina Cordium* pictures (1860 and 1861) that predate it.⁶ In addition, her short story 'The Lost Titian' (1855) and sonnets 'The P. R. B.' (1853) and 'The two Rossettis (brothers they)' (1853) refer satirically to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.⁷ The concern with her brother's art is, I will argue, informed by two paintings for

⁴Jerome Bump, 'Christina Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood', in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by David A. Kent (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 322-345.

⁵Here I differ from Sharon Smulders, who argues that Rossetti saw herself as the representative woman. See the Summary to 'Christina Rossetti: Response and Responsibility', D.Phil., University of Sussex, 1987. Whilst 'Woman' occupies an ambivalent position as both the ground and vanishing point of phallogocentrism, Rossetti's position was excessively ambivalent, and our inability to access her as an historical personage increases her uncanny place in the aesthetic.

⁶The later picture is almost a copy, but portrays Mrs. Adam Heaton, whilst the former depicts Lizzie Siddall. See Surtees, vol. 1, p. 75 and p. 81. D. G. Rossetti painted a further *Regina Cordium* in 1866, unrelated to the earlier pictures except by title (Surtees, vol. 1, p. 111).

⁷Jan Marsh's introduction to 'The Lost Titian' explains the references to the Brotherhood. *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, p. 305. 'The Lost Titian' may specifically refer to D. G. Rossetti's short story, 'Hand and Soul' (*CW: DGR*, vol.1, pp. 383-98).

which she sat as a model for the Virgin Mary,⁸ *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (Behold the Handmaid of the Lord; 1850), later re-titled *The Annunciation* (Plates 6 and 7). The difficulty of interpreting these pictures has been traditionally attributed to the painter's stylistic immaturity and his interest in the Art-Catholicism.⁹ The paintings benefit, however, from acknowledging their interpretative difficulties as part of an early expression of D. G. Rossetti's feminine aesthetics which his sister's position of alterity — both within and without the Brotherhood, both model and artist — unsettles in her explicit commentaries on his art.¹⁰

* * * * *

It is a critical commonplace that the Pre-Raphaelites thrived artistically on the configuration of word and image, but for D. G. Rossetti the verbal-visual combination is both appealing and problematic. Technical deficiencies, in particular with perspective and the fresco technique,¹¹ make both *The Girlhood*

⁸Miss Love sat as a model for the hair of the Virgin in *The Annunciation*, and the face was painted over many times; Surtees, vol. 1, p. 13. W. M. Rossetti comments that the version of the painting exhibited in 1850 has a more pronounced likeness of Christina Rossetti it does now (*PW: CR*, p. lxii).

⁹For example, Timothy Hilton notes that: 'stylistically, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* is composed with a kind of single-minded originality, in which it is difficult to distinguish the parts played by calculation and by sheer lack of ability', *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970; repr. 1987), p. 40.

¹⁰Rosenblum fruitfully reads the Rossetti canon in terms of the model/artist double (*Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance*). See the discussion of her approach in the Introduction, above. David D. Nolta explores crossings over between the depictions of Christina Rossetti and self-perception in her poetry, in 'Whispering Likenesses: Images of Christina Rossetti, 1847-1853', *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Studies* 2.1 (Spring 1989), 49-55.

¹¹William Bell Scott reports that Rossetti: 'was painting in oils with water-colour brushes, as thinly as in water-colour, on canvass which he has primed with white till the surface was smooth as cardboard, and every tint remained transparent',

of *Mary Virgin* and *The Annunciation* especially difficult to interpret in any satisfactory and coherent way. Indeed, at the same time as the pictures didactically insist on a symbolic interpretation, they unsettle the viewer and undermine the semantic project. This is most obviously true of the earlier *Girlhood* which is littered with spiritual symbols that clutter the domestic space of the interior, attest to the purity of the Virgin and proleptically hint at her visitation by the angel Gabriel, represented in *The Annunciation*. Attached to the frame of *The Girlhood* are two sonnets that leave us with no doubt as to their overtly didactic message. The first poem describes the spiritual qualities of 'that blessed Mary, pre-elect / God's Virgin' (ll.1-2) and points towards the imminent Annunciation. The Virgin is emphatically defined as spiritual, passive, and feminine.¹² In the second sonnet, the symbols of her purity in the painting are explained:

These are the symbols. On that cloth of red
l' the centre is the Tripoint: perfect each,
Except the second of its points, to teach
That Christ is not yet born. The books — whose head
Is golden Charity, as Paul hath said—
Those virtues are wherein the soul is rich:
Therefore on them the lily standeth, which
Is Innocence, being interpreted.

The seven-thorn'd briar and the palm seven-leaved
Are her great sorrow and her great reward.
Until the end be full, the Holy One
Abides without. She soon shall have achieved
Her perfect purity: yea, God the Lord

quoted in the Tate Gallery Catalogue, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Gallery and Alan Lane, 1984), p. 65.

¹²Lynne Pearce shows how D. G. Rossetti made changes to the first sonnet which: 'reinforce Mary's domestic *obedience*' (p. 44).

Shall soon vouchsafe His Son to be her Son.
(Surtees, vol. 1, p. 10)¹³

It could be argued that this explicit didacticism in *The Girlhood* is produced by the artist's frustrations with improperly learnt rules of composition; for the anxiety is that difficulties with the application of technique may confuse the viewer, who would then bring alternative and improper interpretations to the picture. D. G. Rossetti also admitted to difficulties with the execution of *The Annunciation*: he called it 'the blessed white eye-sore' and the 'blessed white daub',¹⁴ and Frederic Stephens and John Millais are reported to have assisted with the perspective of the whitewashed interior (Surtees, vol. 1, p. 13). I would suggest, however, that the didacticism is also an attempt to control the indeterminacy produced by the verbal-visual doubling in *The Girlhood*. *The Annunciation* is also implicated in this, for the frame was originally covered with Latin phrases, as noted in the Tate catalogue:

In 1874 it [*The Annunciation*] was once more in Rossetti's hands when its frame was altered to the present one. The original frame evidently bore Latin mottoes, copies from a brass or brass-rubbing owned by

¹³ For a description of the changes to both these early paintings, see Surtees, vol. 1, pp. 10-11 and pp. 12-14; and the Tate Gallery Catalogue, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 65 and p. 73.

¹⁴ D. G. Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, 1 January and 14 January 1853. *Præraphaelite Diaries and Letters*, ed. by W. M. Rossetti (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1900), p. 29. For an example of a contemporary complaint about the technical deficiencies, see the review quoted in *DGR: FL*, vol. i, p. 162. Later, in 1874, D. G. Rossetti commented to Ford Madox Brown that *The Annunciation*: 'in some of the highest respects I have hardly done anything else so good. [. . .] Of course it is very faulty in mechanical respects, but nothing can be done to it to any purpose except a very little stippling of surface here and there,' *The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), vol. 3, p. 1283.

F. G. Stephens, which were 'Popish' in sentiment. They must have increased the didactic quality of the picture. (p. 73)¹⁵

Furthermore, the sonnets attached to *The Girlhood* offer an interpretation of this later visual text, and, like that painting, it also has another obvious verbal source: the Bible.¹⁶

The effect of the didactic configuration of picture and poems is to present both mediums as one and the same, a project that Lynne Pearce has described as the "will to monolithic meaning" (Pearce, pp. 37-38),¹⁷ that denies the difference between the mediums and imposes a coherent and unitary interpretation upon the spectators. Stamping such a convincing and unquestionable meaning on the pictures, however, fails by virtue of its own excessiveness. Both pictures have a symbolic content that leaves them claustrophobic and stultifying; the

¹⁵See also W. M. Rossetti's comment in *The Pre-Raphaelite Journal* entry for 23-29 January 1853: 'Gabriel finished and sent off the Annunciation picture. It has now lost its familiar name of *The Ancilla* — the mottoes having been altered from Latin to English, to guard against the imputation of "popery,"' *The P.R.B. Journal: William Michael Rossetti's Diary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 1849-1853: Together With Other Pre-Raphaelite Documents*, ed. by William E. Fredeman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 99. I have been unable to find evidence of the exact phrases used.

¹⁶Linda H. Peterson suggests that the main point of departure from biblical tradition is the depiction of the Virgin sewing, not reading; thus, D.G. Rossetti revises the convention of the Virgin as a faithful reader of scriptures. See "Restoring the Book": The Typological Hermeneutics of Christina Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood', *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994), 209-32 (pp. 210-11). John Ruskin, in 'The Three Colours of pre-Raphaelitism' (1878) also notes the divergences from Biblical tradition: 'Rossetti's "Annunciation" differs from every previous conception of the scene known to me, in representing the angel as waking the Virgin from sleep to give her his message. The Messenger himself also differs from angels as they are commonly represented, in not depending, for recognition of his supernatural character, on the insertion of bird's wings at his shoulders', *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), vol. 34 (1908), 149.

¹⁷ Pearce argues that this: 'is dictated by separateness of colour, by sharpness of line. [. . .] The extreme stillness and rigidity of *The Girlhood* is usually explained simply in terms of the early Pre-Raphaelite penchant for medieval two-dimensionality, but the sonnets betray a deeper fundamentalism in which the concept of "purity" is especially resonant' (pp. 37-38).

visual text is over-burdened with moral meaning and the signifiers are exhausted.¹⁸ Paradoxically and at odds with the didacticism, the end result is to leave the viewers with an unsettling sense of exclusion from the act of interpreting the paintings. Further, the explicit didacticism calls attention to its attempt to suppress alternative readings, and so the attempt to forge a monolithic relation between the visual and the verbal is exposed and undone.¹⁹

The tight and clinical structuring of *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *The Annunciation* forcefully suggests both the attempted refusal to acknowledge the gap between art forms, and the associated attempt to control the gaze of the viewer. In the earlier painting, the vertical lines of the lily and that of its embroidered counterpart, the criss-crossing of the lattice, the edging of the floor tiles, the seven-thorned briar and the palm leaf and the frozen angularity of the figures all suggest the tight structuring of space along linear principles. In *The Annunciation*, the cramped and narrow depiction of the Virgin Mary's chamber is even more austere and angular and is heightened by the stark predominant whiteness.²⁰ All the details in *The Annunciation*

¹⁸Laura L. Doan, 'Narrative and Transformative Iconography in D. G. Rossetti's Earliest Paintings', *Soundings* 17.4 (1988), 471-83 (p. 477).

¹⁹Mary Ann Caws, *The Art of Interference: Stressed Readings in Verbal and Visual Texts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 285. Caws argues that this is a frequent occurrence in Pre-Raphaelite art. Contrast the reading of Catherine Golden, who sees the verbal-visual combination as complementary, leading to a totality of meaning. See 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Two-Sided Art', *Victorian Poetry* 26 (1988), 395-402.

²⁰The Tate Gallery Catalogue, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, argues that the narrowness of *The Annunciation* may be partially explained by D. G. Rossetti's plan to add another picture on the Virgin's death and thus make a diptych, in which both pictures together would have made a perfect square. The plan was not executed (p. 73). The organisation of space is also explained here as symbolic of the spiritual and of time: 'the vertical division of space, made by the left side of the blue hanging and the edge of the bed, falls almost on the Golden section. The dove, symbolising the Holy Spirit, and the lily, with the bud still to break, move across this division and are the instruments of conception. The division of space is also one of time, for Rossetti saw

loom large within a domestic interior and the effect is to make the Angel Gabriel seem disproportionate. The bare interior is in contrast to the many symbols that fill up the space of *The Girlhood*, but the effect is still claustrophobic.

Further, both pictures are marked by the contrasting faintness of the outside scene.²¹ In *The Girlhood*, the lattice marks the division between outside and inside whilst the towering unproportional figure of St. Joseph tending the vine has a contrasting faintness of colour: his dusty purple-blue clothes blend with the sky and the horizon, whilst the faint vertical lines of the tree trunks also seem disproportionate. There is a similar visually disturbing quality induced by the view from the window in *The Annunciation*, for the outside is depicted as a small portion of blue sky and an unfocused tree in the top left hand corner, in direct contrast with the interior, as if this was a token of the exterior. In both pictures, with the exception of St. Joseph tending the vine, the sacred symbolism is fully concentrated within the domestic space; the outside does not

the Virgin, when she conceived Christ: "Faith's present, partly what had been / From what began with her, and is for aye" (p. 73). The correspondence between space and time is reminiscent of Blake's gendering of these terms in his notebook commentary on one of his paintings, *A Vision of the Last Judgement* (now lost): 'Time & Space are Real Beings[,] a Male & a Female[,] Time is a Man[,] Space is a Woman[,] & her Masculine Portion is Death,' *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 563. This connection with Blake perhaps explains D. G. Rossetti's interest in painting the Virgin's death.

²¹ Compare the Renaissance tradition of including in Annunciation paintings a portion of the outside scene to heighten the effect of perspective; thus, interior and exterior are organized to suggest a stable and unitary point of view. See, for example, the Annunciation paintings by Sandro Botticelli (c.1490), and Filippo Lippi (1406). Compare Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation* (1470), which employs his *sfumato* technique whereby the landscape dissolves into the far distance, further heightening the sense of perspective. This is to be distinguished from D. G. Rossetti's paintings where the entire depiction of the exterior space is indistinct. Although D. G. Rossetti is obviously drawing on a tradition of Annunciation pictures, as well as the Nazarenes, his particular handling of perspective and the interior-exterior distinction should be read, I argue, with reference to the problematics of his verbal-visual aesthetics.

fully engage with the symbolic content of the picture nor heighten any sense of geometric perspective as one would expect in traditional Renaissance Annunciation pictures. In fact, the depiction of the exterior does not appear to serve any conventional technical or symbolic function. The fading, imprecisely drawn outside, making up only a small portion of both paintings, seems to mark a refusal to engage with what is external to the delineated signifying 'space' of the visual text. The status of the viewer, whose independent participation in the picture is already diminished by the explicit didacticism, seems to be symbolised by this representation of the exterior, which while necessarily included is at once also cornered off and made extraneous, reinforcing the anxiety that the viewer will undermine the attempt to impose a single interpretation.

The resistance to any acknowledgement of the spectator's independence from the didacticism is all the more disconcerting when perspective is considered.²² Perspective presupposes and is organized by the viewpoint of a single spectator. It is constructed with reference to both this *singular* line of vision and to the concept of a *masterful* point of reference, a centre. Further, as Gombrich notes, the illusion of perspective brings about a monolithic reading practice, for it: 'consists [. . .] in the conviction that there is only one way of interpreting the visual pattern in front of us'.²³ According to W. M. Rossetti,

²²Hilton gives D. G. Rossetti's problems with perspective as the reason for the following features of the painting: 'All the figures crowd up to the picture plane, with St. Joachim looming disconcertingly close to us, the floorboards on the left shoot away to a different vanishing point from those on the right, and an unintegrated landscape peeps from behind a strong device of verticals and horizontals, the trellis-work forming a cross behind St. Ann' (p. 40).

²³E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Oxford: Phaidon 1960; repr. 1986), p. 210.

[D. G.] Rossetti never paid any attention, worth speaking of, to perspective, and indeed — so far as his own interest in matters of art was concerned — was at all times almost indifferent to the question whether his works were in perspective or out of it. Mr. Stephens did something to arrange the perspective of Rossetti's picture (1849-50) of *The Annunciation*, now in the National Gallery, and in 1850 gave him a few lessons — and would not have minded giving many more — in this bugbear science.

(*DGR: FL*, vol. 1, 121-22)²⁴

Despite this declaration of indifference to perspective, the overall effect of the perspective in the paintings is unsettling and functions as part of D. G. Rossetti's visual aesthetics.

While denying the spectator the semblance of geometric perspective beyond the domestic space, there is a suggestion of disturbed perspective in the treatment of the lily, used in both paintings as a symbol of the phallus and of purity. In *The Annunciation*, we find that from the spectator's viewpoint the lily points to the Virgin's womb, but from the Archangel's perspective it seems to point to the wall. As the dominant vertical line in *The Girlhood*, the lily is the only point that immediately attracts our gaze as the displaced centre of the picture, balanced but split in the Virgin's embroidery on the anachronistic High Church stole. Ultimately, the clutter and clatter of symbols and the disturbed perspective distract the spectator. Meaning is enclosed within the claustrophobic domestic space and the lines of vision which we seem invited to follow frustrate the text's claim to accuracy (both of history and of perspective). In addition, any semblance of perspective is

²⁴Compare William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1905), vol. 1, p. 118.

confined to the domestic interior; overall, the paintings thus suggest a depthlessness and a two-dimensionality which denies the corporeality of the figure of the Virgin, who seems consequently to be flattened and deanimated.²⁵

The denial of difference between mediums and between the artist's didactic intention and the spectator's threatening independence has its origins in sexual difference. D. G. Rossetti acknowledged this in a note, subsequently transcribed by W. M. Rossetti: 'picture and poem bear the same relation to each other as beauty does in man and woman: the point of meeting where the two are most identical is the supreme perfection' (*CW: DGR*, vol. 1, 510).²⁶ This problematic assertion first genders genre (in its widest possible sense as types of artistic medium) in keeping with literary tradition, only to deny difference at a certain imagined point of intersection between image and word.

The eradication of sexual difference is complicated by Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, which give priority to the male artist over an objectified feminine figure, upon which his identity is predicated. The representational system positions the feminine as both ground and vanishing point of the aesthetic. Indeterminacy is thus connoted as feminine. Toril Moi usefully summarises Luce Irigaray's point, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*: 'if one imagined that the woman imagines anything at all, the object (of speculation) would lose its stability and

²⁵Barbara Garlick, 'The Frozen Fountain: Christina Rossetti, the Virgin Model, and Youthful Pre-Raphaelitism', in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature*, ed. Lloyd Davies (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 105-27 (p. 109).

²⁶This is given in the section 'Sentences and Notes', selected from D. G. Rossetti's notebooks by his brother, who gives no date.

unsettle the [male] subject itself.’²⁷ Elisabeth Bronfen gives the rhetorical implications:

The ambivalence of Woman’s position is that she is supplement to man and point of an original unity. She is fluid, undifferentiated, yet her function is to define man and she serves as the limit or boundary at which difference is drawn and confirmed. She is not whole, a sign for human mortality, yet also the body over which man and culture can be defined as being whole. [. . .] The allegory of the female body is an ambivalently coded figure and the rhetorical figure of ambivalence *per se*; a figure thematising difference and a rhetoric[al] enactment of difference.
(pp. 209-10)

The attempt to control the viewer’s gaze in *The Girlhood* and *The Annunciation* thus emerges as an effect of the scopic basis of sexual difference, ‘by which the sex one can see becomes the gender one must *be*’.²⁸ In addition, according to this formalist logic, a theory of sexual difference based on the gaze perceives the female as being a gender defined by its anatomical lack. Thus, whilst the gaze assures difference between genders, it also carries a reminder of the threat of castration which then leads to the mobilization of the fetish.²⁹ In such a

²⁷ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 136. Paraphrase of Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 165-66.

²⁸ Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 11.

²⁹ Compare Lindsay Smith, who points out that the etymology of ‘focus’ is ‘hearth’, and that: ‘focus as photographic state may thus in a sense be read as fetishized with its antithesis “out of focus” thereby becoming commensurate with a fear of castration (or with “the unwelcome fact of woman’s castration”) symbolised, we might say, in the loss of patriarchal power in the home. We can further rewrite this formulation as the fetishism that *is* focus in the sense that focus in photographic representation newly mobilizes the fetish,’ ‘The politics of focus: feminism and photographic theory’, in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 238-63 (p. 242, p. 256). Smith goes on to critique Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographic practice as a disavowal of the male castration complex through her challenge to the scopic realm (see below).

representational axiom, to view the figure of 'Woman'³⁰ both affirms and denies her difference, as the mark of fetishism both affirms and denies women's castration. In D. G. Rossetti's earliest paintings, then, the mastery of the gaze that is an imperative of geometric perspective is undermined by the acknowledgement that these generic doubles bring about an indeterminacy that is (culturally) encoded as feminine, and that re-inscribes difference and loss. Most obviously, this is evident in the depiction of the Virgin as a vaguely delineated physical body in both pictures, the former as a wooden adolescent and the later picture as an amorphous shape underneath the night-dress.³¹ The physicality of the Virgin is indefinite and uncertain at the very point at which it represents the feminine. Further, this indeterminacy is represented by the viewer's gaze which challenges the artist's didacticism by its very difference in position, threatening D. G. Rossetti's 'supreme perfection' of art.

Within the signifying space of the visual texts it is the rhetorical figure of the Virgin Mary that attempts to counteract the dangerous threat to monolithic meaning produced by indeterminacy. In rhetorical tradition the figure of the Virgin signifies wholeness, completion and stability of meaning. In Christian tradition, the Virgin was depicted as the counterpart of Tuccia, the vestal virgin who proved her virtue by

³⁰I use the phrase 'Woman' within quotation marks because, although my discussion of the position of the feminine within the aesthetic has a specificity, the term implies a stable and monolithic category. Judith Butler has shown the problematics of this phrase for feminist critiques. See *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 3-7.

³¹Ruskin suggests the imprecise (or un-feminine) physicality of the Virgin in his comment that, in *The Annunciation*, she is: "in severe fore-shortening [. . .] and the disturbed coverlid is thrown into confused angular folds, which admit no suggestion whatever of girlish grace," *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 44, p. 149.

miraculously carrying water in a sieve. This potent image for a sealed whole as opposed to a penetrated body was attached to the Virgin Mary, whose maidenhood was described allegorically with images of cinctures or closed vessels drawn from the Old Testament. In particular, she was seen as figured in the verse from the Song of Solomon: 'a garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed' (6.12).³² Significantly, this very passage is echoed in W. M. Rossetti's *Memoir of Christina Rossetti*, to suggest the one flaw in her character:

Over-scrupulosity made Christina shut up her mind to almost all things save the Bible, and the admonitions and ministrations of priests. [. . .] Her temperament and character, naturally warm and free, became 'a fountain sealed.' Not but that affection continued to flow in abundant measure, and the clear line of duty told out all the more apparent from receiving no side-lights. Impulse and élan were checked, both in act and in writing, but the most extreme spontaneity in poetic performance always remained.³³
(*PW: CR*, p. lxviii)

W. M. Rossetti describes his sister as a contained and closed personage, suggesting repression, wholeness, and completion. Depicted by the Pre-Raphaelites and by subsequent biographers as 'Santa Christina',³⁴ in Gosse's words 'cloistered' from society (see above) in her celibate and purely emotional life, Christina

³²See Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Picador, 1987), ch. 11. For the historical development of the representation of the Virgin Mary, see Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex: the myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld, 1976), p.256.

³³The place of Rossetti as a female poet in the nineteenth century is also described in these terms: pure and spiritual, but also spontaneous. Within this cultural construct, moral purity is a condition of artistic production. The phrase 'a fountain sealed' recurs in her poetry; see, for example, 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness': 'I must bear to wait / A fountain sealed thro' heat and cold' (C.iii.266).

³⁴See, for example, Hinkson.

Rossetti would seem to be the perfect choice for the model of the Virgin. Both pictures were finished shortly after her own mysterious and unexplained transformation, recounted in the biographies, from a lively child into a solemn and sickly adult (see Chapter 1). D. G. Rossetti commented to Charles Lyell that her appearance was: 'exactly adapted to my purpose'; and to Frederic Stephens, D. G. Rossetti acknowledges the saintliness of his own sister when he described *The Girlhood* as: 'a symbol of female excellence, the Virgin being taken as its highest type.'³⁵ G. P. Boyce describes the representation of the Virgin as: 'one of, if not the most[,] exquisite conception I have yet seen [...] full of intense thought and awakened and growing religious awe, almost my ideal of a woman's head'.³⁶ And Holman Hunt described the sitter as: 'exactly the pure and docile-hearted damsel that her brother portrayed God's pre-elect to be' (Surtees, vol. 1, p. 14).

As the Second Eve, the Virgin Mary participates rhetorically in the attempt to convert the picture and poem to the status of a unitary and single text which strives to frame and structure interpretation and to tightly control the reader's response. In Christian tradition, the Virgin Mother is a paradoxical feminine ideal that emerges from the cultural impasse that women are defined by both their maternal function and their sexual purity. As the mother of Christ she brings forth and enables Redemption and thus the healing of original sin. She is the mediator between the human and the divine who heals the split between signifier and signified brought about by Eve.³⁷ As

³⁵Quoted in Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1987), p. 31.

³⁶Quoted in Garlick, 'The Frozen Fountain', pp. 113-14.

³⁷Eve is both of Adam and deviant from him, and so she is the first to signify the feminine as the loss of the literal in language. Thus from her derives the creation of

the iconic woman she is also disembodied,³⁸ as Elisabeth Bronfen remarks, for her body is not subject to the decay and death that Eve typifies. In her heavenly reanimation:

conceptually a collapsing of first and second burial occurs, which completely circumvents a dissolution and corruption of the body, and by implication places her from the start outside the 'feminine' realm of material time and bodily decay and into the 'masculine' symbolic realm of eternal unchanged forms.
(p. 68)

Thus, whilst the Virgin Mother is ideally feminine, she is also a figure for translation, for feminine perfection carried over to the masculine realm. Culturally made to mediate 'the underhand double of explicit phallic power',³⁹ the Virgin Mary is *ideally* feminine but not *merely* feminine.

The gender ambivalence inscribed into the cult of the Virgin is suggested by the lily in both *The Girlhood* and *The Annunciation*. In the latter the Angel Gabriel holds the lily as a symbol of virginity and faith whilst the Virgin Mary stares anxiously at the stem which sharply separates her from the Archangel. The erect lily is 'the symbolic instrument of impregnation' and the means of the Virgin's 'transformation from sexual innocence to sexual awareness' (Doan, p. 481). In this way, the lily incorporates masculine and feminine significances and thus becomes the appropriate symbol of the

metaphor and the associated break between signifier and signified. See Stephen J. Nichols, Jr., 'Solomon's Wife: Deceit, Desire, and the Genealogy of Romance', in *Space, Time, Image, Sign*, ed. by James A. W. Heffernan (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), pp. 19-37 (p. 23).

³⁸Compare Garlick's remark that flattened perspective deanimates the female figure, cited above.

³⁹This phrase is from Julia Kristeva's discussion of the Virgin Mary in 'Sabat Mater', reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 170.

Virgin, who in the earlier *Girlhood* picture is shown embroidering the lily onto a stole, supervised by Saint Anne. Here, the Virgin is engaged in a typological act of self-representation as she embroiders the image of herself.⁴⁰ She copies from a real lily which towers close in front of her on top of books denoting the cardinal virtues. The frame on which she works rests tight up against her and suggests that she is hemmed in by this ecclesiastical anachronism. In *The Annunciation*, the narrowness of the canvass emphasises the cowering Virgin's entrapment; and, again, both the lilies hold the figure in her place. The Virgin's representative status as a female figure — in *The Girlhood* as a pious daughter, and in *The Annunciation* as a vulnerable adolescent — heightens the sense that the phallic lily's function is to rein in the feminine.

As a figure for mediation between gender differences, the rhetorical figure of the Virgin Mary enters the symbolic masculine domain and promises to repress the challenging indeterminacy of verbal-visual doubles which are encoded as feminine. In D. G. Rossetti's attempt to posit an effacement of difference between poem and picture and man and woman, the Virgin is the perfect bearer. As the healer of the unstable language split and the mediator from feminine to masculine, she is rhetorically figured as potentially stabilising gender and genre difference.

* * * * *

⁴⁰This is the nineteenth-century construction of female creativity, as a reflex of the experiential and visual. Peterson offers an interesting demonstration of how Christina Rossetti re-instates women as readers of Scripture and thus restores the Book which her brother had replaced with the domestic act of embroidery. There is no mention, however, of her brother's revision of the Virgin's hagiography from the perspective of conventional attitudes to female poetic creativity.

A sonnet that overtly refers to D. G. Rossetti's aesthetics is the posthumously published 'In an Artist's Studio', composed 24 December 1856, which has become emblematic of the relationship between Elizabeth Siddall as model and D. G. Rossetti as male artist. Elisabeth Bronfen, in a case study of their legendary relationship, uses Christina Rossetti's entire sonnet as her epigraph without further comment, implying that the sonnet merely inscribes the legend (p. 168). W. M. Rossetti, the first to publish the poem posthumously, notes only that: 'the reference is apparently to our brother's studio, and to his constantly-repeated heads of the lady whom he afterwards married, Miss Siddal' (*PW: CR*, p. 480).

On a first, cursory reading, 'In an Artist's Studio' *does* seem to be a reinscription of the D. G. Rossetti-Elizabeth Siddall myth. A closer analysis locates its importance in the challenge to the semiotic fixing of the female model into D. G. Rossetti's pictorial representation.⁴¹ This is achieved in the sonnet by establishing an apparently stable frame of reference which is then challenged by the doubleness of the model and her representation. It is this doubling of the poem's representation of the 'real' model and her other that emerges as radically unstable.

The poem begins with a refusal to distinguish between the model and her representation:

One face looks out from all his canvasses,
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;

⁴¹It is thus ironic that the sonnet has achieved the status of a reinscription of the legend, when it actually interrogates and questions the aesthetics which have framed Siddall as a sign of femininity rather than actual personage. See Chapter 1.

We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
(C.iii.264; ll. 1-4.)

The screens are those behind which the artist's model changed, and so the third line introduces the 'real' Elizabeth Siddall whose 'parenthesised subjectivity' (Bronfen, p. 228) is depicted by her 'actual' fleeting presence, as she hides behind her representations. The use of 'selfsame' is ironical: the same as *which* self? The vanishing figure's presence, both displayed and hidden, is almost wholly disavowed even as it is affirmed, when the narrator mimics the convention of equating model with her image (l. 4). The poem then slips back to the representations, the many poses of the model - queen, nameless girl, saint, angel - which repeat: 'The same one meaning, neither more nor less' (l. 8). The second part of this line is a pleonasm which reaffirms the fixity of meaning imposed onto the various representations of the model. In the final sestet, however, we are unsure who is referred to by the personal pronoun 'she', the model or her image:

He feeds upon her face by day and night,
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
Not wan with waiting, nor with sorrow dim;
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.
(ll. 9-14)

The vague, transient images of moon and light further unsettle as the attempt to describe the model/image's returning look (and also, by implication, her identity) flounders. The feminine figure is represented with reference to her own reflection and to that of the moon's reflected light.

A vanishing spectral image of precarious feminine subjectivity, an image that mimics and menaces the gesturing imposed by the artist, is thus evoked. The sexual images of consumption ('He feeds upon her face') suggest a literal disfigurement in the representation that undercuts the 'mirror' of the canvass. Along with the uncertainty implicit in 'she', there is a suggestion of the presence of the model's marginalised subjectivity as the poem acknowledges her as spectator — 'And she with true kind eyes looks back on him'. The use of the word 'true' and 'kind' here is unsettling. 'True' may be understood as faithful to the artist or as suggesting that what is seen is genuine, real (as in 'seeing truly'). Further, 'kind' has similar paradoxical overtones, 'kind' as compassionate or as natural.⁴² In both senses of 'true' and 'kind' there is a fissure between a notion of the subject as autonomous and the subject as constructed with reference to the artist: if her eyes see truly and 'naturally' they do not reflect the artist's consuming passion. There is a disjunction between that which is seen and that which is figured as being reflected back, between object and subjectivity.

The repetition of qualifying negatives in the final three lines disturbs a sense of time scale between 'is' and 'was', which increases the displacement of the model from her representation and which, ultimately, suggests that she exceeds her own representation as she fluctuates between presence and absence. The half rhyme 'dream' in the final line further disturbs

⁴²Jacqueline Labbe, in 'Engendering Landscape: Romanticism and the Standards for Looking', suggests that natural perception is encoded as feminine and explores vision and gender as a site/sight of sexual difference. Paper given at the 'Romantic Boundaries: Gender and Genre' conference at Sheffield Hallam University, 26 June 1993.

both the sense of rhyme (and therefore of time) and comes with an acknowledgement that although the model exceeds the attempt to equate her with her representation and to suppress her subjectivity, she can nevertheless only be 'seen' relative to the artist: 'Not as she is, but as she fills his dream'. We have a sense of the model's 'real' presence, constructed in terms of negatives and as a mimicry of D. G. Rossetti's aesthetics, but this 'real' is itself a further representation. The poem confronts the dilemma that the model is presented to us as already a linguistic construct. The text which is read as an adumbration of the model's image is thus ekphratic — a representation of a representation.

The poem's relation to the visual works in other ways. The narrator is posited as a voyeuristic spectator who intrudes upon a spectacle - 'We found her hidden just behind those screens' (l. 3). The model and her other are both gazed upon and gaze back, an activity which disrupts the distinction between the passive model as object and image, and the woman who inhabits her own subjectivity. The verbal-visual interchange is also something that we, as readers, participate in. For the poem, as a visual shape on the page, is itself an object of our gaze. Compounded with this is the status of the sonnet as a poetic form associated with the scopic and which, from Petrarch to D.G. Rossetti, is conventionally the masculine medium through which the speaker predicates his subjectivity upon a female beloved.

In Christina Rossetti's version of her brother's visual aesthetics, the depiction of the model as a male representation of the feminine is fleeting, spectral, but marks a difference between the model and her image — as Christina Rossetti, the

spectator, in the act of writing the sonnet, marks a difference from herself as her brother's model. The effect of 'In an Artist's Studio' is to intimate a precarious feminine subjectivity by mimicking and exceeding her brother's aesthetics which attempt to impose a unitary and stable aesthetic over the instability of verbal-visual doubles. In this way, Christina Rossetti explores differences *within* the trope 'Woman' that displace the concern with the difference *between* genders and genres.

This intervention in her brother's aesthetics exploits his anxiety that the spectator and the model may, by mere act of looking, challenge the perfection of an art based upon a repression of difference. Both the subject in the poem and Rossetti herself have a superlative feminine position of alterity in the representational scheme as both observed and observer. In a dynamic of presence and absence, parodying the conception of female poetry as a direct experiential reflex,⁴³ her poem speaks from the position of the fading feminine subject which Pre-Raphaelite art so compulsively depicts. As the speaker in her famous crocodile dream-poem coyly asks, after giving a blatantly uninterpretable account of her dream:

What can it mean? you ask. I answer not
For meaning, but myself must echo, What?

⁴³Margaret Reynolds gives the following account of this conception: 'because women were traditionally the raw material for poetry, when they themselves came to write they were supposed to be capable only of producing autobiography; because women were naturally private, feeling, and irrational, as was poetry itself, their writing of poetry was assumed to be doubly endowed with enthusiasm, artlessness, and self-revelation,' Critical Introduction to *Aurora Leigh*, p. 3. Compare the comment of Arthur Christopher Benson: 'Miss Rossetti's poems are so passionately human a document as to set one tracing by a sort of inevitable instinct the secrets of a buoyant and tender soul, sharpened and refined by blow after blow of harsh discipline. The same autobiographical savour haunts all her work,' 'Christina Rossetti', p. 756.

And tell it as I saw it on the spot.
(‘My Dream’, C.i.40; ll. 49-51)

* * * * *

Like ‘In An Artist's Studio’, Christina Rossetti’s ‘An Echo From Willowwood’ makes explicit reference to her brother’s art, in this case the four ‘Willowwood’ sonnets from the *House of Life*.⁴⁴ This sonnet sequence exhibits the same concern with structure as his earliest pictures: as well as referring to architectural structure, the house of life is the first of the twelve ‘houses’ of astrology. The prefatory sonnet stresses the structure of the sonnet itself, as a ‘moment's monument’, an ivory or ebony carving, and a coin (*CW: DGR.*, vol. 1, 176). The sequence is partly concerned with the mystical union of masculine and feminine, the ‘supreme perfection’ of art.

Sonnet LX elaborates the topos. The ‘transfigured life’ of the title refers to a carrying over of features from both parents onto their child, a physical translation in a ‘real’ figure:

As growth of form or momentary glance
In a child's features will recall to mind
The father's with the mother's face combin'd,—
Sweet interchange that memories still enhance:
And yet, as childhood's years and youth advance,
The gradual moulderings leave one stamp behind,
Till in the blended likeness now we find
A separate man's or woman's countenance:—
(*CW: DGR.*, vol. 1, 207; ll. 1-8)

⁴⁴The date of composition of Christina Rossetti’s poem is unknown. It was published in the *Magazine of Art*, XIII (September, 1890), 385 (C.iii.380). D. G. Rossetti’s sequence was written 1847 to 1881.

The child's transfiguration of the parent's features — the 'sweet interchange' — is seen from the 'growth of form' or in some fleeting instant⁴⁵ (two things which are equated in the syntax but which are semantically dissimilar). This is later fixed into 'one stamp' that inevitably takes on a gendered identity. The octave links the second part of the comparison of a child's development to the form of the sonnet itself:⁴⁶

So in the Song, the singer's Joy and Pain,
Its very parents, evermore expand
To bid the passion's fullgrown birth remain,
By Art's transfiguring essence subtly spann'd;
And from that song-cloud shaped as a man's hand
There comes the sound as of abundant rain.
(ll. 9-14)

Joy and Pain are thus presented as analogous to the parents, the Song (the sonnet in process) to their child (the sonnet). The moment of consummation is invoked to delay forever the fixity of form which, in the analogy, is given as inevitable. Art transfigures the union which is depicted as a song-cloud, whose creative fertility is given a feminine image — 'abundant rain'. The song-cloud, however, takes on a masculine form, a man's hand: an incongruous gendering in view of the previous octave. In the analogy, the gendering is also a fixity, a 'stamp', but the corresponding form (a rain cloud) in the sestet is an image of transience and mutability and also a metaphor for a masculine creator. The sonnet, constructed as a perfect analogy ('And...So') bears this mismatching as a triumphant gesture of a perpetual

⁴⁵Both are perhaps implicit in the phrase 'moment's monument'.

⁴⁶See Chapter 5, which discusses the analogy made in the nineteenth-century between the body and the sonnet form.

‘sweet interchange’ whose union brings forth another image of fertility and consummation, ‘abundant rain’.

Rather than the stability of ‘A separate man's or woman's countenance’, we have an image of intangible form, figured as masculine. Turning to the four ‘Willowwood’ sonnets (*CW: DGR*, vol. 1, pp. 201-2), the artist as masculine is fundamental to the achievement of this perpetual union. But already we are faced with a paradox: to stress the masculinity of the union is to inscribe a gender difference onto the aesthetics which thrives on the attempt to *efface* difference in type (be it gender or genre).⁴⁷ Willowwood is the place of doomed love, a forest of grief circumscribing Love's fountain. In this enchanted place — enclosed and also liminal, transient — the union between lovers is fleeting and momentary. The brief meeting is, however, dependent upon the fading and provisional nature of the female beloved. The speaker's own reflection in the ‘woodside well’ (Sonnet 1, l. 1) brings forth the lover as mapped onto a reflection of him, a ‘superscription’:⁴⁸ the speaker looks into the pool at the personified Love's image, ‘and my tears fell / And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers’ (Sonnet 1, ll. 8-9). His beloved is only seen as an image in the pool: she is not a spectator, but merely a reflection. Further, she appears in the place of Love: Love transforms into lover, figuration becomes a personage, which turns out to be an image, another figuration. Love sings and warns of the danger of meeting a dead beloved: ‘Better all life forget her than this thing, / That Willowwood should hold

⁴⁷Here, as elsewhere in the chapter, I take ‘genre’ in its widest possible meaning as a difference in type within a specific art form and also as an actual category of art form. The etymology of genre is linked to that of gender: both derive from the French ‘genre’ meaning kind, natural, and type.

⁴⁸See Sonnet XCVII, ‘A Superscription’, *CW: DGR*, vol. 1, p. 225.

her wandering!' (Sonnet 2, ll. 13-14). It is her intangibility, her death, which allows a momentary union, but at the end, when the two are depicted in Love's aureole, the masculine speaker has consumed and subsumed the beloved:

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.
(Sonnet 4, ll. 9-11)

The union is achieved, precariously and at a cost: the dead beloved is imaged as a feminine figure constantly in the process of fading, a dangerous wandering signifier, an embodiment of the cultural cliché that 'Woman' is man's symptom, and she is unified with the masculine upon the assumption that the male creator has primacy. It seems that the attempt to efface gender difference becomes a further attempt to displace and efface the provisional feminine figure.

Christina Rossetti's sonnet in response uses the suggestive word 'echo' in the title which is fundamental to the notion of translation and interchange between the texts, whilst also suggesting diminution (in the sense of both diminishment and a diminutive). The reference to her brother's sonnets seems self-deprecatory, but, as with 'In An Artist's Studio', the poem's initial appearance as a reinscription of her brother's aesthetics emerges as ironical. The echoic quality of this poem is similar to D. G. Rossetti's 'superscription', but for Christina Rossetti the mimicry exceeds its counterpart.

In D. G. Rossetti's 'Willowwood' sonnets, the beloved is seen only as an image, a reflection on the water, and is devoid of a fully present subjectivity. Christina Rossetti's version depicts

the two lovers looking upon each other's image: 'Two gazed into a pool, he gazed and she', and 'Each eyed the other's aspect, he and she' (C.iii.53; l. 1, l.5). The repetition of 'he and she' and the anaphoric repetition of 'each' in the following lines (ll. 5-7, l. 10) suggest that the gaze is reciprocated and so by implication both are affirmed as subjects. To the duality of the gazers is added another spectator: the narrator, who in D. G. Rossetti's version is the male lover. The threefold viewpoint of this spectacle undermines the corresponding text's attempt to efface gender difference. Further, the third person, the narrator, introduces figures of aporia, liminality and a vagueness which exceed the images of transience in the original version. The excess is that of meaning itself, and a third term is inscribed onto the original doubleness of spectator/narrator and feminine image that gestures toward a threshold of meaning to which feminine subjectivity had been implicitly marginalised in the original.⁴⁹ 'Not hand in hand, yet heart in heart, I think' (l. 2) is emblematic of this linguistic operation: moving from D. G. Rossetti's physical union in the lovers' kisses to the heart which is both literal and metaphorical, and finally the 'I think' which introduces the spectator's gaze to the intertextual translation between texts and the intersubjectivity of the lovers. Images of thresholds also denote excess: 'brink' is repeated (l. 3, l. 4, l. 8)

⁴⁹Compare 'The Queen of Hearts' (C.i.132) which has two active subjects, the speaker and the addressee (the figurative Queen of Hearts), in contrast to D. G. Rossetti's two early *Regina Cordium* pictures, in which the female figure is not an active agent. Significantly, during their discussions for the preparation of the *Princes Progress* volume, D. G. Rossetti seems to have objected to the poem, then entitled 'Flora'. Christina Rossetti writes to him: 'Flora (if that is the "next" you allude to) surely cannot give deep umbrage.' *CR: FL*, p. 55. Griselda Pollock gives an interesting interpretation of the 1860 and 1866 versions of *Regina Cordium* in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, feminism and histories of art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 131-135.

and first denotes the edge of the pool and later 'of life's dividing sea' (l. 8), and the strange perspective which submerges the reflections: 'Lilies upon the surface, deep below / Two wistful faces craving each for each' (ll. 9-10). The shadowy intangible 'Willowwood' is translated into that which exceeds even its own provisionality.⁵⁰

* * * * *

A sonnet which reverses the topos of a dead female beloved is 'Love Lies Bleeding.'⁵¹ Here, a lost and ghostly beloved is confronted who does not recognise the female speaker; the result is the denial of an intersubjectivity:

⁵⁰The culmination of Rossetti's tentative and provisional intimation of feminine active subjectivity can be seen in Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh's *O Ye That Walk in Willow Wood* (1903-4), a painted gesso, originally designed for the Room de Lux in The Willow Tea Rooms and now in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow. See *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880-1920*, ed. by Jude Burkhauser (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990; repr. 1994), p. 39. Three female figures are represented within oval and vertical lines of coloured glass beads, as well as roses (signifying the feminine), that both reveal and conceal the figures. Only the faces of the figures are fully delineated and distinct, and the bodies seem to merge into one another within the fluidity of the lines of beads. Two figures have side profiles and the middle facing out of the gesso, directly engaging the view of the spectator and holding a rose to her face, suggesting an active subject within conventions of the feminine aesthetic. See Plate 8.

⁵¹The date of composition is unknown. The poem was published in *The Argosy*, XV (January, 1873) 31, and later in *Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1875). Other poems play on the word 'love-lies-bleeding'. 'Balm in Gilead', published in *Verses* (1893), exploits parabolically the name of this plant and of 'heartsease' (the wild pansy): 'Heartsease I found, where Love-lies-bleeding' (C.ii.317). In *Sing-Song* (1872), another poem exploits the symbolic value of 'heartsease':

Heartsease in my garden bed,
With sweetwilliam white and red,
Honeysuckle on my wall:—
Heartsease blossoms in my heart
When sweet William comes to call,
But it withers when we part,
And the honey-trumpets fall.
(C.ii.26).

Love that is dead and buried, yesterday
 Out of his grave rose up before my face;
 No recognition in his look, no trace
Of memory in his eyes dust-dimmed and grey.
(C.i.210; ll. 1-4).

The fading male is menacing, just as the model of 'In an Artist's Studio' menaces the artist, but here the sonnet proceeds to make safe and counter, rather than celebrate, the transitoriness of the figure who is less than a subject and who has usurped the posthumous feminine position. The disruption in the discourse caused by the threatening figure is suggested by the confusion between literal and figural. The dead beloved is love personified, but the bleeding corpse is also a metaphor for a past love. The title is the name of a drooping red feathery flower and perhaps a reference to Wordsworth's poem of the same name, which describes the flower as appearing to be constantly in the process of dying⁵² — an apt figure for the feminine position in masculinist discourse. The end of the poem poses a question which allows us to doubt the actuality of the encounter: 'Was this to meet? Not so, we have not met.' The 'event' occurred yesterday: a displacement of time which the sonnet proceeds to intensify in order to make safe the linguistic blockage in the speaker, the male figure's threat to dialogue and intersubjectivity.

⁵²Originally in a sonnet form and published in 1842.

 You call it, 'Love lies bleeding,' — so you may,
 Though the red Flower, not prostrate, only droops,
 As we have seen it here from day to day,
 From month to month, life passing not away:
 A flower how rich in sadness!
(ll. 1-5)

(*Poems*, ed. by John O. Hayden, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), vol. 2, p. 776).

At the speaker's acknowledgement that there is no remembrance in the male figure, there follows a sequence of images which denotes her recalled memory as displaced fragments:

I, remembering, found no word to say,
But felt my quickened heart leap in its place;
Caught afterglow, thrown back from long-set days,
Caught echoes of all music passed away.
Was this indeed to meet?
(ll. 5-9)

With this sense of internal displacement comes a reversion to the female self: difference seems to be located internally, in the distinction between the speaker's remembrance of the beloved and the description of the encounter. The highly suggestive word 'echoes' was employed in Christina Rossetti's 'Willowwood' sonnet where the precursor is inscribed before 'superscribing' a difference of meaning onto D. G. Rossetti's own sonnets.⁵³ Here, the dialogical operation is explicitly *internal*, figured as a function of the workings of memory, and this overcomes the rhetorical impasse or aporia caused by the reversal of the aesthetic.

In contrast, 'Venus's Looking Glass' (C.i.209), the sonnet intended to precede 'Love Lies Bleeding' and printed before it in *The Argosy* and in *Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems* (1875) volume, presents the speaker as spectator to the splendour of Venus and her court in Spring. Venus is the personification of love, but in this sonnet there is no action: nothing happens except verbal play, a glory in poetic artifice,

⁵³Compare Nichols's concept of the female image as transgrediential, palimpsestic — as if femininity operates through textual layering. Here, subjectivity seems to be present as a 'trace' or 'residue' of this operation (p. 23).

suggested by the alternative title 'Love Lies Idle'.⁵⁴ Venus seems an empty trope but nonetheless one upon which the poem is nevertheless dependent. Together, these sonnets are more than an inversion of D. G. Rossetti's denial of difference. His aesthetics are negotiated in terms of their implications for intersubjectivity. The claustrophobic pastoral scene of Venus, in which the only motion is that of verbal play, and a fading masculine figure underscore the supremacy of the narrator as spectator; but nevertheless the subjecthood of these figures is dependent upon the cultural cliché of 'Woman' as man's symptom (Venus) and an inversion of that cliché (the dead male beloved). 'Love Lies Bleeding' ends with an attempt to refuse the textual encounter — 'Not so, we have not met' — in a mimicry of D. G. Rossetti's own refusal of intersubjectivity, but it is ambiguous. The repetition of the question 'Was this to meet?' (l. 9 and l. 14) opens up a figure of doubt and a sense of incompleteness, as well as heightening the confusion between literal and figural — of course, they *have* met, but the sense of what constitutes a meeting is never defined. 'Love Lies Bleeding' exists in this vague, liminal realm which both mimics and challenges D. G. Rossetti's attempt to erase difference. What prevails is the image of the dead male beloved — hovering between literal and figural, forever gesturing towards the aesthetic that he inverts but which the sonnet exceeds.

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⁵⁴According to W. M. Rossetti: 'in a copy of her collected *Poems*, 1875, there is also the following note: "perhaps 'Love-in-Idleness' would be a better title, with an eye to the next one"—i.e. to *Love lies Bleeding*', *PW: CR*, p. 487.

As a conclusion, I turn to the shared resonances, unseen in the critical tradition, between the photography of Julia Margaret Cameron and Christina Rossetti's commentary on D. G. Rossetti's aesthetics of the feminine. Cameron's work, like Rossetti's, does not simply reiterate the representational registers of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, despite her reputation as a Pre-Raphaelite photographer. For example, Graham Ovenden, in *Pre-Raphaelite Photography*, explains her divergence from the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic as an effect of the technical deficiency of photography in general:

If the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites painters' search for realism contradicts Mrs. Cameron's sense of spiritual romanticism, it is because the camera is unable to interpret as readily as paint the complex emotional strain that make up the strength and weakness of mid-nineteenth century English art. Often, but not inevitably, the sublime hovers on the brink of the absurd.⁵⁵

Ovenden compares Cameron's depiction of women with D. G. Rossetti's photographs of Jane Morris, for certain pieces of Cameron's work: 'give greater depths to our understanding of the languid sensuality of ideal Victorian womanhood' unlike 'the fantasy of the decaying, dope-ridden mind' suggested by portrayals of Siddall (p. 13).

Although the seminal biography by Mackenzie Bell makes no mention of Rossetti's relation to Cameron, it is known that the two women enjoyed some degree of social contact. On 13 May 1862, Cameron wrote to W. M. Rossetti to give effusive thanks for the gift of the *Goblin Market* volume:

⁵⁵Graham Ovenden, *Pre-Raphaelite Photography* (London: Academy Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), p. 13.

If you and your Sister have judged of me by my seemings, you must both have thought me unworthy and ungrateful of the book which is really precious to me. It has given me a great *longing* to know your Sister; but you don't know and won't understand how much this discourse of her soul makes me feel as if I *did* know her now, and always affectionately as well as admiringly.

(*RP*, p. 4)

Cameron's social gatherings seem to have given Rossetti the opportunity to make the acquaintance of literary celebrities (including 'a glimpse of Browning'), but the invitation to her house on the Isle of Wight, with the promise of meeting Tennyson, was never taken up.⁵⁶ There is also evidence that Cameron took a photograph of Christina Rossetti's profile which unfortunately is now lost.⁵⁷

Cameron's photographic oeuvre draws some of its specific subjects from Pre-Raphaelite painting (such as *In the Garden*, a representation of Arthur Hughes's *April Love*, and *The Parting of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere*, suggesting the earlier D. G. Rossetti painting *The Wedding of St. George and Princess Sabra*; Ovenden, pp. 42-43, and pp. 50-51), poetry (such as Tennyson's 'The Gardener's Daughter', depicted in a photograph of the same

⁵⁶Christina Rossetti to W. M. Rossetti, 4 June 1866, mentions that Cameron showed the Rossetti sisters and their mother her portfolio and then presented five photographs to them. Maria and Christina Rossetti returned the visit, whereupon they saw various literary personages. 'I am asked down to Freshwater Bay, and promised to see Tennyson if I go; but the plan is altogether uncertain, and I am too shy to contemplate it with anything like unmixed pleasure.' W. M. Rossetti's note prefacing the letter suggests that she never visited Cameron's Isle of Wight house, nor did she ever meet Tennyson (*RP*, p. 202). Jan Marsh mentions that the portfolio consisted of photographs of D. G. Rossetti's paintings (*Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, p. 350).

⁵⁷Colin Ford reproduces a photograph of the lid of a negative box of Cameron's, on the inside of which is listed in her handwriting portraits which seem to date from 1865 to 1866, including a profile of Christina Rossetti. See *The Cameron Collection: An Album of Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron, Presented to Sir John Herschel*, ed. by Colin Ford (London: Van Nostrand Reinhold in association with The National Portrait Gallery, 1975), p. 15.

title; Ford, p. 89 and p. 133), and also includes portraits of literary and artistic personages (most famously, of Tennyson; Ford, p. 26, p. 29, pp. 95-97, p. 99, p. 107, pp. 117-18, pp. 134-5, p. 137).

It is, however, her exploitation of perspective that subverts at the same time as it represents Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics. Perspective, as a way of structuring the visual from the fallacy of the spectator's unique centrality, was undermined with the development of photography. As John Berger points out:

The camera isolated momentary appearances and in doing so destroyed the idea that images were timeless. [. . .] It was no longer possible to imagine everything converging on the human eye, as on the vanishing point of infinity. [. . .] The camera [. . .] demonstrated that there was no centre.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Lindsay Smith describes how photography was motivated to preserve visual aesthetics :

From the beginning, the photographic definition of focus was made to serve existing systems of representation, and in particular to conspire with the dominance of geometric perspective, thus further confirming the sovereignty of the latter in various media. In one fundamental and immediate sense, photography could appear to guarantee the continued ubiquity of geometric accounts of space by seeming to represent geometric spatial mapping in the greatest degree of verisimilitude experienced in visual perception up to that time.
(p. 243)

Pre-Raphaelite art was developed alongside the new art form of photography, and the relationship between them was explored through Cameron's most distinctive characteristic: the refusal of sharp focus. This famous 'blurred' quality was considered by

⁵⁸John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: B.B.C. and Penguin, 1972), p. 18.

some contemporary commentators to be so deviant from standard practice that it constituted a flaw: 'as one of the special charms of photography consists in the completeness, detail and finish, we can scarcely commend works in which the aim appears to have been to avoid these qualities.'⁵⁹ Cameron's blurred focus has rarely been attributed to an aesthetic, but rather to her camera or her poor eyesight. Cameron, however, defined her photography as an art form, similar to oil portraits. Ford comments that her negatives were untouched and unenlarged, and yet unusually large for her day (p. 19). Further:

She appears to have had blinds fitted to her glass house so that she could cut off light from any direction, enabling the isolation of her sitters from their backgrounds, the revelation of depths of character in a face by a searching shaft of light from one side or another, the control of all the dramatic composition in a figure or group. She swathed her models in dark clothes, pushed her camera as close to their heads as she could and eliminated all extraneous details of clothing and furniture.

(p. 20)

Cameron's subject fills up the entire space of the photograph, as with the portrait taken of Cameron's niece Julia Jackson in April 1867, the mother of Virginia Woolf (Plate 9). As in other photographs by Cameron, this portrait denies a sharpness of focus. Rather than geometric perspective, the sense of depth is given by light and shade falling on the subject's face and all extraneous background details are consigned to the darkness. There is a focused plane on Jackson's nose and lips, but the subject seems to recede from it, to fade away from sharpness. The detail of the neck of the dress, for example,

⁵⁹From *The Photographic News*, 1864, quoted in Ford p. 18.

varies in degrees of focus from the left side which is *almost* in focus to the right portion which is completely indistinct. The subject that fills up the space of the photograph thus conveys a presence in absence; the pose is static (partly due to the lengthy exposure time) but the figure, in an enactment of loss and indeterminacy, seems to vanish into indistinctness as there is no secure point of the photograph, no obvious point of sharpness, that attracts the gaze.

Cameron's response to criticism of her blurred negatives forms a statement of her aesthetics. In a letter to Sir John Herschel, December 31 1864, she famously comments on her non-experiential mode of photography and attempts to define her principle of representation. She wishes that Herschel:

had spoken of my Photography in that spirit which will elevate it and induce an ignorant public to believe in other than mere conventional topographic Photography — map making & skeletal rendering of feature & form without that roundness and fullness of force & feature that modelling of flesh & limb which the focus I use can only give tho' called & condemned as '*out of focus.*' What is focus — & who has a right to say what focus is the legitimate focus — My aspirations are to ennoble Photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real & Ideal & sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry & *beauty.*
(pp. 140-41)

The combination of structure of space, locale and representation in topography is rejected by Cameron as a false literalness which does not depict the desired 'roundness & fullness of force & feature'. Further, the exclusion of all but the subject is, in relation to the conventional photographic insistence on sharpness and detail, a (synecdochal) attempt to represent a

subject in terms other than with reference to an experiential depiction of a locale or background. Cameron's insistence on the aesthetic value of her 'out of focus' photography also suggests that the subject is fading, transitory and elusive:

I believe that what my youngest Boy Henry Herschel [. . .] told me, is quite true, that my first successes viz. my out of focus pictures, were 'a fluke.' That is to say that when focusing & coming to something which to my eye was very beautiful I stopped there, instead of screwing on the lens to the more definite focus which all other Photographers insist upon.
(Ford, p. 17)

The quotation is often taken as an statement of the accidental and arbitrary nature of her blurred focus, but she qualifies her 'fluke' with an assertion that she catches a Paterian moment of beauty that is fragile, delicate and fleeting.

As Lindsay Smith comments, Cameron's photographic techniques critique representational axioms, in particular 'the ideology of perceptual mastery' (p. 250). To read her photographs, as photographic historians have done, as the development of 'soft focus' — rather than unfocused — falsely aligns her practice with a painterly style and obscures her challenge to the representational system's masculinist scopic regimes (pp. 249-50). Smith equates focus with the fetishization of the gaze, for focus enables loss (castration) to be displaced. The denial of focus is thus the denial of the fetish, and so 'the female subject is here newly realized'. Cameron: 'represents the possibility of demobilizing the whole mechanism of fetishism in the field of vision' (p. 257). The disturbance of geometric perspective in D. G. Rossetti's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *The Annunciation* conveyed problematics of the

fetishistic attempt to deny difference of both genders and genre, and so to deny loss (or women's castration) and the corresponding aporia of 'Woman' in the representational axioms. The refutation of perspective and focus in Cameron's photography exploits the insecurity evident in D. G. Rossetti's verbal/visual aesthetics by an insistence on unfocused subjects that resist the denial of difference and resist the fetishization of the gaze.

The juxtaposition of Cameron's photography and Christina Rossetti's response to her brother's early pictures reveals a shared concern with perspective and the represented subject. Cameron's 'unfocused' female subjects have a similar spectral quality to Rossetti's; both representations of the excessively feminine, fleeting, and posthumous, they dramatise the feminine as both the ground and vanishing point of the aesthetic, and enact 'Woman' as man's symptom. But this is not a mere re-inscription of 'Woman' as undefinable, as not there. Precisely *because* the figure vanishes within the aesthetic, the subject evades the masculinist frame and fetishistic gaze:

If [. . .] we conceive the symptom as it was articulated in the late Lacan, — namely, as a particular signifying formation which confers on the subject its very ontological consistency, enabling it to structure its basic, constitutive relationship towards *jouissance* — then the entire relationship is reversed: if the symptom is dissolved, the [male] subject itself loses the ground under its feet, disintegrates. 'Woman is the symptom of man' thus comes to mean that *man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom*: all his ontological consistency is suspended from his symptom, is 'externalized' in his symptom. [. . .] Woman, on the other hand, does *not* exist, she *insists*, which is why she does not come to be through man only. There is something in

her that escapes the relation to man, the reference to the phallic signifier.
(Wright, p. 426)

Although vanishing spectral figures in Rossetti's poems discussed above are feminine, within the ideology of the scopic it is ultimately the identities of the masculine creator and beloved that dissolve with the fading figure. Cameron's 'out of focus' photographs are a reminder of castration which frustrates the potency of the gaze of the masculine subject. This is not a declaration of feminine autonomy but an intimation of the potential for the undoing and un-fixing of the feminine from inside representational axioms and challenging the position of the masculine in the aesthetic. Always caught within the masculinist regime, Rossetti and Cameron nevertheless suggest that uncanny spectral feminine figures may dissolve as symptoms, and that they can unsettle the masculine gaze and have the ability to return the look.

Chapter 4

Father's Place, Mother's Space: Identity, Italy, and the Maternal

We cannot fathom these mysteries of transplantation
—Edmund Gosse on Christina Rossetti's Italian extraction
(p. 139).

In chapter 1, the construction of 'Christina Rossetti' in the biographies is seen to be a trope that always infects accounts of her life. This trope carries with it a set of assumptions about the creative female; most significantly, the alignment of the identity, function, and output of a poetess with the contemporary aesthetic of the feminine with which the Pre-Raphaelites engage. The claim of a biography to offer an accurate representation, or reflection, of a life also naively utilises the poetry as part of its factual evidence, for the poetry is seen as directly indexed to the poet's experiences and emotions.

Such constructions, born as they are out of the contemporary androcentric discourse of the feminine, entrap Rossetti, as a female poet with a claim to subjectivity, within a representation of herself. Elisabeth Bronfen, in *Over Her Dead Body*, concludes her project to map out the cultural conjunction of femininity and death, by turning to women writers in an effort to critique a response to the discourse that would align them, by virtue of their gender, with otherness, silence, non-

being. She justifies her decision to focus upon post-1945 writers by an insistence that, in the postmodern period, the theme of female authorship is turned 'into a metatextual concern'. Bronfen continues:

To write explicitly out of indignation, in the language of the culture that produced it and resisting its logic (as Charlotte Brontë perhaps could not), may require the theoretical and social awareness contemporary culture offers to women writers. If earlier texts (by men and women) go so far as to disclose Woman as absence, ground and vanishing point of representation, women today write out of this aporia, out of this negation of their own voice.
(pp. 405-6)

And yet, for such contemporary women writers, there is no resolution to the aporia, for 'femininity, which in its linkage with death marks uncanny difference within, has not been translated into canny Otherness' (p. 395). The representational system remains the site for the feminine subject, which, 'writing out of death is still in a position of oscillation with no defined or fixed place, but here somehow within' (p. 395). Further:

The woman writing shows herself as subject and object of her representation of woman as sign. [. . .] Rather than moving towards a recuperation of stable order, these texts emphasise the precariousness and illusion of any regained stability and preserve the difference of sexuality and of death within. The dance on the boundary between life and art is once again shown to be coterminous with a game between life and death.
(p. 407)

The cross-over of the representation of the feminine onto the feminine subject position thus yields no clean and

unproblematic translation of otherness into same. It is this uncanny doubleness which produces the feminine subject that is also evident in Rossetti's poetry. I do not claim that Rossetti is self-consciously subversive and revolutionary, nor do I claim that she is the mother of the postmodern female writer who, as Bronfen has it, confronts and speaks from the position of the aporia so heroically. But her exemplary position within the representational system, and in particular her excessive imbeddedness within that system insofar as it is constituted by the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, places her in a similar position to her literary daughters and produces a signification practice that is proto-modernist.¹ In fact, as the poetess of morbidity (a claim many of the biographies insist on, and which her brother W. M. Rossetti was at pains to underplay)² her subject position speaks from/out of, rather than reinscribes, a place of death, absence, and silence. Such a morbidity is, of course, a feature of the sentimental tradition of nineteenth-century women's poetry which inscribes the sorrow, suffering, and self-denial of Sappho along with the excessive self-expression of Corinne. For Angela Leighton, this contradictory code inscribed within the sentimental means that: 'the story of imaginative creation [. . .] is, very often for Victorian women, a death story, as well as the story of fantasy, invention, dream' (*Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*, p. 3, p. 6). Rossetti's duplicitous doubleness, her speaking silences, result from her contradictory and 'uneven' position within both sentimental discourses and

¹As chapter 1 argues, she is presented in the biographies and reminiscences as the sign for representation itself.

²W. M. Rossetti admits that the poetry is morbid and that this stems from her illnesses; but he argues that, to anyone who shares her religious beliefs, it is not morbidity to long for death (*PW: CR*, p. I xviii). See also Bell, pp. 319-20.

proto-modernist Aestheticist discourses within which, as Kathy Alexis Psomiades persuasively argues, Rossetti's poetry is embedded.³

The strategies for sustaining the seemingly impossible claim to control, direct and validate one's own meaning within such a signification system mark the aporia as similar to that of the postmodern woman writer, and yet Rossetti's case is rendered yet more problematic and uncanny by her well-documented religious and moral conservatism.⁴ With the construction 'Christina Rossetti', and the process that enables that construction, haunting her work in a way that may remind us of the inseparability of the speaker and her model head in Sylvia Plath's 'The Lady and the Earthenware Head', the subject position is caught in a no-man's land within and without the patriarchal subject-other duality.⁵

The various tropic constructs that make up 'Christina Rossetti' in the biographies are part of the dynamics of the representational system that her poetry is necessarily located within. The biographical tropes are structured most forcefully by the question of her identity and heritage; these are negotiated

³The phrase 'uneven' is taken from Poovey. Kathy Alexis Psomiades, 'Subtly of Herself Contemplative: Women, Poets, and British Aestheticism', Ph.D., Yale University, 1990, chapter 3.

⁴This is registered by recent critical tendencies to read Rossetti's relation to her moral discourse as both conservative and subversive. See, for example, Mary Carpenter, "'Eat me, drink me, love me": The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*', *Victorian Poetry* 29 (1991), 415-34 (p. 418).

⁵*Sylvia Plath: Collected Poems*, ed. by Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1981; repr. 1989), p. 70. 'Yet, shrined on her shelf, the grisly visage endured, / Despite her wrung hands, her tears, her praying: Vanish!' Jacqueline Rose's comments on this poem are also applicable to Rossetti criticism: 'there is no getting rid of this head. The more she tries to be free of it, the more it returns. The effigy haunts the original. It loves and terrifies the very being it was intended to represent.' Rose takes this poem as a metaphor for the position of Plath in contemporary culture. See *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1991), p. 2.

by the poetical subject in an attempt to gesture to a private interior locale that is a utopian retreat for the subject. In this chapter I explore configurations of paternal-maternal in the poetry and their relation to the desire for the afterlife, the imaginary (and Imaginary) locale into which the subject is projected. This is also related to other issues of locale and translation, both linguistic and tropic, that affect the feminine subject, in particular Italy and the Italian language.

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Aside from the biographies, remarkably little critical attention has been paid to Rossetti's engagement with her Italian heritage, both literary and parental. The fullest account is an interpretation of Rossetti's response to Dante Alighieri and Petrarch in Harrison's *Christina Rossetti in Context*, which argues for an intertextual and parodic assimilation of these poets (chapter 5). Mary Arseneau describes Rossetti's careful distancing from her father Gabriele's controversial work on Dante Alighieri and her praise for her sister's Maria's study of *La Divinia Commedia, A Shadow of Dante*.⁶ But Rossetti also associated herself in genealogical terms with the object and addressee of Dante and Petrarch's poetry. In her entry on Petrarch in the *Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography*, she names Laura as her ancestress, provable by family

⁶Mary Arseneau, "May my great love avail me": Christina Rossetti and Dante', paper given at the Christina Rossetti Centenary Conference, Anglia Polytechnic University, December 1994.

documentation,⁷ and in the preface to *Monna Innominata* she famously aligns herself with both Laura and Beatrice when she claims to speak from their position and that of the preceding line of *donne innominate* (C.ii.86).

In 'Dante, An English Classic', Rossetti describes her appreciation of Dante in a fraternal metaphor which aligns nationhood, literary history, and the familial:

Viewing the matter of nationality exclusively as one of literary interest, now in this nineteenth century when it is impossible to be born an ancient Greek, a wise man might choose not unwisely to be born an Italian, thus securing Dante as his eldest brother, and the 'Divina Commedia' as his birthright.⁸

A later article explains her family's involvement with Dante studies and, in fact, suggests that her own name *connotes* Dante scholarship:

If formidable for others, it is not least formidable for one of my name, for *me*, to enter the Dantesque field and say a little on the Man and on the Poem; for others of my name have been before me in the same field, and have wrought permanent and worthy work in attestation of their diligence.⁹

In a letter to her sister in law, Lucy Rossetti, dated 20 March 1892, she comments: 'perhaps it is enough to be half an Italian, but certainly it is enough to be a Rossetti, to render Dante a fascinating centre of thought' (*CR: FL*, p. 184). Writing to W. M. Rossetti, on 19 July 1892, she asks:

⁷Marsh speculates on Rossetti's comment on Laura, and concludes that the proof of descent is less significant than Rossetti's declaration of a symbolic genealogy from Laura (*Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, p. 212).

⁸Christina Rossetti, 'Dante, An English Classic', *Churchman's Shilling Magazine and Family Treasury* 2 (1867), 200-5 (p. 200).

⁹Christina Rossetti, 'Dante: The Poet Illustrated Out Of The Poem', *The Century* 27 (Feb. 1884), 566-73 (p. 566).

does any one dispute the *existence* of Beatrice Bardi, nata Portinari? I should fancy the point of any such controversy might be limited to the question of her identity or otherwise with the surnameless Beatrice of Dante's immortalisation.. [. . .] You see, all too late I am being sucked into the Dantesque vortex.
(*CR: FL*, p. 188)

Rossetti, with either humility or irony, suggests she is a latecomer to Dante studies, but more importantly she also suggests an interest in the identity of Beatrice and the connection between the literary and historical personage. Gabriele Rossetti had rejected a literal interpretation of Beatrice and argued that she was an emblem for a secret brotherhood. D. G. Rossetti in the notes to his translation of *La Vita Nuova*, in contrast, declares a belief in: 'the existence always of the actual events even where the allegorical superstructure has been raised by Dante himself' (*CW: DGR*, vol. 2, p. 89).

Thus for Rossetti, family relationships intersect with Italian literary history, in particular with Petrarch and Dante Alighieri, and expose the interconnected issues of identity, subjecthood, and literary history. This is exposed by D.G. Rossetti's declaration, reported by William Sharp, that: '*she* was the Dante in our family', and: 'Christina is the daughter of what was noblest in our father and beautiful in our mother' ('Some Reminiscences', p. 738). Despite her literary and familial Italian heritage, and her own work in Italian and on Italy, however, biographies of Rossetti cannot agree on how her heritage

manifests itself in her personality or poetry.¹⁰ She is seen to typify the blending of English and Italian traits. Her father, Gabriele, was an Italian exile and encouraged his children to converse in Italian from an early age. Rossetti confided to Elihu Burritt, an American linguist: 'I cannot tell you how dear the Italian language is to me, so dear that I will not attempt to compare it with my native English.'¹¹ The maternal grandfather, Gaetano Polidori, was also Italian and was responsible for the private publication of Christina Rossetti's first volume in 1847.

The juxtaposition of inherent foreignness and the typically English within Rossetti's Anglo-Italian identity is negotiated in the biographies by a scrutiny of appearance and personality and by plundering the poetry for evidence of identifiable Italian or English landscapes (see also chapter 1). The effect of such interpretative strategies is, however, highly ambivalent. English and Italian are posited as opposites, one representing an alien sensuality and the other familiar 'Englishness', but neither can be determined as fixed traits in personality and poetry. Biographers disagree as to where such

¹⁰In addition to her two articles on Dante and her entry on Petrarch for the *Imperial Dictionary*, Rossetti worked on tracing references to Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio for Grosart's edition of *The Faerie Queene* (Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, p. 457). She also pursued private study of Dante, attending lectures at University College in 1879 and 1880 on the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* (ibid., p. 471), in addition to annotating her copies of *A Shadow of Dante* and amending Charles Bagot Cayley's terza rima translation of *La Divina Commedia* (ibid., p. 457, p. 289). Her poetry in Italian has also been critically neglected, and includes a translation of her volume of children's nursery rhymes *Sing-Song*, a sequence 'Il rosseggiar dell'Oriente', and an unfinished epistolary novel in Italian, published in 1852 in *The Bouquet culled from Marylebone Gardens*, entitled 'Corrispondenza Familiare' ('Family Correspondence'). The latter is translated in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, pp. 275-85. Marsh points out that the English and Italian heroines 'reflect the author's bi-national inheritance' (p. 275).

¹¹Letter dated autumn 1867; quoted by Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, p. 361.

traits are represented.¹² Edmund Gosse is perplexed that, despite being three-quarters Italian, and in contrast to her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti, she:

is a thorough Englishwoman [. . .] and in her poetry the landscape and the observation of Nature are not only English, they are so thoroughly local that I doubt whether there is one touch in them all which proves her to have strayed more than fifty miles from London in any direction.
(p. 139)

Arthur Benson finds 'a haunting sense of locality' in the poetry, but it is that of the English countryside: 'it is strange that one of Italian blood should manifest no alien longings for warm and sun-dried lands' (p. 753). In contrast, Mackenzie Bell's biography asserts that Rossetti's Englishness has been overstated and that the influence of Italy 'has left abiding traces on her writings; and [. . .] she described aspects of Nature not to be seen in England' (p. 43).

The difficulty in the identification of English and Italian elements is compounded in the biographies by a description of Rossetti's direct experience of Italy, limited to a brief visit between 22 May and 26 June 1865 with her mother and W. M. Rossetti. The trip encompassed Paris, Langres, Luzern and an Alpine journey via St. Gotthard into Italy. Once there, they visited Lake Como, Verona and Milan. W. M. Rossetti kept a diary which purports to include his sister's comments, but she is rarely mentioned and her point of view is implicitly merged with her brother's: 'the extracts which I give from this Diary are more

¹²Compare this discussion with chapter 1, which suggests how contemporary critics claimed her poetry describes an identifiable locale, and chapter 3, in which the nineteenth-century reviewers use visual language in critiques of Rossetti's poetry.

numerous and detailed than usual, on the ground that it indicates in large measure the things which Christina, as well as myself, saw and enjoyed' (*RP*, p. 104). Similarly, he chronicled her only other trip abroad in his diary, prefaced in *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism* with the comments: 'although in the Diary I speak of myself and not of Christina, it should be understood (and may confer interest upon some jottings) that she was very frequently along with me when I went out walking, &c' (p. 276). Christina Rossetti's reaction to Italy is thus effectively silenced.

W. M. Rossetti elsewhere, and in particular in the notes to his collected edition of her poetry, does not fail to give voice to the personal, autobiographical meanings of her work. But his rhetorical sleight of hand in the preface, and the parenthesis which confers marginal significance to her subsumed comments, imposes the signature of W. M. Rossetti upon his sister's silence. This unusual reticence in fact brackets off the significance of Italy to the tropic construction of Christina Rossetti, and enacts the sense of alienation and exile from the homeland which is suggested by her poetry. The explicit silencing of her point of view conforms to his general attempt to offer a description of the persona of his sister exclusively in his own authoritative voice. The issue of gender within the conceptualisation of Italy, however, spirals beyond such masculinist tendencies and inscribes even more profound questions of identity and homeland. The connection of Italy with gender is also suggested by Barbara Fass Leavy, who argues that the biographies have assimilated unfortunate stereotypes of the Italian woman and have mostly failed to account for the social position of the Rossetti family

as Italian émigrés. She suggests, moreover, that her gender makes the question of identity 'doubly problematic'.¹³

In the nineteenth-century Italy functions as a privileged trope, as the metaphorical site where issues of the past, political revolution and the exotic coalesce.¹⁴ For Victorian women poets, however, Italy is also invested with particularly acute and gender inflected questions of identity and homeland. Angela Leighton reads this concern as the reaction of female poets both to the post-Romantic formulation of the home as a stable feminine sphere and the associated feminization and interiorisation of poetry. Summarising Felicia Hemans' reaction to this discourse, Leighton argues: 'in many of her poems, home is either empty of its main figurehead, the father, or else home is somewhere else: in Italy, in the south — paradoxically, in one of those places still subject to the convulsions of political change.'¹⁵ Her anthology of Victorian women poets, edited with Margaret Reynolds, demonstrates the fascination and importance of Italy as a reclaimed home, with such poems as Meynell's 'The

¹³Barbara Fass Leavy, 'Christina Rossetti, Anglo-Italian Woman', *Italian Americana* 3 (1977), 205-25 (p. 223).

¹⁴Hilary Fraser argues that the metaphorical colonization of Italy in this period is part of a wider concern to reappropriate the past. See *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 4.

¹⁵Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds, eds, *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. xxxv-xxxvi. Compare Sandra Gilbert, who argues that Italy functions as a metaphor for women writers which allows them to imagine a utopian motherland: 'such women writers as Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning revise and revitalize the dead metaphor of gender that is their literary and linguistic heritage, using it to transform Italy from a political state to a female state of mind, from a problematic country in Europe to the problem condition of femaleness. Redeeming and redeemed by Italy, they imagine redeeming and being redeemed by themselves.' See 'From *Patria* to *Matria*: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Risorgimento*', *PMLA* 99 (1984), 194-200 (p. 196). Gilbert's analysis, however, collapses Rossetti's and Barrett Browning's personal experiences directly into poetry, in a strategy familiar from nineteenth-century gender ideology, and yet the argument does not account for Rossetti's limited direct experience of Italy nor does it take on board the full complexities of her sense of alienation from Italy as an alienation from the maternal.

Watershed' testifying to the transformative and enabling potential of this trope to forge a sense of place and belonging:

But O the unfolding South! the burst
Of Summer! O to see
Of all the southward brooks the first!
The travelling heart went free
With endless streams; that strife was stopped;
And down a thousand vales I dropped,
I flowed to Italy.
(p. 522)

The images of warmth, fluidity, and *jouissance* occasioned by travel into Italy here denote the maternal, an association also made by other writers of the period. Mary Coleridge declares: 'I feel as if I'd come not to a Fatherland but to a Motherland that I had always longed for and had never known' (pp. 610-11).

For Christina Rossetti, Italy proves a more problematic trope which provides a focal point for explorations of identity and heritage.¹⁶ Her poems suggest a sense of distance and exile from Italy, and also, simultaneously, forge a maternal relation to the trope of her lost homeland as a gesture towards a private utopian space. In Rossetti's poetry it is, then, not her direct experience of Italy that emerges as significant, but its *conceptualisation* and in particular the conceptualisation of Italy as masculine, paternal, and also maternal, the (m)other tongue.¹⁷ Of course, Italy and the Italian language enjoyed priority for the Rossetti family by virtue of the father Gabriele Rossetti, but it is the stress upon Italy as specifically and

¹⁶Rosenblum notes the importance of Italy as a metaphor for identity, the mother country and the afterlife, but assumes the relation is stable and unproblematic (*Christina Rossetti and the Poetry of Endurance*, pp. 49-50).

¹⁷Direct comments about her Italian trip are made in *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (London: SPCK, 1885), June 10, June 13, June 14, August 4, August 22; and in 'Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets' (sonnet 21 and 22; C.ii.147-48).

surprisingly not wholly maternal that lends emphasis to the paternal tropic construction.¹⁸ Thus, in Rossetti's poetry, the cross-over between her Italian literary and familial heritage is evident in the themes of exile — from the mother, from a homeland, and from herself.¹⁹

W. M. Rossetti's note to the posthumously published poem 'En Route' links his sister's relation to Italy with Gabriele Rossetti and suggests that, for both of them, the country is not wholly foreign: 'the passionate delight in Italy to which *En Route* bears witness suggests that she was almost an alien — or, like her father, an exile — in the North' (*PW: CR*, p. 485). The speaker in the poem addresses Italy: 'Wherefore art thou strange, and not my mother?', for the country is both unfamiliar and familiar:

Thou hast stolen my heart and broken it:
Would that I might call thy sons 'My brother',
Call thy daughters 'Sister sweet';
Lying in thy lap not in another,
Dying at thy feet.
(*C.ii.382-383*)

The departure from Italy, the 'land of love', prompts intense and excessive 'yearnings without gain', but rather than being simply a yearning for a return to that country, it is for something never possessed:

¹⁸Already here we encounter an ambiguity in the identity of Italy with the paternal, for Rossetti's mother was herself half Italian. I wish to stress, however, that there needs to be a distinction between Rossetti's actual parental heritage and representations of that heritage, and it must be remembered that biographies situate the Italian and foreign with Gabriele and Englishness with Frances Rossetti. In no sense — as becomes apparent later in the discussion — is the duality Italian-English and paternal-maternal wholly stable. This has repercussions for identity as constituted in the poetry.

¹⁹Julia Kristeva argues that we are all exiles: 'strangely, the foreigner lives within us; he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity flounder,' *Strangers to Ourselves*, transl. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 1.

Why should I seek and never find
That something which I have not had?
Fair and unutterably sad
The world hath sought time out of mind;
Our words have been already said,
Our deeds have been already done:
There's nothing new beneath the sun
But there is peace among the dead.
(C.ii.120, 383)

The sense of loss is provoked by the departure from Italy, but the excessiveness of the loss and its lack of a referent ('that something') render the poem disturbing and non-sequential. Earlier in the poem, a clue to this excessiveness is offered, for the speaker is given as emphatically female, although this significantly occurs in a parenthesis.²⁰ Consequently, by virtue of her gender, the speaker can take no action to appease the longing:

Men work and think, but women feel:
And so (for I'm a woman, I)
And so I should be glad to die
And cease from impotence of zeal,
And cease from hope, and cease from dread,
And cease from yearnings without gain,
And cease from all this world of pain,
And be at peace among the dead.
(C.ii.120)

²⁰I take the parenthesis here as emblematic of the feminine at the margin, both cause and effect of the subject's dilemma. Bronfen's term 'parenthesised subjectivity' is particularly apt here, as a description of the emptied trope of the feminine subject aligned in a position equivalent to death in androcentrism (pp. 226-28). Compare Terence Holt's comment on 'Goblin Market': 'parenthesis, rather than existing outside of the discourse it interrupts, speaks [. . .] to the heart of the matter. The bracketing off of a parenthetical phrase does not exclude it, so much as clear it for a privileged space', "'Men sell not such in any town": Exchange in *Goblin Market*', *Victorian Poetry* 28 (1990), 51-67 (p. 54). As is later suggested, 'the *heart* of the matter' is not an unproblematic centrality in relation to the subject, who retreats into the heart as a private, interior and *displaced* space.

The anaphoric repetition of 'and' highlights the aporia whereby, as a female for whom action is prohibited, an excess of feeling cannot be resolved and freedom from longing only comes with death. In a sense this is a total surrender to the position of the subject in discourse, which is itself analogous to death or non-being. The subject, like the referent, would be removed from the text. For the subject to become what it represents, absence, collapses sign with signified²¹ and is a parodic solution that maintains the representational system even as it evades and exposes its ambiguities.

Part of 'En Route' is included in *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881) in 'An "Immurata" Sister' (C.ii.120-21). In this revised version, the three stanzas that refer to Italy are deleted and new lines added that seem to resolve the impasse of the other, for they suggest that death brings a renewal and a mystical purification reminiscent of Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans* (1650):²²

Hearts that die, by death renew their youth,
Lightened of this life that doubts and dies;
Silent and contented, while the Truth
Unveiled makes them wise [. . .]

Sparks fly upward toward their fount of fire,
Kindling, flashing, hovering:—
Kindle, flash, my soul; mount higher and higher,
Thou whole burnt-offering!
(ll. 13-16, ll. 25-28)

²¹See below, where the subject's becoming what it represents is located in the *chora*, a concept developed from Plato's 'Becoming'.

²²'I was a flint — deaf and silent. [. . .] You draw nearer and break that mass which is my rocky heart. [. . .] See how it is torn, its fragments at last setting your heavens alight [. . .]. By dying I live again', translated from the Latin 'Authoris (de se) Emblema' in *Henry Vaughan: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Alan Rudrum (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976; repr. 1983), p. 137-8. See also chapter 7.

The addition of these lines, along with the deletion of those referring to Italy, resolves the sense of loss by portraying death as rejuvenation in a realm *beyond* language and *beyond* loss. The title of this version, furthermore, suggests a speaker removed, or literally walled off, from earthly concerns whilst awaiting a spiritual release in death.

In comparison with the revised version, the focus upon Italy in 'En Route' seems strange and ambiguous.²³ Italy is non-maternal but also 'Sister-land of Paradise'. With the revisions in mind, this emphasis upon grief at the departure from a worldly paradise seems to be a misplaced desire for perfection which can only be achieved in Italy's counter-part, the afterlife, which is figured as feminine.²⁴ By virtue of this analogy, Italy is both paternal and, because it analogously figures the afterlife, is related to the feminine. For a speaker firmly pronounced as female, then, Italy represents the foreign, but a foreignness which is inherently already part of the feminine subject. Italy is half other.

²³This may be why, in his posthumous edition of his sister's complete poems, W. M. Rossetti gives only the three stanzas of 'En Route' that are not in 'An "Immurata" Sister', and not the lines common to both ('An "Immurata" Sister', ll. 1-12 and ll. 17-24, the latter with a slightly altered last quatrain) which depict the speaker's desire and yearning for something that was never possessed. In his notes he finds that the three sections that make up the two poems 'seem to have little connection one with the other' (*PW: CR*, p. 485).

²⁴See, for example, 'Mother Country' (C.i.222), which describes the afterlife accessible to the soul sleeper. It is also significant that the space of the grave, the home for the sleeper who awaits the Resurrection, is portrayed as maternal in the deleted section of 'Seeking Rest' (C.i.429):

She knocked at the Earth's greeny door:
O Mother, let me in;
For I am weary of this life
That is so full of sin.

As the site for spiritual rebirth, the grave is analogous to the womb. See below for a further discussion of this.

This sense of partial identification and assimilation with Italy is described in 'Italia, io ti Saluto' (C.ii.74-75), also published in *A Pageant and Other Poems*.²⁵ The speaker in this poem is resigned to leaving Italy: 'To see no more the country half my own, / Nor hear the half familiar speech, / Amen, I say' (ll. 6-8). The south and the north are firmly differentiated and set up as opposites: 'I turn to that bleak North / Whence I came forth— / The South lies out of reach' (ll. 8-10). The distance is traversed by swallows, whose migration back to the south reminds the speaker of 'the sweet South' (l. 12) and 'the sweet name' (l. 15). As in Swinburne's 'Itylus', the swallows sustain a link between the two opposites, north and south, and thus negotiate the loss of the other, Italy; but, in Rossetti's poem, the prevailing sense is that of an ambiguous assimilation and isolation from the 'half familiar' country and language, made more immediate when we remember Italian comprised half the Rossetti family's actual speech.²⁶

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To posit Italy as partially identifiable is, then, to maintain that the tropic construction Italy as other is inherently part of the subject. It is appropriate that the most frequently repeated Italian phrase in Christina Rossetti's poetry is 'cor mio', my

²⁵*A Pageant and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1881).

²⁶*Swinburne's Collected Poetical Works*, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1927), vol. 1, pp. 54-56. In the entry for October 20 and 21 in *Time Flies*, Rossetti suggests that swallows mediate between the worldly and the divine: 'the swallows by dint of analogy, of suggestion, of parallel experience, if I may call it so, convey messages from the Creator to the human creature' (p. 203).

heart.²⁷ This platitude figures the intensely private space of the heart and, in fact, is used only in poems that remained unpublished during Rossetti's lifetime, probably because of their personal nature and because of fears that her non-native Italian would be criticised.²⁸ Whilst the concept of a private interior space that is both physically *there* and beyond interpretation and language is also to be found in the bulk of her poetry (see Chapter 2), the Italian phrase suggests the significance of the concept of Italy and the Italian language to the subject as both alien but nevertheless part of the subject, its heart. In fact, the conceptualisation of Italy shows Italy to function as part of the movement of translation (literally, of course, carrying over) and exchange between subject and other.

In a posthumously published sonnet, which takes as its title the Italian phrase, the speaker addresses a beloved from her past whom she terms 'cor mio'. This phrase also refers to the subject of the poem and thus functions as part of the movement of exchange between subject and the beloved²⁹ (see Chapter 5), in which the subject's heart itself is figured as partly containing the other:

²⁷The poems in which this phrase is used are: 'Lisetta all'Amante' (C.iii.133), 'Il rosseggiar dell'Oriente' (C.iii.301-12), 'Cor mio, cor mio' (C.iii.336), 'Cor mio' (C.iii.346). See also 'Amore e Dovere' (C.iii.91) which repeats the word 'core'.

²⁸In the preface to his edition of her poetical works, W. M. Rossetti quotes an Italian critic who disparages Rossetti's Italian verse: 'they not only do not add anything to her fame as a poet, but rather detract from it, so formless and inept do they seem to me. It might almost be thought that the writer of those verses did not, as we know she did, speak from early childhood her paternal language.' W. M. Rossetti declares such a criticism harsh and cites another unnamed literary Italian, according to whom the poems are: 'not undeserving of commendation, and assimilate to native work more nearly than those of Dante Gabriel Rossetti' (*PW: CR*, pp. vi-vii).

²⁹'Cor mio, cor mio' also has the reciprocal phrase 'Cor del mio core' [heart of my heart] (C.iii.336). In this poem, 'cor mio' is repeated five times in seven lines.

Still sometimes in my secret heart of hearts
I say 'Cor mio' when I remember you,
And thus I yield us both one tender due,
Wielding one whole of two divided parts.
(C.iii.346; ll. 1-4)

The naming of the beloved is located firmly within the subject's 'secret heart of hearts', within the interior security of a self-reflexive doubling that is prompted by memory. The ambiguous unity of subject and beloved is immediately suggested by 'one tender due', 'due' implying that the union is not actual but owed to them both, and also implying monetary value which the following lines emphasise in images of exchange. The union between subject and other becomes, in fact, not a union but an exchange between the subject and the foreign, but the foreign is again ambiguously already part of the subject. 'Would you have given me roses for the rue / For which I bartered roses in love's marts?' (ll. 7-8): in this rhetorical question, exchange works back on itself as the speaker posits the reversal of an earlier transference, figured, significantly, as occurring in the market place. The beloved is asked whether he would have *replaced* the roses that the speaker exchanged for rueful love, but there is also the sense that the beloved is questioned as to whether he would have *accepted* roses from the speaker in return for rue. The uncertainty as to what type of exchange is referred to ensures that the beloved and the speaker are not given secure market-place positions, as producer or consumer of a commodity, and heightens the sense that exchange itself is not a

transferral of equivalents, of roses for rue, love for pain, but a type of substitution of one thing for an unlike other.³⁰

The sestet, however, increases the speaker's alienation from the beloved as the emphasis moves back to memory, upon which the sonnet is predicated. Despite being her 'heart', the beloved forgets the speaker's sacrifice just as 'late in autumn one forgets the spring' (l. 9). The previous octave, which had told of exchange, gives way to a sense of loss, of impasse and of the speaker's powerlessness:

So late in summer one forgets the spring,
Forgets the summer with its opulence,
The callow birds that long have found a wing,
The swallows that more lately got them hence:
Will anything like spring, will anything
Like summer, rouse one day the slumbering sense?
(ll. 9-14)

A remembrance of metaphorical acts of exchange gives way to a rhetorical question that doubts the inevitability of the cycle of the seasons, the eventual substitution of autumn for spring.³¹ Exchange between subject and beloved is entirely retrospective and intransigent. The final line suggests a fruitless anticipation that the 'slumbering sense' might awaken and the passive speaker's loss is heightened by the absence of the addressee, for the question is rhetorical.

³⁰Terence Holt suggests that: '*Goblin Market* attempts to imagine a position for women outside systems of power, but its language, which cannot escape from gender, undoes the attempt: the autonomy is an illusion' (p. 51). The separation of Lizzie and Laura from the economics typified by the goblins is unstable; they emerge as embroiled in exchange but their position in this system does not seem to be clearly marked.

³¹This octave is used for sonnet 18 of 'Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets', published in *A Pageant and Other Poems* (C.ii.146), another type of substitution.

Absence of the beloved also predominates in the Italian sequence ‘Il rosseggiar dell’Oriente’ (C.iii.301-12), or ‘The reddening of the East’, which is similarly concerned with a type of exchange between the subject and beloved utilising the phrase ‘cor mio’, but this time the exchange is superseded by a desire for the afterlife, which is related to the conceptualisation of Italy.³² As in the sonnet ‘Cor Mio’, reciprocity is stressed and ‘cor mio’ is the locale for this, for it denotes both the subject and the beloved:

Possibil non sarebbe
 Ch’io non t’amassi, o caro:
 Chi mai si scorderebbe
 Del proprio core?
 Se amaro il dolce fai,
 Dolce mi fai l’amoro;
 Se qualche amor mi dà,
 Ti do l’amore.
 (Poem 16; ll. 1-8)

[It would not be possible for me not to love you, oh darling: whoever would forget their own heart? If you make bitter the sweet, sweet you make the bitter; if you give me some love, I give you love.]³³

The sense of a secretive locale, the cor mio and the more amorphous concept of the afterlife, is especially emphatic in this sequence, for it is loaded with personal references, presumably to Charles Bagot Cayley whom the sequence is traditionally taken to address.³⁴ William Michael Rossetti names Cayley as the addressee of the sequence in the memoir to the

³²Appendix B gives a full prose translation of the sequence.

³³This conditional and provisional reciprocity is also to be found in ‘Lisetta all’Amante’: ‘Se a te fedel son io, / Sarai fedele a me?’ [If I am faithful to you, will you be faithful to me?] (C.iii.133).

³⁴Antony H. Harrison points out that the afterlife is amorphous (*Christina Rossetti in Context*, p. 157).

Poetical Works of 1904 and suggests that, although his sister apparently rejected his proposal of marriage on religious grounds, 'she loved the scholarly recluse to the last day of his life, 5 December 1883, and, to the last day of her own, his memory' (*PW: CR*, p. liii). He asserts that much of the relationship was very private, for 'Christina was extremely reticent in all matters in which her affections were deeply engaged'. The suggestion that the relationship has a wholly private and interior existence, especially after Cayley's death when it was located in her memory, is again repeated in his notes to the sequence with reference to the manuscript itself:

For any quasi-explanation as to these singularly pathetic verses—'Love's very vesture and elect disguise,' the inborn idiom of a pure and impassioned heart—I refer the reader to the Memoir. The verses were kept by Christina in the jealous seclusion of her writing-desk, and I suppose no human eye had looked upon them until I found them there after her death.

(*PW: CR*, p. 493)

There is a constant emphasis upon reciprocity between the subject and the beloved within the secret space of the subject's heart. In poem four the speaker posits possible reunions independent of material time, and concludes:

E perciò 'Fuggi' io dico al tempo, e omai
 'Passa pur' dico al vanitoso mondo:
Mentre mi sogno quel che dici e fai
 Ripeto in me 'Doman sarà giocondo,
'Doman saremo'—mai s'ami tu lo sai,
 E se non ami a che mostrarti il fondo?—
(4; ll. 9-14)

[And therefore to time I say 'flee', and now 'please pass by' I say to the vain world. While I dream of what you say and do, I say to myself again and again 'tomorrow will be joyful, tomorrow we will be...'—but if you love me you

know, and if you don't love, why show you the depths of my heart?]

Exchange is located in anticipation and memory, in dreams; but, significantly, the reverie is broken off with an assertion that the beloved does not, or should not, know her thoughts; for the gesture of showing the heart to the beloved is deemed unnecessary if he loves her and superfluous if he does not. The interplay of subject and other is thus grounded in retrospect, expectation, and gesture.

The exchange is made possible by the separation of subject from the beloved — in fact, the sequence is subtitled 'To the distant friend.'³⁵ His absence incites the desire for presence, as in poem 13, where the speaker looks out from her 'eastern window' in the direction where the beloved lives, and yearns for him. Unlike Barrett-Browning's 'Sonnets From the Portuguese', which was an important influence upon Rossetti, the sequence does not seem to be based upon a linear narrative, and interspersed amongst poems that imply that the beloved is alive there are lyrics based upon his death. The first suggestion of this is in poem 5, where the speaker laments: 'Dolce cor mio perduto e non perduto, / Dolce mia vita che mi lasci in morte' [my sweet heart lost and not lost, my sweet life that left me on dying]. The following poem seems placed before the beloved's death, when the speaker imagines meeting the beloved in his house; but the death of the beloved does not impede communion and exchange, for he is both 'lost and not lost' (poem 5). The

³⁵'All' Amico Lontano.' Crump's edition gives the last word as 'Contano', from Rossetti's manuscript. I use William Michael Rossetti's text which gives 'Lontano' (C.iii.480; *PW: CR*, p. 447).

separation through death of the other, however, signals another type of exchange in which the beloved is bargained for by the speaker, who urges God to allow them a union in the afterlife:

Che Ti darò Gesù Signor mio buono?
Ah quello ch'amo più, quello Ti dono:
Accettalo Signor Gesù mio Dio,
Il sol mio dolce amor, anzi il cor mio;
Accettalo per Te, siati prezioso;
Accettalo per me, salva il mio sposo.
(12; ll. 1-6)

[What shall I give You, Jesus my good Lord? Ah that which I love the most I will give You: accept it, Lord Jesus, my God, my only sweet love, indeed my heart; accept it for Yourself, may it be precious to you; accept it for me, save my groom.]

The gesturing towards the afterlife that allows glimpses of paradise is by virtue of the 'cor mio', in which a movement is signalled towards exchange and translation (carrying across) between subject and other and which introduces God into the binary pair subject—other.³⁶ In poem 19, the speaker describes the transformative effect of the separation caused by death in Dantesque terms:

Cor mio a cui si volge l'altro mio core
Qual calamita al polo, e non ti trova,
La nascita della mia vita nuova
Con pianto fu, con grida e con dolore.
Ma l'aspro duolo fummi precursore
Di speranza gentil che canta e cova [. . .]
O tu che in Dio mi sei, ma dopo Iddio,
Tutta la terra mia ed assai del cielo
(19; ll. 1-6, 9-10)

[My heart towards which the other heart of mine turns like a magnet to the pole, and can't find you: the birth of

³⁶See chapter 5, in which a similar movement is seen in 'Later Life' and compared to 'Sonnets From the Portuguese'.

my new life was with crying, with shouting and with pain.
But the sharp grief was the precursor of a gracious hope
that sings and broods. [. . .] Oh you who are in God for me,
but after God, all of my world and much of my sky]

The doubleness of 'cor mio' and 'l'altro cor mio' suggests a mutual identification which is frustrated by separation, but the 'new life' intimates a mystical communion that is now possible, if painful, because of the separation. The semantic twists — 'O tu che in Dio mi sei, ma dopo Iddio'— place, again painfully, the beloved as secondary to God. The very last poem in the sequence also suggests that there is hope for reunion in the afterlife through the speaker's mediation and negotiation with God: 'Tu che moristi per virtù d'amor, / Nel altro mondo donami quel cor / Che tanto amai' (21; ll. 6-8) [You who died for love, in the other world give me that heart I loved so much].

The ability to glimpse the afterlife which sustains hope of a reunion is through the deployment of the phrase 'cor mio', in which language is manoeuvred so that it exceeds its denotation as a platitude. As an excessively overused phrase, as a cliché, 'cor mio' includes and exceeds its own semantic limitations and, by virtue of its almost mystical reiteration, enables the afterlife to be connoted. W. David Shaw discusses Rossetti's creation of 'elusive contextual definitions for the dictionary meaning of so apparently simple a word as "heart"' (*Victorians and Mystery*, p. 258). He suggests that the gesturing beyond accepted meanings is a 'crisis of representation', an attempt: 'to cross the divide that separates knowledge from belief' (p. 251).³⁷ Her reserve and obliqueness are sceptical, self-

³⁷Compare Franco Ferrucci's comments on Dante Alighieri, quoted by Harrison: 'Dante's genius lies in his deep-rooted conviction that heaven is attainable through

protective, and yet rooted in her faith, for 'rather than saying less about God than she means to say, she prefers to say nothing' (p. 252). The 'cor mio' signifies less a crisis of representation than the impossibility of representing the crisis, for it gestures towards the afterlife which can only be *beyond* direct representation, non-referential and can only be intimated in fragmentary visions.

Further, these brief mystical glimpses are themselves half-familiar. Paradise is 'the other life' (1; l. 1), 'the other world' (1; l. 21), 'up there' (1; ll. 5):

[. . .] Con lui discerno
Giorno che spunta da gelata sera,
Lungo cielo al di là di breve inferno,
Al di là dell'inverno primavera
(5; ll. 10-13)

[With him I discern the day that breaks from the icy evening, the long heaven beyond the brief hell, beyond winter, spring]

And in poem 10, the afterlife is both known and unknown, as 'the day of love', but an eternal day without moon or sun:

...venga poi, ma non con luna o sole,
Giorno d'amor, giorno di gran delizia,
Giorno che spunta non per tramontare.
(10; ll. 12-14)

[then let the day of love come, but not with moon or sun, day of love, day of great delight, day which breaks never to set.]

a poetic masterpiece, and his profound faith rests upon the vast expressive possibilities that the Christian hereafter offers to his imagination. Spiritual evolution can never be separated from its representation. *To believe is to represent*, and vice versa; consequently, spiritual flowering cannot be separated from creative rebirth' (given in Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p. 158).

In this way, as partially familiar to the experiential realm, or material reality, the hereafter occupies a similar ambiguous position in relation to the subject as the conceptualisation of Italy. The speaker in poem 13, 'Finestra mia orientale' (My eastern window) seems to give the land in which the lovers are imagined together Italian traits, which correspond *almost* to paradise:

Fossiamo insieme in bel paese aprico!

Fossiamo insieme!
Che importerebbe
U'si facesse
Il nostro nido?
Cielo sarebbe
Quasi quel lido.
(13; ll. 15-20)

[If only we were together in the sunny land! If we were together! What would it matter where we had made our nest? It would almost be paradise, that shore.]

The south, Italy, is seen as the counterpart of the colder north in 'Italy, io ti saluto' and 'Enrica'. The latter, published in *Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1875) maintains such a stereotype and finds it manifest in the character of an Italian visitor to England: 'She summer-like and we like snow' (C.i.194). Although, as the speaker in 'En Route' declares, Italy is 'Sister-land of Paradise', the analogy of Italy and Paradise, and of both of these to the familiar and the known, is only partial; it is this partiality that allows intimations of and fuels the desire for heaven, as Italy is necessarily a flawed earthly equivalent.³⁸

³⁸For more on how analogy functions in Rossetti's poetry, see chapter 5.

Thus, whilst the 'cor mio' signals a linguistic movement of exchange between subject and beloved, it also gestures to the afterlife as another type of highly personal and secretive space related to the conceptualisation of Italy, as it is in the afterlife that the exchange between subject and other is relocated. In the projected (re)union of subject and beloved in the afterlife,³⁹ the gap between the identity of subject and other is put into question, allowing the perfect love envisaged in 'Monna Innominata' — 'With separate 'I' and 'Thou' free love has done / For one is both and both are one in love' (C.ii.88) — to come to fruition.

* * * * *

Jan Montifiore discusses the indistinction between lovers in traditional love sonnets as akin to the Imaginary, in which the pre-Oedipal child recognises no boundaries between itself and the mother: 'the concept of the Imaginary defines the dynamic of passionate love: idealization, ambivalence, fear and, above all, desire for the beloved['s] total *presence*.'⁴⁰ Necessarily, this relationship is articulated through the Symbolic. Montefiore suggests that the construction of an Imaginary identity between subject and beloved is not apparent in Rossetti's 'Monna

³⁹See also 'Monna Innominata', where this is a dominant concern: 'So shall we stand / As happy equals in the flowering land / Of love, that knows not a dividing sea' (C.ii.89). Later in this sonnet sequence the speaker employs the conventional Petrarchan conceit of giving the beloved up to another love if it makes him happy (C.ii.92). In the second sonnet of 'By way of Remembrance' (C.iii.313), the speaker promises to rejoice if the beloved dies before her and finds another 'to share / Your gladness, glowing as a virgin bride'. Throughout Rossetti's oeuvre, union with the beloved in the afterlife is not anticipated as a certainty.

⁴⁰Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing* (London and New York: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 105.

Innominata', for the female speaker, adopting from the genre the traditional female role of passivity, cannot actively shape her identity and use the beloved as a mirror:

in so far as the poems construct her identity, they do not do so, as in their originals, by examining the speaker's own responses to the ideal image of the lover in her mind [. . .] but through the experience of passively loving. The lover is not a mirror to the woman poet who addresses him; rather, these sonnets represent the process of offering oneself as a mirror to the other.
(p. 127)

The resistance displayed in Rossetti's poetry to absorbing unproblematically the convention whereby the subject narcissistically subsumes the beloved would signify the acknowledgement that, as a feminine subject, the speaker is always inherently constructed as other in the masculine-feminine dyad. The preface to 'Monna Innominata' claims to speak from the position of the silenced other, 'the bevy of unnamed ladies "donne innominate" sung by a school of less conspicuous poets' (C.ii.86) than Dante Alighieri and Petrarch. In Montefiore's account, however, this claim to subjectivity and the resultant aporia is elided. The process is not simply a passive one of the female speaker continuing the gender and genre inscribed stipulation that the female as beloved be the other or the mirror, but an impossible and uncanny combination of speaker as other *and* as occupying a subject position.

What is significantly different in 'Il rosseggiar', however, is the way in which such an aporia emerges as located within the subject's secretive heart, a conventional device of love poetry. The heart represents at once both the subject and the beloved, and, as a secret personal space, gestures to the analogous

afterlife as an anticipated and projected personal arena for the continuation of love relations. In fact, the Imaginary identities that Montefiore rejects in Rossetti's love sonnets *are* desired, but evinced sporadically when, in the projected maternal space of the afterlife, the Imaginary ruptures the Symbolic and suggests the pressure of a prior, pre-Oedipal, jouissance. The memory is analogous to the desired perfection of earthly love in the afterlife; as the Imaginary, or what Kristeva terms the semiotic, it can only be perceived through the Symbolic and is similar, but not equivalent, to the feminine. Here, the gender relations inscribed into the tradition of love poetry which Rossetti invokes are evaded by the subversive play of the feminine, and in particular the feminine as akin to the semiotic.⁴¹

As suggested above, the Italian phrase 'cor mio' gestures to a secret interior space, is also a trope for the heart and for the beloved, and signifies that the other or alien is already partially assimilated into the subject. When, as in 'Il rosseggiar' the beloved is transposed, and depicted as absent, the anticipation of a meeting in the afterlife heightens the pressure

⁴¹It is important to stress that Kristeva does not equate the feminine with the semiotic. As Toril Moi points out, in the semiotic there is no masculine-feminine polarity and, 'any strengthening of the semiotic, which knows no sexual difference, must therefore lead to a weakening of traditional gender divisions, and not at all to a reinforcement of traditional notions of "femininity". [. . .] Femininity and the semiotic do, however, have one thing in common: their marginality. As the feminine is defined as marginal under patriarchy, so the semiotic is marginal to language. This is why the two categories, along with other forms of "dissidence", can be theorized in roughly the same way in Kristeva's work' (*Sexual/Textual Politics*, pp. 165-56). Rossetti's association with a feminine ideal doubly displaces her, in Belsey and Belsey's terms, from any claim to a fully present subjectivity (pp. 30-50). The relation of her subject position(s) to culturally constructed notions of the feminine is not in itself one of equivalence; displaced by virtue of her excessive association with the feminine, the strategies for articulation from outside the dominant patriarchal discourse are *analogous* to the semiotic and its pressure on the symbolic. This demonstrates the feminine as both the condition upon which the sonnet's gender-genre ideology is predicated, and the point at which it recedes.

of memory on the Symbolic. Such retrospection combines with anticipation: effectively in Freudian terms a conjugation of birth with death which intimates, for Kristeva, the *chora*.⁴² The afterlife, in such moments, is glimpsed in dreams and non-verbal language, a type of non-significatory practise that is associated with the Imaginary. The 'cor mio' is analogous to the secret, transformative space of the grave where the sleeping soul dreams of Paradise.⁴³ The pulsations of the 'core', suggesting the pulsations of the *chora* upon the symbolic,⁴⁴ intimate a movement of retrospection as well as a longing for death that would release the subject from such drives. Both constructs are spatial and amorphous, both there as the body and not-there, embedded in but also positioned beyond the significatory practise that they interrupt.

Kristeva takes the notion of the *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus*. Near the beginning of *Revolution in Poetic Language*

⁴²The *chora* is extremely controversial in feminist theory. Judith Butler, in particular, argues that: 'it is unclear whether the primary relationship to the maternal body which both Kristeva and Lacan appear to accept is a viable construct and whether it is even a knowable experience according to either of their linguistic theories'. Butler also questions Kristeva's argument that the semiotic is unsustainable in culture, subversive, and also that its sustained presence can lead to psychosis. She also argues, via Foucault, that: 'insofar as Kristeva conceptualizes this maternal instinct as having an ontological status prior to the paternal law, she fails to consider the way in which that very law might well be the *cause* of the very desire it is said to *repress*' (p. 80 and p. 90). In response to Butler, Oliver argues that Kristeva's *chora* should not be read as prelinguistic and precultural, and, because language, culture, and meaning are all heterogeneous, the semiotic can be apprehended as a non-essentialistic concept. Further, against Butler's argument that Kristeva naturalises the semiotic, Oliver points out that the semiotic is always a cultural phenomenon and thus not 'natural' (p. 104). See also p. 9 and pp. 48-49 for further engagement with Butler.

⁴³Linda Marshall gives the most complete account of Rossetti's belief in Soul Sleep, or the waiting time between death and the Resurrection, in 'What the Dead Are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti', *Victorian Newsletter* 72 (Fall 1987), 55-60.

⁴⁴Despite the similarity of the two words, they denote separate concepts. Both are related semantically, however, to enclosed bodily space, the womb and the heart. See chapter 5 for a discussion of Rossetti's love sonnets and nineteenth-century sonnet criticism which found rhythmical pulsations distinctive to the sonnet form.

she situates her use of the term with reference to the original.⁴⁵ In Greek, the *chora* denotes an enclosed space or womb and for Plato constitutes 'an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible'.⁴⁶ Plato also highlights the ambiguity of the concept that cannot, by virtue of its definition, be named:

Space, which is everlasting, not admitting destruction; providing a situation for all things that come into being, but itself apprehended without the senses by a sort of bastard reasoning, and hardly an object of belief. This, indeed, is that which we look upon as in a dream and say that anything that is must needs be in some place and occupy some room.

(quoted in *Revolution*, n. 12, p. 239)

It is amorphous but, by being named, becomes a container (n. 13, pp. 239-40). Always becoming, it is a process and not a state and can, in Plato's terms, only be apprehended 'as in a dream'. Kristeva's reworking of the term intersects biology and culture (Oliver, p. 104) and situates it in the pre-Oedipal as 'a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated' (*Revolution*, p. 25). The drives and pre-signifying pulsations circulate through the pre-Oedipal child's body and collect in the *chora*. This space is:

an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements in their ephemeral stases. [. . .] The *chora*, as rupture and

⁴⁵Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, transl. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁴⁶*Timaeus*; quoted in the 'Introduction' by Leon S. Roudiez to Kristeva's *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, transl. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 6.

articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality. [. . .] One can situate the *chora* and, if necessary, lend it a topography, but one can never give it axiomatic form. [. . .] Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm.
(*Revolution*, pp. 25-25)

At what Kristeva terms the thetic phase this ceaseless continuum is split; the *chora* is ruptured and the child begins to attribute differences and signification ensues (pp. 43-45). This enables the child to enter the Symbolic, and the 'realm of *positions*' (p. 43) supersedes the heterogeneous semiotic. Moi's description of the perception of the semiotic through the symbolic suggests why the *chora* is a useful tool in the critique of poetic language:

Once the subject has entered into the Symbolic Order, the *chora* will be more or less successfully repressed and can be perceived only as pulsational *pressure* on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences in the symbolic language. The *chora* is a rhythmic pulsation rather than a new language. It constitutes, in other words, the heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language, that which can never be caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory.
(*Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 162)

The *chora* is thus part of the *process* by which an identity is constituted, and the poetic subject itself is constituted as a process, resisting a stable relationship with the other. As chapter 1 illustrates, however, in the biographies Rossetti is depicted as removed from her cultural and social contexts, unchanging in personality (after her twenties), and static. Her oeuvre is not seen to develop, and her poetry is taken to reflect

her assumed personality, constructed rather than in process, mysteriously always complete and finished with the process of creation mystified or elided. Begun as an attempt to sustain her idealized image by W. M. Rossetti, such an attitude prevails in critiques of the poetry, where Rossetti is often seen as the Anglicised Emily Dickinson: removed, isolated, and mysterious. The depiction of Rossetti by her brother as reclusive aligns her with her mother, who embodies, as Lila Hanft suggests, 'the domestic ideal of strict retirement'.⁴⁷ Hanft attempts to point to how this association with her mother in a trope of inactivity may be re-read in terms of issues of motherhood that affected Rossetti in her volume of children's verse, *Sing-Song*.⁴⁸

Rossetti criticism is in danger of placing her back within the representational system which she negotiates and evades, by a re-utilisation of that very framework to establish the terms in which she is to be critiqued; that is, by analysing the poetical subject as a stable representative figure in relation to an ideal of femininity. W. M. Rossetti's notes to 'Il rosseggiar' prompt and authorise such a reading by describing it in terms of a finished product locked away inside the drawer of Rossetti's writing desk, the production of which was mysterious and private, thereby eliding the sequence's unsettling non-linearity, its unfinishedness. Hilary Fraser reminds us that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood subscribed to the bourgeois value placed on detailed works of art with highly finished surfaces, even as they proposed to challenge those values (p. 121). This is a feature of

⁴⁷Lila Hanft, 'The Politics of Maternal Ambivalence in Christina Rossetti's *Sing-Song*,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 19 (1991), 213-32 (pp. 213-4). Also, see W. M. Rossetti's comment in his Memoir: 'like her mother, Christina went out very little into society' (*PW: CR*, p. lv).

⁴⁸*Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (London: Routledge, 1872)

the capitalist distribution system which, as Catherine Belsey summarises, 'has the effect of suppressing the process of production'.⁴⁹ Whilst Hanft avoids the critical pitfall exemplified by W. M. Rossetti, excessive emphasis upon Christina Rossetti's social concerns can also have the effect of reinforcing the system which constructs the reclusive/socially active dyad.⁵⁰ Aligning Rossetti on either side of the dyad sustains and entrenches her work even further within the representational system.⁵¹ An analysis of Rossetti and her relation to her mother is pertinent, however, as a way to engage with Rossetti's exemplary position in the aesthetic as a process oscillating both within and without the representational system.

Kristeva's interpretation of the *chora* emphasises, from Plato, its 'nourishing and maternal' aspect (*Revolution*, p. 26). In fact, it is the maternal body which 'mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*, which is on the path of destruction, aggressivity, and death' (pp. 27-28). It is a space 'anterior to naming, to the One, to the father, and consequently, maternally connoted', and 'the site of the undifferentiated bodily space the mother and child share' (Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 133; Wright, p. 195). The relation of the *chora* to the maternal allows for the rupture into the Symbolic of a retrospective desire for

⁴⁹Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 126.

⁵⁰For an example of this, see Andrea Abbott and Sharon Leder, *The Language of Exclusion: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987).

⁵¹Compare Bronfen's comment: 'one could speculate whether feminist writing, aimed at denying complicity with culture by drafting a feminine subject position outside its alienation, does not merely miss the point that all human beings are irrevocably subjected by cultural language. [. . .] Theirs would be as illusory a position of wholeness as the one I have been critiquing for masculine culture' (p. 406).

the mother's body, or desire for the space of the maternal body or womb, undifferentiated for the pre-Oedipal subject. Elizabeth Campbell, writing on 'Goblin Market', suggests that in the poem 'the pull of the fantastic is toward the semiotic *chora*' as an 'unseen and unnameable place' which has an analogy in the maternal body, itself according to Lacan an unrepresentable and constantly displaced sign of loss.⁵² Such a conjunction of the *chora* with an unlocatable place is evident in Rossetti's conception of the afterlife, and both the fantastic and the afterlife are associated with the maternal as the epitomies of the 'unseen and unnameable place'.

The alignment of the feminine subject with the maternal is thus instigated by the *chora* which maintains, always through the Symbolic, a retrospective link with the pre-Oedipal lack of differentiation between child and mother. In the biographies Rossetti is depicted as the ideal daughter and is constantly associated with her mother. In the seminal biographical text, the Memoir prefixed to his edition of the poems, W. M. Rossetti comments that:

For all her kith and kin, but for her mother far beyond all the rest, her love was as deep as it was often silent. [. . .] To the latter [Frances Rossetti] it may be truly said that her whole life was devoted: they were seldom severed, even for a few days together.
(*PW: CR*, p. lv)

The first biographer, Mackenzie Bell, tells how Rossetti's doctor remembers her most for her maternal love, which was: 'a feeling shown in every word and look. In the whole course of his life he

⁵²Elizabeth Campbell, 'Of Mothers and Merchants: Female Economics in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"', *Victorian Studies* (Spring 1990), 393-410 (p. 395). See chapter 5 which critiques Campbell's use of the *chora*.

had never known an instance of affection more absorbing in itself or more touchingly evinced' (p. 21). This excessive identification with her mother marks Rossetti as an eternal daughter, forever identified securely as feminine. As her mother's companion, and after her mother's death the companion of her aunts, Rossetti is always socially dependent, never independent. The ideal domestic, feminine sphere she inhabited with her mother secures and refines her spinsterly status into the reflection of the highest love, maternal love, and also enables Rossetti's asexuality, in line with her saintly persona, to be sustained.⁵³ As Deborah Gorman asserts, the contradiction inherent in the Victorian notion of female sexuality — the ideal of asexual feminine purity and the active sexuality required for motherhood — is resolved by the emphasis upon the daughter and her childlike dependency, transposed from the mother.⁵⁴ In fact, Bell quotes from Watts-Dunton's review in *The Athenaeum*, 15 February 1896, of the posthumously published *New Poems*: 'all that is noblest in Christina's poetry, an ever-present sense of the beauty and power of goodness, must surely have come from the mother' (p. 116).

As an appendix to her *Family Letters*, W. M. Rossetti gives extracts from a diary she kept on behalf of her mother between 1881 and 1886, and he notes that:

⁵³'[As] masculinity and femininity were defined in relation to their different fields of activity — the public and the private — gender identities became organized around the ideology of separate spheres,' Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 32-33. Nina Auerbach sees Rossetti's spinsterhood as the springboard for her own self-recreation: 'the quiet sister's devout, family-bounded existence contained its own divine potential for violent metamorphoses' (p. 117).

⁵⁴Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Hill, 1982), p. 7.

This, as the wording shows, purports to be the diary of Mrs. Rossetti, our mother; but my sister, acting on her behalf, was, with a few exceptions in the earlier dates, the real writer of the diary, so far as handwriting is concerned, and no doubt the composition or diction is often hers as well.

(*CR: FL*, p. xiii)

In the act of writing this diary, Rossetti adopts her mother's subject position and enacts discursively her close relationship with the maternal. Significantly, she continues speaking in her mother's voice while giving an account of Frances Rossetti's death: 'the night over, no rally: unconsciousness at last. [. . .] Mr. Nash prayed beside my bed-side, but I knew it not (?)' (p. 232). The parenthetical question mark exposes Rossetti's own subject position here as she speaks from and through the uncertainty of her mother's consciousness, literally (if tentatively) re-figuring the maternal at the mother's death. Only in an afterword to the diary after Frances Rossetti's death does she assume her own voice as a daughter: 'I, Christina G. Rossetti, happy and unhappy daughter of so dear a saint, write the last words' (p. 232). The ventriloquised, and, in the final entries, prosopopoeic, diary illustrates Christina Rossetti's ability to transpose subject positions between her own signature and that of her mother's. This dialectic translation from self to maternal and back again suggests a subject engaged with the (m)other, a subject-in-process that attempts to enjoy an intersubjectivity which questions the stability of identity.⁵⁵

Despite Rossetti's close identification with her mother, however, the attempt to forge in the poetry an intersubjective

⁵⁵See chapter 7.

dialogue between the subject and (m)other cannot completely free itself from androcentric axioms. Instead, what emerges are tropes of exchange which disclose both sameness and difference, underpinned by the endless return to the mother. In Rossetti's poetic language, the mother is depicted as the origin of love, the perfect precursor. *A Pageant and Other Poems* contains a dedicatory poem which celebrates maternal love in a love sonnet:

Sonnets are full of love, and this my tome
Has many sonnets: so here now shall be
One sonnet more, a love sonnet, from me
To her whose heart is my heart's quiet home,
To my first Love, my Mother, on whose knee
I learnt love-lore that is not troublesome
(C.ii.59; ll. 1-6)

There is a sense of addition, that this sonnet both supplements the oeuvre of love poems and also refers back to their origin. The speaker associates her mother with requited and restful love, whose heart is the resting place of the speaker's heart. In later lines the mother is the 'loadstar while I come and go' (l. 8), the point of stability to be returned to, the guide. The reciprocity of the love means that the speaker will dedicate the volume to the mother: 'I have woven a wreath / Of rhymes wherewith to crown your honoured name' (ll. 10-11). And, in the final couplet, the maternal love is seen to transcend all that is changeable: the flame of love's 'blessed glow transcends the laws / Of time and change and mortal life and death'. Along with the idealized picture, the speaker's emphatic insistence on her position as a daughter responding to the mother's love associates her with the passive. The maternal love is the ideal: all future love is

imperfect and there is always a return to the perfection of the origin, to the mother.

Rossetti also wrote Valentines to her mother for each year between 1877 and 1886 (C.iii.314-18). As a note in the manuscript explains,

These *Valentines* had their origin from my dearest Mother's remarking that she had never received one. I, her CGR, ever after supplied one on the day= & so far as I recollect it was a *surprise* every time, she having forgotten all about it in the interim.
(C.iii.487)

This note adds a narrative to the poems, attaches them through the anecdote to an origin, and suggests how the Valentines themselves form a repetitive pattern, written for the same day each year and each year surprising Frances Rossetti. In fact, the poems establish a thematic repetition attached to seasonal repetition, depicting maternal love as the superlative earthly love, pure and constant, and connecting the feast of St. Valentine with the proximity of spring, with all its typical symbolic overtones for Rossetti. For example: 'More shower than shine / Brings sweet St. Valentine' (1880; ll. 1-2); 'Too cold almost for hope of Spring' (1881; l. 1); and, furthermore, the feast day always comes at Winter's first sign of Spring, 'When life reawakens and hope in everything' (1886; l. 4). The topos of repetition also is evident in the Valentine for 1877, which describes the transformative effect of familial love:

Own Mother dear
We all rejoicing here
Wait for each other [. . .]
Till each dear face appear
Transfigured by Love's flame

Yet still the same,—
The same yet new,—
My face to you,
Your face to me,
Made lovelier by Love's flame
But still the same
(ll. 1-3, ll. 6-13).

The iteration of sameness despite the transfiguration tells of more than the retention of an individual's identity; for daughter and mother, sister and brother, are mirrored onto each other as the same and yet difference is retained between them, emphasised by the personal pronouns 'you' and 'me'.

As the ideal precursor to which all subsequent love refers but cannot equal, as 'embodied Love', 'A better sort of Venus with an air / Angelic from thoughts that dwell above' (1882; ll. 5-6), the mother represents domesticated asexual love which the subject always returns to. This suggests what Bronfen terms 'an economy of love based on repetition' (p. 324), a repetition that hinges on a paradox, for as well as returning to the primordial loss of the maternal body the repeated act marks a difference from that origin as well as establishing plurality. Repetition is the conflation of loss and addition, and: 'describes a longing for an identity between two terms, even as it stages the impossibility of literal identity' (p. 324). The wish to return to a full unity is frustrated at the very point at which it is desired.⁵⁶

⁵⁶The desire for the maternal should be distinguished from an inability of the subject metaphorically to separate from the mother, which is a psychic necessity, according to Kristeva in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, transl. by Leon S. Roudiez (Ithaca: Columbia University Press, 1989). In 'And the one doesn't stir without the other', *Signs* 7.1 (1981), 60-67, Luce Irigaray identifies the daughter's perception of the mother as one of two categories, the phallic or castrated mother. For the Victorians the identification of the daughter with the mother, and the daughter's struggle to forge a separate identity, is complicated by

In *Time Flies*, the St. Valentine's Day ceremony is seen to mediate between the worldly and the divine. Originally, the exchange of Valentines was a pagan ceremony and the history of the saint's day connects the exchange with love and with suffering, and so: 'the love exhibits a double aspect and accords, or should accord, with heaven as well as with earth' (p. 33). In the poetry, the desire of the feminine subject to align itself with the maternal testifies to a yearning for an original perfect wholeness that becomes the projected paradigm with which all love is compared. This is, however, also the utopian condition upon which the afterlife is desired: both origin and end, death and life converge in the association of the maternal unity with paradise. The fullest statement of this is 'Mother Country' (C.i.222), published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in March 1868 and then added to *Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1875). The poem begins with the question:

Oh what is that country
And where can it be,
Not mine own country,
But dearer far to me?
(ll. 1-4)

Only the title identifies this land as firmly maternal and also a land of origin. The speaker does not belong to the place, and possession of it is deferred, 'If one day I may see' (l. 6). The

the tendency to conflate, in legal, social and cultural discourses, femininity and maternity. See the discussion above, and Lila Hanft's article on *Sing-Song*.

Steven Connor argues that Rossetti's use of repetition is a destabilising force. Mary Arseneau, in contrast, sees it as an unproblematic expression of her Tractarian beliefs. See "Speaking Likenesses": Language and Repetition in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, *Victorian Poetry* 22 (1984), 439-448; and Arseneau, 'Incarnation and Repetition: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and *Goblin Market*', *Victorian Poetry* 31 (1993), 79-93.

attributes listed, however, suggest an exotic place, with spices, cedars, gold and ivory; but these are only intimated:

As I lie dreaming
It rises, that land;
There rises before me
Its green golden strand,
With the bowing cedars
And the shining sand;
It sparkles and flashes
Like a shaken brand.
(ll. 9-16)

The speaker now positions herself as dreaming and perceiving the land in glimpses. In the next stanza it becomes clear that she imagines herself as a Soul Sleeper who can catch the 'windy song' (l. 20) of the angels and understand their non-verbal communication, 'Like the rise of a high tide / Sweeping full and strong' (ll. 21-22). The subject is involved in a double projection: she positions herself as dead and, as a Soul Sleeper who dreams of the Resurrection, she anticipates the time when the dreams become real. The following stanzas emphasise the space of the grave as a social leveller and as a separation from the material world: 'Gone out of sight of all / Except our God' (ll. 47-48). And then, in the final three verses, the subject depicts herself in a retreat from language and at a point of repetition, as the afterlife is both an end and a beginning:

Shut into silence
From the accustomed song,
Shut into solitude
From all earth's throng [. . .]
Life made an end of,
Life but just begun,
Life finished yesterday,
Its last sand run;
Life new-born with the morrow,

Fresh as the sun:
While done is done for ever;
Undone, undone.
(ll. 49-53, ll. 57-64).

The repetition in the language mimics the theme that life and death coalesce. The final stanza, however, reverses the repetition: if the afterlife is life then it is also real, and the material world is a dream:

And if that life is life,
This is but a breath,
The passage of a dream
And the shadow of death
(ll. 65-68)

The poem works on the principle of repetition as both difference and sameness and, by imagining the afterlife as a utopia accessible through dream and non-verbal communication that juxtaposes life and death, also associates that land with the maternal, suggesting the pull of the *chora* in the desire for paradise.

* * * * *

The dyad Italy-maternal thus involves Rossetti's poetics in a negotiation of the parental and an associated intimation of the afterlife. Within this configuration the subject remains part of the representation system that would negate her subjectivity; yet the configuration allows for no surety within that axiom. It is precisely the instability of this framework that enables the gesturing towards the afterlife, and which promises the subject a reconstitution elsewhere, beyond the text. This procedure is

sanctified by Rossetti's religious beliefs, but the poetry retains an uncanniness, for the subject is always less than a subject and has inscribed already within itself its denotation as an object. And so any claim for autonomy beyond the text and beyond the temporal retains the androcentric binary construction here-elsewhere.⁵⁷

The special associations that Italy and the Italian language hold in the nineteenth-century construct Victorian women poets on one side of the Italian-English dyad, and retain the Italian as partially or completely alien. For Christina Rossetti's poetry, the loaded concept of Italy aligns the feminine subject with the maternal in an act of translation from the paternal. This is exemplified by the addressee of 'Il rosseggiar dell'Oriente', Cayley, the real-life translator of Dante Alighieri, whose rhetorical function in the sequence enables a translation and exchange from earth to heaven and between speaker and beloved.⁵⁸ In fact, both the beloved and the maternal attempt to reclaim Italy from the place of the father to the space of the mother. In this way, Rossetti is a translator *par excellence*: from father to mother, subject to other, home to Italy.⁵⁹ Margaret

⁵⁷Compare Barbara Johnson's comments about the impossibility of leaving behind binary oppositions: 'the very impulse to "go beyond" is an impulse structured by a binary opposition between oneself and what one attempts to leave behind', *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. xi.

⁵⁸Denman and Smith comment on Rossetti's annotations of Cayley's translation of Dante as part of a wider Pre-Raphaelite concern with translations: 'while the major themes of the Pre-Raphaelite poets include the translation of *eros* into *agape*, of Italian medieval art into English Victorian art, and while Rossetti herself certainly expressed these with power in her poetry, the annotations in her copy of Cayley's Dante point to a humbler engagement with translations, from the glorious words of her idolized Dante into the awkward efforts of her beloved friend.' See Kamilla Denman and Sarah Smith, 'Christina Rossetti's Copy of C. B. Cayley's *Divine Comedy*', *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994), 315-38 (pp. 329-30).

⁵⁹Rosenblum notes that Rossetti's poems on Italy: 'show how profoundly she is a *translator*: of the language of patriarchal tradition, of the language of scripture and into the language of scripture, of English into Italian into English again' (*Christina*

Waller, introducing her translation of Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*, argues that the act of translation itself effaces the 'paternal' text:

In representing what is textually 'other', the translation inevitably appropriates the 'alien' through the familiar. Indeed, inasmuch as it replaces the previous work, a translation is not only a transformation of that text but also its elimination: the homage paid is a covert form of parricide.
(p. vii)⁶⁰

For Rossetti, however, this elimination is not so clear: Italy is not wholly translated into the familiar, and, as well as bearing maternal connotations, Italy retains its uncanny otherness.

Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance, p. 51). Rossetti was interested in acts of translation, assisting the projects of W. M. Rossetti and Cayley, as well as translating *Sing-Song* into Italian.

⁶⁰Compare Barbara Johnson's comments on J. Hillis Miller's 'The Critic as Host', that the parasite is feminine and parricidal, a daughter. See *A World of Difference* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 36. See also J. Hillis Miller, 'The Critic as Host', *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1979), pp. 217-53.



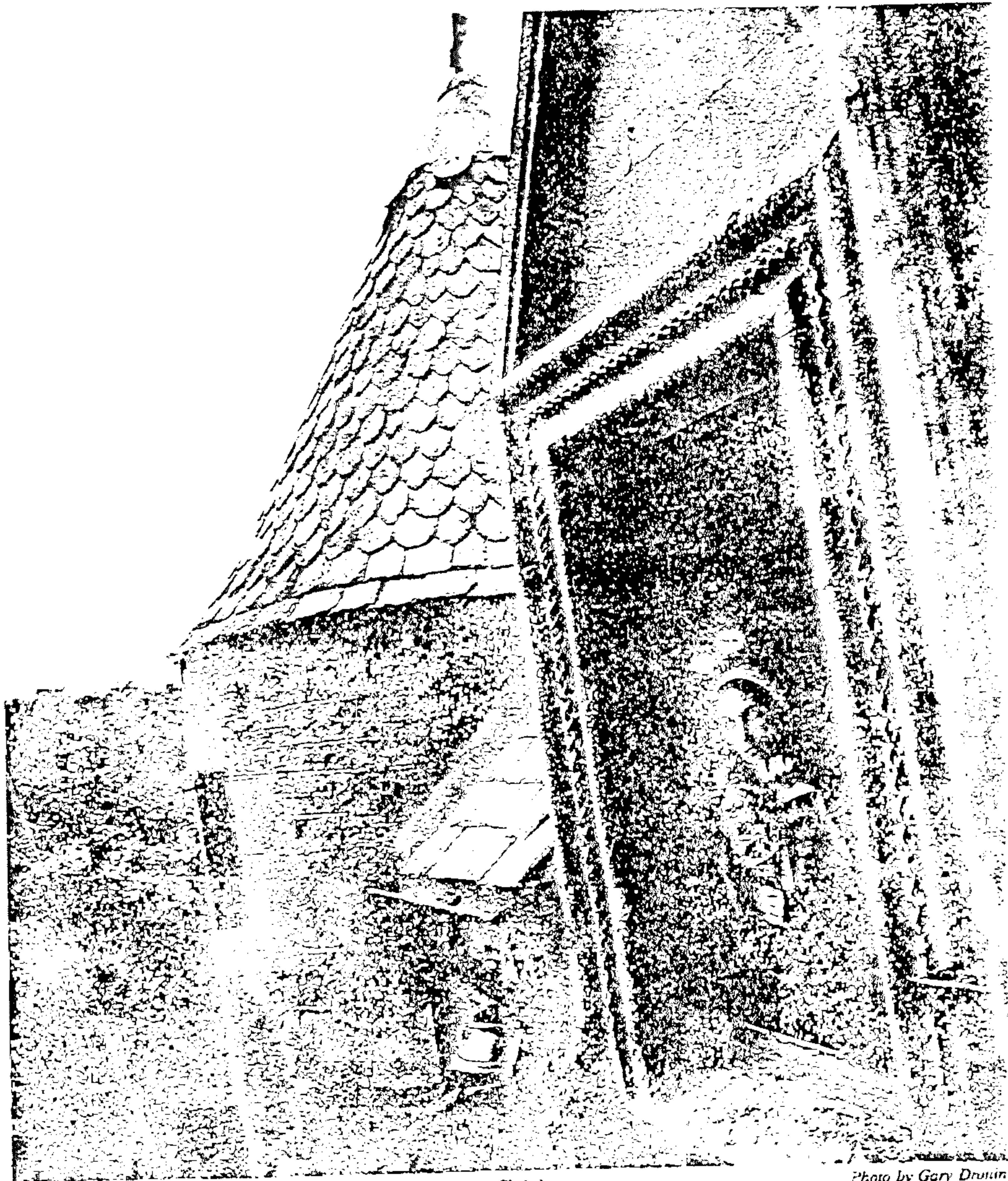
THE ORDER OF THE OWL

NEWSLETTER OF THE PENKILL FOUNDATION

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IN THE BLEAK MID-WINTER CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AT PENKILL CASTLE

by Hugh Taylor



Christina Rossetti at her Penkill Bedroom Window: Lila Cano as Christina

Photo by Gary Druin

Plate 1: Photograph of a model dressed as Christina Rossetti at her Penkill bedroom window



Plate 2: Chalk drawing of Christina Rossetti, by D. G. Rossetti, 1866

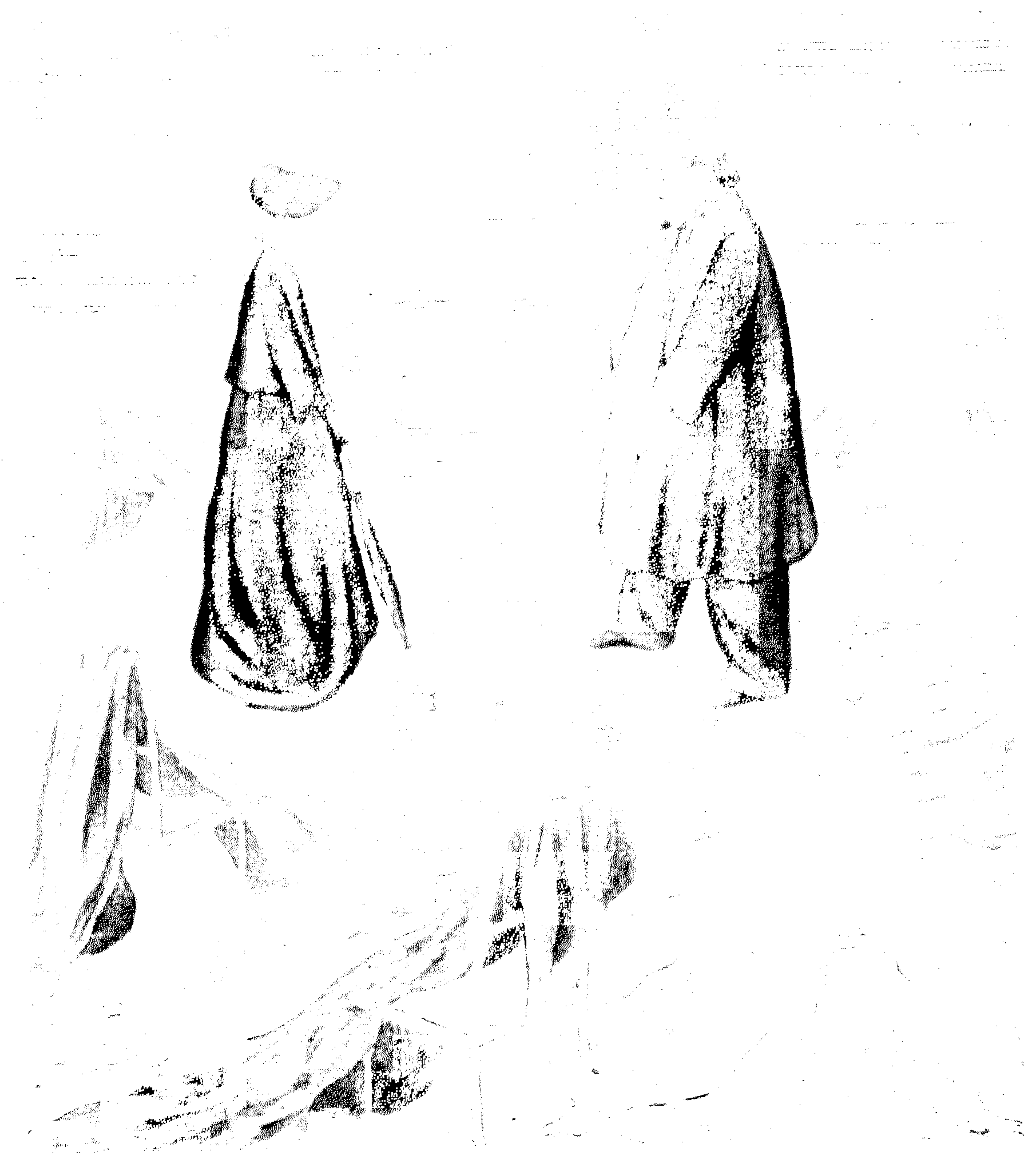


Plate 3: Cartoon of Christina and D. G. Rossetti, by Max Beerbohm



Plate 4: Chalk drawing of Christina Rossetti, by D. G. Rossetti, 1877



Plate 5: Studio photograph of Christina Rossetti, 1877

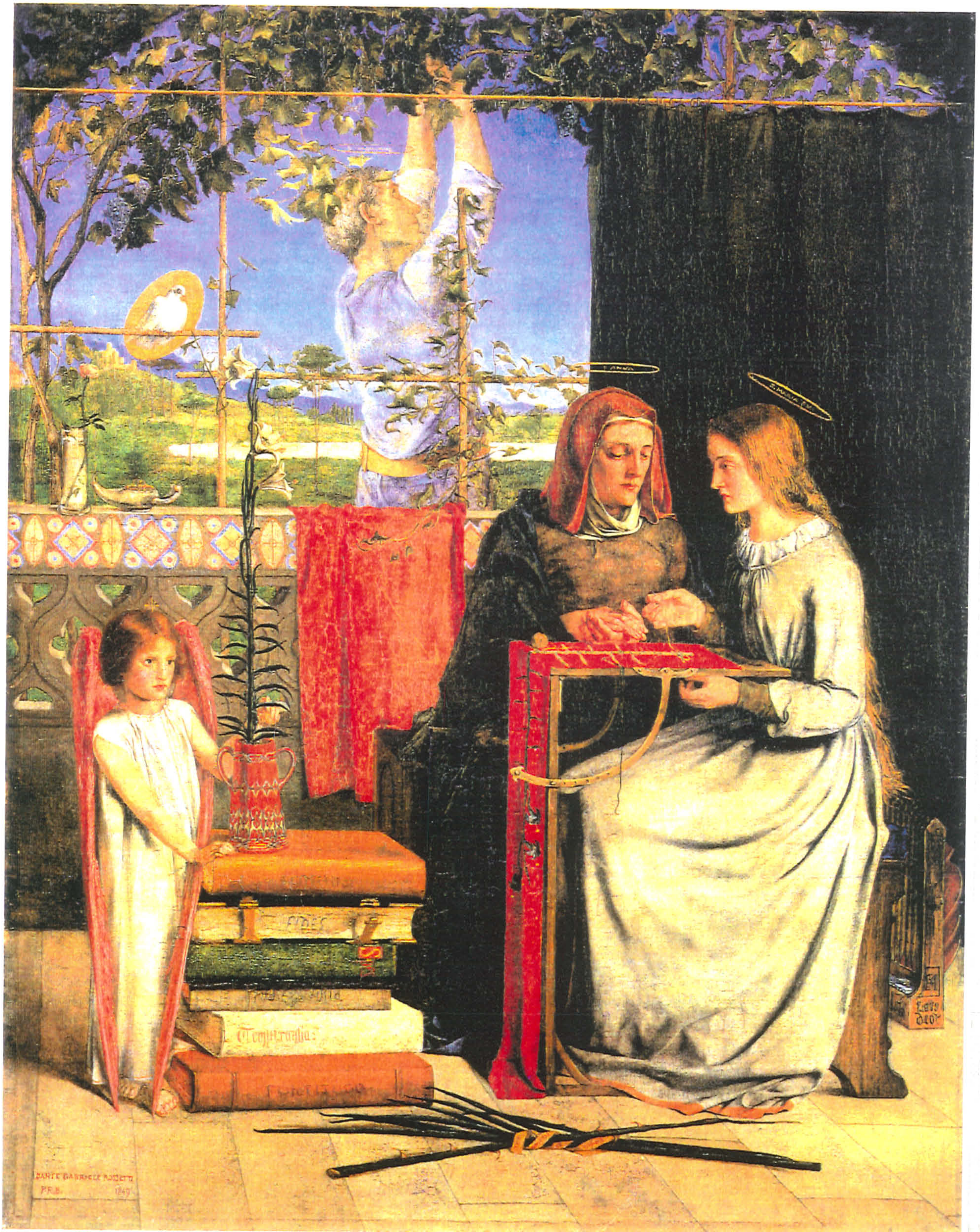


Plate 6: *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, by D. G. Rossetti, 1849



Plate 7: *The Annunciation*, by D. G. Rossetti, 1850



Plate 8: *O Ye That Walk in Willow Wood*, painted gesso, by Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 1903-4



Plate 9: Photograph of Julia Jackson, by Julia Margaret Cameron, April 1867

Chapter 5

The Rhetoric of Analogy: 'Monna Innominata' and 'Later Life'

Love is our parallel unending line
Whose only perfect Parallel is Christ,
Beginning not begun, End without end.
— 'Later Life', sonnet 7 (C.ii.141)

The feminine must be deciphered as inter-dict: within the signs or between them, between the realized meanings, between the lines.
— Luce Irigaray (*Speculum*, p. 22)

The rhetoric of analogy inflects nineteenth-century discursive practices. In the Romantic and post-Romantic debate over the priority of metaphor, allegory, or typology, the concept of analogy and its rhetorical function — most simply defined as a parallel between comparable things — underpins attempts at the definition of literary terms. Most significantly, analogy is the subtext in the critical discourse of subject and object that dominates the debate on figurative language. This discourse evolves from the Romantic concern to establish configurations of the self and nature to the mid-nineteenth-century concern with the relation between poetic subject and other.

As a literary figure which gives privilege to sameness and represses difference, analogy is also the linch-pin of the logic of the same, the basis of the androcentric representational system. Luce Irigaray, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, critiques

this Freudian paradigm of sexual difference whilst also syntactically parodying its repetition of sameness:

the desire for the same, for the self-identical, the self (as) same, and again of the similar, the alter ego and, to put it in a nutshell, the desire of the auto . . . the homo . . . the male, dominates the representational economy. 'Sexual difference' is a derivation of the problematics of sameness, it is, now and forever, determined within the project, the projection, the sphere of representation, the same. The 'differentiation' into two sexes derives from the a priori assumption of the same, since the little girl is, must become a man minus certain attributes whose paradigm is morphological—attributes capable of determining, of assuring, the reproduction-specularization of the same.
(pp. 26-27)

The woman's perceived lack endlessly proliferates the desire for sameness with the man as a reflex of the castration complex (see chapter 3). Irigaray argues, furthermore, that the only place outside of this economy for women is death (p. 27).

Christina Rossetti's sonnet sequences 'Monna Innominata' and 'Later Life' explore questions of difference and sameness in relation to the traditional subject-other dyad of the genre. Although her religious ideology posits God as the same, in whom all differences collapse, for 'we and all creatures are all alike in God's hands', her attempt to inscribe this transcendental signified is frustrated.¹ Writing from a superlative position in the representational system as both subject and other, poet and muse, the rhetoric of analogy in the sonnet sequences exposes the 'uneven work' (Poovey) of her competing ideological positions as a post-Romantic, Tractarian, and female poet. But

¹ *Time Flies*, April 10, p. 69. This spiritual diary offers many other examples of differences collapsing into the sameness of God, such as May 1 (pp. 83-4), October 28 (p. 207), December 1-3 (pp. 229-32).

the gap between belief and poetical praxis does not merely place the subject in the position of death, Irigaray's other side of the androcentric economy.² Rather, Rossetti's sonnet sequences expose the tenuousness of the logic of the same and, in so doing, the difference repressed in both the rhetoric of analogy and the paradigm of sexual difference returns to gesture to alternative representational axioms.

* * * * *

Coleridge, in *Aids to Reflection* (1825, 1831), suggests that analogy operates behind symbols and works by iterating sameness between different manifestations of a single subject (or rather repressing their difference), whereas metaphor presents a sameness between similar subjects:

Analogies are used in aid of conviction: metaphors as a means of illustration. The language is analogous whenever a thing, power, or principle in a higher dignity is expressed by the same thing, power, or principle in a lower but more known form. [. . .] Analogies are the material, or (to speak chemically) the *base*, of symbols and symbolical expressions; the nature of which is always *tautological* (i.e. expressing the *same* subject but with a difference) in contradistinction from metaphors and similitudes, that are always *allegorical* (i.e. expressing the same subject but with a resemblance).³

²Mary Finn argues that the sonnets testify to the predicament of the religious writer in the nineteenth-century attempting to represent belief: 'Monna Innominata' through an ill-concealed failure to revise an earlier tradition and 'Later Life' through the anarchism of the religious mind in turmoil. Finn does not, however, discuss the Tractarian doctrines that inform the failure of the sonnets. See *Writing the Incommensurable: Kierkegaard, Rossetti, and Hopkins* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp. 130-55.

³*The Oxford Authors: Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by H. J. Jackson (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1985), p. 672.

The distinction between the tautological and the allegorical is defined in the parentheses to be a relation of 'difference' to 'resemblance'; but in both the significant point is that, inherently, analogy and metaphor inscribe difference within sameness. *The Statesman's Manual* (1816) offers a further attempt to define the operation of analogy behind symbolic language by reference to the subject-object dialectic:

It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognises no medium between *literal* and *metaphorical*. [. . .] Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses. [. . .] On the other hand a symbol [. . .] is characterised by a translucence of the special in the individual or of the general in the especial or of the universal in the general. Above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative.
(p. 661)

The juxtaposition of both passages suggests that the attempt to give priority to the symbol above allegory gives priority to analogy's function behind the semantics of the symbol at its very inception, or '*base*'. Further, it is the analogous nature of the symbol that allows the function of 'the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal', and which gives the symbol its tautologous nature, the repetition of sameness 'with a difference'. The denotation of 'translucence' is highly ambiguous, for it encompasses both transparency and opacity and thus is indicative of a liminal state. Further, Coleridge manoeuvres the

term to denote a crossing over between the temporal and eternal that operates in the field of vision.⁴

In his discussion of this passage, Paul de Man chronicles the movement in literary history whereby symbol supplants allegory in a world-vision that consists of a configuration of symbols leading to a totality or unity of meaning, Coleridge's 'whole'.⁵ Within this movement, however, de Man suggests that because there is a crucial and painful distinction between perception of reality and its representation in language, the rhetoric of landscape description does not suggest symbolic language but the operation of allegory, which is defined as the translation of concepts into a 'picture language' which in turn derives from perception ('objects of the senses'). The use of 'translation' carries the sense of separateness and foreignness, the alienation of the subject from the referent.⁶ The insistence

⁴M. H. Abrams discusses the priority of the symbol's indefiniteness over allegory's conceptual specificity in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988), pp. 184-6. He gives a passage from Goethe's *Maxims and Reflections*, Nos. 279, 1112, 1113:

There is a great difference, whether the poet seeks the particular for the sake of the general or seeks the general in the particular. From the former procedure there ensues allegory, in which the particular serves only as illustration, as example of the general. The latter procedure, however, is genuinely the nature of poetry; it expressed something particular, without thinking of the general or pointing to it.

Allegory transforms the phenomenon into a concept, the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept always remains bounded in the image, and is entirely to be kept and held in it, and to be expressed by it.

Symbolism [however] transforms the phenomenon into an idea, the idea into an image, and in such a way that the idea always remains infinitely active and unapproachable in the image, and even if expressed in all languages, still would remain inexpressible.
(p. 186)

⁵Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 188.

⁶Note, however, that Coleridge's struggle to define allegory contradicts itself here. In the passage from *Aids to Reflection*, the comparison between symbol and allegory yields a definition that sees a greater distance between the same subjects in symbols

on 'translucence' suggests to de Man the importance of origins, represented by Coleridge as a transcendental source which *supersedes* the perception of the material world and thus also supersedes the gap between self and material referent, the gap that allegory presents as the space between the primary and secondary levels of signification (de Man, pp.192-93). Hence, the symbol has become spiritualised and its operation is that of the Coleridgean definition of allegory: any insistence on *sameness*, on continuity between tenor and vehicle, is elided. The result is to give priority to the self over material perception and vision, and that: 'the relationship with nature has been superseded by an intersubjective, interpersonal relationship that, in the last analysis, is a relationship of the subject toward itself' (p. 196). Ultimately, de Man argues, the dialectic of subject and object is replaced by a reflexive relationship of the subject to itself within the *temporality* of allegory; a unified system of signs or a continuous configuration of symbols is not offered, nor a transcendence of material perception, but rather a language of distance and difference, a system of allegorical signs that gives priority to the subject (pp. 207-8).⁷

For Christina Rossetti, this *aporia* of Romantic literary discourse that celebrates allegory in the name of symbol, that supersedes the subject-object dialectic with an emphasis upon the subject in a system of allegorical signs, is complicated by a Tractarian inheritance that would urge the importance of the

(i.e. symbols express 'the same subject but with a difference', allegories 'with a resemblance'). This is despite terming symbols tautological, which would suggest the iteration of like subjects.

⁷Compare Walter Benjamin: 'allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things,' *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 178.

object in analogy.⁸ As she comments in *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite*, the object supersedes the subject in its divine message: 'common things continually at hand, wind or windfall or budding bough, acquire a sacred association, and cross our path under aspects at once familiar and transfigured, and preach to our spirits while they serve our bodies.'⁹ Further, 'to exercise natural perception becomes a reproach to us, if along with it we exercise not spiritual perception. Objects of sight may and should quicken us to apprehend objects of faith, things temporal suggesting things eternal' (p. 180). The Romantic fracture of object and subject, manifested in the discontinuous system of allegorical signs, is turned back in Rossetti's poetry to become a *discontinuous chain of signs*, a crossing over of the Coleridgean symbol's indefiniteness and allegory's specificity, and a return to the source or 'base' of symbolic language. It is in her sonnet sequence 'Monna Innominata' that such an operation is manifested, for the love sonnet offers the traditional site for exploring sameness and difference in terms of gender.

The Tractarians were influenced by Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion* (1736) which presents the transformations

⁸Rossetti's position as a Tractarian poet is well documented. The major study of Tractarian poetics includes an account of Rossetti's place in the tradition of Keble, Newman and Williams, as well as an analysis of Rossetti's status as Tractarian. See G. B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). This has been supplemented more recently by, for example, Harrison (*Christina Rossetti in Context*), Arseneau ('Incarnation and Repetition'), and Linda Schofield ('Being and Understanding: Devotional Poetry of Christina Rossetti and the Tractarians', in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 301-21). Aside from W. David Shaw's *Victorians and Mystery* and *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age* (London: Athlone, 1987), no critic has pointed out the problematics of Rossetti's Tractarian beliefs in praxis.

⁹*Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite* (London: S.P.C.K., 1879), p. 203.

of nature as evidence, analogously, for the existence of a future life.¹⁰ This concept was further developed by James Buchanan, whose *Analogy* (1864) asserts that the seen and the temporal are analogous to things unseen and eternal; thus, language is capable of transcendence beyond the human and the temporal.¹¹ Rossetti herself formulates this doctrine in her devotional commentary, for example in *Letter and Spirit*:

we should exercise that far higher privilege which appertains to Christians, of having 'the mind of Christ'; and then the two worlds, visible and invisible, will become familiar to us even as they are to Him (if reverently we may say so), as double against each other.¹²

And in *Seek and Find*, there is a further explanation of the double worlds and an emphasis on the importance of the scopic:

Thus we learn that to exercise natural perception becomes a reproach to us, if along with it we exercise not spiritual perception. Objects of sight may and should quicken us to apprehend objects of faith, things temporal suggesting things eternal.
(p. 180)

Tractarianism assimilated analogy as central to sacramentalism, which for Newman is: 'the doctrine that material phenomena are both the types and instruments of real things unseen.'¹³ The reassertion of a temporal totality of

¹⁰Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (London: Bell and Daldy 1736; repr. 1857).

¹¹James Buchanan, *Analogy, Considered as a Guide to Truth, and Applied as an Aid to Faith* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1864). And see Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 13.

¹²*Letter and Spirit* (London: SPCK, 1883), p.131.

¹³John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being A History of His Religious Opinions* (London: Longmans, 1890), p. 18. For Isaac Williams, the sacraments are to be understood in terms of the doctrine of reserve. See 'On Reserve in

meanings which can be read as signifying spiritual transcendent truths reworks the Romantic separation between subject and object, and the corresponding priority of the subject; for the Tractarians, the analogy gives priority to the visual object within the temporal world which is itself figured as a semantic construct, as a field of signs. Further, Keble defines analogy as vast and types as infinite.¹⁴

Ruskin's aesthetics, as represented in the *Modern Painters* volumes, suggests such an insistence upon the visual world as the basis for analogous discourse that signifies spiritual truths.¹⁵ As Chris Brooks notes, the attack on Romanticism in the demand for a formal demarcation between perceiver and perceived presents a sharp distinction between subject and object in which the *object* is supreme:¹⁶

Ruskinian aesthetics rests upon a radical dualism, an absolute distinction between inner and outer reality, subject and object, and an *a priori* assertion of the supremacy of the object. *Ex hypothesi*, external nature is inviolable. *Ex hypothesi*, again, any alteration in that nature initiated by the individual consciousness is not only mistaken, it is immoral, an act of human presumption.¹⁷

Communicating Religious Knowledge', Tract 87 of *Tracts for the Times*, 6 vols (Oxford: James Parker, 1868), vol. 5, pp. 88-93.

¹⁴John Keble, *On the Mysticism Attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church*, Tract 89 of *Tracts for the Times*, vol. 6, p. 176.

¹⁵I maintain a distinction between the subjective and the spiritual, the latter relating to an assumption that the referent or object seen embodies the spiritual, whilst the subjective would resist such an 'objective' perception of the material referent.

¹⁶As de Man notes, a Romantic protection strategy was to hide from the painful awareness that the self and nature were separate by, in the intersubjective quest, borrowing the temporal stability of nature and asserting the value of the symbol over allegory; thus blurring, apparently, the distinction between subject and object (pp. 207-8).

¹⁷Chris Brooks, *Signs For the Times: Symbolic Realism in the Mid-Victorian World* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 115.

To the post-Romantic consciousness, however, there is an acknowledgement that the object cannot attain a separation and purity distinct from the subject. Although the emphasis upon the natural world gives the sign (as the semantic equivalent of the object) supremacy, any insistence upon the sign must also acknowledge the signified, for the object is experienced through perception and is thus inseparable from the subject (de Man, p. 193). Perception always presupposes the signified. Ruskin is unable, rhetorically, to fulfil his aesthetics; as Gary Wihl asserts, with reference to the sign of truth as both a distinct conceptualisation and also universal:

it really is as a *substitutive* conceptualization that the sign obtains universality. Ruskin says the sign is like a 'word' in that it 'substitutes' for direct perception. [. . .] The sign is definite in its signification yet capable of being infinitely repeated in a chain of substitutions, and so in various contexts.¹⁸

This substitutive function sets up a chain of signs that dangerously proliferate.¹⁹ Although, as Wihl points out (see above), Ruskin attempts to maintain a distinction between likeness (perceived by the senses) and the sign of truth, in practice that sign behaves like the slippery visual signs that Ruskin disparages in order to attain a universality or truthfulness.

Similarly, the sign of truth, or divine meaning, can only function in analogous discourse by a chain of referents that

¹⁸Gary Wihl, *Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 23.

¹⁹For Keble proliferation is an integral feature of analogy, what he terms an: 'eager profuse way of heaping simile upon simile, something not unlike St. Paul's manner of passing rapidly, even in the gravest arguments, from one analogy to another more or less connected with it' (*Tract 89*, p. 183).

announce their status as referential only to admit the signified. Further, in the doctrine of analogy (as well as in typology) the antitype, the divine meaning, is always presupposed, always the given, and thus is prior to the type.²⁰ As Rossetti herself declares in *The Face of the Deep*: 'the antitype determines the type, not this that.'²¹ Keble also, in *Tract 89*, insists on the word of God as prior in analogies of nature (*Tract 89*, pp. 140-43).²² In this way, the rhetoric of analogy transforms signified (divine meaning) into sign (the Word). Although each analogous unit has a temporal and eternal portion, meaning is pre-ordained, a sign in its own right, and analogy as transcendence is frustrated by the slippery proliferation of signs. Wihl concludes that, for Ruskin, 'the sign is totally eclipsed by the signified' (p. 23); but the point is also that its signified may simply be another sign which may be substituted by yet another temporal sign. The result of this chain of signs confuses sign and signified, object and subject, and denies a stable demarcation between difference and sameness. The sign is both cause and effect of this significatory practice.

My attempt to posit a framework that moves between Coleridgean, Tractarian, and Ruskinian definitions of subject-object discourses proposes a rhetoric of analogy that disrupts the aesthetic of representation by resisting any pure and formal

²⁰W. David Shaw also points this out in relation to typology: 'in trying to decipher the Bible's "great code of art", both the liberal and conservative hermeneutic critics share at least one assumption. They profess to discover meaning rather than to create it.' Thus: 'in a typological system [. . .] the normal relation of cause and effect is reversed. The type is related to its antitype, not as cause to effect, but as effect to cause' (*The Lucid Veil*, p. 188, p. 190).

²¹*The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 1892), p. 380.

²²Much space in this tract is given over to vindicating the natural world as a set of types to be read in the same way as the Old Testament is in typology; see, for example, p. 167.

demarcation between subject and object. This, furthermore, questions Ruskin's substitution of object for perceived object as already acknowledging the influx of the subject into objectivity and the visual. The love sonnet exhibits such a mode of discourse most forcefully, for it posits a rhetoric of sexual difference in analogous terms that would, by traditionally figuring the beloved as a mirror, identify the speaker by virtue of a passive other; in fact, the genre posits rhetoric *as* sexual difference, as a play of difference operating in the mode of analogy. As Irigaray comments: 'to return to the question of sexual difference is therefore rather a new passage [*retraversée*] through analogism.'²³

The Rossettian generic paradigm was Dante's *Vita Nuova*, which D. G. Rossetti translated as part of his *Early Italian Poets* volume. Dante Alighieri's narrative, interspersed with poetry, is annotated by D. G. Rossetti, who suggests in a footnote that the speaker's beloved Beatrice functions as both actual and metaphorical.²⁴ At the point in the narrative where Dante condemns his love for the '*donna della finestra*', D. G. Rossetti suggests she is in fact Dante Alighieri's wife, Gemma Donati, and adds:

Such a passing conjecture [. . .] would of course imply an admission of what I believe to lie at the heart of all true Dantesque commentary; that is, the existence always of the actual events even where the allegorical superstructure has been raised by Dante himself.
(*CW: DGR*, vol. 2, p. 89)²⁵

²³*Ce sexe qui n'est pas un*, transl. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); the translation is by Toril Moi (in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 141).

²⁴Compare Gabriele Rossetti's allegorical reading of Dante Alighieri.

²⁵W. M. Rossetti's endnote to this volume claims that he has added some footnotes, but does not identify which (p. 517).

In Dante's narrative, however, the suggestion that Beatrice is both historically verifiable and a spiritual symbol is part of a process whereby Beatrice *becomes* what she represents, transferring her from sign to signified; thus the distance between autobiographical and spiritual narratives is obscured, in particular in moments of epiphany such as the *salute*. Further, the ambiguous nature of the referent 'Beatrice' means that she is not approached directly, but through substitution. For example, Dante's line of vision to Beatrice in the early church scene is misinterpreted by another lady, who thinks he gazes with love at her. This lady is used 'as a screen to the truth' (vol. 2, p. 35) to fool others. The speaker sometimes presents his emotions in his love sonnets in the third person. The '*donna della finestra*' operates similarly as a substitute for Beatrice's actual presence, for she looks upon grief and then herself grieves. Dante's heart speaks:

[. . .] 'Be no more at strife
'Twixt doubt and doubt: this is Love's messenger
And speaketh but his words, from him received;
And all the strength it owns and all the life
It draweth from the gentle eyes of her
Who, looking on our grief, hath often grieved.'
(vol. 2, p. 90)

The cross over between historical person and symbol reveals Beatrice to be both sign and signified, a substitutive entity for the speaker, and both a value of exchange in the speaker's oscillation between public and private discourse and a metaphor

for this meaning process itself.²⁶ D. G. Rossetti's comments to his namesake's narrative suggest an awareness of the beloved's role in such a signficatory system, and a later remark by Christina Rossetti to her other brother also registers an interest in the denotation of the beloved as sign and/or signified (see chapter 4):

does any one dispute the *existence* of Beatrice Bardi, nata Portinari? I should fancy the point of any such controversy might be limited to the question of her identity or otherwise with the surnameless Beatrice of Dante's immortalisation.
(*CR: FL*, p. 188)²⁷

As the paradigmatic Rossettian beloved, the interpretation of Beatrice forms part of the representational system that seems to give priority to the object over the subject, but in the end must admit the overlap between visual sign and speaking subject. Christina Rossetti's sonnet sequences also participate in the courtly love ideology that shapes the generic nature of the beloved, but this is inflected by the failure to project her Tractarian beliefs in the priority of the object onto the representation of the beloved as prior to the subject. The interweaving of the love sonnet tradition with competing Romantic and Tractarian ideologies means that the beloved takes on the position as the object in the analogy. But in these poems the inability to escape from a slippery chain of signs exposes an investment in elliptical narratives, in the liminal, and in the

²⁶Chapter 1 discusses woman as exchange value and metaphor for the signification system in relation to biographical representations of Christina Rossetti.

²⁷Christina Rossetti's preface to 'Monna Innominata', however, claims that Beatrice and Laura 'have come down to us resplendent with charms but [. . .] scant of attractiveness' (C.ii.86), because they are silent 'donne innominate' who do not speak for themselves.

interstice. Within this gap between sign and sign, the feminine subject is located.

The importance of generic origins in disclosing the sonnet's relation with analogy is also informed by an analysis of the Victorian fascination with the sonnet. Nineteenth-century commentators on the sonnet gives priority to the form's natural propensity for self-reflexive doubleness and rhythmical waves. James Noble Ashcroft, in *The Sonnet and Other Essays*, argues for the sonnet's organic 'impressive unity' and terms it 'literature within a literature, a domain within a domain'.²⁸ This sense of the sonnet's inherent self-reflexive doubleness is also suggested by the Rev. Matthew Russell's anthology *Sonnets on the Sonnet*, which encapsulates the Victorian interest in the sonnet revival and presents a collection of sonnets which comment on the sonnet form itself, and in particular on the contemporary debate concerning the relative merits of the Shakespearean (or English) and Petrarchan sonnet forms. The relation between the octave and sestet is compared to harmonious music in George A. Greene's sonnet, suggesting their organic relation and mutual interdependence:

I hear the quatrains' rolling melody,
The second answering back her sister's sounds
Like a repeated music, that resounds
A second time with varying harmony:

Then comes the tercets with full-voiced reply,
And close the solemn strain in sacred
bounds,

²⁸James Noble Ashcroft, *The Sonnet and Other Essays* (London: John Lane, 1896), p. 10, pp. 62-63.

While all the time one growing thought expounds
One palpitating passion's ecstasy.²⁹

The sonnet is described as a rhythmical wave, obeying natural law, by William Sharp in the introduction to his selection *Sonnets of this Century*. In general terms, he defines poetry as 'the dynamic condition of the imaginative and rhythmical faculties in combination, finding expression verbally and metrically — and the animating principle is always of necessity greater than the animated form, as the soul is superior to the body'.³⁰ The Petrarchan sonnet form, in particular, and in Theodore Watts's formulation, is 'based on a natural melodic law' akin to a wave's ebb and flow (Sharp, p. lxi). Harriet H. Robinson's 'The Sonnet Sonnetised', given in *Sonnets on the Sonnet*, suggests that 'The sonnet is mechanical in part, / In part ideal': a song which must adhere to the constraints of the Petrarchan form from which, with the last rhyme, it achieves 'a breath divine— / In charmed flight towards immortality' (Russell, p. 17; ll. 1-2, ll. 13-14). 'What is a Sonnet?' (anonymous) suggests that it 'is the body of a thought' which is transient and fleeting, needing shape and form (Russell, p. 16). Wordsworth's sonnet on the sonnet also suggests that the sonnet's form is analogous with a hermit's cell, or a 'scanty plot of ground', whose limits can be exceeded (Russell, p. 23).

Sonnets on the Sonnet suggests a contemporary concern to define the sonnet in terms of other physical forms: its self-reflexivity emerges analogously: 'The sonnet is a diamond

²⁹Matthew Russell, ed., *Sonnets on the Sonnet: An Anthology* (London: Longmans and Green, 1898), p. 9, ll. 1-8.

³⁰William Sharp, *Sonnets of this Century* (London: Walter Scott, 1886), p. xxvii.

flashing round', 'The sonnet is the body of a thought', 'A sonnet should be like a dewdrop, round', 'What is a sonnet? 'Tis the pearly shell / That murmurs of the far-off, murmuring sea', 'What is a sonnet? 'Tis a silver bell / That keepeth with its mates melodious chime' (Russell, p. 74, p. 73, p. 73, p. 60, p. 15.). In fact, the Petrarchan form's octave and sestet in itself lends the internal structure to analogy. It is this sense of internal division which D. G. Rossetti's sonnets typically exploit, suggested by his prefatory sonnet to the sequence *The House of Life*,

A Sonnet is a moment's monument,—
 Memorial from the Soul's eternity
 To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,
 Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,
 Of its own arduous fulness reverent:
 Carve it in ivory or in ebony,
 As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see
 Its flowering crest impearled and orient.

A Sonnet is a coin: its face reveals
 The soul, —its converse, to what Power 'tis due:—
 Whether for tribute to the august appeals
 Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue,
 It serve; or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,
 In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death.³¹

The sense of the sonnet's inherent physical shape is again suggested here in an analogy between the sonnet form and a monument to the moment, or a coin which denotes the soul and, conversely, the debt to either Life/Love or Death. But the internal structure also sets up a comparison between the sonnet as a monument and the sonnet as a coin, an analogy in which the

³¹Reprinted in Russell's collection, p. 25. Here I use, however, W. M. Rossetti's edition of his brother's poems (*CW: DGR*, vol. 1, p. 176), from which the sonnet anthology differs in capitalisation.

octave and sestet sit uneasily together. Within each analogy there is a further sense of doubleness: the oxymoron 'dead deathless' encapsulating the paradoxical nature of the comparisons. The monument may either be 'for lustral rite or dire portent', and belong to either Day or Night. The sonnet-coin, itself inherently double-sided, is empowered to Life/Love or death. As chapter 3 argues, the construction of one as the obverse of the other transpires in D. G. Rossetti's sequence to be an uneasy and unstable binary opposition, epitomised by the representations of the fading, death-like beloved Lizzie Siddall.

Not only is analogy an inherent facet of the Petrarchan sonnet form, as is suggested in contemporary sonnet critiques, but it bears a significant relation to the rhetoric of sexual difference in the love sonnet. The construction of the feminine emerges excessively in the tropes, structure and theme of Rossetti's 'Monna Innominata'. This seems to be an implicit commentary upon Barrett Browning's rhetorical exchange between the feminine and the masculine in the 'Sonnets From the Portuguese', which is attempt to empower a feminine subject position with reference to the powerful masculine other, who is also depicted as a successful poet belonging to the masculine realm of public articulation.³² The analogy between successful love relations and the articulation of the feminine subject would seem to replace this radical empowering of the feminine back within literary tradition, which presents the female as passively dependent upon her male lover. Recent feminist critics have suggested that Barrett Browning's 'Sonnets From the

³²*The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), pp. 318-27.

Portuguese' represent the female speaker's, and Barrett Browning's, passage from entrapment within a masculine poetic tradition to a powerful feminine poetic voice. Helen Cooper summarises this progression: 'the *Sonnets* record the transformation of woman from muse/helpmeet/object into poet/creator/subject.'³³ Similarly, Dorothy Mermin asserts that, in the sequence, 'this is not a reversal of roles, but a doubling of them. There are *two* poets in the poem, and *two* poets' beloveds, and its project is the utopian one of replacing hierarchy by equality. The plot, too, doubles gender roles, subject and object.'³⁴ Mermin's exploration of the various doubles in the sonnets is suggestive, but rather than an indication (as she implies) of *fixed* gender and subject-object doubling, the proliferation of various pairs is indicative of a type of *exchange* of gender positions between the speaker and addressee in a process of translation and transferral. It is thus apt that the title of the sonnet sequence, erroneously suggesting that the poems were originally in the Portuguese language, points to translation as a significant trope. This is most evident in the beginning sonnets of the sequence, where the subject and beloved rhetorically jockey for position.

The sequence begins by presenting the speaker in terms of the cultural construction of the feminine, occupying a position associated with melancholy, passivity, weakness, illness and death. The first sonnet suggests, however, that an exchange is being initiated between love and death: by thus distinguishing

³³Helen Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woman and Artist* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 100.

³⁴Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 130.

the difference between romantic love and death, there is a struggle to define the feminine in terms other than the representational system's metonymical equivalence of the feminine with death.

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,—
'Guess now who holds thee?' — 'Death,' I said. But,
there,
The silver answer rang, — 'Not Death, but Love.'
(Sonnet 1)

The speaker thinks of Theocritus, adopting 'his antique tongue', who tells how each year brings a gift by a 'gracious hand'. This hand then appears: it belongs to the 'mystic Shape' misread by the speaker for death. Commentators have noted how the reference is to the *Iliad* I.204, where Athene prevents Achilles from fighting Agamemnon, who thus *chooses* love over death (Cooper, p. 102).³⁵ But whereas Athene grasps the golden locks of Achilles and asks him to choose between love and death, the speaker in the sonnet is given no choice: love holds her, not death. This sequence of transferrals, translations and substitutions — Theocritus's antique tongue as the language of the speaker's musings, the hand of Theocritus and Athene as the

³⁵Homer, *The Iliad*, transl. by E. V. Rieu (London: Penguin, 1950; repr. 1988), pp. 28-29.

mystic hand of Love, the mistaking of the hand as that of death personified — generates an exchange between love and death which, as the sequence progresses, becomes, additionally, an exchange between the masculine and feminine. To abandon death for love, it is implied, necessitates a shift of socially fixed gender positions.

In the following sonnet, the hand and voice are differentiated:

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said, — Himself,
beside
Thee speaking, and me listening! and replied
One of us . . . *that* was God, . . . and laid the curse
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee,—that if I had died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion. 'Nay' is worse
From God than from all others, O my friend!
(2; ll. 1-9)

Here, the 'mystic Shape', the hand on the hair of the speaker, the masterly voice and the enunciator of the 'silver answer' are identified. Whereas, in the first sonnet, they seem equivalent with Love, here they are God and the male lover. This differentiation of the three presences depicts God as a third term, a *supplément* that unsettles the pairing of I-Thou and acquires a prohibitory status that securely differentiates the beloved as masculine and the lover as the feminine — and so, once again, the speaker associates death with her response to God's prohibition. The sonnet ends with a declaration of their fixed positions, their mutual love, despite their separation in the material world. A reiteration of this fixity follows in the

third sonnet: 'Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart! / Unlike our uses and our destinies' (ll. 1-2): he belongs to the social, public world, whilst the speaker identifies herself in the sentimental tradition as 'A poor, tired, wandering singer, . . . singing through / The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree' (ll. 11-12). Tentatively, tropes of exchange then emerge as the speaker chronicles the development of their love. Imagery of overlap first suggests that their fixed position within the norms of sexual difference is agitated: 'Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand / Henceforward in thy shadow' (6; ll. 1-2). To God, however, they are already mutually identified with each other (sonnet three). From this, it is suggested that representation itself is shifted by this move towards exchange:

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
 Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
 Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
 Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
 Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
 Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
 Of life in a new rhythm.
 (7; ll. 1-7)

For Barrett Browning, the representational axiom is altered by the position of the male beloved between herself and death, 'the dreadful outer brink'. The beloved thus disrupts the alignment of the feminine subject with death, or, more metaphorically, with non-representation. This exchange of gendered positions empowers the female speaker and escapes the genre and gender codes which equate the feminine with the silent beloved.

'Sonnets from the Portuguese' is invoked in the preface to 'Monna Innominata' in which Elizabeth Barrett Browning is ironically charged with speaking from a position of happiness,

fulfilment, and plentitude, rather than from a position of unhappiness, of lack:

had the Great Poetess of our own day and nation only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the 'Portuguese Sonnets', an inimitable 'donna innominata' drawn not from fancy but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura.
(C.ii.86)

The play with the masculine and the feminine as entities that can be rhetorically exchanged is also suggested in Christina Rossetti's poetics. For Rossetti, however, the female speaker is not empowered by a male beloved; rather, she speaks explicitly from a position of lack and silence, and this feminine subject has a more uncanny position in the representational system than the subject of Barrett Browning's sequence. Tropes of exchange, furthermore, are employed in a discourse of analogy which is part of a wider attempt to apprehend the afterlife: analogy is an attempt to transcend the temporal, a struggle forwards towards eternity that is often depicted in terms of a race.

In 'A Life's Parallels' (C.ii.105) — the title itself suggesting analogy — there is an attempt to formulate partial comparisons, partial because the temporal element can only gesture towards the eternal as both sign and signified. Three stanzas depict a movement forward of the soul that is also a linguistic movement:

Never on this side of the grave again,
On this side of the river,
On this side of the garner of the grain,
Never, —
(ll. 1-4)

The emphasis upon 'this side', or the temporal, sets up the type, the first unit of the analogy, which is not completed in the poem. Instead there are images of a flowing river and corn blowing in the wind, denoting the slipperiness of the temporal signifier and a pursuit forwards, 'Faint yet pursuing, faint yet still pursuing / Ever' (ll. 10-11) The expectation that the eternal portion of the parallel will emerge is not fulfilled, but its absence nevertheless invokes a sense of a chain of signs striving for an apprehension of this spiritual signified. The opacity of the language suggests the 'translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal' (see above) that, for Coleridge, characterises the symbol; but, here, the poem denies the signification that the analogy promises. The sense of a poetic language made up of temporal substitutive entities is conveyed by the use of lists that seem to denote an endless procession of signs gesturing towards the signified.

Included in the same *Pageant* volume, 'Monna Innominata' (C.ii.86-93) carries similar overtones of lists and chains. In particular, the various doublings emerge in figures of excess such as tautology and pleonasm; but within the doubles there is an impasse whereby an exchange within each similar type is suggested and then denied. The very subtitle, 'A Sonnet of Sonnets', initiates the sequence of doubles which seems to be an implicit reworking of Barrett Browning's own exploitation of the technique in the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'. The language proliferates with double constructions: 'I do I do' (1; l. 5), 'A day of days', 'hand in hand' (2; l. 10, l. 14), 'O my heart's heart', 'myself myself' (5; l. 1, l. 2), "“Love me, for I love you” — and answer me, / “Love me, for I love you”" (7; ll. 1-2). And, most

obviously, the number of sonnets, fourteen, is indicative of the self-reflexivity that characterises the doubles.³⁶

Within such signficatory practice, the beloved has an important rhetorical role, for his status as other (and thus the speaker's double or counterpart) is displaced to become part of a sequence, a chain, of visual signs, part of an analogous discourse. The first sonnet anticipates a Barrett Browningsque exchange, but this is resisted when the beloved is held at a distance while the speaker locates herself in the interstice between anticipation and fulfilment:

Come back to me, who watch and wait for you:—
Or come not yet, for it is over then,
And long it is before you come again,
So far between my pleasures are and few.
While, when you come not, what I do I do
Thinking 'Now when he comes,' my sweetest 'when:'
For one man is my world of all the men
This wide world holds; O love, my world is you.
Howbeit, to meet you grows almost a pang
Because the pang of parting comes so soon;
My hope hangs waning, waxing, like a moon
Between the heavenly days on which we meet.
(1; ll. 1-12)

The attempt in the following sonnet to recall the origin of their love is frustrated, but the emphasis is upon a visual recollection: 'So blind was I to see and to foresee' (2; l. 6) A narrative of their love is denied — perhaps an implicit resistance to the linearity of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sequence — and the next sonnet continues the emphasis upon sight. In fact, the

³⁶Harrison points out that the sequence is a macrosonnet (*Christina Rossetti in Context*, p. 153).

beloved has become a visual sign that is fleeting and elusive, and the poetry withholds a sequential narrative:³⁷

I dream of you to wake: would that I might
Dream of you and not wake but slumber on;
Nor find with dreams the dear companion gone,
As Summer ended Summer birds take flight.
In happy dreams I hold you full in sight,
I blush again who waking look so wan;
Brighter than sunniest day that ever shone,
In happy dreams your smile makes day of night.
Thus only in a dream we are at one,
Thus only in a dream we give and take
The faith that maketh rich who take or give;
If thus to sleep is sweeter than to wake,
To die were surely sweeter than to live,
Tho' there be nothing new beneath the sun.
(3)

There is no fulfilment of pleasure even in sleep, for the speaker awakens, but the utopian equality that critics have made much of in this sequence emerges as an exchange that is also an act of faith. Further, despite the emphasis upon a visual totality that only exists in dreams, the beloved has a transformative effect that seems to parody and exceed the conventional Petrarchan and Dantean overtones: 'In happy days your smile makes day of night.' The rhetorical doublings and exchange culminate at the end of the sonnet in a line which seems superfluous, 'Tho' there be nothing new beneath the sun'; the analogy between sleep and death seems to give priority to death over living, and thus the earth's failure to renew has no bearing on a subject who chooses death. This concluding line's puzzling opening word 'Tho'' seems to indicate a logical clause only to ultimately deny the relevance of the line to the preceding analogy. Such a conclusion suggests a

³⁷With this in mind, the quotations above each sonnet from Dante and Petrarch suggest an ironically fragmented narrative.

rhetorical impasse and a semantic contortion, a stalemate that results from the traditional exchange between lover and beloved, rendered now as sterile in its reflexivity.

Ultimately, however, the beloved gives way to further links in the chain of signs, to further substitutes. This rhetorical movement begins in sonnet five, when the binary subject-other impasse of sonnet four, exemplified by 'With separate "I" and "thou" free love has done, / For one is both and both are one in love' (ll. 10-11), is disrupted by God. In this way, analogy as the rhetoric of the same which allows material signs to signify the divine becomes instead a chain of signs that resists divine signification. Initially, a triadic structure is suggested by the grouping together rhetorically speaker-beloved-God, such as at the end of sonnet six: 'I cannot love you if I love not Him, / I cannot love Him if I love not you' (ll. 13-14).³⁸ The chiasmus which reverses the positions of the beloved and God suggests an attempt to negotiate between them, but the end result of this construction is repetition. The device of chiasmus is not here what W. David Shaw terms an 'heroic' crossing over between belief and knowledge (*Victorians and Mystery*, pp. 251-52), but a substitution of God for the beloved and vice versa. The position of the speaker in relation to God and the beloved is such that they are given identical positions, both predicating the other on the subject. God and the beloved are thus entities that may be replaced or substituted rhetorically by each other, and so this line seems a tautology in the sense defined by Coleridge above, 'expressing the same subject but

³⁸And compare sonnet twelve, in which the speaker encourages the beloved to find another love — a substitute for her — if it would make him happier.

with a resemblance'. The tight, twisting syntax of the chiasmus both separates the two addressees and brings them together. Similarity and difference are signified by the crossing over of the chiasmus and the liminal space between the terms where signification is generated.

The product of this chiasmic interstice is ellipsis, which reveals the constant deferral of desire (Derrida's *différance*; to defer, postpone, delay, and to differ), in particular the deferred fulfilment of the desire for sameness, to be the linking force in analogy. Paradoxically, however, the chain of signs also resists linearity. In sonnet ten, a chain of concepts is represented as contestants in a race, but their position is not recounted hierarchically: 'Time flies, hope flags, life plies a weary wing; / Death following hard on life gains ground apace' (ll. 1-2). At the end of this race, however, the chain is shown to be exceeded by sleep which is first analogous to death and then becomes life-in-death:

Let us go fall asleep, dear friend, in peace:
A little while, and age and sorrow cease;
A little while, and life reborn annuls
Loss and decay and death, and all is love.
(ll. 11-14)

The relationship between life and death is transformed by virtue of sleep which, as a temporary stasis and a liminal realm which lingers between life and death, obscures the demarcation between them.

Analogy is an integral part of the dominant representational system, and the discourse of patriarchy *par excellence*, but the poetry both consorts with and agitates analogy as surety and conviction, as a mode of discourse based

upon belief. The liminal, the interstice within analogy's type and antitype, type and type, posits perpetual discontinuity between sign and the next sign. The doubling of the same emerges as both cause and effect of this discontinuity: both the origin of the lover-beloved impasse which gives way to a chain of substitutes, and a protection from the non-signification which this chain posits.

Jan Gordon suggests that the failed Romantic quest for authentication resulted in the nineteenth century combination of autobiography with art.³⁹ 'Monna Innominata', which fails to authenticate belief in praxis, rather conceals the autobiographical element in ellipses. The personal functions in the interstice between signs: as what is left unsaid, the withheld semantic secret whose absence also maintains the elliptical discontinuous chain of signs. Signification can only be partial. W. M. Rossetti's notes to the sequence in his 1904 edition, however, stress the autobiographical meaning as the only complete and accurate interpretation:

To any one to whom it was granted to be behind the scenes of Christina Rossetti's life — and to how few was it granted — it is not merely probable but certain that this 'sonnet of sonnets' was a personal utterance — an intensely personal one. The introductory prose-note, about 'many a lady sharing her lover's poetic aptitude,' etc., is a blind — not an untruthful blind, for it alleges nothing that is not reasonable, and on the surface correct, but still a blind interposed to draw off attention from the writer in her proper person.
(*PW: CR*, p. 462)

³⁹Jan Gordon, "Decadent Spaces": Notes for a Phenomenology of the *Fin de Siècle*' in *Decadence and the 1890s*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), pp. 31-58 (p. 33).

In proposing his interpretation as authoritative, complete, and exclusive, W. M. Rossetti suggests that there are two readings of 'Monna Innominata': the personal, or the non-personal, the 'blind'. The sequence, however, refuses to locate meaning in either the autobiographical or the literary historical. The sequence oscillates, as a result, *between* these two categories.⁴⁰

Located within the Rossettian biographical myth, ellipsis becomes a sign of the personal: 'Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke, / I love, as you would have me, God the most' (6; ll. 1-2). In the deployment of the personal, however, the beloved is placed at a distance and his status as other diminished to become part of the rhetoric of visual signs. At the end of the sequence, the beloved is commended to God, to whom the speaker trusts the beloved's fate. And thus, the final exchange is between the beloved and God:

Searching my heart for all that touches you,
I find there only love and love's goodwill
Helpless to help and impotent to do,
Of understanding dull, of sight most dim;
And therefore I commend you back to Him
Whose love your love's capacity can fill.
(13; ll. 9-14)

The last sonnet follows, and is the only one not to mention the beloved. The speaker seems to re-place herself within the representational system. Once again, the visual is stressed:

Youth gone, and beauty gone if ever there
Dwelt beauty in so poor a face as this;
Youth gone and beauty, what remains of bliss?
I will not bind fresh roses in my hair,

⁴⁰W. M. Rossetti's use of 'blind' locates the non-personal, or the literary historical, with the non-visual. Rather, I would argue that it is the personal, the autobiographical referent, which is gestured to but not seen, or blind, in the text.

To shame a cheek at best but little fair,—
Leave youth his roses, who can bear a thorn,—
I will not seek for blossoms anywhere,
Except such common flowers that blow with corn.
(14; ll. 1-8)

The corn recalls 'A Life's Parallels' ('Ever while the corn blows heavy-headed, wan'), which suggests the slipperiness of the temporal sign. The conventional designation of the female as a sad, inspired lyricist close to death seems to pose the final analogy. The speaker likens herself to the literal embodiment of the lyrical feminine and in doing so the conventional visual representation of a female poetess, singing of her sadness, is ironically parodied by a renunciation of speech.⁴¹ In her silence, the speaker locates meaning wholly within, and the heart is the locale of this semantic process:

Youth gone and beauty gone, what doth remain?
The longing of a heart pent up forlorn,
A silent heart whose silence loves and longs
(14; ll. 9-11)

This seems merely a reversal of the representational system, of the image of a poet as beautiful and lyrical, but there is still present an uncanny doubleness that both avows and rejects that system. Rossetti speaks from a position of the 'doubly blank', the 'double lack', from an absence that has doubleness inherently inscribed within and that is also, thematically and rhetorically, the position of death, of woman in the representational economy.⁴² Both ground and vanishing point,

⁴¹The 'common flowers that blow with corn' are poppies which induce sleep and death.

⁴²The phrase 'doubly blank' is taken from the poem 'From the Antique' (C.iii.231); Andrew and Catherine Belsey coin the phrase 'double lack' (p. 46).

the feminine as sign is both the basis for the representational system and the threatening point at which the system recedes. The Freudian paradigm of sexual difference posits the feminine as the same with reference to the male and also as the uncanny difference, by virtue of the castration complex, and thus also posits the feminine as signifying both disavowal and acceptance of the dominant image repertoire. This sense of a crossing over of boundaries, a suspension or a violation of norms, is the definition of the liminal, which frustrates the attempt manifested by the poetic language to transcend the temporal.⁴³ As Bronfen neatly summarises, 'the feminine subject position writing out of death is still in a position of oscillation with no defined or fixed place, but here somehow within [the dominant representational system]' (p. 395).

Speaking from the position of the feminine as both lack and as the same, rather than from the place of the traditional silenced female beloved, the subject challenges cultural, social and literary norms in an *unheimlich* gesture that would also reaffirm the pull of patriarchal structures.⁴⁴ Kristeva's concept of the semiotic *chora* is useful here. Neither position nor sign, but wholly provisional, the pressure of the *chora* is intimated in Rossetti's love sonnets which formulate a tropic construction of

⁴³'Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial,' Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p.95. In analogous discourse the liminal is equivalent to the interstice, both analogous terms which posit perpetual discontinuity between sign and the next sign. The doubling of the same emerges as both cause and effect of this discontinuity; both the origin of the lover-beloved impasse which gives way to a chain of substitutes, and a protection from the non-signification which his chain posits. In addition, the liminal puts into question the stability of boundaries, as does the abject (see below) which is also the place of in-betweenness, of the interstice.

⁴⁴Contrast Jan Montefiore's approach to 'Monna Innominata' which interrogates the implication of reversing the norm whereby a male lover addresses a female beloved; I critique Montefiore in chapter four, above.

the feminine. The Rossettian subject is both bound within the Symbolic and, by occupying the position of the excessively feminine and the posthumous, the feminine paradoxically and metonymically comes to represent the *chora*, the death drives, and the disruption of social norms and stable sexual difference. Paradoxically, the *chora* intimates both what 'Monna Innominata' would thematically avow (sameness, intersubjectivity, a state prior to sexual difference) and, finally, reject (the challenge to social and sexual norms). The fear of a total surrender to a state prior to the entry into the Symbolic, a state which knows of no sexual difference, marks its difference from the sameness of God by the radical feminine and maternal space that would undermine the representational system. The sonnet is an apt vehicle to explore such concerns, for, as interpreted by nineteenth-century commentators, the etymology of 'sonnet' is 'little sound, from the Italian 'sonetto', or short strain, and the poem was originally recited with musical accompaniment.⁴⁵ As well as displaying an inherent concern with rhythm, the sonnet also was seen as analogous to bodily form, suggesting a commensurability with the rhythmical pulsations of the *chora*.

Rossetti's rhetoric, however, finally resists a sustained radical semiotic strain, for the lack of differentiation between subject and other is feared as well as desired. This pulling away from the semiotic emerges as abjection, a term coined by Kristeva to denote a borderline state between subject and other, the recognition in the child that the preliminary identification with the mother is an illusion and the beginning of separation from her. While it represents a movement away from the

⁴⁵This is noted by Sharp, *Sonnets of this Century*, p. xxvii.

heterogeneity of the *chora* it is a stage prior to thethetic (which attributes differences and thus signification). Kristeva's notions of the abject and the *chora* can be read, however, as not strictly mutually exclusive. Both are offered by Kristeva as ways of interpreting the fragile borders of the Symbolic Order. Kristeva explains the process of abjection as the experience a primary separation that returns to haunt the subject later. Abjection is: 'a kind of narcissistic crisis: it is witness to the ephemeral state called "narcissism" with reproachful jealousy'.⁴⁶ Further:

The abject is the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost. The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgements. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away — it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive, and death.
(p. 15)

Thus, in the Symbolic Order, there are moments rehearsed or enacted during which the subject remembers the primary separation when borders were not yet defined. Such moments, from within the Symbolic, undermine the distinction between subject and object. This psychic experience is a primary form of the uncanny, for it is both frightening and reassuring: the subject remembers sameness, but this threatens subjectivity and identity.

In the sonnet sequences, abjection is the result of destabilising categories of subject and other, and the abject is 'experienced at the peak of its strength when [the] subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the

⁴⁶Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, transl. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 14.

outside, finds the impossible within' (p. 5). The subject cannot expel the object and cannot decide between subject and object: the untenable identity of each is thus made clear. The abject is 'what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (p. 4). The subject becomes, in Kristeva's terminology, a '*deject*': as with the move from biographical trope to self-representation in chapters 1 and 2, the '*deject*' is concerned with positioning him/her self in the space that engrosses him/her and asks "*Where* am I?" instead of "*Who* am I?" (p. 8). Although intimated in the liminality of 'Monna Innominata', the abject disrupts the rhetoric of analogy most forcefully in 'Later Life', which thereby gestures towards a perverse representational axiom not based on a desire for an object, but upon exclusion of the jettisoned object.⁴⁷ But in this later sequence it is the inscription of the Tractarian doctrine of reserve that sanctions an avoidance of the full horror of the lack of distinction between subject and other that is the consequence of Rossetti's poetic praxis.

* * * * *

The other sonnet sequence in the *Pageant* volume, 'Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets', proliferates doubles in an implicit reference to 'Monna Innominata'. In this 'double sonnet', the attempt is again to exceed the visual and the temporal within a discourse of analogy in an exploration of the impasse by which analogy formulates comparisons that are both paradoxically

⁴⁷Kristeva comments that abjection points to 'lives not sustained by *desire*, as desire is always for objects' and that it thus 'challenges the theory of the unconscious' (pp. 6-7).

based upon and refute equivalence. Analogy presents temporal signs as comparable with an eternal signified that is also, as suggested above, presented as a sign. Further, this chain of temporal and eternal constitutive parts is conflated (or confused) with a chain of temporal signs that resists any eternal signified; indeed, calling into question the aesthetic and ethical assumption that analogy is the language of transcendence by disturbing any secure relation between temporal sign and eternal counterpart, precisely because that counterpart is both signified and sign. This aporia, this classic disjunction between aesthetics/ethics and rhetoric, is endlessly unresolvable and locates the signifiatory process in the interstice between signs.

‘Later Life’ confronts this aporia in such a way that the impasse emerges not only rhetorically in the tropes but also thematically, for the sequence suggests that everything temporal collapses into God.⁴⁸ The concern with sexual difference inscribed within the love sonnet here becomes a relationship between the speaker and God, who in ‘Monna Innominata’ was presented rhetorically as an agitating prohibitory force, a third element or *supplément* that breaks the exchange and doubling between masculine and feminine entities that the love sonnet, particularly those of the Barrett Browning style, presupposes. Whilst the ‘Later Life’ sequence looks toward the destruction of the temporal self, the signifiatory process is

⁴⁸Diane D’Amico suggests that a dominant concern of ‘Later Life’ is a movement between different types of time. She also points to the underlying uncanniness of the sequence, in her comment that the sequence is both unresolved and asymmetrical, and yet represents, in a unified sequence, a process of faith. See ‘Christina Rossetti’s *Later Life*: The Neglected Sonnet Sequence’, *Victorians Institute Journal* 9 (1980-1981) 21-28 (p. 22, p. 27).

located in the interstice, in the between-time of now and the eternal, of temporal sign and eternal signified, anticipation and the fulfilment of desire. This liminal place is also the space of the abject, which puts into question boundaries and borders.

The sequence begins triumphantly with the assurance that the temporal will collapse into the divine, just as the divine was the origin for all things temporal:

Before the mountains were brought forth, before
Earth and the world were made, then God was God:
And God will still be God, when flames shall roar
Round earth and heaven dissolving at His nod.
(1; ll. 1-4)

The repetition 'And this God is our God' (l. 5 and l. 7), by the use of the double and the possessive, establishes a sense of security, a security both rhetorical and thematic, that God is the stability before, through and after the unstable temporal world. In the following sonnet, however, this divine security only further inscribes the subject in the double lack that is located inside the speaker: 'Rend hearts and rend not garments for our sins; / Gird sackcloth not on body but on soul' (2; ll. 1-2). And because the subject is inescapably within the temporal, there can be no claim to borrow the stability of the eternal, and being 'All left undone, we have yet to do the whole' (2; l. 6). The desire for wholeness is depicted throughout the sequence as a pursuit, a race that takes place insistently and desperately in the present moment: 'Let us today while it is called today / Set out, if utmost speed may yet avail' (2; ll. 9-10). The race is represented as the attempt to find a way through the darkness, again recalling the significance of the visual to the discourse of analogies:

The shadows lengthen and the light grows pale:
For who thro' darkness and the shadow of death,
Darkness that may be felt, shall find a way,
Blind-eyed, deaf-eared, and choked with failing
breath?
(2; ll. 12-14)

The image of a struggle onwards in the dark marks the importance of the linear, of the race forwards as a struggle to transcend the temporal; but the race, and the chain of signs which is its rhetorical equivalent, becomes caught within the present and anticipatory moment. The struggle frustrates both the subject and the subject's attempts at articulation, and only the struggle to articulate, and not articulation itself, can be represented. Sonnet twelve represents the struggle in terms of a dreamer who longs to scream but cannot; this dream, it is suggested, is analogous to 'waking life':

A dream there is wherein we are fain to scream,
While struggling with ourselves we cannot speak:
And much of all our waking life, as weak
And misconceived, eludes us like the dream.
For half life's seemings are not what they seem
(12; ll. 1-5)

The sonnet concludes, however, with the importance of the struggle itself, 'But now I deem some searching bitters are / Sweeter than sweets, and more refreshing far' (12; ll. 10-11).

Sonnet four suggests how the location of the signifying practice in the present anticipatory moment further diminishes the subject:

So tired am I, so weary of today,
So unrefreshed from foregone weariness [. . .]
Ah, always less and less, even while I press

Forward and toil and aim as best I may
(4; ll. 1-2, ll. 7-8)

The malaise is located firmly within, 'half-starved of soul and heartsick utterly' (4; ll. 9); but the subject struggles to transfer this interior locale of desire to the spiritual. In sonnet five the aporia emerges in the use of reiteration; this sonnet, in fact, seems to serve as a paradigm for the aporia implicit within the whole poetic enterprise of the sequence:

Lord, Thou Thyself art Love and only Thou;
Yet I who am not love would fain love Thee;
But Thou alone being Love canst furnish me
With that same love my heart is craving now.
Allow my plea! for if Thou disallow,
No second fountain can I find but Thee;
No second hope or help is left to me,
No second anything, but only Thou.
O Love accept, according my request;
O Love exhaust, fulfilling my desire;
Uphold me with the strength that cannot tire,
Nerve me to labour till Thou bid me rest,
Kindle my fire from Thine unkindled fire,
And charm the willing heart from out my breast.
(5)

The refutation of all that is secondary insists upon a wholeness that the analogous discourse resists. The plea for God, the representative of Love, to grant love to the subject acknowledges the difference between the subject and perfection, acknowledges the lack that the creation of parallels or comparisons fails to disperse. The desire to collapse difference into sameness emerges excessively and thematically in the prayer that all humanity may coalesce in God:

We feel and see with different hearts and eyes:—
Ah Christ, if all our hearts could meet in Thee

How well it were for them and well for me
(8; ll. 1-3)⁴⁹

Similarly, sonnet nine confronts the difference repressed in analogy and strives towards an intimation of sameness that the analogy nevertheless fails to deliver:

Star Sirius and the Pole Star dwell afar
Beyond the drawings of each other's strength:
One blazes thro' the brief bright summer's length
Lavishing life-heat from a flaming car;
While one unchangeable upon a throne
Broods o'er the frozen heart of earth alone,
Content to reign the bright particular star
Of some who wander or of some who groan.
They own no drawings each of other's strength,
Nor vibrate in a visible sympathy,
Nor veer along their courses each toward each:
Yet are their orbits pitched in harmony
Of one dear heaven, across whose depth and length
Mayhap they walk together without speech.
(9)

The sonnet's original title, 'One star differeth from another Star' is deleted in the manuscript and pencilled above by Rossetti is, '—the stars in Night's pale fillet wrought/Gleam undividably—' (C.ii.388). The prevarication over a stress upon division or sameness in the description of the stars is carried over to the sonnet. Each star is shown to be comparable with something else and both are depicted as independent from each other. Their sameness is by virtue of heaven, whose existence grants both their separateness and mutual identification. The personification which forms the basis for the comparison and

⁴⁹Compare 'Our teachers teach that one and one make two: / Later, love rules that one and one make one' (16; ll.1-2); again, sexual sameness and difference is presented as the paradigm for *all* sameness and difference, recalling 'Monna Innominata.'

differentiation between the stars asserts their sameness in the final two lines when they are represented as *provisionally* ('mayhap') and paradoxically talking together in silence.⁵⁰ Difference collapses into a conditional and tentative sameness.

The transformation of difference into sameness, however, relies upon religious conviction, and the transferral is rendered problematic by the suggestion that the speaker doubts that the transformation can be effected, doubts that the present moment will ever yield a future that will regenerate the subject. Further, this doubt paradoxically suggests the dynamics of desire which, in Lacanian terms, is characterised by lack and constant deferral, even though the thematics of the poem define desire's fulfilment as the apprehension of the divine. In particular, there is a fear that the subject is too late — the 'Later Life' of the title referring to both old age and a sense of spiritual belatedness (as well as to the afterlife). Sonnet eighteen, originally and suggestively entitled 'A Heart's Autumn', later deleted for 'Late Autumn' (C.ii.391), suggests that belatedness is a blight that may be transformed with Spring (Spring is often indistinguishable as either literal or figurative in Rossetti's poetry). The poem, as it appears in 'Later Life', was altered from the sonnet 'Cor Mio' ('My Heart'). For the sonnet sequence, the original octave is replaced with one that turns from the address to the beloved as a transferral and exchange between masculine and feminine entities⁵¹ (as in *Monna*

⁵⁰The last lines of some other sonnets also read strangely, such as sonnets sixteen and seventeen of this sequence. Here, the final lines seem excessive and additional, the rhetorical question perhaps employed to break from the sterility of self-reflexivity or of rhetorical deadlock.

⁵¹ Still sometimes in my secret heart of hearts
I say 'Cor mio' when I remember you,
And thus I yield us both one tender due

Innominata) to question the stability of the temporal signifier. The surety and conviction of analogy is agitated.

The usual connective employed in analogous constructs, 'So' (for example, the 'As . . . So' of D. G. Rossetti's sonnet on the sonnet which prefaces his *House of Life* sonnet sequence, the 'So' marking the beginning of the sestet), comes in this revised sonnet at the beginning as well as at the usual line nine. The sense of *in medias res*, a trope of the abject, is employed to unsettle the usual narrative sequence of analogous pairs:⁵²

So late in Autumn half the world's asleep,
And half the wakeful world looks pinched and pale;
For dampness now, not freshness, rides the gale;
And cold and colourless comes ashore the deep
With tides that bluster or with tides that creep;
Now veiled uncouthness wears an uncouth veil
Of fog, not sultry haze; and blight and bale
Have done their worst, and leaves rot on the heap.
(18; ll. 1-8)

In the first line, 'the world' seems to denote humanity, but the octave moves into a personification of nature that is elliptical (the synecdoche 'the deep' and 'tides'). Nature is personified doubly: uncouthness is veiled and then the veil becomes uncouth (ll. 6-7). Such a reversal questions the stability and authority of the trope of pathetic fallacy, and, in the sestet, the conviction upon which analogy is based — that there will be a spiritual

Wielding one whole of two divided parts.
Ah Friend, too wise or unwise for such arts,
Ah noble Friend, silent and strong and true,
Would you have given me roses for the rue
For which I bartered roses in love's marts?
(C.ii.390)

⁵²Compare Finn: 'the title, *Later Life*, suggests the poem begins in *medias res*, at some later period in some life. It promises to anchor what follows in a temporal location —later, not earlier—and then not only reneges on the promise, but holds up such promises of secure temporality for scrutiny' (p. 136).

renewal, that the eternal signified will facilitate transcendence from the temporal — is questioned. The sonnet moves from the fear that, in Autumn, the Spring is forgotten, to question whether the Spring will come at all:

So late in Autumn one forgets the Spring,
Forgets the Summer with its opulence,
The callow birds that long have found a wing,
The swallows that more lately gat them hence:
Will anything like Spring, will anything
Like Summer, rouse one day the slumbering sense?
(18; ll. 9-14)

The original octave, which questioned unity and exchange as part of the love sonnet tradition becomes, in the revised portion, an aporia at the level of the temporal signifier with the anxiety that the sequential promise of the seasons will not be fulfilled. The sense of belatedness in *Later Life*, in fact, posits an urgent and profound interrogation of the temporal as a stable and authoritative unit of analogous discourse; the 'literal' or material/temporal referent can be endlessly substituted by unstable signifiers, unsettling the authority of the 'eternal unseen'. This is also how the autobiographical element operates, as a crossing over between the personal and the poetic which introduces the aporia by which full interpretation is both gestured towards and resisted.⁵³

The question of conviction also emerges in the sonnets which describe the nightingale's song.⁵⁴ Sonnet twenty describes

⁵³Perhaps partly suggesting why W. M. Rossetti presents himself as an authoritative chronicler of the personal semantics behind his sister's work, which implies that only he may fully understand her work.

⁵⁴Diane D'Amico argues, in response to the nightingale typology, that Rossetti's Christianity frees her from the restrictions of Romanticism. See 'Fair Margaret of "Maiden-Song": Rossetti's Response to the Romantic Nightingale', *The Victorian Newsletter* 80 (1991), 8-13 (p. 13). Similarly, Catherine Musello Cantalupo

how one night bird represents grief and, in doing so, becomes what it represents and transfers the grief of the listeners onto itself:⁵⁵ ‘Its mellow grieving wiles our grief away, / And tunes our weary watches to delight’ (20; ll. 1-4). The bird seems to sing the unspoken thoughts of the listeners, ‘and to set them right’ — an ambiguous phrase meaning both to set to music and to correct them. Although ‘this solitary bird outweighs, outvies’ (20; ll. 9), the day chorus of the other birds may help the listeners to ‘launch our hearts up with them to the skies’ (20; ll. 14). Thus, the supremacy of the grieving bird is undercut by the dawn chorus which may also enable transcendence. A similar pattern emerges in the following sonnet which begins with a statement of surety and conviction which the following lines then proceed to undermine:

A host of things I take on trust: I take
 The nightingales on trust, for few and far
 Between those actual summer moments are
 When I have heard what melody they make.
 (21; ll. 1-4)

Located in the interstice ‘between those actual summer moments’ which pronounce their material existence as real (‘actual’), the nightingale song is a sign of the speaker’s conviction; but in the process of the sonnet, in what is a

argues that Rossetti moved away from the Romantic conceptualisation of nature to nature as a sign for the divine. See ‘Christina Rossetti: The Devotional Poet and the Rejection of Romantic Nature’, in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 274-300. In contrast, I argue that Romantic ideologies cannot be so easily displaced.

⁵⁵Compare the discussion on the *Vita Nuova* above, where Beatrice and the ‘*donna della finestra*’ become what they represent. In chapter 1 it was seen how the biographical subject operates as a trope that is both sign and signified; thus, the biographical subject becomes what it represents. See also recent feminist work (especially Cowie) on Woman as sign where Woman represents exchange and is also an object of exchange. Such doubleness and self-reflexivity is also, of course, characteristic of the love sonnet.

seemingly anti-literary act, the status of the birdsong as a literary sign, with overtones of Milton, Keats, Shelley and Coleridge,⁵⁶ is thrown into doubt. At Lake Como - which Rossetti actually visited, again instigating a play with autobiographical data — the song of the nightingale has as much significance as other sounds:

But all things, then, waxed musical; each star
Sang on its course, each breeze sang on its car
All harmonies sang to senses wide awake.
All things in tune, myself not out of tune,
Those nightingales were nightingales indeed:
Yet truly an owl had satisfied my need
(21; ll. 6-11)

The assertion that ‘those nightingales were nightingales indeed’ seems a reference to their literary status which would present their song as a sublime symbol for the imagination; the sonnet diminishes their literary status by declaring that everything, all temporal signs, are invested with significance. The sonnet ends with the declaration that ‘June that night glowed like a doubled June’; the insistence on the double is an attempt to hail sameness within the chain of temporal signs.

Such a confidence in the material world's signification, however, quickly recedes. The following sonnet moves from a celebration of the mountains, another Romantic symbol for the

⁵⁶Keats ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, Shelley’s ‘To a Skylark’, and Coleridge’s ‘To a Nightingale’ all shape birdsong into a symbol of the imagination. See: *Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1970), pp. 523-32; *The Poetical Works of Percy B. Shelley* (London: Milner and Sowerby, 1867), pp. 379-81; *The Oxford Authors: S. T. Coleridge*, pp. 99-100. Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, suggests that the nightingale singing in the dark is a symbol for his own blindness; light is interiorised and physical light becomes dangerous as a potential obstruction to true vision. See *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. by John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1980), Book 3, ll. 38-9 (p. 563), Book 3, ll. 51-55 (p. 564).

creative imagination, to an emphasis upon the small flowers at St. Gothard:

The mountains in their overwhelming might
Moved me to sadness when I saw them first,
And afterwards they moved me to delight;
Struck harmonies from silent chords which burst
Out into song, a song by memory nursed [. . .]
All Switzerland behind us on the ascent,
All Italy before us we plunged down
St. Gothard, garden of forget-me-not:
Yet why should such a flower choose
such a spot?
Could we forget that way which once we went
Tho' not one flower had bloomed to weave its
crown?
(22; ll. 1-5, ll. 9-14)

Whilst the speaker positions herself relative to the Swiss Alps and their significance for the creative powers, the move towards small detail signals a revisionary tendency which questions the security of the natural world's significance. Rhetorical questions challenge the conviction of a response: the answer is only implicit, and because it is unspoken a textual fissure inscribes doubt and undermines our conviction of the appropriate meaning (Nichols, p. 24). This sonnet comes at an important moment in the sequence, when visual landscape as the source for temporal signs is interrogated.⁵⁷ The attempt to exceed the visual is explicit in the following sonnet, which recalls Rossetti's statement in *Seek and Find* that 'All the world over, visible things typify things invisible' (p. 244):

⁵⁷Compare de Man's argument, summarised above, that the visual landscape description of the Romantics presents allegory in the guise of the symbol and also gives priority to the subject above material perception.

Beyond the seas we know, stretch seas unknown
 [. . .] we run a race
 Today, and find no present halting-place;
 All things we see lie far within our scope,
 And still we peer beyond with craving face.
 (23; l. 1, ll. 11-14)

The struggle to exceed the visual is depicted in visual terms: Rossetti remains both within and apart from the representation system. The remaining sonnets in the sequence continue this *unheimlich* trope of the visual, in particular playing on dreams and ambiguous states of consciousness to gesture towards a non-temporal totality of meaning. Sonnet 17, originally entitled ‘Befogged’, suggests such a questioning of the literal:

Something this foggy day, a something which
 Is neither of this fog nor of today,
 Has set me dreaming of the winds that play
 Past certain cliffs, along one certain beach
 (17; ll. 1-4)

The use of ‘certain’ here denotes both actual (but unspecified; compare W. M. Rossetti's attempt to identify the scene) locale, and certainty, conviction. This locale is, however, ‘So out of reach while yet within my reach’ (17; l. 7), and the speaker is only partially able to articulate the scene which is analogous to the foggy day she perceives. The subject seems trapped within self-reflexivity with the failure of analogous discourse: ‘I am sick of all I have and all I see, / I am sick of self’ (17; ll. 11-12). Towards the end of the sequence, however, the vagueness of the language and the instability of the signifier escapes such sterile self-contemplation. The language strives towards an apprehension of the afterlife which would renew the subject. A fear that renewal will fail surfaces as the language increases in

opacity and the speaker tries to distinguish between the literal and the figurative: 'I have dreamed of Death:—what will it be to die / Not in a dream, but in the literal truth' (27; ll. 1-2). The famous last lines of the penultimate sonnet, hailed by biographers as uncannily portentous of Rossetti's last hours, mark the climax of fear, fear that she 'May miss the goal at last, may miss a crown' (27; l. 14). This fear emerges rhetorically as well as thematically; missing a goal also denotes a failure in the signifiatory process and a failure to attain wholeness and univocality, the abjected gap between sign and signified, sign and sign, out of which meaning is nevertheless generated as well as repressed. In the last sonnet, this impasse emerges finally as an attempt to suggest a presence outside language and outside the visual:

The dead may be around us, dear and dead,
The unforgotten dearest dead may be
Watching us with unslumbering eyes and heart;
Brimful of words which cannot yet be said,
Brimful of knowledge they may not impart,
Brimful of love for you and love for me.
(28; ll. 9-4)

The stress in the anaphoric construction of 'yet', on anticipation, suggests that the illusory wholeness of meaning is carried over into the tropic construction of the afterlife.

* * * * *

Rossetti's two sonnet sequences in the *Pageant* volume thus present a complex relation of the subject with cultural and literary norms of the feminine. The analogous discourse suggests

that an attempt is made by the poetic subject to *transcend* such norms but, whilst the tendency of recent criticism is to force closure and resolution on the text by reading the transcendence as complete and effectual, the rhetorical strategy fails.⁵⁸ This process exposes the interstice between signs — the liminal, the space of the abject — in a crossing over of avowal and disavowal of norms.

Analogy works to disrupt any fixed designation of sameness and difference and of subject and other in the love sonnet. Within the poetic discourse the rhetorical figures of masculine and feminine themselves participate in the disruption of fixed norms, and such an operation has been explored by Barbara Johnson in line with an exposure of the unstable nature of binary oppositions. The problematics of difference are formulated thus: ‘the difference *between* entities (prose and poetry, man and woman, literature and theory, guilt and innocence) are shown to be based on a repression of differences *within* entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself’ (Johnson, *The Critical Difference*, pp. x-xi).⁵⁹ The entities which make up a binary pair always inherently have within themselves the difference which is projected as an opposition: both entities have a wholeness, a necessary illusion which maintains social codes. The relationship between entities in a binary pair, however, in fact denies a coherent and sharp distinction between them. When the binary pair is the gendered subject-other of a

⁵⁸Compare one of William Sharp’s rules of the sonnet form: ‘the end must be more impressive than the commencement — the close must not be inferior to, but must rather transcend what has gone before’ (*Sonnets of this Century*, p. lxxix).

⁵⁹Compare Shoshana Felman: ‘the rhetorical hierarchization of the very opposition between the sexes is [. . .] such that woman’s *difference* is suppressed, being totally subsumed by the reference of the feminine to masculine identity’, ‘Rereading Femininity’, *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), 19-44 (p. 25).

sonnet sequence that aims to attain analogous identities, the repressed difference returns and is shored up as abjection, the failed attempt to expel the other. In the end, difference cannot be repressed to allow for a semiotic intersubjectivity. As Linda Marshall notes with reference to the prosody of 'Later Life', the sequence proliferates tropes of difference and sameness, and thus marks the borders between subject and other as uncanny and uncertain.⁶⁰

The final chapter moves forward to suggest that Rossetti's engagement with the Tractarian doctrine of reserve functions as an economy in the religious poems collected in *Verses*, her last publication. It could also be argued that her rhetorical deployment of analogy, however, also suggests the strategical use of reserve as the underhand sanctioning of the failure of belief in poetical praxis, for the doctrine suggests the impossibility, or undesirability, of directly representing the divine. In *Tract 89*, Keble himself juxtaposes the two doctrines to account for the failure of analogy to deliver a univocal meaning.⁶¹ As W. David Shaw notes, 'Keble uses his doctrine of reserve to keep intact the mystery of indefiniteness' (*The Lucid Veil*, p. 194). The extent, however, to which this doctrine is

⁶⁰Linda Marshall, "Abstruse the problems!": Unity and Division in Christina Rossetti's *Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets*, *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994), 299-314 (p. 301)

⁶¹In fact, Keble argues that analogy should not necessarily give a fixed, stable meaning, for: 'the whole creation can hardly be too large or too various to shadow out His manifold aspects, who is all in all to every one of His creatures' (p. 176). And yet he also struggles to reconcile this with the sameness of God: 'in the greatest possible variety, whether of objects typified by one symbol, or of symbols typifying the same object, there must still be substantial uniformity, because all point or converge towards Him, His work and His everlasting kingdom' (p. 176). Shaw comments: 'failure always to translate the analogies in identical ways suggests that the Author of nature does not permit a full deciphering of the code' (*The Lucid Veil*, p. 194). Shaw also remarks that the other Tractarian definitions of analogy annexed it with reserve (p. 47).

unable to fully resist the pull to intimate the unrepresentable can be seen in 'Monna Innominata' and 'Later Life', for some subversive semiotic and abjected pressures cannot be contained by reserve. Instead, the sonnets gesture to the in-betweenness of subject and other, sign and sign, as a liminal space which is also the place of the endless play of desire within the feminine subject: 'We lack, yet cannot fix upon the lack: / Not this, nor that; yet somewhat, certainly' (*Later Life* 6; ll. 1-2; C.ii.140).

Chapter 6

Infectious Texts: 'Goblin Market' and Critical Discursive Practices

As chapter 5 shows, Rossetti's attempt to forge a rhetoric of analogy represents the meeting-point of her Tractarian and Romantic heritage. This Tractarianism practice, supported by the influence of Ruskin, formulates analogical relationships that connect the material world to the spiritual. Such a procedure emphasises the visual object as prior to and separate from the perceiving subject. As chapter 2 explicates, the priority of the object is feminised in Pre-Raphaelitism so that the visualised object, the beautiful woman, is denied a subjectivity. In this way, the male artist predicates his own subjectivity on the absence of a feminine subject. These two ideologies of representation cross over in Christina Rossetti's poetry. For her, the subject is prior but somehow absent. The subject becomes less than an object.¹

Rossetti's relation to analogical discourse is further complicated by her inability to inscribe poetically her belief in a transcendental signified. The material world fails to give a stable system of signs whose signified is the spiritual. In 'Goblin Market' (C.i.11-26) the failure of analogical strategies to

¹Catherine and Andrew Belsey develop this idea along another tangent.

fix type to antitype produces the strange sensation that the poem gestures to certain spiritual truths — incarnation, sacramentalism² — that are somehow elided or displaced in the poem. In this process, the slip between sign and signified, between type and antitype, disrupts the signifiatory system so that the play is instead between signifier and signifier, the level, in ‘Goblin Market’, of the fantastic.³ Analogy, as in the love sonnets, does not then provide a link between earth and heaven. And yet the shadow of this failure, the intimation of a spiritual or moral meaning, remains to resist any stable reading. There is certainly, as Noble describes, no coherent allegory,⁴ but the symbols denote more than they would seem to.⁵

I argue that it is precisely the failure in analogical discourse that locates the poem in what Julia Kristeva terms the

²See Mary Arseneau who, however, does not see any problematic relation between Rossetti's belief and language use (‘Incarnation and Repetition’, *passim*).

³Compare Steven Connor: ‘released from reference to the real world, or even to a strongly experienced world of feeling, her verse often enacts in the shifting of its appositions a drama which is to be apprehended at the level of the signifier’ (p. 440).

⁴Compare the comments of another contemporary reviewer, which owe something to the Victorian dislike of allegory: “‘Goblin Market’, the most important of Miss Rossetti's poems, has true dramatic character, life and picture for those who read it simply as a legend, while it has an inner meaning for all who can discern it. Like many of its companions it is suggestive and symbolic without the stiffness of set allegory,’ review of *Goblin Market* in the *Athenaeum*, 26 April 1862, pp. 557-58; quoted by Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose* (p. 460).

⁵W. David Shaw makes a similar point in relation to Rossetti's poetics, in *Victorians and Mystery*, pp. 251-81. It is a critical commonplace to accept the temptation-fall-redemption theme. However, the competing discourses of the poem, as Lorraine Janzen Kooistra identifies them, are radically at odds: ‘moral discourse attempts to fix boundaries and stabilize meaning, while fairy-tale discourse breaks bounds and disperses meaning.’ See ‘The Representation of Violence / The Violence of Representation: Housman's Illustrations to Rossetti's *Goblin Market*’, *English Studies in Canada* 19.3 (September 1993), 305-28 (p. 306). Jeanie Watson also recognises the double discourses in “‘Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me”: The Dilemma of Sisterly Self-Sacrifice’, *JPRAS* 7.1 (1986), 50-62 (p. 52); and “‘Men Sell Not Such in any Town”: Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Fruit of Fairy Tale*’, *Children's Literature* 12 (1984), 61-77 (p. 61). Compare Rosemary Jackson's definition of fantasy: ‘the fantastic plays upon difficulties of interpreting events/things as objects or as images, thus disorientating the reader's categorisation of the “real.”’ See *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 20.

semiotic. The dyad subject-other becomes that of subject-subject, a movement towards intersubjectivity, and the poem progresses towards an attempt to understand this radical discursive practise, based as it is on a crisis of language and belief, in terms of the Symbolic. It could be argued that Rossettian rhetoric has initiated my own critical attempt at mastering the poem, for I treat the semiotic as analogous to Rossetti's exploration of analogical signification. 'Goblin Market' invites such reading strategies, as a function of its precursory relation to Aestheticism in which art calls attention to its involute, turning in upon itself.⁶

* * * * *

D. G. Rossetti's efforts to find a publisher for his sister were rewarded when he secured the interest of Alexander Macmillan, who wrote to him of his decision to publish the book for the Christmas market (it eventually came out in the following spring), and explaining the decision by offering the following anecdote:⁷

I took the liberty of reading the *Goblin Market* aloud to a number of people belonging to a small working-man's society here. They seemed at first to wonder whether I

⁶'Involute' as complex, intricate and also rolled inwards (the botanical meaning). The protagonist of John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* used this epithet to describe Rossetti's poetry; see Campbell, p. 398.

⁷Christina Rossetti herself was astutely aware of manipulating the market. See Campbell for a discussion of this in relation to *Goblin Market*. Her correspondence with publishers shows an active concern with marketing her volumes. *SingSong*, for example, was also targeted for the Christmas market in 1871. Rossetti changed to Dante's publisher F. S. Ellis for this volume, and she offered it to them as 'a marketable proposition' (Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, p. 440). Kegan Paul proposed an edition of *Goblin Market* for Christmas, which never transpired (*CR: FL*, pp. 190-91).

was making fun of them; by degrees they got as still as death, and when I finished there was a tremendous burst of applause.⁸

This experiment to test the response to the poem is telling. The audience's reaction suggests their confusion over how the poem should be designated — as a fairy tale or moral story. The beginning of 'Goblin Market', suggestive as it is of fantasy, provokes puzzlement and perhaps resentment at Macmillan's seeming patronage; then, the realisation of moral overtones in competition with the fairy tale excites narrative tension which captivates the audience until, with the conclusion, they evidently show their appreciation that the conventional status quo has been retained, that it triumphs, even, over the menacing goblins. This audience, whose response is the first recorded to the poem, is paradigmatic of the history of critiques of 'Goblin Market' as a product of the stress produced by the poem's competing fairy tale and moral discourses. It also, as argued below, is suggestive of the dynamics within the poem involving the child-like pre-Oedipal and adult domains, or the semiotic and the Symbolic, charted by the first audience's confusion, suspense, and appreciative relief at the conclusion. The act of reading the poem enforces our entry into a child-like realm which we must reconcile with an adult world where experiences can only be recounted and understood as moral.⁹ There is, however, no resolution of this dynamic.¹⁰

⁸Quoted in Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p. 158.

⁹Kathleen Mayberry interprets this anecdote simply as reaffirming her impression that the poem has childlike qualities that suggest that the poem was written for children; see *Christina Rossetti and the Poetry of Discovery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 89. As Kooistra reminds us, the poem was defined to be for children only in the twentieth-century; 'Modern Markets for Goblin Market', *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994), 249-77 (pp. 254-55). Compare

The proliferation and profusion of critical studies of 'Goblin Market' has accelerated with the renaissance in Christina Rossetti studies that is largely a result of Rebecca Crump's edition of the poems and Antony Harrison's study of the poetry's contexts. 'Goblin Market' remains the most discussed Rossetti poem, and a poem that is largely critiqued in isolation.¹¹ As represented in critical readings, it is thus both central to her poetics and also different from the rest of her oeuvre, both emblematic and a phenomenon. In recent years so many studies of the poem have appeared, with diverse theoretical and hermeneutic frameworks, that it has become difficult to say anything new about 'Goblin Market'. The critic approaches the text with a fair amount of anxiety,¹² for the poem has been appropriated to such an extent that, more than any other poem by Rossetti, it has created its own critical goblin market.¹³ We are invited to purchase the fruits of criticism and there seems no

Bruno Bettelheim's famous analysis of fairy tales, which asserts that they encourage the development of the child's psyche. See *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), Introduction, especially pp. 5-6.

¹⁰The best and most recent Rossetti criticism acknowledges unresolved tensions in the poetry and strives to keep the tensions in play, resisting the temptation to find the text coherent and logical, for example the paper given by Kath Burlinson at the Christina Rossetti Centenary Conference, Anglia Polytechnic University, entitled 'Frogs and Fat Toads: Reproduction and the Body in Rossetti's "Nature" Poems'. It could be argued that the traditional critical stress upon finding a coherent hermeneutic framework is incited by the poem's narrative framework itself, in which the conclusion forms an ambiguous and unsatisfactory resolution of tension.

¹¹Notable exceptions are Connor; and Helena Michie, "There Is No Friend Like a Sister": Sisterhood as Sexual Difference', *ELH* 56.2 (Summer 1989), 401-21.

¹²Dennis Evans makes the point that the shifting positions in the poetry as a whole opens the way to endless possibilities for commentary and creates anxiety in the reader. See 'Christina Rossetti: Patrolling the Borders Between Ascetic and Aesthetic', paper given at the Christina Rossetti Centenary Conference, Anglia Polytechnic University, December 1994.

¹³Elizabeth Campbell makes a similar point: the *Goblin Market* volume used the literary market to critique capitalism and in so doing it created 'its own goblin market' that ensured the success of the Pre-Raphaelite poets and 'the new, more sophisticated mode of fantasy' (p. 394).

escape from the representational and critical system that positions us as readers within such a market.¹⁴

The template for this comes from the poem itself, where Laura is tempted by the goblin fruits but cannot offer money: “Good folk, I have no coin; / To take were to purloin” (ll. 116-7). The goblins suggest the ‘gold upon your head’ (l. 123) as alternative currency, and thus Laura is able to consume their wares. The substitution of actual monetary for figurative currency to enable the transaction to take place has an analogy in the critical marketplace, where the text has been purloined — in the sense of both stolen and put at a distance¹⁵ — through academic reading and rereading, and which attempts to represent the meaning of ‘Goblin Market’ according to the particular critical discourse employed, and entering into the text’s production of meaning. In this respect, it is ironical that the most recent trend is to locate the poem within the Victorian ideology of the marketplace.¹⁶ Elizabeth Helsinger turns around

¹⁴‘Perhaps the taste of goblin fruit must linger in our mouths whenever we retell stories in the languages of our own critical discourses’ (Kooistra, ‘The Representation of Violence / The Violence of Representation’, p. 316).

¹⁵Lacan’s famous rereading of Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’ also points out that the etymological meaning of ‘purloin’ is to put aside. He reads the story of a circulating letter as also the story of signification within the symbolic order, which also has relevance for critical readings of ‘Goblin Market’, situated as they are in relation to the text’s own signifying system which endlessly circulates fairy and moral discourses. Catherine Belsey explains the significance of Lacan’s reading: ‘the displaced letter is evidence of the division in the self between conscious subjectivity and the unconscious, site of another set of signifiers. It is the repeated insistence of the (displaced) unconscious signifiers in conscious discourse which constitutes the return of the repressed in dreams and slips of the tongue. [. . .] Each holder of the stolen letter [in Poe’s story] in turn necessarily repeats the symbolic situation which shows how the signifying chain both binds and blinds’ (*Critical Practice*, pp. 141-42). Critiques of ‘Goblin Market’ must, in order to offer a coherent narrative, choose to give priority to either moral or fairy-tale discourses, thus re-enacting the text’s representational system which tempts us with either version of the story, only to elide the other discursive strategy.

¹⁶For example: Campbell; Carpenter; Elizabeth K. Helsinger, ‘Consumer Power and the Utopia of Desire: Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market”’, *ELH* 58.4 (Winter 1991), 903-33; and Holt.

the usual reading of the poem in order to validate her emphasis upon market relations rather than the Christian moral discourse:

Much of the criticism of 'Goblin Market' treats its story of buying and selling, like its rhymes and goblins, as the figurative dress for a narrative of spiritual temptation, fall, and redemption. But what happens if instead we read the figure as the subject: buying and selling, or more specifically, the relation of women to those markets of the nursery tales?
(p. 903)

By thus reversing the traditionally accepted terms of the poem, Helsinger reads 'Goblin Market' as a critique of patriarchal consumption, the secular moral of the tale.

Of course, to some extent this suggests an obvious point: criticism is always structured by the specific discursive practises that the critic chooses to position himself or herself in relation to. But I argue that the excessive attention paid to 'Goblin Market' is an *effect* of the poem's representational strategy that denies any stable meaning within the poem. Criticism has had to confront this when re-presenting the poem.

James Ashcroft Noble is an astute contemporary critic of 'Goblin Market', but he says more than he knows, and is worth quoting in full:

In thus making us aware of two worlds at once, Miss Rossetti does not use the mechanical method of the allegorist, who chooses a set of arbitrary symbols, and labels each with its special spiritual significance; for she is a true mystic, to whom each simple thing of nature or each homely human relation tells its own secret of meaning, and to-morrow's meaning may not be that of to-day, because the object is not a figure in a cipher, but a true symbol with infinite variety of revelation. The poem, for example, which gave its name to her first volume, may be read and enjoyed merely as

a charming fairy-fantasy, and as such it is delightful and satisfying; but behind the simple story of the two children and the goblin fruit-sellers is a little spiritual drama of love's vicarious redemption, in which the child redeemer goes into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, that by her painful conquest she may succour and save the sister who has been vanquished and all but slain.¹⁷

Noble's re-telling of the poem attempts to separate and reformulate the fairy and moral discourses and to give priority to the 'little spiritual drama' over the 'charming fairy-fantasy'. This critical sleight of hand is a commonplace in criticism of 'Goblin Market', for, in an attempt to represent the poem in terms of a stable and coherent narrative structure, one discourse is erased or elided. It is the discursive practise of 'Goblin Market' that produces such critical disquiet.

W. M. Rossetti's editorial comments on the poem are seminal in the recognition of competing discourses:

I have more than once heard Christina say that she did not mean anything profound by this fairy tale—it is not a moral apologue consistently carried out in detail. Still the incidents are such as to be at any rate suggestive, and different minds may be likely to read different messages into them.
(*PW: CR*, p. 459)¹⁸

The reported authorial intention has often represented a block in critiques of the poem, as critics attempt to reconcile Christina Rossetti's statement with spiritual or moral truths perceived in the narrative. Consequently, critics attempt to make meaning out of 'Goblin Market' by giving priority to one discourse and eliding

¹⁷James Ashcroft Noble, 'The Burden of Christina Rossetti', *Impressions and Memories* (London: Dent, 1895), pp. 58-59.

¹⁸This is repeated almost word for word in Bell, p. 207.

the other. Mary Arseneau demonstrates the relation between 'Goblin Market' and Rossetti's religious beliefs without a consideration of the fairy-tale element ('Incarnation and Repetition'). Marion Shalkhauser proposes the poem as a re-telling of the biblical temptation/fall/redemption story. The article's concluding reference to the fairy-tale subsumes this discourse into the moral message:

Though there are surely many other elements, particularly that of folk-lore, which contribute to the composition of the entire poem, 'Goblin Market' sets forth Christina Rossetti's beliefs in original sin and in the sacrificial nature of Christ's death through her creation of a Christian fairy tale in which a feminine Christ redeems a feminine mankind from a masculine Satan.¹⁹

Folk-lore is, in Shalkhauser's terminology, caught up in the Christian discourse and the conflict between moral and fairy tale is elided — the narrative becomes a Christian fairy tale.²⁰ Ellen Golub and Patricia Andrews give a psychological interpretation of the poem via a reading of the fantasy as, respectively, the conflict between the oral and anal stage and the latent neurotic perversion functioning behind the manifest moral allegory.²¹ A further school sees 'Goblin Market' as a

¹⁹Marion Shalkhauser, 'The Feminine Christ', *Victorian Newsletter* 10 (1956), 19-20 (p. 20).

²⁰In fact, folklore may be seen as central to the conception of the poem. 'Goblin Market' was originally entitled 'A Peep at the Goblins', until D. G. Rossetti suggested the title change. In a copy of the volume, Christina Rossetti explains the original title, which was 'in imitation of my cousin Mrs. Bray's "A Peep at the Pixies"' (C.i.234). Anna Eliza Bray's *A Peep at the Pixies; or, Legends of the West* (London: Grant and Griffith, 1854) was based upon legends of Dartmoor and North Cornwall. Jan Marsh demonstrates the debt of 'Goblin Market' to folklore in 'Christina Rossetti's Poetic Vocation: The Importance of *Goblin Market*', *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994), 233-48.

²¹Ellen Golub, 'Untying Goblin Apron Strings: A Psychoanalytic Reading of "Goblin Market"', *Literature and Psychology* 25 (1975), 158-65; Patricia R. Andrews,

demonstration of Rossetti's concern with sensuality, reading the fairy-tale as equivalent to the sensuous which she must, for the benefit of her religious scruples, not be tempted by.²² The sisterhood criticism, which suggests that Laura and Lizzie are the two sides to Rossetti's personality, the aesthetic and the ascetic, re-presents the poem as either an allegory of psychic re-integration,²³ 'a fantasy of feminine freedom, heroism, and self-sufficiency and a celebration of sisterly and maternal love',²⁴ or an allegory of repression.²⁵ The moral of Christian redemption is translated into psychic redemption or fall; in both cases, the critics mark their difference from the text by the elision of the fairy-tale.²⁶

Despite the urge to separate the fairy from moral discourses, in order to stabilise the narrative, the two resist a pure and formal demarcation. One has infected the other and 'Goblin Market' refuses either a purely fantastic or (Christian or Marxist) moral reading. Barbara Garlick, who herself chooses to

'Latent Meaning in "Goblin Market"', *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 5.3-4 (1984), 171-74.

²²Lynda Palazzo, 'Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market": The Sensual Imagination', *Unisa English Studies* 26.2 (September 1988), 15-20; Alan P. Barr, 'Sensuality Survived: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"', *English Miscellany: A Symposium of History, Literature and the Arts* 28-29 (1979-80), 267-82.

²³Winston Weathers, 'Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self', *Victorian Poetry* 3 (1965), 81-9 (pp. 81-89).

²⁴Dorothy Mermin, 'Heroic Sisterhood in *Goblin Market*', *Victorian Poetry* 21 (1983), 107-18 (p. 108).

²⁵'That "Goblin Market" is not just an observation of the lives of other women but an accurate account of the aesthetics Rossetti worked out for herself helps finally to explain why, although Keats can imagine asserting himself from beyond the grave, Rossetti, banqueting on bitterness, must bury herself alive in a coffin of renunciation.' See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 574-75.

²⁶'[Housman] does what all critics do when they re-present stories: he follows out the implications of his own mastering discourse, even though this means the suppression of the text's difference from his own critical representation' (Kooistra, 'The Representation of Violence / The Violence of Representation', pp. 311-312).

identify 'Goblin Market' with the fantastic, shows how nineteenth-century commentators primarily saw the poem as a fairy-tale, whereas twentieth century readers prefer a more hermeneutic and allegorical approach. 'The fantasy in 'Goblin Market', however, can neither be totally set aside nor innocently allowed to divert the reader from more complex readings.'²⁷ Despite thus identifying the two discourses, Garlick's analysis depends upon the assumption that Rossetti's purpose is to critique the feminine subject in fantasy:

The result is an angry poem in which woman is both active subject, and fetishised object of the gaze and the machinations of the goblins like the women in the fairy paintings of the period. In the poem, however, as active subject, she engenders a kinetic energy of language which gives her a decisive role in the fantasy; through the dual figures of Laura and Lizzie the market place is entered and appropriated and finally rejected to the point of not retelling. Unlike her place in the visual world of fantasy where female decision is inappropriate and passivity is emphasised, Laura/Lizzie controls the male marketplace which her linguistic energy creates.

(p. 144)

Thus, the fantasy allows a critique of the Victorian marketplace, the (secular) moral of the tale. In fact, the category of fantasy as separate from the moral breaks down, in particular through the use of the commonplace which introduces the economic marketplace of the Symbolic into the poem. Garlick sees this as a response to fantasy which Rossetti categorises as 'problematic and factitious' (p. 149). Of course, fantasy need not

²⁷Barbara Garlick, 'Christina Rossetti and the Gender Politics of Fantasy', in *The Victorian Fantasists: Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in the Mythopoeic Fiction of the Victorian Age*, ed. by Kath Filmer (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 133-52 (p. 143).

be separate from the commonplace, and the Symbolic is the domain of the moral, where it has its application. This is what produces its uncanniness — ‘the fairy tale is made of the stuff of the enchanted and the prosaic, the real and the unreal’,²⁸ ‘the fantastic cannot exist independently of that “real” world which it seems to find so frustratingly finite’ (Jackson, p. 20); ‘as soon as the poem [“Goblin Market”] opens we are located in a world that is simultaneously exotic and remote and gnawingly familiar’ (Barr, p. 272). But the impossible urge to separate completely the moral and the fairy tale results in a critical re-enactment of the text’s double and interactive discourses by reinscribing the moral into the fairy-tale, for the two cannot be kept separate; thus a fantasy of female consumer relations becomes an oblique critique of the female’s dangerous position as both consumer and consumed in the Victorian market place (Helsing, Holt).

Lorraine Janzen Kooistra’s analysis of the illustrations to ‘Goblin Market’ suggests how each verbal-visual combination, not least in the case of D.G. Rossetti, re-presents the poem and reinterprets the text according to the illustrator’s concerns. She figures illustrators as critics who attempt to dominate the text:

Each successive critic’s will to power is in evidence in his/her desire to suppress difference and to assert dominance in the powerful symbolic mode of writing, for criticism may be described as a wilful representation of the creative text according to a particular interpretative approach.
(‘The Representation of Violence / The Violence of Representation’, p. 305)

²⁸Simon A. Grolnick, ‘Fairy Tales and Psychotherapy’, in *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*, ed. by Ruth B. Bottigheimer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 203-15 (p. 208).

Kooistra sees this as a result of the poem's thematic concern with representation: 'by tantalisingly exposing its own failure to tell the "real story", the poem entices other would-be storytellers — both artists and critics — into its narrative game' (p. 307). I take this line of thought further. It is not just the coy play with the true version of events that tempts the critic into rewriting the tale as a more stable and coherent narrative. Rather, the text's resistance to resolution is rhetorical as well as thematic; it is embedded in Rossetti's response to the representational systems in which her work is positioned.²⁹

It is thus the dynamics of the text's discourses that have produced such critical strategies, as the reader is enticed by the text's invitation to interpret. In fact, the poem is about the act of reading, of choosing whether to have commerce with the signification system and what our means of transaction will be. Arseneau declares 'Goblin Market' to be: 'a paradigm for the kind of symbolic interpretation in which Rossetti wanted her readers to engage' ('Incarnation and Repetition', p. 79) and suggests how Rossetti's belief in an analogical system of signification, influenced by Tractarianism, provides the mode by which the poem should be read. The conviction that the temporal world signifies spiritual truths was, Arseneau continues, complicated for Rossetti by a distrust of the sensual attraction of the world (p. 82), and so the poem invites us along with Lizzie and Laura to

²⁹Deborah Ann Thompson makes a similar point in relation to the poem's concern with the metaphoricity of eating: 'Gilbert and Gubar and Rosenblum reflect the tendency of critics of "Goblin Market" to re-enact the dialectical mechanisms of the poem by taking the side of either Laura or Lizzie, either bulimic excess or anorexic renunciation.' See 'Anorexia as a Lived Trope: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 24 (1991), 89-106 (p. 94).

read the true significance of the goblin fruits. But this interpretation fails to account for the unsettling nature of the poem, its failure to be resolved wholly into a spiritual drama. It is, in fact, the *failure* of Rossetti's analogical rhetoric to consistently reveal spiritual signifieds that leads us into much more complex issues of interpretation and readership.

Sartre's comments on fantasy, as interpreted by Jackson, explain the uncanny double discourse of 'Goblin Market'. Fantasy in a religious culture transcends the material, whereas in a secular capitalist society, fantasy:

presents a natural world inverted into something strange, something 'other'. It becomes 'domesticated', humanized, turning from transcendental explorations to transcriptions of a human condition. [. . .] Objects no longer serve transcendent purposes, so that means have replaced ends.
(Jackson, pp. 17-18).

Put in these terms, Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' is caught up in the movement from one mode of fantasy to the other, from mystical asceticism to a transformation of the known world, from transcendental ends to material means.³⁰ And this accords with the failure in analogic discourse, whereby the desire to transcend the material and apprehend the spiritual is frustrated by a crisis in signification.

* * * * *

³⁰Campbell argues that the poem helps establish a 'new, more sophisticated mode of fantasy' (p. 394). Garlick sees the poem as a complex response to the contemporary domestication of fantasy ('Christina Rossetti', pp. 141-2).

Although D. G. Rossetti was active in seeking a publisher for his sister's poems, Christina Rossetti herself was exploring possible channels for her verse. On 1 August 1854 she wrote to Professor Aytoun, a member of staff at *Blackwood's Magazine*:

I hope that I shall not be misunderstood as guilty of egotism or foolish vanity, when I say that my love for what is good in the work of others teaches me that there is something above the despicable in mine; that poetry is with me, not a mechanism, but an impulse and a reality; and that I know my aims in writing to be pure and directed to that which is true and right.³¹

This very diffident letter, to which no reply is extant, enclosed a hand bound booklet containing six poems: 'Symbols' (C.i.75, 260; eventually published in *Goblin Market*); 'Something like Truth' (C.i.79, 262; published as 'Sleep at Sea' in *Goblin Market*); 'Easter Even' (C.i.221, 310; 'Paradise' in *Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1875)); 'The Watchers' (C.iii.194, 435); 'Once' (C.iii.186, 431; 'Is and Was', the title in the manuscript notebook, in W.M. Rossetti's 1896 edition); and 'Long enough' (C.i.123, 272; 'Dream-Love' in *The Prince's Progress*). These poems, deliberately selected as an introduction to a prospective publisher, form an early statement of Rossetti's interpretative strategies, in particular the concern with the perception of material symbols.

The first poem in the booklet announces, in the title ('Symbols'), such a concern. The speaker watches a rosebud and

³¹The letter and fair copy booklet are held by the Beinecke Library, Yale University. Reprinted in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, p. 414, although Marsh does not mention the fair copies. Marsh also gives a letter written to David Masson at *Macmillan's Magazine* on 19 January 1861, along with 'Up-hill' and 'A Birthday', which he published (pp. 414-15). These two poems are also significant examples of Rossetti's interest in symbolic and interpretative modes. 'Goblin Market' was written 27 April 1859, and I discuss the letter to Aytoun because it predates 'Goblin Market'.

then a nest of eggs in order for their apparent spiritual promise to be fulfilled. However, the rosebud does not open and the eggs do not hatch. They prove unstable symbols of the spiritual: 'I crushed the eggs, not heeding how / Their ancient promise had been fair' (ll. 16-17). In the last stanza, this is turned back upon the speaker who is spoken to by the symbols she has destroyed in her wrath:

But the dead branch spoke from the sod,
And the eggs answered me again:
Because we failed dost thou complain?
Is thy wrath just? And what if God,
Who waiteth for thy fruits in vain,
Should also take the rod?
(ll. 19-24)

The personification of the symbols gives them a peculiar additional metaphoricity as the speaker's spiritual fruits become the subject of the poem. The expected analogy fails and is replaced by another, that of the speaker with the symbols themselves. This doubling is a protective strategy that re-establishes analogy, by default, as the way to interpret fruits. But the oddity of the symbols remains to disturb the reader as they resist their spiritual designation and are then personified. In this way, analogy is questioned as a secure mode of interpretation.³²

³²Compare Mayberry's reading of analogy in this poem, which she does not figure as disturbing or problematic: 'In "Symbols", a correct interpretation of natural phenomena (the fate of the rosebud and the eggs), based upon a recognition of the symbolic nature of God's universe, discovers positive truth in seeming failure' (pp. 118-19). Mayberry recognises the importance of the Tractarian belief in analogy to Rossetti's poetry in general, but as with her reading of 'Symbols' does not see this inducing a crisis of signification. For example: 'confident in the spiritual significance of material reality, Rossetti often uses a parabolic method, presenting material phenomena as a basis for spiritual instruction. Her parabolic approach maintains a correspondence (which implies a separation, a distance) between the signifier and the signified, whereas some poets of the period (Hopkins is an obvious example) tend to collapse the signified into the signifier' (p. 116). I take issue

'Once', another of the poems sent to Aytoun, similarly stresses the importance of reading, in this case reading a character. The speaker describes the change in a simple maiden when she becomes a dignified lady 'whiter than the ermine / That half shadowed neck and hand' (ll. 1-2) with hair 'more golden / Than their golden band' (ll. 3-4). The images of white and gold suggest opulence and excess rather than purity, in contrast to their deployment in 'Goblin Market' to describe Lizzie as she braves the goblins and their fruit for Laura's sake: 'White and golden Lizzie stood' (l. 408). In an ironical tone, the speaker suggests she 'almost' prefers the simple state: 'Yet I almost loved her more / In the simple time before' (ll. 6-7). An association of the simple maiden with the natural world then follows, when the maiden was ignorant of her beauty, which exceeded her natural environment: 'Then she plucked the stately lilies / Knowing not she was more fair' (ll. 8-9). The poem suggests that lack of self-knowledge, the pre-lapsarian state, is more charming than self-knowledge that may lead to vanity, but qualifies with the coy and laconic 'almost', thus seeming to withhold judgement. The lady's word and actions are subject to a double meaning:

Now she is a noble lady,
With calm voice not overloud;
Very courteous in her action,
Yet you think her proud;
Much too haughty to affect;
Too indifferent to direct,
Or be angry, or suspect;
Doing all from self-respect.
(ll. 22-29)

with this statement and suggest that the signified is absent or displaced from the text as a result of the failure of analogical discourse.

This final stanza further disturbs the reading of symbols with a shift from the first person singular of the first stanza to the second person. The cumulative list and the repeated end-rhymes drive the poem onwards and emphasise the doubleness and duplicity of the lady's character while coyly refusing to give an explicit judgement. Another version of this poem from the manuscript notebook, entitled 'Is and Was', gives an additional deleted final stanza which re-introduces the subject into the text:

All her present pomp of beauty
Had not won me of a truth
If I had not known and loved her
In her simple youth.
Now I cannot change; and yet
Sometimes I almost regret
That we twain have ever met,
Or that I cannot forget
(C.iii.432)

The speaker more explicitly, in these deleted stanzas, suggests how she is able to read the lady's character by comparing her with her former state, by the difference between what she is and what she has become. The character described is thus read symbolically and through the difference from herself. Once again the speaker *almost* regrets her acquaintance with the lady or *almost* regrets remembering the painful difference that enables her to read the character. This construction either/or reinforces the ambiguity inherent in the symbolic reading which is related to the painful knowledge of difference within symbols. In addition, the speaker posits herself as incapable of change — 'Now I cannot change' — the 'now' suggesting but refusing to

identify the temporal moment of the poem, and also placing the speaker as different from the character who is symbolically read. This difference of the speaker from the subject described, it is suggested, enables the truth to be perceived. And yet the comparison of differences is rendered unstable by the repeated use of the word 'almost'.

The remaining poems in the Aytoun selection explore the relation between interpretation and states of consciousness, in particular dreaming and Soul Sleep. The version of 'Sleep at Sea' sent to Aytoun, originally entitled 'Something like Truth', suggests more explicitly than the revised title the theme of perceiving. Here, dreaming is a metaphor for the inability to be conscious of and interpret correctly material signs. In an allusion to Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (*S. T. Coleridge: The Oxford Authors*, pp. 46-65), all the crew of a ship, including the watchman, are asleep and the spirits who try to waken them and warn of an approaching storm do so in vain. The poem begins with a description of the deep sleep and the dreams which make the sleepers oblivious to the oncoming tempest:

Oh soft the streams drop music
Between the hills,
And musical the birds' nests
Beside those rills:
The nests are types of home
Love hidden from ills,
The nests are types of spirits
Love music fills

So dream the sleepers.
(ll. 17-25)

The sleepers, in their dream-state, cannot distinguish the true signs of nature, which foretell of the storm. Instead they dream of a pastoral nature, safe 'from ills'. The repeated use of the word 'type' introduces the concept of analogy, but the sleepers have mistaken nature as a benevolent haven, a retreat. The irony, however, is that despite not reading the types correctly, nature *will* lead them to a type, a version, of rest, in death. The sleepers' error lies in not giving material signs a proper spiritual antitype; for them, nature has only an empirical, material signified.³³ And so, when the spirits finally abandon them:

They sleep to death, in dreaming
Of length of days.—
Vanity of vanities,
The Preacher says:
Vanity is the end
Of all their ways.
(ll. 83-88)

Ironically, the sleepers end their days believing that days will never end.

The poem's last lines, introducing the Preacher, give the only explicit moral pronouncement on the sleepers. Throughout, however, there is a sense that the dreaming crew are themselves metaphors for those who mis-perceive and mis-read material signs. Their sleep is not that of the Soul-Sleepers, who dream of the afterlife whilst awaiting their Resurrection, but the sleep of the misguided. The poem's elusive and unsettling quality seems to come from the difficulty in placing the poem as either a narrative or wholly a spiritual parable. The text resists

³³In chapter 5 I show how Rossetti's poems themselves are subject to this signification crisis when the material offers no spiritual counterpart.

belonging in either category, and seems to place itself in a mysterious unidentifiable space similar to that of the ship, in neither the material or spiritual worlds. Thus, the poem has an uncertain position as either narrative or parable, and the gaps that any reading must acknowledge may lend the poem to allegory in the same way that 'Goblin Market' has lent itself. In the end, however, the poem does not invite this closure for, despite the overt Christian ending of 'Something like Truth', the very import of the poem seems, paradoxically, to rest in its undecidability, its mysterious semantic elisions. D. G. Rossetti's teasing critique of the poem, that it seems, in a pun on the title, 'very like a whale' and full of imaginative 'dreamings', acknowledges the poem's disturbing qualities.³⁴ The only major change in the poem for publication, as far as we know, is the title change which emphasises the sea as opposed to misreading the truth, which may be Rossetti's half-hearted attempt to pacify her brother and try to make the poem applicable to 'real abundant Nature' as he advised (see chapter 2). D. G. Rossetti, like the sleepers in the poem, seems not to have interpreted analogically.³⁵

In contrast, 'Easter Even' recounts a dream of paradise:

Once in a dream I saw the flowers
That bud and bloom in Paradise;
More fair they are than any eyes

³⁴Letter from D. G. Rossetti to Christina Rossetti, 8 November 1853, in *DGR: FL*, vol. 2, p. 120.

³⁵Mary Arseneau argues that the prince in 'Prince's Progress' is a figure for D. G. Rossetti, whose delay in providing the woodcuts for the volume was so frustrating for his sister and her publisher and who fails to read symbols correctly. See 'Pilgrimage and Postponement: Christina Rossetti's *The Prince's Progress*', *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994), 279-98 (pp. 291-95).

Have seen in all this world of ours.
(ll. 1-4)

The poem plays on nature as analogous to the beauty of Paradise, whilst reminding us that nature is a dream, and is not really constituted by the material signs that signify the afterlife. Rossetti herself further removed the poem from the experiential by, as W. M. Rossetti points out, noting 'not a real dream' next to the poem in one of her volumes (*PW: CR*, p. 470). This poem, in fact, reads as an anticipation of Soul Sleep, which is itself an anticipation of the afterlife. In the poem's final stanza, there is again an emphasis upon the signs that signify the spiritual, which looks towards the actual sight of paradise:

I hope to see these things again,
But not as once in dreams by night;
To see them with my very sight,
And touch and handle and attain.
(ll. 41-44)

The dreams which prefigure and signify the afterlife are distinguished from 'my very sight' which will finally behold paradise. This emphasis upon seeing truly and faithfully recalls the Tractarian and Ruskinian insistence upon the priority of the object above the seeing subject. Rossetti is here not subordinating the subject to the object, but deferring the subject as a true seer (in both senses) to the afterlife. The implication is that the Symbolic, which provides the type that enables, analogically, the dream state to be described in the poem, is similarly not seen properly, spiritually, 'with my very sight'.

The remaining two poems in the Aytoun selection, 'The Watchers' and 'Long enough', both suggest the movement from real sleep to Soul Sleep to the afterlife, and play upon the implications of the analogous chain such a dynamic attempts to create. 'Long Enough' describes the sleep of 'young love' which becomes the sleep of 'poppied death' (l. 50). 'The Watchers', which starts as a sentimental poem, moves to the spiritual as three presences are described overlooking a dead woman: the Cross, her Guardian Angel, and 'prayers of truest love' (l. 9). The Angel watches the woman until her resurrection when 'She shall behold him face to face' (l. 32), whilst human love:

[. . .] prays that in her deep
Grave she may sleep a blessed sleep

And when time and the world are past
She may find mercy at the last.
(ll. 35-38).

The watchers preside over this waiting time which becomes the waiting time of the soul. The analogy that is suggested between real sleep and Soul Sleep and Soul Sleep and the afterlife establishes Soul Sleep as an intermittent phase that ensures, verifies and stabilises the movement between the material, the dream, and the afterlife. As a figure for the unrepresentable liminal in-between time, Soul Sleep effects what would otherwise be an impossible leap from sign to signified, and a leap of faith from the Symbolic order to the spiritual. In 'Long enough' — whose change to 'Dream-Love' for publication again obscures the concern with perceiving the spiritual through the temporal — the dream of the sleeper is both unrepresentable and analogous with the visual, temporal world:

Young love lies dreaming;
But who shall tell the dream?—
A perfect sunlight
Upon the forest tips;
Or perfect moonlight
Upon a rippling stream;
Or perfect silence;
Or song of cherished lips.
(ll. 17-24)

Despite offering various possibilities for the dream through the anaphoric construction, the poem does not signal explicitly when the dream of the 'Young love' becomes the dream of the dead, nor if 'Young love' moves from the sensual to the spiritual, and nor if 'Young love' is a consistent personification. Again the poem refuses explicitly to position itself as sentimental narrative or parable. The abstract and concrete are blurred as the boundary between the real and the spiritual is obscured. There is no explicit pairing between type and anti-type, but the analogous matrix material/Soul Sleep/afterlife persists to de-stabilise visual signs. 'Young love lies sleeping / In May time of the year' (ll. 1-2), and it is the space of possibility, the May time, that teases with a referent whilst also positioning the poem in an uncertain in-between time.

The issues of perceiving the spiritual in the material are thus fraught with complications, and these poems dramatise the resulting crises in signification. The problem is not only how to read symbols, but if our gaze can be trusted to see properly; the failure of the analogical chains re-introduces the perceiving subject whose authority to negotiate this crisis rests on belief rather than experience, thus diverting signification away from the unreliable material world to a space *within* the subject

whilst that subject is projected out of the text³⁶ And the relocation within, along with the emphasis upon the dream and states of consciousness, is suggestive of the semiotic. These twinned concerns — with analogy and a prior state (the semiotic) — is where I situate the ambivalences of ‘Goblin Market’, in order to account for the discourses of both fantasy and morality.

* * * * *

Mary Arseneau's work on ‘Goblin Market’ is a groundbreaking attempt to formulate issues of readership and interpretation in the poem. But, as argued above, it does not take into account the implications for the signification process nor for the feminine subject caught within the rhetoric of analogy. No re-reading of ‘Goblin Market’ has considered the text’s lacunae and semantic problems from the perspective of analogy.

The competing discourses of fairy-tale and morality in the poem involve the problematics of boundaries and thresholds, for Lizzie and Laura seem to live on the edge of the Symbolic, on the threshold of fairy-land.³⁷ As Noble comments, Rossetti's poetics leave us with an elusive sense of ‘familiar remoteness’ (p. 57).

³⁶See chapter 2 on manuscript revisions.

³⁷Kooistra helpfully summarises the relation of the voices in ‘Goblin Market’ to the moral and fairy tale elements: ‘three story-tellers compete for the dominant representation of the girls-meet-goblins story. Laura’s moral epilogue represents the principal narrator’s story, but with a critical interpretation. The principal narrator’s story itself may be viewed as the re-writing of Lizzie’s cautionary tale of Jeanie—a re-presentment of Jeanie’s tragedy as Laura’s comedy, the revised ending marked by marriage and fecundity rather than death and sterility. These story-tellers employ different discursive strategies for their representations. The principal narrator tells her story as a fairy tale; her form is open-ended to the extent that she willingly shares her speech with the seductive voices of the goblins. Lizzie and Laura, on the other hand, invoke the moral-tale model to tell their stories, and so attempt to master their narratives by effecting closure’ (‘The Representation of Violence / The Violence of Representation’, p. 306).

The poem, although devoid of specific contexts, implies a tension between spheres, the domestic and the marketplace.³⁸ It also suggests the Symbolic (or a pastoral version of the Symbolic) and the other; in Sartre's terms (see above), this other is both a transformation of the Symbolic, a fantastical marketplace, *and* a transcendence of the Symbolic, the suggestion of the spiritual. This ambivalence lends the text its uncanniness that many commentators note.³⁹ The first of these is W.M. Rossetti, who terms the fruits 'uncanny' (*PW: CR*, p. 459) because they are both dangerous and restorative. Critics have noted that the fruits themselves, by their very abundance and excessiveness, are difficult to visualise, and seem perversely shapeless despite the plethora of types of fruit.⁴⁰ But the uncanny pervades the poem in other ways; there is a dialectical dynamic between within and without, the known and unknown, and the boundaries between geographical locales and fantastical realms, the girls' cottage and the goblin market, and the mysterious glen that suggests both at once. This corresponds to what Kristeva terms the abject, which is elucidated above, in Chapter 5. The abject is explained by Diane Chisholm as a development of Freud's notion of the uncanny:

Abjection is the horror of not knowing the boundaries distinguishing 'me' from 'not-me', a primary uncanny which precedes and conditions the horror of castration, and which is generated by the repulsive fecundity and generative power of the maternal body as sensed by the embryonic superego. Fear and dread of being overwhelmed by that body give rise to feelings of abjection

³⁸This assumption underlies critiques by Campbell, Helsing, and Holt.

³⁹Harold Bloom's review of Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* points out that Freud did not believe that fairy tales aroused the sense of the uncanny (quoted in Grolnick, pp.206-7).

⁴⁰Mayberry, for example, terms the goblins 'protean' (p. 96).

which find expression in rituals of purification; these rituals, in turn, lay the foundations for instituting sexual difference and for establishing hierarchical social order.

(Wright, p. 439)

In these terms, the abject gives rise to a substitution of the mother's body in the orality of Laura's frenzied feeding first on the fruit and then on her sister's body which is smeared with the goblin juices.⁴¹ Kristeva, in fact, links the abject to eating. She offers the example of milk given by parents to the child, which the child both consumes and also rejects as the object of the parents' desire. Consequently, what nourishes is also repulsive. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva links this to the process by which the child is constructed as a subject, as an oscillation of ingestion and expulsion, and so: 'I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*' (p.3). The frenzied feeding in 'Goblin Market' suggests that first the goblin fruit and then the body of Lizzie have replaced the desire for the maternal figure, noticeably absent from the poem until its end, when in the proleptic conclusion the sisters have become mothers. The abjected fruit, via the actions of Lizzie, purifies Laura and allows her to claim a position in the Symbolic order.

She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore
(ll. 134-35)

⁴¹For further analyses of the orality of the poem from a psychoanalytical perspective, see Golub and Andrews. David Morrill argues for an interpretation of the sucking reiteration with reference to vampirism, in "Twilight is not good for maidens": Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in "Goblin Market", *Victorian Poetry* 28 (1990), 1-16. Cora Kaplan rejects the view that this orality can be related to the mother's breast because it would then be the mother's breast, not the child's lips, that would ache (p. 102). I still maintain that the verb to suck in the poem has maternal overtones, if only by the very obvious absence of a maternal figure until the final verse paragraph, when the sisters are shown proleptically to be mothers themselves.

She clung about her sister,
Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
Tears once again
Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
Dropping like rain
After long sultry drouth;
Shaking with anguish fear and pain,
She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.
(ll. 485-492)

But, as Kristeva notes, the abject, from its place of banishment, continues to challenge the subject (p. 2). In this way, the ending of the poem itself is both an avowal of social norms, with the sisters becoming mothers, and a disavowal, with the preceding narrative inexplicably glossed over in the parabolic re-telling to the children. As Thompson notes, the ending leaves the reader with the sense that the poem is both a protest against and a reproduction of patriarchy (p. 103). This is a typical Rossetti position, or non-position, understandable equally as conservatism or radicalism.⁴²

But the analogous discourse itself both promotes and undermines this uncanny duplicitous doubling,⁴³ as types and anti-types, signs and signifieds, fail to give secure signification, although carrying the promise of full spiritual meaning that must necessarily be deferred, or projected outside the text in a leap of faith. The boundaries are between the known

⁴²Many critics have called attention to this aporia. I argue that it spirals out from Rossetti's various ideological positions, primarily those of Tractarianism and Pre-Raphaelitism.

⁴³'Rossetti often uses simile, particularly a series of similes, to suggest uncertainty or incompleteness. As much as the narrator of "Goblin Market" seems to delight in her ability to create endless poetic images, she also asserts that there is something frightening about definition through comparisons' (p. 99). This is the nearest Mayberry gets to allowing for the disturbing quality of similes. No association is made with analogy here, though, which Mayberry elsewhere discusses.

and unknown, Symbolic order and fairy-tale, the type and anti-type, which the object constantly puts in question.

The language of the goblins inscribes this shifting of denotations. At the beginning of the poem, the goblins' cries list the fruits they purvey whilst suggesting a disruption or suspension of temporal time as the fruits are unnaturally ripe all at once, and time flies:

'Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crab-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries;—
All ripe together
In summer weather,—
Morns that pass by,
Fair eves that fly;
Come buy, come buy.'
(ll. 5-19)

Arseneau identifies these lines as examples of the lure of the sensual which distracts from the symbolic spiritual truth which the reader is invited to interpret: 'the goblin fruit does not seem to invite a moral or symbolic reading at all; by their sheer number, the fruits overload the senses and tend to impair the observer's ability to see beyond the physical' ('Incarnation and Repetition', p. 85). But the significance of the goblin-language resonates beyond this concern. The chains of names and similes give a catalogue of types with no apparent anti-types and thus the goblins' cries signify discourse which has an absence of

spiritual signifieds. But the goblin-language is also that of the market-place, and so the goblins represent patriarchal discourse at its most grotesque, its most excessive. In fact, the absence of signifieds makes the goblin-language a parody of patriarchal discourse.⁴⁴ Patriarchal discourse is analogical, as Irigaray defines it; but for in 'Goblin Market' this is translated into spiritual significances as patriarchal discourse *represents* its own failure to apprehend, analogically, divine signifieds. This marks its difference from spiritual discourse, which strives for analogy in order to apprehend the spiritual.

Throughout the poem the excessive chains of similes are associated with the goblins. In particular, they are described in an anaphoric list:

 'One hauls a basket,
 One bears a plate,
 One lugs a golden dish
 Of many pounds weight [. . .]
 One had a cat's face,
 One whisked a tail,
 One tramped a rat's pace,
 One crawled like a snail,
 One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
 One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.
 (II. 56-59, II. 71-76)

⁴⁴Gillian Beer notes that analogy is lateral rather than causal, thus appealing as a mode of discourse to Darwin in his concern with intentionality. See *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Ark, 1985), p. 88. The plethora of the goblins' chains of similes is a parody of analogy's non-causality, and an exposure of the failure of the discourse to apprehend the spiritual. But the term 'lateral', meaning of the side, is ambiguous in relation to the Tractarians, who require analogy to transcend, to go beyond or above, the material to the spiritual. This aporia is exposed by Rossetti's poetics and in 'Goblin Market' Rossetti gives her most critical exposure of analogy's limitations. It is interesting to note that *The Origin of the Species* was published in the same year that 'Goblin Market' was written, 1859.

Comparison with other animals heightens the uncanniness of the goblins as both familiar and unfamiliar. They have no firm denotation as wholly fantastical or animal and consequently lack any stable identity, either in the poem's text or the various accompanying illustrations, as W. M. Rossetti, in his notes to the poem, comments:

The authoress does not appear to represent her goblins as having the actual configuration of brute animals; it was Dante Rossetti who did that in his illustration to the poem (he allows human hands, however). I possess a copy of the *Goblin Market* volume, 1862, with marginal water-colour sketches by Christina. [. . .] She draws several of the goblins,—all very slim agile figures in a close-fitting garb of blue; their faces, hands, and feet are sometimes human, sometimes brute-like, but of a scarcely definable type.
(*PW: CR*, p. 460)

As soon as Laura begins to succumb to temptation, she is also described in terms of chains:

Laura stretched her gleaming neck
Like a rush-imbedded swan,
Like a lily from the beck,
Like a moonlit poplar branch,
Like a vessel at the launch
When its last restraint is gone.
(ll. 81-86)

The repeated anaphoric word 'like' emphasises the chain of similes that describes Laura in an array of different images.⁴⁵ The chain does not thus posit identities but substitutes, and the following verse-paragraph aptly describes how: 'One parrot-

⁴⁵Mayberry summarises thus: 'this passage is remarkable for the balance it achieves between contradictory implications; it is, finally, noncommittal. [. . .] Laura's action, compared as it is to such uncertain and contradictory phenomena, is as ambiguous and unfathomable as the goblins themselves. She is operating under conditions of infinite possibility and no certainty' (p. 99).

voiced and jolly / Cried “Pretty Goblin” still for “Pretty Polly” (ll. 112-13). But the most significant substitution is Laura’s golden curl for a penny which enables her to purchase the goblin fruits; she herself is substituted for monetary value, her body becomes the currency. Critics tend to read the exchange of a golden curl as a figure for rape, which doubles the substitution.

The most explicitly moral passage comes ironically too late, after Laura’s dealings with the goblins, when Lizzie warns Laura of the dangers of the fruits as she meets her ‘at the gate’ (l. 141), the threshold between the domestic and the marketplace. This is the first introduction we have to Jeanie, linked homonymically with D. G. Rossetti’s ‘Jenny’ (see chapter 2). As a figure for the dangers of the goblin-fruits, Jeanie is a pre-cursor whom Laura may replace as the next fallen woman. As such, Jeanie has a shadowy presence in the poem, implying a moral message of abstinence and chastity. It is not just the goblins who haunt the glen, but also Jeanie (l. 146). As a consumer in the goblin market, Jeanie has been consumed and diminished physically in images of illness reminiscent of consumption: ‘She pined and pined away’ and ‘dwindled and grew grey’ (l. 154, l. 156).⁴⁶ She occupies a textual place that, it

⁴⁶Alarminglly, this imagery of waste, decline and diminishment is also applied to the goblins after Lizzie has resisted eating the fruit:

At last the evil people
Worn out by her resistance
Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit
Along whichever road they took,
Not leaving root or stone or shoot;
Some writhed into the ground,
Some dived into the brook
With ring and ripple,
Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
Some vanished in the distance.
(ll. 437-446)

seems, Laura is also in danger of joining. As the figure of the prostitute, Jeanie also represents the superlative figure for the female as object of consumption (Helsing, pp. 903-4). Jeanie is mentioned in only two other places in the poem — when Lizzie is considering buying fruits to quench Laura's craving (l. 312), and when she finally accosts the goblins (l. 364) — but her ghostly, diminished figure is everywhere implicit. The apostrophe which re-members (l. 147) the dead Jeanie, which makes us 'mindful' (l. 364) of her, gives her a presence in absence at the liminal and uncanny border between life and death.

Jeanie also has another function in the text, as *supplément*⁴⁷ to the intersubjective dyad that Lizzie and Laura represent. This double subjecthood is famously described after Laura's transaction with the goblins:

Golden head by golden head,
Like two pigeons in one nest
Folded in each other's wings,
They lay down in their curtained bed:
Like two blossoms on one stem,
Like two flakes of new-falln snow,
Like two wands of ivory
Tipped with gold for awful kings [. . .]
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Locked together in one nest.
(ll. 184-91, ll. 197-98)

The subject-object in analogical discourse — the perceiving subject and visualised object — becomes primarily a subject-

Some critics have noted how Laura and Lizzie take on characteristics of the goblins and their ideological affinity to the marketplace in the text, as if the goblins and their language is infectious. See, for example, Holt, p. 52.

⁴⁷In chapter 5, Christ is shown to act as a rhetorical *supplément* to the dyad lover-beloved in 'Later Life'.

subject pair. This forges a semiotic intersubjectivity⁴⁸ which does not, however, leave wholly behind the desired object, the goblin fruits (which the reader has difficulty visualising: thus giving emphasis to the subjects as perceivers above the object that is looked at). The sisters, as Helena Michie points out, are both uncannily the same and different (pp. 414-19, and see especially pp. 416-17). Their doubleness allows one to be substituted for the other, Lizzie for Laura, which effects Laura's cure.

The most significant rhetorical figure in this respect is metonymy (from the Greek, 'name change') by which the name of an attribute of a thing is substituted for the thing itself; thus, Lizzie for Laura, Laura for Jeanie, Jeanie for Jenny, and the goblins for their fruit. Further, the goblins' language substitutes, in issues of interpretation and readership, for the goblins themselves: their language is a goblin-language.

Margaret Homans discusses rhetorical strategies that denote a feminine sexuality in Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti. She argues for Dickinson as the more radical of the two in her poetic creation of a new female-centred sexuality and a new rhetoric for that sexuality. Homans describes this in Irigaray's terminology as a disruption of an androcentric logic of the Same by the multiplicity of the female, whose concealed sexual organs, the 'two lips' that 'speak together,' defy the masculine gaze. This leads to a 'non-metaphorical rhetoric and [. . .] a different definition of language's referentiality based not

⁴⁸Intersubjectivity: 'reorientates the conception of the psychic world from a subject's relations to its object toward a subject meeting another subject', Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), pp. 19-20.

on distance [the rhetoric of metaphor] but on contiguity'.⁴⁹ And, thus, both Irigaray and Dickinson before her imagine 'a female sexuality (privileging touch) that is also a female textuality (privileging metonymy)' (p. 580).

Rossetti, in comparison, is seen as not nearly so radical, but Homans suggests that her rhetorical strategies are similar to those of Dickinson. In an analysis of 'Goblin Market', Homans argues that the poem identifies 'metonymy with a more female-centered sexuality', for: 'there is no distance at all to be crossed between these sisters, and metaphor does not enter into the description of their encounter, their contact' (p. 587). Homans's argument suggests the intersubjectivity which is brought about by the failure of analogical discourse to affirm an object's spiritual signified. This subject pairing is a metonymical formulation, left over from the failure of analogy to repress difference.⁵⁰

However, the poem does not consistently advocate metonymy as the supplanter of analogy. Homans describes the narrative after Laura's cure, thus:

natural objects and creatures reappear not as metaphors, but as part of the observable landscape the sisters inhabit. [. . .] These natural objects are not *like* Laura or Lizzie; they simply coexist with them. The cure of female sexuality subjected to romantic desire is the cure of metaphor into metonymy.
(p. 589)

⁴⁹Margaret Homans, "'Syllables of Velvet': The Rhetoric of Sexuality', *Feminist Studies* 11.3 (Fall 1985), 569-93 (p. 579).

⁵⁰Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* (1825, 1831) defines analogy as tautological, 'expressing the *same* subject but with a difference' (*The Oxford Authors: S. T. Coleridge*, p. 672). See chapter 5.

But a close look at the passage suggests a more complex reading. During the process whereby Laura is cured, she is described in a sequence of disconnected similes:

Sense failed in the mortal strife:
Like the watch-tower of a town
Which an earthquake shatters down,
Like a lightening-stricken mast,
Like a wind-uprooted tree
Spun about,
Like a foam-topped waterspout
Cast down headlong in the sea,
She fell at last;
Pleasure past and anguish past,
Is it life or death?

Life out of death.
(ll. 513-24)

It is a failure in sense, or perception, which produces these chains. Laura regains consciousness - she awakes 'as from a dream' (l. 537) — and has been cured from the goblin-language, the grotesque parody of patriarchal discourse which proliferates types without antitypes, and which celebrates signifiers over signifieds. The lines following Laura's redemption link her restoration to that of the natural world, and so the analogous chain has been restored, whereby the material seems to signify the spiritual renewal:

But when the first birds chirped about their eaves,
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass
Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
And new buds with new day
Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,
Laura awoke as from a dream,
Laughed in the innocent old way.
(ll. 530-538)

Here nature complements Laura's recovery as the signification crisis has passed. Analogy as a spiritual mode of language seems to be restored. But, again, the text surprises us with no satisfactory victory for the moral discourse.

What remains at the poem's conclusion is a restoration of social order with the sisters becoming mothers and euphemistically re-telling the tale of 'The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men' (l. 553). Along with this, however, is a return to the insistence upon the doubling of the sisters and their mutual substitution for the missing mother in the prior narrative as they themselves are shown to have children. Their final song, in addition, re-tells the tale with an overt moral message but re-inscribes the chains and lists that were a feature of the goblin-language:

'For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.'
(ll. 562-67).

With the anaphoric listing construction re-introduced, and the peculiarly elliptical re-telling of the goblin encounter, it is, as many critics have noted, hard to imagine a conclusion more ambiguous.

* * * * *

The Aytoun poems, with their concern for issues of interpretation and perception, indicate that Rossetti gave priority to poems that suggest altered states of consciousness. This is pertinent because, in the crisis in signification induced by the rhetoric of analogy, the rupture between type and antitype suggests the pressure of the pre-Oedipal semiotic on the text. The semiotic emerges in altered states of consciousness that exert a radical pull on the text away from the confirmation and enactment of social order. As chapter 4 indicates, Kristeva suggests this in her reformulation of Plato's notion of the *chora* in the *Timaeus*, particularly in her citation of the passage in which he describes its perception: 'this, indeed is that which we look upon as in a dream' (*Revolution*, n. 12, p. 239). In 'Goblin Market', the insistence upon the moral discourse, mediated via analogy, coupled with the seemingly primary fairy-tale discourse thus induces a crisis in signification that in turn establishes a movement across another threshold, from the Symbolic to the semiotic. In this way, the effect of the discourse of fairy-tale is similar, although not identical to, the semiotic.⁵¹

The failure in analogy as a secure mode of signification gives way to the ungovernable disruptive influence of the semiotic upon discourse which aims to attain the spiritual or transcendental signified. But the goblin-language, as an

⁵¹For Kristeva, the semiotic is similar, but not identical, to the feminine (see note below). If the implications of this are extended — analogically, of course — the feminine and the fairy tale are related in their disruptive pressure upon social norms. The association of fairy-tales with the feminine realm of the nursery has been well documented (see Campbell for a discussion of the feminine and nursery rhymes, and also Hanft). Marie Louise von Franz's *Problems of the Feminine in Fairytales* (Zurich: Spring, 1972) analyses fairy tales from a Jungian perspective.

excessive and grotesque parody of patriarchy, and as a mimicry of signification, similarly suggests a disruption of norms. In this way, the goblin-language parodies the feminine semiotic of the subject-subject dyad Laura and Lizzie whilst also threatening to overwhelm it. The sisters must confront the menace of the goblins and their challenge to the female idyll.⁵² But the negotiation of this threshold is not resolved with a conventional re-placement of the sisters in the Symbolic. In fact, the disruptive semiotic that is intimated with the failure in analogy is re-appropriated into the female world.

The two instances in which Laura consumes the goblin fruit both induce alterations to her sense of social order and consciousness. After first succumbing to the wares of the goblins, she 'knew not was it night or day' (l. 139) and is diverted from her simple domestic chores by her longing for a second taste. She is 'in an absent dream' (l. 211), and as her consumption progresses, 'She dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees / False waves in desert drouth' (ll. 289-90). After Laura feeds on the juices smeared on Lizzie, she swoons orgiastically and undergoes a psychic transformation:

⁵²See Campbell for a contrasting reading of 'Goblin Market' and the semiotic, pp. 395-396 and pp. 403-4. This account over-thematizes the *chora* and gives it too fixed a position in the Symbolic, for she suggests it 'metaphorically describes those nurseries and playrooms where women and children resided as politically insignificant, nonspeaking subjects' (pp. 395-6). I prefer to follow Kristeva and see the *chora* in more linguistic terms as a pressure and not a position, an intimation that does not arise purely as a condition of statement: 'although the *chora* can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitively posited: as a result, one can situate the *chora*, and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form' (*Revolution*, p. 26). The equation of nursery and semiotic *chora* does not account for the conventionality of the girls' idyll as a domestic pastoral, upholding the androcentric status quo and allowing for the existence of the public, masculine sphere. Campbell does, however, make a useful distinction between the rhythmical, women's time of the *chora* and evolution's suggestion of progressively linear historical time (p. 396). She also points out that the goblins assume a maternal voice in order to woo Laura, 'She heard a voice like voice of doves / Cooing all together' (ll. 77-78), which I describe as a parody of the pull of the semiotic.

Pleasure past and anguish past,
Is it life or death?

Life out of death [. . .]
Laura awoke as from a dream
(ll. 522-24, l. 537)

This re-awakening seems to re-introduce and re-affirm the Symbolic, as Laura and Lizzie are shown to be mothers, re-telling their tale with an overtly moral message. But the conclusion opens up more textual interstices associated with the break between type and anti-type. The huge proleptic and elliptical leap from pastoral maidenhood to motherhood, the patently inaccurate re-telling of their tale, the absence of fathers, the incantatory child-like list of final morals on sisterhood, the anaphoric logic — all these suggest the re-establishment of the Symbolic but with the pressure of the semiotic emerging as a reformulation of the feminine.⁵³ With this ambivalent conclusion, the story of Lizzie and Laura's goblin-encounters becomes a parabolic quest for subjecthood within an androcentric representation system.

To move backwards in the tale, the representation of Laura and Lizzie as double subjects also suggests a mother-child dyad, but with the explicit absence of the maternal:

Moon and stars gazed in at them,
Wind sang to them lullaby,
Lumbering owls forbore to fly,

⁵³Kristeva does not equate the semiotic with the feminine, for in the pre-Oedipal state there is no perception of gender difference; however, both are related in that they are marginal positions (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 165). Moi comments that: 'any strengthening of the semiotic, which knows no sexual difference, must therefore lead to a weakening of traditional gender divisions, and not at all to a reinforcement of traditional notions of "femininity."' This disturbance in the conventional codes of the feminine is borne out in 'Goblin Market'.

Not a bat flapped to and fro
Round their rest:
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Locked together in one nest.
(ll. 192-198)

The moon and stars and wind, not the mother, gaze at them and sing a lullaby. Along with the maternal figure, other sorts of origins are missing; in particular, the origin of the goblin-fruit.

‘Citrons from the South’
(l. 29)

‘Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry, thirsty roots’
(ll. 44-45)

‘How fair the vine must grow
Whose grapes are so luscious;
How warm the wind must blow
Thro’ those fruit bushes’
(ll. 60-64)

‘Fruits which that unknown orchard bore’
(l. 135)

‘I’ll bring you plums tomorrow
Fresh on their mother twigs’
(ll. 170-71)

‘Pellucid grapes without one seed:
Odorous indeed must be the mead
Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink
With lilies at the brink,
And sugar-sweet their sap’
(ll. 179-183)

‘Pears red with basking
Out in the sun,
Plums on their twigs;

Pluck them and suck them'
(ll. 358-61)

Laura, in her delirious yearning for a second taste, plants a kernel-stone she has retained from the goblin-encounter, but it does not grow (ll. 281-87). The origins of the fruits are puzzling and mysterious: although the plums have 'mother-twigs', the orchard is 'unknown' and the kernel-stone does not thrive in ordinary soil.

The absence of the girls' mother and the strange mother-earth that fed the goblins' fruit suggests another unsettling parallel between the girls and the goblins. But the difference, offered by the text's conclusion, is that the girls *become* mothers and are fruitful; unlike the unseeded grapes, they reproduce. Thus, the goblin-fruit, and the goblins themselves (for they are known by their fruit)⁵⁴ represent a grotesque patriarchal logic based on the absence of the mother that is parodied to such an extent that the *origin* of the analogical discourse, and not just its spiritual signified, is lost.⁵⁵ In

⁵⁴This is a significant and often overlooked point, although it also true that the object of Laura's desires is the fruit and not the goblins.

⁵⁵Compare Gillian Beer's comments on Darwinian origins, evocative of Plato: 'Darwin's work is not a search for an originator nor for a true beginning. It is, rather, the description of a process of becoming, and such a process does not move constantly in a single direction. [. . .] Originating is an activity, not an authority. And deviation, not truth to type, is the creative principle' (pp. 64-65). Further, 'origins can never fully be regained nor rediscovered. Origins — whether of species, of individual experience, or even of language — are always antecedent to language and consciousness' (p. 88). Beer also makes a connection between Darwinism and the Victorian fantastic: 'Darwin's theories, with their emphasis on superabundance and extreme fecundity, reached out towards the grotesque. Nature was seen less as husbanding than as spending. Hyperproductivity authenticated the fantastic' (p. 123). This suggests a further connection with the nineteenth century vogue for 'horn of plenty' pictures. Jeremy Maas gives a full account of this genre in *Victorian Painters* (London: Cresset, 1969), chapter 11 — coming, significantly, directly after his account of fairy painting. Analogy is the meeting-point of Darwinism and the Oxford Movement, but spirals out into many other discourses.

contrast, the girls become mothers and, as mothers, their elliptical re-telling of their tale calls attention not just to the children who become an audience, but to the circumstances of the tale's origin that their re-telling elides (both the actual goblin encounter and the discursive strategies that have produced the ambiguities).⁵⁶ Kristeva's formulation of the semiotic as maternally defined also includes the sense of the semiotic which:

remains incompletely contained by the Symbolic, and is manifested in the 'physicality' or 'materiality' of textual production; it is a materiality that, like the primary processes or the repressed, threatens to return, disrupting signifying conventions.
(Wright, pp. 195-96)

A reading of 'Goblin Market' forces the return of the materiality of the rhetorical strategies by their very incomplete and endlessly analogical nature. Meanwhile, the goblin-fruit, whose precise origins are elided, or suggested as located in the Symbolic order's other, re-enact what Catherine Belsey terms a primary effect of capitalism's distribution system, to suppress and mystify the process of production (*Critical Practice*, p. 126).⁵⁷

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⁵⁶This discursive slippage is, as Campbell describes, an attribute of the semiotic: 'because the longed-for anterior space is indefinable and inarticulate, it exists in the language of the poem only as a displacement' (p. 404). In my terms, the signifieds are displaced.

⁵⁷Compare chapters 1 and 2 on biographical representations and manuscript revisions. The impulse to conceal the poetic revisions — which she herself was involved in by preserving her poetry in neatly hand-written manuscript notebooks — and her portrayal as a spontaneous poet, both subscribe to the capitalist ethic of production as given here by Belsey.

Two versions of analogical failure thus haunt 'Goblin Market'. The goblins' language, or goblin-language, represents the cost of the failure to analogically intimate the spiritual. But the process by which the spiritual signified is strived for suggests the space of the feminine, positioned as fruitful in its constant deferral of the analogical anti-type and the moral message of the poem. Rossetti has created a subversive feminine position out of the failure of her spiritual discourse; but this radical strategy is tempered by the insistence that the intersubjective dyad cannot be maintained and is always projected outside the text. The final lines, presenting Laura and Lizzie as wives and mothers, but with the husbands and fathers notably absent, leaves us with a problematic ending. The doubled feminine subject, suggestive of the pre-Oedipal child-mother dyad, becomes recast and reformulated as the girls have children of their own. The intimation of the semiotic as a disruptive impulse upon the Symbolic is moderated by the very conventionality of the scene of re-telling of a nursery fable that: 'there is no friend like a sister' (l. 562). But the poem also concludes with a circularity that ensures that the *process* continues. In this way, the subject is both in process and also exiled from the text, endlessly being constructed in our critical re-readings but always absent, and, moreover, posited as feminine. This final aporia ensures 'Goblin Market' a lack of finality that frustrates attempts to find a consistent and coherent hermeneutic framework. The linguistic undoing of Rossetti's chain of analogies leads her to intimations that belie the apparent failure of her discourse: the gesture towards an

alternative representational system in process, an apprehension of a discursive practise whose signature, positioned uncannily both within and beyond infectious androcentric goblin texts, is the feminine subject.

Chapter 7
Economies of Reserve:
***Verses* (1893)**

Between knowledge and reality, there is an intermediary that allows for the encounter and the transmutation or transvaluation between the two. [. . .] The mediator is never abolished in an infallible knowledge. Everything is always in movement, in a state of becoming. And the mediator of all this is, among other things or exemplary, *love*. Never fulfilled, always becoming. [. . .] Love is thus an intermediary *between* pairs of opposites: poverty/plenty, ignorance/wisdom, ugliness/beauty, dirtiness/cleanliness, death/life, and so on.
—Luce Irigaray¹

Love is still Love, whatever comes to pass:
O Only Love, make me Thy glass,
Thy pleasure to fulfil
By loving still
Come what will.
Verses (1893) (C.ii.198)

Hélène Cixous, in an often quoted passage from ‘Sorties’, asks of woman: ‘*Where is she?*’, and explores her position in relation to the binary oppositions which generate meaning within logocentrism. Cixous argues that death works in such dyads, in the power struggle of one term over another. Fundamental to this process is the primary dyad activity/passivity, the ground of sexual difference, from which Woman emerges as either passive

¹Luce Irigaray, ‘Sorcerer Love,’ in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), p. 21, p. 24.

or non-existent.² In *Verses*, it is precisely this question of the location or geographics of the subject which the poetry explores.³ The main enterprise of the collection is the desire for union with Christ, which is endlessly anticipated. The longing is articulated in the attempt to forge a dialogue with Christ, and in this process the speaker is positioned within the economics of passivity that is part of the aesthetic. In a critique of *Verses*, as a text associated with self-representation, we explicitly move from *who* is Christina Rossetti to *where* is she, for, in the attempt to initiate and sustain a dialogue with Christ, the position of the subject calls itself into question.

The first section of *Verses* consists of a sequence of seventeen sonnets, entitled 'Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord', of which fifteen are taken from *The Face of the Deep* (1892) and the remainder from *Time Flies*. The sequence inherits the concerns of *Later Life*, published in the *Pageant* volume (1881), although the date of composition of all the poems but one is unknown.⁴ This grouping introduces many of the principal concerns of the volume and, as the title suggests, attempts to forge a dialogue between the speaker and Christ. The dialogue has an unsettling sense of indirection, of unresponsiveness.⁵ There is no sense that Christ is present as a fully active participant in the dialogue, and no sense of the

²Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties,' in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. with Introductions by Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), pp. 90-98 (pp. 90-91).

³For a discussion of the geographics of the subject, see Gilmore, Introduction, and particularly n. 1 on pp. 3-4

⁴According to Crump, 'Weigh all my faults and follies righteously' was composed February 26, 1854. (C.ii.402)

⁵Mary E. Finn connects Kierkegaard's notion of 'indirection' to Rossetti's poems (passim).

entire reciprocity which is the foundation of Barrett Browning's secular sequence *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Rossetti's significant precursor. Instead, in Rossetti's sonnets, the active involvement with Christ is postponed even as it is so acutely desired; an exchange of identities, of looks, of faces, of hearts, can only be anticipated as the subject enunciates her longing.

In the first sonnet of *Verses* the speaker believes in eventual union with Christ but a sense of distance and dislocation nevertheless prevails. The poem begins with anticipation: 'Alone Lord God, in Whom our trust and peace, / Our love and our desire, glow bright with hope' (C.ii.181). The phrase 'Alone, Lord God' is also repeated at the start of the sestet, and seems to suggest that Christ is the only recipient of the speaker's trust, and that this leaves her solitary. The sonnet is a plea for an end to her experience of a temporal world found to be insufficient and lacking: 'Lift us above this transitory scope / Of earth, these pleasures that begin and cease' (ll. 3-4). An analogy then follows between the speaker and wheat 'Bending and stretching sunward ere it sees' (l. 8), and the sestet continues the concern with perception:

Alone Lord God, we see not yet we know;
By love we dwell with patience and desire,
And loving so and so desiring pray;
Thy will be done in earth as heaven today;
As yesterday it was, tomorrow so;
Love offering love on love's self-feeding fire.
(ll. 9-14)

By the end of the sonnet, the speaker's faith sustains a hope for eventual union in the afterlife, but simultaneously the concept of love shifts its rhetorical function from being the *source* of

joyful anticipation (l. 2 and l. 10) to a *logic* of causality that the poem cannot sustain. In line 11, 'so' marks a shift from desire to prayer. But the poem then concludes with an acceptance of God's will and the self-consuming logic of love that resists the previous logic of the poem, that denies the linearity (or temporality) of the preceding lines. The desire to transcend 'this transitory scope' is caught up in the circularity and tautology of love's offering to love.⁶

Throughout the collection, this same strategy recurs: the intense desire for the afterlife, where the speaker will unite with Christ, crosses over into a self-sustaining and circuitous rhetoric of love. This maintains the speaker's position as an anticipatory and passive subject-in-waiting, whose desire would mediate between earth and heaven. The devotional prose also speaks of this contradiction. On the one hand, Rossetti urges the need to conquer the self. The entry for December 14 in *Time Flies* describes how the blood of the Paschal Lamb was put on door posts but not on the threshold. The following entry forges a typological connection: Christ guards Christians as the blood of the Paschal lamb guarded Israel:

A single point remained unguarded: the threshold. Whence we learn that the one foe whom we ourselves alone can grapple with; whom even Christ our Head, although He deigns to work in us and with us, will not in our stead put down with a high hand; it is the one who

⁶Virginia Glee Sickbert also mentions the tautological and reflexive logic of love in a discussion of 'Quinquagesima' (C.ii.220), 'Dissident Voices in Christina Rossetti's Poetry,' Ph. D., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1990, p. 179.

crosses the threshold of our house, that is, our own self.
(*Time Flies*, December 15, p. 241)⁷

But Rossetti, in a frequently cited passage from *The Face of the Deep*, acknowledges the impossibility of transcending the self, despite the need for self-conquest:

Concerning Himself God Almighty proclaimed of old: 'I AM THAT I AM,' and man's inherent feeling of personality seems in some sort to attest and correspond to this revelation: I who am myself cannot but be myself. I am what God has constituted me: so that however I may have modified myself, yet do I remain that same I; it is I who live, it is I who must die, it is I who must rise again at the last day. I rising out of my grave must carry on that very life which was mine before I died, and of which death itself could not altogether snap the thread. Who I was I am, who I am I am, who I am I must be for ever and ever.

I the sinner of to-day am the sinner of all the yesterdays of my life. I may loathe myself or be amazed at myself, but I cannot unself myself for ever and ever.
(*The Face of the Deep*, p. 47)

This extraordinarily and uncharacteristically forceful iteration of selfhood sits uneasily with the claim that we must also conquer our selves. And this is carried across into the devotional poetry, with the result that the urge to unite with Christ as the Beloved, and so to be lifted above the transitoriness of earth, is foiled by a self that obstinately insists on its materiality and presence sustained by the very love that the subject would unite with. The fear is that anticipation of fulfilment, 'hope deferred', becomes an end in itself rather than the means to the afterlife.

⁷The entries for May 19 and 22 and June 26 also discuss the necessity of conquering the self.

Within *Verses*, the tropes associated with this frustrated movement are those of the face and heart. In order to attain a glimpse of the desired union, the speaker longs for a moment in which she may see Christ face to face and heart to heart, thus placing herself in a posthumous position uncannily reminiscent of the feminine subject as represented by the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic.⁸ 'Because He first loved us' (C.ii.200) rehearses this construct. The poem begins with an address to Christ:

I was hungry, and Thou feddest me;
Yea, Thou gavest drink to slake my thirst:
O Lord, what love gift can I offer Thee
Who hast loved me first?—
(ll. 1-4)

Exchange is the aim of the speaker, an exchange in which she returns and acknowledges the spiritual sustenance he gave her. But this desired reciprocity is deflected by Christ, who answers in the next stanza and instructs the speaker to transfer her attentions to her brethren: 'Love them as I loved thee, when Bread I brake / In pure love of thee' (ll. 7-8). The speaker then agrees that she will 'Love Thee, seek Thee, in them; wait and pray' (l. 10), but she still longs for complete union with Christ: 'Yet would I love Thyself, Lord, face to face, / Heart to heart, one day' (ll. 11-12). The heart is thus transformed from a displaced and secretive trope for the subject (chapter 1) to the projected space of fulfilment in Christ. This conjunction of hearts and faces is significant, for it is a union that would put an end to all reciprocity forever and do away with all distance

⁸Chapter 1 points out that the feminine subject, watching and waiting for the afterlife, is a revolutionary strategy of erasure which mimics contemporary stipulations that a woman be inert and silent.

and difference between Christ and the speaker, as well as validate the speaker's faith and her authority for speaking. It would be the immolation of the subject. The act of expressing a longing to merge with Christ, to meet him face to face and heart to heart, is thus inseparable from the acknowledgement that this must always be textually deferred.

Virginia Sickbert's analysis of the 'dissident voices' in Rossetti's poetry persuasively argues that Christ, as represented in *Verses*, is associated with the feminine and the maternal:

in the devotional poetry she primarily addresses the human rather than the supernatural Christ, and constructs reciprocal dyadic relationships between him and her female speakers. Far from being only a poetry of asceticism, denial or deferred longing, Rossetti's devotional poetry imagines and creates relationships of fulfilment and equality like those existing between her mothers and children. Thus the humanized Christ, like the mother figure of the Eve poems, allows her speakers access to God and to Love.

(p. 141)

Sickbert notes how the attention to Christ and his humanity was a departure from the Tractarian tradition, and suggests that this allowed Rossetti's speakers: 'the means to overcome societal restrictions: through sympathetic identification with Christ, and Christ with them, they are liberated and loved' (p. 143). Further, Sickbert disagrees with Dolores Rosenblum's assertion in *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance* that Rossetti creates a self by abnegating herself, and argues instead that: 'Rossetti manipulates language to re-create a self that exists primarily in relationship, a self most fully realized in the mirroring reciprocity of the human Christ' (p. 181).

Sickbert's project is important, for it considers the critically neglected role of the semiotic and maternal in the devotional poems. However, the denial of the poetry's longing for union, and the assertion that devotional poetry is liberating for the subject through the creation of a relationship based on the mother-child dyad, underplays the significant element of frustrated desire in the poems. Maternal reciprocity is certainly desired, but its full achievement is constantly *anticipated*, not enjoyed. Further, this anticipation is not the same as Rosenblum's abnegation and renunciation of self; as we have seen, Rossetti was caught between the desire for a type of self-immolation and a belief in the immortality of the self.⁹ The devotional poems do not therefore offer a straightforward liberation, although currently this is the growing attitude toward Rossetti's religious work.

The constant deferral of union with Christ accords with the Tractarian doctrine of Reserve, which urges a theological and rhetorical indirection when approaching him. The tension between the desire for union with Christ and the tautologous and self-sustaining rhetoric of love gives the dialectic of reserve linguistic expression, oscillating between concealing and revealing. Williams, in his Tract on reserve, suggests that even Christ expresses himself in this way. The 'important practical conclusion' of the doctrine is: 'that Jesus Christ is now, and has been at all times, hiding Himself from us, but at the same time exceedingly desirous to communicate Himself'. Further, his

⁹Compare the conclusion of chapter 2, where CR's collusion with her brother's revisions is explained as a further erasure of the subject.

communications are undemocratic and: 'exactly in proportion as we show ourselves worthy' (*Tract 80*, p. 82).

Analogy represents nature as both concealing and revealing sacred truths and is embodied stylistically by Reserve in a poetry of humility and contemplation, passivity rather than activity (Tennyson, pp. 105-6). G.B. Tennyson summarises the relationship between the concepts, whilst also suggesting a struggle in the religious poet between spontaneous expression as a psychic release and self-conscious reticence, a parallel with Rossetti's acknowledgement of the burden of the self and its desires and the awareness that there is no self-immolation to provide relief:

Reserve, then, dictates that the poet will be guarded and gradual in revealing sacred truth, hence in writing verse at all. While poetry serves as a safety-valve for the expression of intense religious emotion, Analogy and Reserve see to it that the expression will be veiled, indirect, subdued, and self-effacing.
(p. 106)

Tennyson charts the history of the term Reserve and relates it to the notion of Economy:

the idea of Reserve is that since God is ultimately incomprehensible, we can know Him only indirectly; His truth is hidden and given to us only in a manner suited to our capacities for apprehending it. Moreover, it is both unnecessary and undesirable that God and religious truth generally should be disclosed in their fullness at once to all regardless of the differing capacities of individuals to apprehend such things. God Himself in His economy has only gradually in time revealed such things as we know about Him. Both the sacredness and the complexity of the subject of religious truth are such that they require a holding back and a gradual revelation

as the disposition and understanding of the recipient
mature.
(p. 45)

Newman's *Apologia* defines economy as follows: 'out of various courses, in religious conduct or statement, *all and each allowable antecedently and in themselves*, that ought to be taken which is most expedient and most suitable at the time for the object in hand' (p. 343).

Reserve and economy are responsible for what Harrison terms Rossetti's 'poetics of conciseness', a concern with brevity which gives the poems an apparently simple surface and a hidden, sophisticated depth.¹⁰ This doubleness does not, however, liberate Rossetti's poetry from patriarchal structures, although this is the conclusion that New Historicist critiques reach. Sharon Smulders, for example, suggests that the movement to devotional subjects in Rossetti's career was an attempt to avoid marginalization as a female poet.¹¹ In a discussion of Rossetti's devotional prose, Joel Westerholm similarly argues that her writing gains authority from its devotional subject matter, and so: 'Christina Rossetti did not abide by the contract she made with her culture. Instead, she engaged in serious and scholarly biblical interpretation,

¹⁰See Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p. 10, where a letter from Rossetti is quoted in which she claims: 'perhaps the nearest approach to a method I can lay claim to was a distinct aim at conciseness; after a while I received a hint from my sister that my love of conciseness tended to make my writing obscure, and I then endeavoured to avoid obscurity as well as diffuseness. In poetics, my elder brother was my acute and most helpful critic' (p.10). Harrison does not make an explicit connection between Tractarian aesthetics and the poetics of conciseness.

¹¹Sharon Smulders, 'Woman's Enfranchisement in Christina Rossetti's Poetry', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34.4 (Winter 1992), 568-88 (p. 569). See also Sharon Smulders, 'Christina Rossetti: Response and Responsibility', which argues that Rossetti's reliance on Tractarianism and the Bible legitimises self-expression (passim).

assuming a man's role according to the standards of the time.'¹² Virginia Sickbert's framework of analysis, a recovery of the poetry's relation to the maternal, is also in danger of overstating the case for Rossetti's independence from patriarchal structures, for it defines the semiotic as too coherent and stable, and locates the semiotic in *Verses* too emphatically in the themes of the poetry.

In a discussion of Tractarian reserve, W. David Shaw takes issue with G. B. Tennyson, who in *Victorian Devotional Poetry* rejects the psychoanalytic interpretation of Keble's theories propounded by M. H. Abrams and Alba H. Warren, especially the concepts of suppression and neurosis. Tennyson's main criticism is that this reading of Keble neglects the theological implication of his theories. Shaw replies:

Keble's poetic is no more separable from a theory of psychological displacement or reserve than is Victorian aesthetics itself from theology. [. . .] We distort the ideas of displacement and reserve the moment we remove them from a theological setting, because poetry is the expressive evidence of divine power. But when that power is secularized, Abrams' and Warren's interpretation seem to me less to 'misapprehend Keble in crucial areas' [G.B. Tennyson] than to explore the kinds of psychological and dramatic impact his theories were beginning to have on the Victorians themselves.
(*The Lucid Veil*, pp. 70-71)

Shaw argues that the diffusion of Keble's theories: 'met a deep Victorian need for repressed and subliminal

¹²Joel Westerholm, "I Magnify Mine Office": Christina Rossetti's Authoritative Voice in her Devotional Prose', *The Victorian Newsletter* 84 (Fall 1993), 11-17 (p. 14). See also Harrison's 'Christina Rossetti and the Sage Discourse of Feminist High Anglicanism', in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse*, ed. by Thais E. Morgan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 87-104, which similarly argues that Rossetti undermines the devotional and gender conservatism she seems to have adopted in her Tractarian sage discourse.

expression', and 'began to diffuse themselves into the Victorian sensibility at large' (p. 71). Further, 'for Keble's poet of reserve [. . .] language is only a residue, the trace of a meaning that has passed. It is the trace of something unsayable' (p. 74). Isobel Armstrong, in a discussion of the expressive theory of women's poetry, suggests that Freud's account of repression is an unsuitable analogy, for in the expressive tradition what is unrepresentable is consciously known but unrepresentable, whereas for Freud the repressed, the unconscious, is unknowable.¹³ Keble's reserve is associated with the expressive tradition, as 'a refusal to bring forth an excess of feeling and an assent to hidden meaning' (*Victorian Poetry*, p. 341). But this assumes that reserve betokens what is known and consciously withheld. Reserve, on the contrary, is a more complex dynamic, gradually revealing sacred truths that are both unknown (for God is ultimately incomprehensible) and known (through indirection, analogy, typology: the *a priori*, the Word).

Shaw's acknowledgement of this Victorian poetics as a type of proto-deconstruction suggests that reserve is more of a necessity than a choice, bound to achieve no more than an intimation of the spiritual which cannot be signified. For Rossetti, however, the Tractarian notion of economy, or restraint, is not a stable repression of the unsayable. Reserve is part of a *system of economics*, the symbolic complex of the subject's activities involving exchange, investment, profit, and loss. The economy is that of passivity; for, in the desire to unite with Christ, the subject maintains her passivity by reserving

¹³Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, poetics and politics* (Routledge: London, 1993), p. 342.

herself for the time when she will see face to face. But within this economics of economy, the subject cannot fully repress and contain the reserved desire, which erupts into the signification and rhetoric. This utilisation of reserve thus works against the conventional model of woman's anatomical lack in an economy of met means which cannot contain female desire; consequently, rapture fractures the patriarchal model of exchange.¹⁴ The text is fractured by semiotic desire as the dynamics of reserve fails to repress the longing for a full identification with Christ. This regression to the Lacanian mirror stage is also a temporary rejection of social norms, for the desire to unite with Christ results in self-annihilation, seeing the unseeable, the final resting place of the posthumous feminine subject.¹⁵

As a type of psychic regression (a seemingly paradoxical result of anticipating the afterlife), the eruption of the semiotic is suggested by the tropes of decay and dissolution within regular poetic forms. Jerome J. McGann notes that Rossetti's poetry is offered to us '*under the sign of completion,*' as a finished form (*The Beauty of Inflections*, pp. 21-22). Rossetti, however, exposes the illusion of completion, the illusion of a poetic language that denotes experience or knowledge, by her open play with difference, with gaps in meaning. Often, in her oeuvre, the decay of poetic form is parallel to the physical decay of the speaker, as in 'May':

I cannot tell you how it was;
But this I know: it came to pass

¹⁴See Gilmore, p. 60.

¹⁵Compare Kristeva, for whom: 'religion [. . .] symbolically recuperates a usually repressed *jouissance*: religion provides one of the few social institutions which tolerates, even encourages, the experience and articulation of commonly unspoken pre-oedipal or semiotic elements, such as religious ecstasy' (Wright, p. 198).

Upon a bright and breezy day
When May was young; ah pleasant May! [. . .]
I cannot tell you what it was;
But this I know: it did but pass.
It passed away with sunny May,
With all sweet things it passed away,
And left me old, and cold, and grey.
(C.i.51; ll.1-4, 9-13)

The word 'May' is a pun, denoting either a month, possibility, or personage, opening up semantic gaps as the speaker ages. The irregular line lengths of the poem also suggest the decay of poetic form — but, despite appearances, the scansion is regular.

Similarly, in *Verses* there is a tropic concern with dissolution. Two types of poems confront this: first the dominant forms in the collection, sonnets and roundels, which deal thematically with dissolution whilst in form suggesting circularity; and second the poems whose structure itself conveys spatially the sense of decay.¹⁶ A sonnet which takes the first approach is 'Darkness and light are both alike to Thee' (C.ii.204). The speaker asks Christ to look at her darkened face, for he can see her and love her even though her sight and breath fail and she scarcely feels his 'Hand of Love' (l. 5). The speaker's physical decay heightens the desperate desire to be remembered and reassured by Christ. But this regressive dissolution of the body prompts the speaker to ask for further strength to complete her life's course and unite with Christ in the afterlife: 'Add

¹⁶Compare Rossetti's comment, reported by William Sharp: 'I heartily agree in setting the essence of poetry above the form.' This point she extended on a later occasion, when she said that the whole question of the relative value of the poetic spirit of a poem and the form of that poem lay in this: that the spirit could exist without the form, whereas the form was an impossibility without the spirit, of which it was the lovely body.' This associates the poetic with physical form, a connection also made in nineteenth-century conceptions of the sonnet (see chapter 5). Sharp, 'Some Reminiscences', p. 744.

breath to breath, so I may run my race / That where Thou are there may Thy servant be' (ll. 7-8). Christ is the source, the 'gulf and fountain' (l. 9), of her love, and she is the 'unreturning torrent to Thy sea' (l. 10). The speaker's love thus flows out of her as a torrent into Christ's bountiful sea of love. Torrent has, as its etymological root, the verb to burn, and this image of the speaker's flowing into Christ is a moment of consummation, reminiscent of the medieval mystics' burning mirror.

Within this subsuming of the speaker in Christ, however, the logic is one of ceaseless circularity that remains distinct from the anticipated final reunion, in lines suggestive of Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale':

Seeking I find, and finding seek Thee still:
And oh! that I had wings as hath a dove,
Then would I flee away to rest with Thee.
(ll. 12-14)

The endlessness of finding and seeking him moves towards the fulfilment of desire, with the image of the flowing of the torrent and the rill of the speaker into the ocean of Christ both suggesting the pre-oedipal and the mystical subsuming of identities.

The sonnet begins and ends, however, with seeking Christ once and for all; the sonnet form contains this circular logic even as it intimates its dissolution with the death of the speaker. Further, the circular logic is predicated on Christ, for whom there is no difference — 'Darkness and light are both alike to thee'.¹⁷ The logic of the Same, the basis of masculinist

¹⁷The disavowal of sexual difference, based on the scopic, seems to be suggested here by the difference between light and dark described as meaningless for Christ; thus, any difference based on this, including sexual difference, does not operate.

constructions of sexual difference by which the female is defined as anatomically lacking, becomes transposed into a *lack of all difference*. This is equivalent to the semiotic *chora*, which precedes and does not demark the distinction between subject and object. Difference is the basis of signification, and the attempt to apprehend Christ who knows no difference leads the speaker to circularity, not divinity, in a movement reminiscent of Freud's discussion of the 'fort-da' game, for finding leads to a recognition of absence which in turn leads to further seeking.¹⁸ The end of the sonnet therefore marks a wish to end the desire for Christ by transcending the temporal world and uniting with him. Julia Kristeva terms this shift in signification the *thetic*, whereby the intimation of the *chora's* 'ceaseless heterogeneity'¹⁹ is split by a provisional ordering marking entry into the symbolic, which defines the ego as transcendental and unified.²⁰

The roundel form is even more suggestive of circularity. Swinburne developed the form from the rondel, which has as its etymological root little circle or round. 'Advent' (C.ii.212) exploits this circuitous technique, taking, once again, the theme of decay and degeneration. The poem describes how Spring disguises the age of the earth:

Earth grown old, yet still so green,
 Deep beneath her crust of cold
 Nurses fire unfelt, unseen:
 Earth grown old.

¹⁸Bronfen connects Freud's interpretation of his grandson's game with his attempt to validate an economic model within psychoanalysis (pp. 18-35).

¹⁹The phrase is Toril Moi's, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 162.

²⁰For a discussion of the *thetic* phase, see *Revolution*, pp. 56-61, and Wright, p. 196. For the transcendental ego, see 'The System and the Speaking Subject', in Moi, *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 29-30.

We who live are quickly told:
Millions more lie hid between
Inner swathings of her fold.

When will the fire break up her screen?
When will life burst thro' her mould?
Earth, earth, earth, thy cold is keen,
Earth grown old.

Circularity intrinsic to the roundel form is exploited to emphasise the earth's progressive age, repeated as the refrain, which in turn is concealed by the annual coming of Spring (l. 1). The sense of the earth's degeneration is heightened by the spatial shape of the poem on the page. Within the rigid form, the contrast in line lengths, ending with the short refrain in stanzas one and three, gives the suggestion of diminishment, which heightens the impression of conciseness and reserve. Once again, the thematics of age and decay are reflected by the poetic form.

Undercutting this, however, is the fire beneath the earth's cold crust, which will break the earth free from the illusion of renewal that comes each year with spring. The fire, like the torrent in 'Darkness and light are both alike to thee', gives a promise of spiritual, as opposed to physical, renewal. The second short stanza's position at the centre of the roundel echoes the place of the dead, swathed in between the folds of the earth. In fact, it is this in-betweenness, the waiting time or advent, that is the dominant trope of the poem. The interval between advent and arrival is figured in the rhetoric of the poem, which resists a signified which would apprehend the second advent. Rhetorical questions in the final stanza open up a gap which denies fullness of meaning, and by the last two lines the poem hovers in the

interstice between the play of signifiers and the signified, with the address to the earth: 'Earth, earth, earth, thy cold is keen,/Earth grown old.'²¹ The repetition of 'earth' disrupts the poem's regular trochaic rhythm and also marks a disruption in the subject, whose desire has put pressure on the signification process. This is the pressure of the semiotic, described by Kristeva thus (with reference to Mallarmé's 'The Mystery of Literature', in which he calls attention to the rhythm within language):

Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible in its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgement, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax.²²

Other poems in *Verses*, apart from sonnets and roundels, suggest decay and diminishment within a regular form. 'Joy is but sorrow' (C.ii.302) utilises the concise, clipped style which approaches the elliptical.

Joy is but sorrow,
While we know
It ends tomorrow:—
Even so!

²¹Stephen J. Nichols, Jr., elaborates: 'the interrogative mode opens a threatening space in any system of affirmative rhetoric. It indicates a gap in the discourse, a sense of incompleteness. One might argue that questions [. . .] have a double meaning: while calling for an answer, they manage to suggest that the answer may not be singular and definitive, but multiple and provisional. In pointing to space to be filled (by an answer), the question [. . .] indicates 'what is not there'. More unsettling still, even when the blank has been filled in, the answer occupies a space that calls attention to itself as provisionally filled. [. . .] So the interrogative mode is the palimpsestic mode of discourse *par excellence*, refusing to yield its space to the answer that comes to cover it' (p. 24).

²²*Revolution*, p. 29. Kristeva defines the feminine in language as analogous to the semiotic. This is to be distinguished from the nineteenth century's denotation of the feminine. Bronfen makes the connection between the feminine aesthetic and modernist recuperations of the feminine, which exploit the feminine as a position of alterity, the ground and vanishing point of patriarchy. See below, conclusion.

Joy with lifted veil
Shows a face as pale
As the fair changing moon so fair and frail.

Pain is but pleasure,
If we know
It heaps up treasure:—
Even so!
Turn, transfigured Pain,
Sweetheart, turn again,
For fair thou art as moonrise after rain.

In both stanzas, the signified is assured by the completion of comparisons, the 'turns', (suggested by 'As' and 'For') in the last lines. This is despite the pleonasm, the excessive repetition, of 'fair'. Although these last lines complete the trope of transformed joy and pain, the image of transfiguration in both is based upon a delicate and provisional image of the moon. The long length of the lines, which seem to serve as anchors to the poem, arresting the fading lines, themselves refer to fading. Although the vagueness maintains reserve by resisting a firm apprehension of the signified, it also insists upon a desire that *exceeds* reserve. In the poem, the vowel sound 'o' predominates and undermines the metrical regularity of the verse form. Importantly, this vowel sound is dissonant in the last line of each stanza, with 'moon'. This rhythmic disturbance increases the movement of the poem towards non-signification, as the attempted personification of joy and sorrow takes on emphatically non-human attributes.

The importance of assonance in underlying and undermining the poem's semantics can also be seen in 'A Castle-Builders World' (C.ii.314).

Unripe harvest there hath none to reap it
 From the misty gusty place,
 Unripe vineyard there hath none to keep it
 In unprofitable space.
 Living men and women are not found there,
 Only masks in flocks and shoals;
 Flesh-and-bloodless hazy masks surround there,
 Ever wavering orbs and poles;
 Flesh-and-bloodless vapid masks abound there,
 Shades of bodies without souls.

Like Coleridge's 'Limbo,' this poem describes a ghostly 'no place' devoid of substance.²³ The alternate rhymes are based on a repetition of the same end words and consequently convey a sense of stagnation, of lack of movement forward. This is heightened by the similarity of lines 7 and 9 and the difference in line lengths which suggest dissolution and diminishment. Here, the theme is not that of longing for Christ but a description of the world of a vain daydreamer and his/her 'unprofitable' imagination.²⁴ In fact, the poem is taken from 'A Coast-Nightmare' (C.iii.268), which does not explicitly sign itself as devotional, but describes the ghostland where the speaker's 'friend' (which Rossetti substituted for 'lover', in the manuscript) lives.²⁵ In the *Verses* version, the emphasis moves from ghosts to the masks of the inhabitants; in lines 6, 7 and 9 of 'A Castle-Builder's World', 'ghost' is replaced with 'mask'. The lack of corporeality is heightened by replacing 'indistinguished' with 'flesh-and-bloodless' in lines 7 and 9. The

²³"Tis a strange place, this Limbo!—not a Place, / Yet name it so' (*The Oxford Authors: Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, p. 131).

²⁴Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, notes that *The Face of the Deep* warns against daydreams and building castles in the air, rather than the world of true revelation (p. 558).

²⁵C.iii.465-66. Crump does not mention that 'A Castle-Builder's World' comes from this poem.

final line originally read 'Troops, yea swarms, of dead men's souls', and in the published version becomes: 'Shades of bodies without souls.' The poem in *Verses* thus is revised to become a warning of the moral dangers of illusion and unreality. Associated with this is the rhyme scheme which, with the repetition of end-words and of lines, gives a sense of fading and diminishment. Extreme rhythmic disturbance is carried over to the semantics, which describe an 'unprofitable space' of no substance and no meaning. This represents a complete immersion in the pre-verbal, without the provisional ordering of the thetic phase, which leads to psychosis. The double-bind of the subject — how to allow for the disruptive pressure of the semiotic without leaving the socialising symbolic behind²⁶ — is acknowledged in *Verses* in the rhetorical disavowal of reserve. The economy of reserve involves an awareness of the absence and loss of the desired Christ, but the danger is that a sustained semiosis leads to a complete breakdown in signification.

* * * * *

Rossetti's interest in degeneration links her poetry with Aestheticism. Kathy Alexis Psomiades places Rossetti firmly in the Aestheticist tradition, a tradition which Rossetti uses to critique Pre-Raphaelite art.²⁷ The relation between the Oxford Movement and Aestheticism is sketched by David J. DeLaura, who shows how Newman's prose was re-defined to provide the Decadents with a definition of a style based on musicality. John

²⁶See Oliver, especially the Introduction.

²⁷Psomiades, 'Subtly of Herself Contemplative', pp. 136-37

Campbell Shairp, for example, praises Newman for his ‘unearthly music’, and Church admires his ‘delicate music’, which gives the impression of instinctiveness.²⁸ The music is a sign of his spirituality, both veiled and displayed in an indirect mode of expression; Shairp, for example, praises his words which are ‘at once a revelation and a veil’ of the self (p. 9), affording a ‘glimpse’, a ‘mere indirect hint’, a ‘haunting glance’ of his personality (p. 9).²⁹ Whilst this would seem to credit Newman’s style with poetic rhythms, Ruskin was criticised for his explicit overstepping of the rhythmic boundaries between poetry and prose (p. 6), ironical given his condemnation of Christina Rossetti’s verse as metrically irregular.

Such a musicality is a feature of Rossetti’s poetry, as described by contemporary critics.³⁰ Bell notes this feature in her voice first of all, and relates it to her Italian heritage. When he first met Rossetti:

Her voice attracted me at once: never before had I met such a voice. It was intensely musical, but its indefinable charm arose [. . .] from what Mr. Watts-Dunton has aptly called her ‘clear-cut method of syllabification,’ — a peculiarity which he thinks, no doubt rightly, attributable to her foreign lineage. Indications of her foreign lineage were very noticeable on the occasion I am describing. Not of course that it was discernible in accent, nor even in mere tone or inflexion of voice, certainly it was not markedly observable either in her modes of speech or in her ideas.

²⁸David J. DeLaura, ‘Newman and the Victorian Cult of Style’, *The Victorian Newsletter* 51 (Spring 1987), 6-10 (p. 7, p. 10).

²⁹William Sharp praises Rossetti for a superior ‘artless art’ to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s, in ‘Some Reminiscences’, p. 741.

³⁰Compare, however, Edmund Gosse, who comments that she: ‘makes no pretence to elaborate metrical effects; she is sometimes even a little naïve, a little careless, in her rough, rhymeless endings, and metrically her work was better in her youth than it has been since’ (pp. 153-54). Armstrong employs the trope of musicality to describe the forging by women poets of a feminine poetics in the nineteenth-century, ‘a “music” of their own’ (*Victorian Poetry*, p. 323).

It was something assuredly there, but, like many of the things we perceive with life's subtler perceptions, it eluded precise definition.
(pp. 136-37)

Bell reports W. M. Rossetti's bland disclosure that his sister had no talent for music, nor any great liking for it (p. 167). Later in the biography, in the section that gives a critical study of her devotional works, Bell identifies a musicality in *Anno Domini* that is: 'full of the true rhythm of the finest English prose' (p. 287). In Rossetti's 'Key to my Book', that prefaces *Called to be Saints*, Bell notes that the prose: 'is full of that rhythmical beauty noticeable especially in much of her devotional prose' (p. 292).³¹ Again, he finds the same qualities in *The Face of the Deep*. Bell implies that her 'childlike humility' and her unconscious possession of 'miscellaneous learning' lead to a word or phrase which awakens a lyrical quality, and she: 'breaks forth into snatches of exquisite song'. Further, 'in these sequences her rich diction and fine ear for the rhythm of prose enable her to excel. Some of these, indeed most of them, are choice examples of rhythmically balanced and delicate prose' (pp. 310-11).

Alice Meynell notes a paradox in Rossetti's poetry: it is 'without music, except that ultimate music of the communicating word, [and] she utters the immortal song of love and that cry of more than earthly fear'. Meynell discusses Rossetti's metrical irregularity (which so irritated Ruskin), and suggests that there is an ambiguity about the scansion of some of her lines, based on the same use of accent as Coleridge's

³¹*Called to be Saints: the Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied* (London: SPCK, 1881).

'Christabel'. However, Meynell insists that Rossetti's use of this Old English metre, 'the voice that sings in musical time', should be praised as refreshing a poetic form.³² William Sharp ends his article on Rossetti by admiring a stanza which: 'made a music in my mind' ('Some Reminiscences', p. 749). She is noted by James Ashcroft Noble for: 'the haunting music of the lyrical melodies which the poet has made her own' (*Impressions*, p. 63).

The contemporary critical emphasis upon Rossetti's musicality connects her to later Victorian re-evaluations of Newman's style, which praised its musicality as a sign of spirituality, its 'unearthliness', an indication of a personality both shown and veiled — a function of the Tractarian doctrine of Reserve. The biographical trope of Rossetti also exhibits a similar construction of identity, suggested by Bell's association of Rossetti's musical speech with her Italian heritage: it is both known and unknown: 'it was something assuredly there, but, like many of the things we perceive with life's subtler perceptions, it eluded precise definition' (quoted above).

In *Time Flies*, Rossetti associates a particular type of music with heaven: 'a heaven of music seems rather a heaven of endless progression, of inexhaustible variety, than a heaven of monotony' (February 8, p. 29). In *Verses*, music is seen as part of the economics of reserve, for music can apprehend what words cannot:

³²Alice Meynell 'Christina Rossetti,' *New Review*, 12 February 1895, pp. 201-6 (pp. 203-5).

Words cannot utter
Christ His returning [. . .]
Speech is left speechless;
Set you to singing,
Fling your hearts open wide,
Set your bells ringing [. . .]
This is man's spousal day,
Christ's day and ours.
(‘Easter Day,’ C.ii.229-30; ll. 1-2, ll. 7-10, ll. 17-18)

On the day of union between the speaker and Christ, music utters the joy that words cannot; thus, music speaks *through* or in spite of reserve, and marks the pressure of the semiotic, *jouissance*. Reserve cannot contain the semiotic's musicality.³³ In fact, Rossetti's description of the music of heaven as ‘inexhaustible variety’ anticipates Kristeva's association of the *chora* with what Moi terms a ‘ceaseless heterogeneity’, an endless unrelatedness and disparity. Music is firmly associated with the name of Christ itself:

‘Jesus’ certainly
Is music and melody:
Heart with heart in harmony
Carol and worship we.
(‘Christmas Day,’ C.ii.215; ll. 21-24)

Further, the speaker in another poem asks to be tuned to this music:

³³See the quotation above, from Kristeva's comment on ‘The Musicality of Literature.’ For Kristeva, the feminine element as the semiotic *chora* corresponds to the poetic in language. This definition of the poetic is paradigmatic of the productivity of any text as the unrepresentable and untranslatable musicality underlying signification. See John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 4-5. The privilege given to the term ‘poetic’ is also seen in Tractarian aesthetics, which equate ‘poetry’ with art and the imaginative in general, not restricted, as with Kristeva, to poetic forms. Both these claims for poetry as paradigmatic are influenced by the Romantic formulation of the creative imagination. See Tennyson, p. 20.

Tune me, O Lord, into one harmony
With Thee, one full responsive vibrant chord:
Unto Thy praise all love and melody,
Tune me, O Lord [. . .]
As Thy Heart is to my heart, unto Thee
Tune me, O Lord.
(C.ii.255; ll.1-4, ll.10-12).

Bell, in his critical study of Rossetti's poetry, suggests that the use of French verse forms in her later poetry induces her to juxtapose rhymes which are open to the objection of repeating similar sounds (p. 251). As an example, Bell cites 'Time passeth away' (C.ii.274), in which the words 'bane' and 'bay' uncomfortably almost rhyme:

Time passeth away with its pleasure and pain,
Its garlands of cypress and bay,
With wealth and with want, with a balm and a bane,
Time passeth away.
(ll. 1-4)

This poem, however, creates a dissonant jingle between 'bay' and 'bane' and, by use of assonance, disrupts the conventional ABAB rhyme scheme typical of roundels. The other stanzas similarly employ assonance to work against the conventional rhyme scheme: 'stay' and 'way' are thus linked with 'again' in the middle stanza, and 'main' and 'wane' with 'pray' and 'away' in the last. The repeated vowel sound 'a' thus works to suggest a rhythmic pattern that breaks down the demarcation and distinction between end-words in the rhyme scheme.

This musicality is associated with the music of heaven itself, for the theme of the poem is the end of material time and

the beginning of eternity.³⁴ Once again, the speaker is only on the point of apprehending this, suggested by the use of gerunds in the repetition of 'arresting': for example, 'Eternity barring the way, / Arresting all courses of planet or main' (ll. 7-8). 'This near-at-hand-land' (C.ii.268) has a similar theme, suggesting that the rhythms are those of heaven:

This land hath for music sobbing and sighing:
That land hath soft speech and sweet soft replying
Of all loves undying.
(ll. 7-9)

Feminine rhymes suggest a lilting and fading rhythm, whilst the theme addresses the reciprocity of speech in heaven, where Christ will be gazed upon — 'Come, gaze upon Jesu' (l. 33).

The musicality of Rossetti's devotional verse is thus apprehended in the rhythms of her language, in particular the use of assonance, alliteration, incremental repetitions, and doublings. Repetition of non-referential, non-experiential musicality intimates the semiotic's heterogeneity. The 'receptacle' for such rhythmical pulsations, the *chora*, does have some degree of organisation as a pressure on Symbolic order. According to Kristeva the *chora*: 'is subject to what we shall call an objective *ordering* [. . .] which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure' (*Revolution*, pp. 26-27). Rossetti's devotional poetry, however, disrupts such norms that

³⁴Sickbert argues that: 'when her poetry explores the relation between speaker and Love, Rossetti approaches the limits of the semiotic. Poems verge on the nonsensical as rhythm and anaphora predominate and meaning is borne more and more by the music of the poem' (p. 168). I would argue, however, that the semiotic can work both with and against the meaning of the poem and, as a disruptive pressure rather than a position, the semiotic cannot in itself replace the semantic.

articulate sexual differences through a logic of the Same, in her intimation of disparity and unrelatedness that announces itself as semiotically prior to gender. This is because, as critics often note, Christ encompasses both masculine and feminine significances for Rossetti: in *Seek and Find*, she is consoled by Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (3:28): 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (p. 32). Rossetti declares, in *Face of the Deep*, that: 'underlying all is an essential equality, inasmuch as we are all Christ's' (p. 501). As Sharon Smulders comments, this location of the feminine in Christ seems to elide social issues and sexual difference:

Rossetti ascribes value to women's lives by aligning femininity and Christianity against the values of secular, masculinist society, by giving priority to transmundane rather than temporal concerns. But in so doing, she defers the question of sexual equality raised in 'The Lowest Room' to the realm of the spirit and, therefore, diffuses its sociopolitical relevance.
(*'Woman's Enfranchisement'*, p. 572)

Sickbert, who argues for a forging (rather than an anticipation) of a maternal semiotic relation between the speaker and Christ, maintains with reference to Chodorow an awareness of *difference* between subject and object, despite Rossetti's collapsing of masculine and feminine into Christ (chapter 5 and *passim*). This argument discounts the fact that union with Christ — face to face and heart to heart — attempts to eradicate all difference in a union that subsumes the speaker in his Love. Union or reciprocity with Christ, however, is only desired thematically, and intimated rhythmically and sporadically by the pull of the semiotic. Although, thematically, the poetry heralds

an eradication of sexual difference, the poetic language keeps the question of sexual difference in play, for the speaker's subject position maintain its denotation as feminine within the aesthetic and, *simultaneously*, this designation is unsettled by the desire for union and the semiotic intimations of *jouissance*. The inability to sustain semiotic musicality unsettles rather than eradicates sexual difference, and the poetry is caught uncannily both within and beyond the aesthetic.

* * * * *

George Steiner connects the modernist supplanting of the word by non-verbal communication, such as silence and music, with mysticism:

The highest, purest reach of the contemplative act is that which has learned to leave language behind it. The ineffable lies beyond the frontiers of the word. It is only by breaking through the walls of language that visionary observance can enter the world of total and immediate understanding.³⁵

This modernist project leaves behind language in a utopian attempt to attain a purity that apprehends the object of thought. In contrast, the Tractarian doctrine of reserve intimates a mystical knowledge through an indirect use of language; language is not left behind, as in Steiner's paradigm, but communicates the divine through an oscillation of revealing and concealing. Keble's Tract on reserve associates the doctrine

³⁵George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966* (London: Faber 1967; repr. 1990), p. 30.

with the mysticism of the early fathers in order to vindicate their writings. Mysticism, a term of disparagement which Keble re-appropriates as a positive value judgement, is defined as: 'a disposition, first, to regard things as supernatural which are not really such; and secondly, to press and strain what may perhaps be really supernatural in an undue and extravagant way' (p. 4). He notes 'the reverential reserve, which undoubtedly they practised in every part of religion, in proportion to its sacredness' (p. 13), and which must be considered in an analysis of their teachings. Keble comments that we must take into account their reserve: 'and often to give those who wrote under its influence credit for a more thorough agreement in high and mysterious doctrines, than their words at first sight would otherwise appear to express' (p. 13).

The last two sections of *Tract 89* offer the most explicit connection between poetry and Tractarian aesthetics. Keble suggests that the fathers should be valued for suggesting: 'not a merely *poetical*, or a merely *moral*, but a *mystical*, use of things visible' (p. 144). These three are hierarchically structured from lower to higher, and are described as: 'the way of regarding external things, either as fraught with imaginative associations, or as parabolic lessons of conduct, or as a symbolic language in which GOD speaks to us of a world out of sight' (p. 143). Through reserve, mysticism communicates divine signification through the material world.

Contemporary reviews of Rossetti's poetry acknowledge her association with the mystical. Edward Boyle, for example, notes that she has been compared to seventeenth-century mystics, and that: 'the atmosphere of mysticism certainly

pervades Christina Rossetti's work. She saw in everything the manifestation of the Divine.'³⁶ William Sharp notes, in some of her lyrics: 'a strange note of impassioned mysticism' ('Some Reminiscences', p. 746). Rossetti is also 'a true mystic', according to James Ashcroft Noble, because: 'each simple thing of nature or each homely human relation tells its own secret of meaning.' Further, in the devotional poems of her early volumes: 'the realities of mystic vision make themselves felt through images of sensuous perception' (*Impressions*, p. 59, p. 60).

Linda Marshall argues that Rossetti's mysticism intimates divine significances through the body, rather than the material world, as Keble suggests. In a discussion of 'Goblin Market', Marshall cites Steiner's analysis in *After Babel* of the mixture of homely literalness and mystic visionariness that Arthur Symons notes in Rossetti's poem. Marshall suggests that the irregular rhythm of 'Goblin Market' may correspond to Kristeva's semiotic or to what Irigaray calls the 'sensible transcendental', the writing of word made flesh, the corporeality of speaking the divine. This is compared with the medieval women mystics, who represent the divine in bodily terms. Marshall also makes the important observation that:

While it would be presumptuous to engraft the historically and culturally specific lives and words of these medieval women onto the life and words of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholic poet, to consider them as mutually resonant might produce a sounding of

³⁶Sir Edward Boyle, *Biographical and Critical Essays, 1790-1890* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936; reprint. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 201.

Rossetti's fairy story in sympathy with its visionary literalism.

('Transfigured to His Likeness', pp. 437-38)

In the devotional poetry, however, the problem is precisely the *inability* to inscribe in bodily, corporeal terms the anticipated union with Christ. This brings about the excess of desire and Rossetti's problematic identification with mystical discourse, which on the one hand the pressure of the semiotic suggests, while on the other, the thematics can only embrace proleptically.

Because Rossetti can only intensely desire and anticipate a mystical union with Christ, she does not achieve the new signifying practise that leaves behind considerations of gender that Gilmore ascribes to the mystics thus:

The body of Christ as the ground of mystical experience provides the occasion for what can be called a counterdiscourse of gender. That is, according to the Bible, in Christ there is *no* male or female, and in the mystic's self-representation of the relationship between Christ's body and her own, there is *both* male and female. [. . .] Their texts insist upon the interchangeability of male- and female-gendered body tropes within a single, reconceived body. In this way, mystical self-representation of the body resists the duality and finality of gender.

(p. 133)

Although Rossetti claims in her devotional prose that in Christ there is an erasure of sexual difference, which would accord with mystical discourses, the poetry in *Verses* cannot enjoy a free play of gender denotations within language. The poems mark their difference from such self-representational axioms by virtue of the unfulfilled desire for communion with Christ, while

the poetic subject cannot completely evade the position construed within contemporary discourses as feminine.

Despite the friction between belief and praxis, Rossetti's revisions of poems for inclusion in *Verses* do suggest an attempt to erase personal pronouns associated with the struggle for mystical discourse with Christ. These changes signal a move from the personal to the general, epitomised by the two poems 'For Each' and 'For All' (C.ii.279), two consecutive roundels that in their original context form the conclusion to *The Face of the Deep*. The first poem focuses upon the personal and the specific: 'My harvest is done, its promise is ended' (l. 1), which becomes, in the second roundel, generic: 'Man's harvest is done, his summer is ended' (l. 1). In the collection there are a large number of poems with omitted stanzas or revisions which delete the personal, thus forming a secret sub-text of the poetry, in much the same way as the personal references in *Time Flies* are disguised but added by the author in her marginalia.³⁷

Sharon Smulders explores the deletion of personal pronouns as the attempt to eradicate sexual difference altogether, as distinct from Gilmore's position which sees Christ's femaleness initiating substitutable tropes of gender. But Smulders' argument seems to be confused about this eradication, for her analysis does not demonstrate that sexual difference is erased, but that gender is not a fixed category. A critique of her analysis exposes the problematics of gender in Rossetti's devotional work, and leads to a different understanding of the feminine subject position with reference to

³⁷The copy of *Time Flies* containing Rossetti's identification of anecdotes is held by the University of Texas at Austin.

Rossetti's own concerns with gender. Smulders asserts that the poems in the collection: 'circumvent questions relating to sex and gender. Indeed, they are purged of the gender specific in order to address concerns of "Man's universal mind"' ('Woman's Enfranchisement', p. 578). The confessional speaker's identification as female is, however, suggested by other critics, whose arguments are cited only to be qualified by Smulders' point that 'when Rossetti abandons the seemingly genderless "I", however, she follows grammatical convention and renders the "representative Christian" as "he"' (p. 578). This is an attempt to re-shape the cultural identity of the Christian as female, in order to authorise the devotional poetry. Smulders's line of argument concludes that: 'Rossetti's flight into androgyny in *Verses*, her erasure of an obviously gendered persona, provides the means to exercise her 'intuition of equality' (p. 583). This statement is problematic, for it suggests that combining male and female characteristics (androgyny) — variously given as the identification of the confessional subject as female, the generic 'he', and the erasure of personal pronouns — evades the question of sexual difference altogether. In fact, rather than an effacement of gender, the devotional poetics combine and unsettle both masculine and feminine subject positions.

Whilst there are many instances of the erasure of the personal pronoun in the revisions to the devotional poetry, such a procedure cannot be read as a simple refutation of gender.³⁸ In

³⁸See the following poems: 'Weigh all my faults and follies righteously'; 'Thy Friend and thy Father's Friend forget not'; 'O Christ our All in each, our All in all!'; 'As a king, . . . unto the King'; 'Earth has clear call of daily bells'; 'Whatsoever is right, that ye shall receive'; 'Then when shall those things be?'; 'Heaven's chimes are slow, but sure to strike at last'; 'What good shall my life do me?'; 'Man's life is but a working day'; 'What is that to thee? follow thou me'; 'Our life is long. Not so, wise Angels say'; 'The sinner's own fault? So it was';

Time Flies, the first person pronoun interrupts the narrative to mark the feminine position of humility. Often, this signals a movement from the complicity of 'we' to the personal 'I'.³⁹ For example, in the entry for April 21, an anecdote is told of a friend who: 'depreciated resignation in comparison with conformity to the Divine Will'. He was in continual pain, but always remained cheerful: 'If only we — if only I were as *resigned* as he was *conformed!*' (p. 76). The entry for 3 May has a similar rhetorical shift:

We are certain to know what suffering is, this needs no disquisition: but do we know what patience is? If not, He finds not His Cross enshrined in our hearts . . . in my heart.

And if His Cross be not there, 'what good shall my life do me?'
(p. 85)⁴⁰

The revisions for *Verses* often conceal not just a personal pronoun, but also an explicit desire for a union with Christ. 'Whatsoever is right, that ye may receive' consists of the first and last stanzas of the original posthumously published poem, 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness.' The deletions elide the abandonment by the speaker of worldly desires, expressed in economic metaphors reminiscent of the sonnet 'Cor mio':

How can we say 'enough' on earth;
'Enough' with such a craving heart:

'Who would wish back the Saints upon our rough'; 'These all wait upon Thee'; and 'The Flowers appear on the Earth.' Despite this long list of revised poems, many others retain the 'I'.

³⁹Compare 'Thy Friend and thy Father's Friend forget not' (C.ii.202): 'Friends, I commend to you the narrow way: / Not because I, please God, will walk therein, / But rather for the Love Feast of that day.'

⁴⁰For other examples, see the entries for April 28, June 27, and December 4. *The Face of the Deep* closes with: 'if I have been overbold in attempting such a work as this, I beg pardon' (p. 551).

I have not found it since my birth
 But still have bartered part for part.
I have not held and hugged the whole,
 But paid the old to gain the new;
 Much have I paid, yet much is due,
Till I am beggared sense and soul.
(C.iii.265; ll. 9-16)

The metaphors of exchange describe the subject's incompleteness, the inability to achieve an end of desire within the economy of bartering of 'part for part'. Subsequent stanzas explain that the desire is to receive as well as to give, to participate fully in an exchange figured in physical terms:

To give, to give, not to receive,
 I long to pour myself, my soul,
Not to keep back or count or leave
 But king with king to give the whole:
I long for one to stir my deep—
 I have had enough of help and gift—
 I long for one to search and sift
Myself, to take myself and keep.

You scratch my surface with your pin;
 You stroke me smooth with hushing breath;—
Nay pierce, nay probe, nay dig within,
 Probe my quick core and sound my depth.
(ll. 25-36)

The bodily interaction is figured in terms reminiscent of Henry Vaughan, whom Rossetti elsewhere borrows from. Chapters 2 and 4 explored the core as a trope for the subject and the subject's heart. Here, the reference to Vaughan suggests the desire for a mystical bodily communion with Christ.⁴¹ The speaker in Rossetti's poem, however, finds that she is not able to achieve this exchange, as the physical images shift to become fluid:

⁴¹Compare Henry Vaughan. *The Complete Poems*, p. 137.

'Your vessels are by much too straight; / Were I to pour you could not hold' (ll. 41-42). She determines instead to 'bear to wait / A fountain sealed thro' heat and cold' (ll. 43-44).⁴² The last stanza reiterates the sense of loss that the earth induces by not satisfying the longing heart, and waits instead for fulfilment in the afterlife: 'There God shall join and no man part / I full of Christ and Christ of me' (ll. 55-56).

The revised poem for *Verses* deletes the middle stanzas which describe the intense mourning over the gap between desire and fulfilment. This version is more overtly devotional and hopeful. Both stanzas alter the last line to insert the petition '(please God!)'. More significantly, the last line of the poem becomes: 'All one in Christ, so one—(please God!)—with me' (C.ii.267), thus translating the anticipation of a personal and mystical exchange with Christ into a more general communion of Christian souls. The revisions to other poems similarly delete the thematic or rhetorical desire for Christ. The musicality of 'Young Death' (C.iii.295) together with the emphasis on the bodily decay of the dying girl that the poem describes is suggestive of both the *chora's* rhythm and the corporeality of mystical discourse. In *Verses*, however, the shortened version, 'Is it well with the child?' (C.ii.292), excises the physical description of the child and the anaphoric lines which suggest most forcefully the musicality. In 'Our life is long. Not so, wise angels say' (C.ii.301), the exchange of hearts in the original, 'Give me Thy heart', becomes 'Lord, make us like Thyself' (l. 16).

⁴²Compare chapter 3 on verbal/visual doubles, in which W. M. Rossetti describes his sister as 'a fountain sealed'.

The intimation of an interchange is revised to a desire for sameness.

The revisions to one poem in particular demonstrate how the deletion of personal pronouns cannot be read unproblematically as the effacement of gender. Smulders notes how 'The sinner's own fault? So it was' (C.ii.308) derives from the unpublished ballad 'Margery' (C.iii.289). This poem is cited to demonstrate the often unnoticed 'sinewy strength of her religious lyrics': 'a taint of "falsetto muscularity" is not apparent to readers, for the "I" or "we" of *Verses* is, more often than not, "neither male nor female"' ('Woman's Enfranchisement', p. 579). Thus, Smulders argues, a speaker unspecified as male or female is a genderless subject position. But her assertion is contradictory: how can a masculine sinewy strength evade sexual difference? As this poem illustrates, the subject position is problematic in the poetical enactment of Rossetti's belief in a feminine Christ who, rather than eradicating sexual difference, puts the difference in question.

Margery, the woman of the title, physically pines away for her beloved: her loss and her sin were not to keep her love a secret: 'A foolish girl, to love a man / And let him know she loved him so!' (ll. 6-7). The jaunty rhythms belie the poem's commerce with the sentimental tradition and the speaker's advice appears ironic — Margery should 'Have loved, but not have let him know: / Then he perhaps had loved her so' (ll. 9-10). The speaker, by virtue of the sentimental theme, seems to be female. The first line: 'What shall we do with Margery?', and the advice to conceal her love suggests that the speaker has a feminine empathy with the bereft lover. Further, the speaker has access

to her bedchamber: 'I hear her moaning in her sleep, / Moaning and sobbing in her sleep' (ll. 19-20), clearly inappropriate for a man.⁴³ In the fifth stanza, however, the speaker positions herself as Margery's beloved:

I think—and I'm of flesh and blood—
Were I that man for whom she cares
I would not cost her tears and prayers
To leave her just alone like mud,
Fretting her simple heart with cares.
(ll. 21-25)

The speaker's gender shifts here to the masculine and again introduces an economic metaphor, implying that Margery's tears and prayers are part of a sexual economics, expended or sacrificed for her beloved's freedom. Further, the insistence on the speaker's corporeality — 'I'm of flesh and blood' — implies a desire for Margery commensurate with the adoption of a masculine position. The following stanzas toy again with the gender of the speaker as they shift back to the sentimental tradition, empathising with her sorrow and suggesting that only by transgressing the female sphere will Margery survive: 'To get beyond the narrow wall / Of home, and learn home is not all' (ll. 44-45). This transgression of the appropriate domestic female space as the cure is also applicable to the speaker's coy teasing with his/her gender position, which surfaces again in the final stanza:

Yet this I say and I maintain:
Were I the man she's fretting for
I should my very self abhor
If I should leave her to her pain,

⁴³ Compare Catherine Maxwell's discussion of the male presence in the speaker's bedchamber in 'After Death'; see 'The Poetic Context of Christina Rossetti's "After Death"', *English Studies* 76. 2 (March 1995), 143-55 (pp. 145-46).

Uncomforted to tears and pain.
(ll. 51-55)

The emphatic re-positioning of the subject as male seems pleonastic by the end of the poem, and the final couplet's repetition of the same end word 'pain' is an unsettling conclusion. The rhyme scheme in each stanza depends upon the repetition of rhyme words, which refuses a sense of progression that the regularity seems to offer. This heightens the uneasiness produced by the speaker's indeterminate gender position which, rather than combining male and female attributes to erase sexual difference, moves between masculine and feminine denotations.

Fluctuation of gender norms is the sign of the hysteric. Armstrong notes that the negative side of the expressive aesthetic is pathological: the release of feeling is then figured as excessive, as hysterical (*Victorian Poetry*, p. 339). But for the poet of reserve, the excess that escapes repression, signified by the indeterminate gender of the speaker in Rossetti's poem, is closer to Irigaray's *mystérique*.⁴⁴ Crossing Keble's terminology of mysticism with Irigaray's, the *mystérique* gestures through the body, through gender denotation, to subversive symbolic truths which cannot be wholly contained by reserve. Controversially, Irigaray gives the *mystérique* a privileged place as the public usurper of patriarchal logic of the same, for in her 'ex-stasies' (outside places) the border between subject and other melts away, and subjecthood itself dissolves. She recognises a remainder to signification, a *supplément*,

⁴⁴As the translator notes, this phrase incorporates mysticism, hysteria, mystery, and femaleness (*Speculum*, p. 191).

‘something [that] *remains to be said* that resists all speech, that can at best be stammered out’ (p. 193). Ultimately, however, the loss of subjecthood always defeats itself, for in her *jouissance*, the abyss of the loss of the self, the *mystérique* finds a burning mirror that specularizes her. The masculine object of theology cannot be overcome: ‘a “God” already draws near in these/her fainting states’ (p. 199). The failure of the mystical venture is inevitable, and brings a return to the subject; but the *mystérique* has nevertheless found a circumscribed space for her own self-representation, for ‘that most female of men, the Son’ (p. 199) is found in the burning glass. The femininity of Christ undoes the androcentric specular logic, even as the *mystérique* is entrapped within that logic.⁴⁵

This cross between hysteria and mysticism is useful in formulating Rossetti’s gender vacillations as the dynamics of a reserve that both expresses and represses anticipation and desire for union with Christ. As Armstrong notes in relation to expressive projection, expression and repression are in conflict and yet also interdependent (*Victorian Poetry*, p. 341).⁴⁶ That the poem registered to Rossetti such a potentially radical pull towards self-representation through the oscillation of reserve is suggested by the revisions to the poem for *Verses*, which retain the seventh stanza and add another:⁴⁷

⁴⁵See also Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p.137.

⁴⁶This is because: ‘the representative symbol [of thought] is both the *means* of expression and the *form* of its repression’ (p. 341).

⁴⁷In a letter to D. G. Rossetti, dated by W. M. Rossetti as April 1865, Christina Rossetti writes : ‘*Margery*: has lost her 3 stanzas, and gained thereby’ (*RP*, p. 99). W. M. Rossetti notes that it is unclear which stanzas are referred to, and the poem was not published in *The Prince’s Progress*, the volume that D. G. Rossetti partially oversaw.

The sinner's own fault? So it was.
If every own fault found us out,
Dogged us and hedged us round about,
What comfort should we take because
Not half or due we thus wrung out?

Clearly his own fault. Yet I think
My fault in part, who did not pray
But lagged and would not lead the way.
I, haply, proved his missing link.
God help us both to mend and pray.

The balladic nature of the original has been completely obscured to create a poem firmly devotional: ironically, the original poem's signature of the *mystérique* is erased to transform the poem into a devotional verse suitable for publication. Smulders argues that the shift from a female's (Margery's) fault to 'he' is generic, and that: 'in the final version, the "sinner's own fault" is no longer associated with illicit love; "it" remains unspecified' ('Woman's Enfranchisement', p. 579). Smulders also asserts that, although the poem originally appeared in *Time Flies* before St. Mary Magdalene's feast day, in *Verses* the poem follows 'Called to be Saints' which is not gender-specific (p. 579). Thus, the revised volume's first context gives it associations with feminine transgression, but its second does not. Despite the addition of the generic 'he', however, the feminine still persists as the speaker's subject position. In the added stanza, the personal enters the text along with humility and a sense of guilt — both associated with the feminine aesthetic. Although the poem has been revised to make it appropriate for inclusion in the devotional volume, even in the *Verses* context the norms of gender unsettle the subject position despite, or rather because of, the attempt to interrogate sexual

difference by suggesting that the speaker is perhaps the 'missing link' that caused the sinner to sin. The 'he' does not lose its gender specificity despite the generalisation. The speaker's position as feminine is only potentially denied by the equation with the sinner, for she fails to be his 'link'. In this complex of cause and effect, the generic 'he' and the humble secondary speaker who 'lagged and would not lead the way' maintain yet endlessly subvert their sexual differences.

'The sinner's own fault? So it was' does not, then, maintain the status quo, the gender norm. By signalling the failure to prevent the sinner sinning, the poem mourns a gap between desire and fulfilment similar to the general pattern in *Verses*, in which fulfilment is only ever anticipated. In fact, the attempt to erase the personal, which does not wholly succeed in this poem, can be read as the operation of transposition. Two basic processes in the unconscious are defined by Freud in relation to his work on dreams: displacement (or metonymy) and condensation (or metaphor). Kristeva adds a third term: a combination of the two, the passage from one sign system to another which alters the thetic position and leads to a new signifying practise:

The term *inter-textuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources', we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic — of enunciative and denotative positionality.
(*Revolution*, pp. 59-60)

The revisions for the *Verses* volume, which attempt to erase personal pronouns, participate in such a translation from one sign system to another—in the case of ‘Margery’, from the ballad to the devotional. This transposition discloses the failure of the subject to contain desire within in the economics of reserve, for the attempt to suppress sexual difference, as documented in Rossetti’s prose, fails in the poetic praxis. In fact, the inability completely to delete the personal, and to delete the poetic subject as feminine, suggests a subject-in-process/on trial which engages with issues of self-representation. Kristeva, in her discussion of transposition, points out that, for Freud, representability emerges as a process related to, if distinct from, displacement. Kristeva defines representability as:

the specific articulation of the semiotic and the thetic for a sign system. Transposition plays an essential role here inasmuch as it implies the abandonment of a former sign system, the passage to a second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new sign system with its new representability.

(*Revolution*, p. 60)

In the devotional poems compiled for *Verses*, it would seem as if the passage between sign systems has not been completed. Thus, the representability of the texts engages with issues of *self*-representation, for the personal has not been completely eradicated.

The inability to denote firmly the personal of these texts is related to issues of genre; in fact, it is here that gender and genre intersect. The cross-over between gender and genre that informs women’s self-representation comes across in the inability to demark the genre as firmly autobiographical, and

brings about an alterity in the law of generic norms. In fact *Time Flies* and *Maude* as well as *Verses*, cannot be consistently classified as autobiographical.⁴⁸ *Verses* borrows its title from her first juvenile collection, privately printed by her grandfather in 1847. Such a repetition of titles brings an uncanny, if not unforeseen, sense of completion to Rossetti's poetic career; but the simple, brief title of these last poems conceals the indeterminate denotation of the type of volume offered. Although the title may promise a continuity between Rossetti's first and last volumes (and perhaps the lack of intellectual development commonly ascribed to her by her contemporaries), the repetition masks the differences in content between the two volumes, and, indeed, masks the shift in her poetics as she continues to negotiate Tractarian aesthetics in her later writing. Further, the choice of title conceals the status of the volume as a collation of poetry previously published in Rossetti's devotional prose. The final volume of poetry is less a collection of new work than a re-arrangement of previously published poems — it re-circulates her devotional poetry but, as always, with a difference.

Dolores Rosenblum has shown how the patterning of the poems conveys the sense of conceptual development and exploration through specific arrangements, for 'more clearly than any other groupings in Rossetti's work, the groupings in *Verses* represent deliberate sequences.'⁴⁹ The meaning of the

⁴⁸*Maude* was posthumously published; see *Maude: a Story for Girls*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: James Bowden, 1897). The story is reprinted in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, and this is the edition to which I subsequently refer.

⁴⁹'Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence', in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 132-56 (p. 154).

poems is a product of their significant (incremental) difference within a sophisticated patterning which is, in a typical Rossettian rhetorical strategy explored in other chapters, concealed by a title that works to promote an idea of sameness rather than diversity. Further, the individual poems in *Verses* implicitly gesture towards their original context in the devotional prose, from which they are dislocated. Neither Tractarian nor mystical, but suggesting both, *Verses* is a curious finale to the Rossetti oeuvre. Even the term 'devotional' requires clarification, for some of the poems are revised from work that is clearly not, or not obviously, devotional.

Although the other devotional prose contains anecdotal material, *Time Flies* calls attention to its status as a diary and seems to be more explicitly engaged in self-representation. Mackenzie Bell's analysis of the volume also reaches this conclusion:

'Time Flies' has the distinction of containing more frequent personal references than any other of her books, unless it be 'The Face of the Deep.' Indeed it may almost be called a kind of spiritual autobiography. For even when there are no obvious personal allusions many of the original thoughts and pregnant sayings that enrich the book have had their root in her spiritual experience. Probably having to write something about each day in the year, something that must necessarily be short, and that ought also to be concise and pithy, she fell back, unconsciously, on her own wide experience, wide, not in the outer but in the inner sense.
(p. 304)

Bell's collapsing of writing into personal experience, and the insistent distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' are familiar from chapter 1, in which biographical representations were explored in order to suggest that the subject labelled 'Christina

Rossetti' did not correspond with the historical personage. *Time Flies*, like *Maude*, however, cannot simply be classed as an autobiography.⁵⁰ *Time Flies*, with a dense poetry—prose pattern, similarly refuses to be labelled a direct spiritual autobiography. *Maude*, in a similar mixture of poetry and narrative, presents itself as a fictional short story which bears striking parallels to Rossetti's own life. It too both invites and rejects an autobiographical reading.

This alterity within the law of generic norms is an hysterical vacillation between the fixed identities, which characterises hysterical discourse. Although in hysteria the identity is that of sexual and social norms, the genre of autobiography is intimately related to gender. Leigh Gilmore's *Autobiographics* teases out this relationship. In her study of women's self-representation, Gilmore finds that: 'autobiographers contest gender identity rather than simply enact it' (p. xi). The traditional collapse of experience into autobiography is exposed thus:

Gender is interpretable through a formalist logic by which the sex one can see becomes the gender one must *be*. [. . .] Autobiography, then, according to this logic of development, would translate the fact of sexual difference through the experience of gender to its subsequent representation. In this dynamic of production, autobiography becomes the last domino to fall: sex becomes gender becomes experience becomes book.
(p. 11)

Strategies of resistance within this logic are explored, and it becomes clear that the autobiographical subject can refuse to

⁵⁰This is despite a critical tradition which, in the manner of Bell, equates female writing with the confessional.

recognise that he or she has, in Althusser's terminology, been hailed, and so: 'the refusal to identify self-representation with that name marks the site of resistance' (p. 20). The stable, unified 'I', sanctified by the autobiographical fiction of a coherent identity, is called into question most forcefully at the point where genre meets gender:

the law of genre stakes its claims through a rhetoric of purity and contamination. [. . .] The law of gender erects an enforceable border between the selfsame and the other, for it stipulates that there are two genders and that we know which two they are. [. . .] The law of gender marks out two and only two domains of sexed identity and requires that persons mix sexually across that border and not within the domain of the selfsame. The compelling attractions of the selfsame, however, while impermissible for genders, are fully expected of genres. The relationship, then, between gender and genre operates through the logic of the chiasmus.
(p. 33)

The crossing over of genre and gender is formulated as the interface between textuality and sexuality:

The division between genders is maintained up to the point of sexuality and then a swift but sure crossing of the gendered border into heterosexuality is required, a crossing made possible through the seeming stability of that border. [. . .] The division among genres speaks of a polymorphously perverse textuality that must be regulated at many different borders. In autobiography, then, 'perversion' underlies and threatens the laws of gender and genre, [and] fracture[s] the spatial logic of separate (and separable) spheres.
(pp. 33-34)

It is in this 'perverse' meeting between gender and genre in self-representation that the feminine subject may be positioned in *Verses*. As in Rossetti's rhetoric of analogy (see chapter 5),

there is a gap between belief (in the eventual union with Christ and in the doctrine of reserve) and praxis, which is commensurate with Irigaray's formulation of the mediatory space between knowledge and reality. For Rossetti, the spiritual and physical love for Christ is the endless mediator between such differences. Rossetti's attempt to erase personal pronouns exposes her subject caught within this operation as a subject-in-process, or what Gilmore calls: 'the "I" [that is] multiply coded in a range of discourses [. . .] the site of multiple solicitations, multiple markings of "identity", multiple figurations of agency' (p. 42).

That the Rossettian subject-in-process is caught within transposition and self-representation is suggested by the prose-poetry content of *Time-Flies* and *Maude* in particular, the two texts which designate themselves as semi-autobiography. *Time Flies* includes hagiography, personal anecdote, scientific and natural observation, typological interpretation, as well as devotional poetry. The concern with self-representation in *Maude* renders it an allegory of transgression. As Jan Marsh puts it, Maude oversteps 'the bounds of proper feminine modesty' (*Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, p. 251), for she admits to taking pleasure in the praise others lavish on her poetry. Such an emotion leads to a deep spiritual crisis which, as Marsh suggests, seems excessive. Shortly after, Maude dies as a result of a traffic accident, and the moral seems to be that: 'the conflict Maude experiences between her desire to be a good Christian [. . .], a good wife [. . .], and a good poet [. . .] is one that can only be resolved by death' (*Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, p. 251). However, the conflict is also expressed on the

level of semiotics; for the short story's mixture of the narrator's prose and Maude's poetry suggests a transposition between sign systems as a reaction against the contemporary belief that women's poetry could only be confessional and reflexive. In fact, it is the attempt to write a moral tale within this ideology that precipitates the crisis in signification that leaves the reader uncertain of the story's status as cautionary, ironical, autobiographical, or moralistic.

The prevalent view of women's poetry is treated explicitly and ironically in the following famous passage, which, like 'Winter: My Secret', mentions possible interpretations only to coyly withhold meaning:

it was the amazement of everyone what could make her poetry so broken-hearted as was mostly the case. Some pronounced that she wrote very foolishly about things she could not possibly understand; some wondered if she really had any secret source of uneasiness; while some simply set her down as affected. Perhaps there was a degree of truth in all these opinions. But I have said enough; the following pages will enable my readers to form their own estimate of Maude's character.

(Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose, p. 253)

Maude's writing practices suggest the same poetry-prose combination of the short story itself in the inclusion of multiple generic styles:

Her writing-book was neither commonplace-book, album, scrap-book, nor diary; it was a compound of all of these, and contained original compositions not intended for the public eye, pet extracts, extraordinary little sketches, and occasional tracts of journal.

(Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose, p. 252)

This hybrid and eclectic writing is not intended for a public readership, and when Maude knows she is dying she leaves instructions for obviously personal writing to be destroyed. The subject-in-process is represented within a text which itself suggests a subject-in-process in its poetry-prose combination; but Maude's journal writing is an act of self-representation which is firmly personal.⁵¹ Subsequently, we do not get access to the full contents of her locked book in the narrative. Agnes, who disposes of Maude's literary remains, places the locked book in her coffin, unread. The scraps of paper found in Maude's room are, to Agnes, surprisingly various and fragmentary, and some are found to be written in a secret code. Significantly, Agnes cannot judge which writing is clearly personal and which is not, so she destroys most of it to ensure the elimination of the personal, as Maude had instructed:

Many of these were mere fragments, many half-effaced pencil scrawls, some written on the torn backs of letters, and some full of incomprehensible abbreviations. Agnes was astonished by the variety of Maude's compositions. Piece after piece she committed to the flames, fearful lest any should be preserved not intended for general perusal.

(*Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, p. 273)

In *Verses*, however, the transposition does not mark a clear shift between differing sign systems, and the personal is not totally eradicated. Gender norms as defined by the feminine aesthetic are consequently unsettled, and in a hysterical discourse which oscillates between the masculine and feminine, as was evident in the biographies of Rossetti, the subject

⁵¹The last poem in *Maude* was revised for inclusion in *Verses*; see C.ii.306, 461.

position occupies a space that both suggests and denies its denotation as feminine within the representational axiom. The subject is an 'identity-in-process', the term which Kristeva uses to define a women's writing practise which adopts a temporary, tentative and non-oppressive identity, to avoid the annihilation of difference which the logic of the Same would perpetrate (Oliver, p. 187). This disrupts the norms of gender and provisionally positions the subject in a 'gynocritical' space, the term Alice Jardine employs to describe: 'the putting into discourse of "woman" as that *process* diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity'.⁵²

Such a proto-modernist tendency has further credence when the link between Rossetti's identity-in-process and Aestheticism is acknowledged. The re-appropriation of Newman's style as a function of the doctrine of reserve, referred to above, figured style as a function of self-individuality, for reserve reveals as much as it conceals. As mentioned in chapter 5, the alterity of the late nineteenth-century artist's position in relation to his or her art is linked by Jan B. Gordon with the failed Romantic quest for self-authentication:

The artist, instead of being at the centre of some structural island of art, moves to the periphery; this enables him to be everywhere at once, to be both detached and involved, to combine autobiography and art within the frames of a divided existence.
(p. 33)

Rossetti's involvement with self-representation links her with the Aestheticist's self-enclosing circle of art. But for

⁵²Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 25.

Rossetti's tentative identity-in-process, the gynocritical space functions as a site for mediation between gender differences and between subject and object, together with the desire and anticipation for the space to be eradicated in a union with Christ. The subject is not trapped within self-reflexivity, for the mourning of the gap between anticipation and fulfilment produces a provisional space that allows for a commerce that leads to the play of difference *and* sameness between subject and other.

Rossetti's poems of desire for union with Christ thus confront the subject's inability to unself herself, whilst also gesturing to a site of mediation that provisionally unsettles gender. Rossetti's poetics engage with issues of identity in a response to the Victorian collapse of women's poetry into a confessional and experiential reflex. This process enables a mediation between differences in belief and praxis, gender and genre. And, consequently, an alternative interaction of subject and object is intimated within the (self)representational system, as the subject endlessly desires to be transformed into Christ's 'glass'.

Appendix A

'Seeking Rest' Original Version

She knocked at the Earth's greeny door:
O Mother, let me in;
For I am weary of this life
That is so full of sin:
I look; and, lo, decay and death;
I listen; and a din.

There was a hope I cherished once,
A longing, a vain dream:
I dreamed it when I thought that men
And things were what they seem;
When the clouds had no gloom for me,
No chill the pale moon-beam.

I never questioned my own heart,
Asking it what was this
That filled it with a secret store
Of unimagined bliss:
Alas, how could I doubt the source
Of so much happiness?

Unto my soul this vision was
As a sweet melody;
As tho' birds sang and limpid streams
Welled bubbling to the sea;
Ad tho' a chime rang evermore
Without monotony.

My Mother said: The Child is changed
That used to be so still;
All the day long she sings, and sings,
And seems to think no ill;
She laughs as if some inward joy
Her heart would overflow.

My Sisters said: Now prithee tell
Thy secret unto us:
Let us rejoice with thee; for all
Is surely prosperous,
Thou art so merry: tell us Sweet:
We had not used thee thus.

But evermore I kept my joy
Hidden in mine own heart;—
I could not show them my life's life:—
So now I bear the smart
Of disappointment; and I strive
To hide it with vain art.

My Mother says: What ails the child
Lately so blythe of cheer?
Art sick or sorry? nay, it is
The Winter of the year;
Wait till the Spring time comes again
And the sweet flowers appear.

My Sister's say: Come, sit with us,
That we may weep with thee:
Show us thy grief that we may grieve:
Yea, haply, if we see
Thy sorrow, we may ease it; but
Shall share it certainly.

How should I share my pain, who kept
My pleasure all my own?
My Spring will never come again;
My pretty flowers have blown
For the last time; I can but sit
And think and weep alone.

So Mother take me to thyself
For I am tired in truth:
Where is the profit of my hope?
The gladness of my youth?
The gladness and the profiting
Were vanity in sooth.

(C.iii.180, 429)

'Seeking Rest'
D. G. Rossetti's Version

My Mother said: The Child is changed
That used to be so still;
All the day long she sings, and sings,
And seems to think no ill;
She laughs as if some inward joy
Her heart would overflow.

My Sisters said: Now prithee tell
Thy secret unto us:
Let us rejoice with thee; for all
Is surely prosperous,
Thou art so merry: tell us Sweet:
We had not used thee thus.

My Mother says: What ails the child
Lately so blythe of cheer?
Art sick or sorry? nay, it is
The Winter of the year;
Wait till the Spring time comes again
And the sweet flowers appear.

My Sister's say: Come, sit with us,
That we may weep with thee:
Show us thy grief that we may grieve:
Yea, haply, if we see
Thy sorrow, we may ease it; but
Shall share it certainly.

How should I share my pain, who kept
My pleasure all my own?
My Spring will never come again;
My pretty flowers have blown
For the last time; I can but sit
And think and weep alone.
(C.iii.180)

'There remaineth therefore a rest'
Manuscript version

Very cool that bed must be
Where our last sleep shall be slept:
There for weary vigils kept,
There for tears that we have wept,
Is our guerdon certainly.

Underneath the growing grass,
Underneath the living flowers,
Deeper than the sound of showers;—
There we shall not count the hours
By the shadows as they pass.

No more struggling then at length,
Only slumber everywhere;
Nothing more to do or bear:
We shall rest, and resting there
Eagle-like renew our strength.

In the grave will be no space
For the purple of the proud,
They must mingle with the crowd;
In the wrappings of a shroud
Jewels would be out of place.

Youth and health will be but vain,
Beauty reckoned of no worth;
There a very little girth
Can hold round what once the earth
Seemed too narrow to contain.

High and low and rich and poor,
All will fare alike at last:
The old promise standeth fast:
None shall care then if the past
Held more joys for him or fewer.

There no laughter shall be heard,
Nor the heavy sound of sighs;
Sleep shall seal the aching eyes;
All the ancient and the wise
There shall utter not a word.

Yet it may be we shall hear
How the mounting skylark sings
And the bell for matins rings;
Or perhaps the whisperings
Of white Angels sweet and clear.

Sun or moon hath never shone
In that hidden depth of night;
But the souls there washed and white
Are more fair than fairest light
Mortal eye hath looked upon.

The die cast whose throw is life—
Rest complete; not one in seven—
Souls love-perfected and shriven
Waiting at the door of heaven,
Perfected from fear of strife.

What a calm when all is done,
Wearing vigil, prayer and fast:—
All fulfilled from first to last:—
All the length of time gone past
And eternity begun.

Fear and hope and chastening rod
Urge us on the narrow way:
Bear we still as best we may
Heat and burden of the day,
Struggling, panting up to God.
(C.iii.226)

'The Bourne'
The Prince's Progress and Other Poems (1866)
D. G. Rossetti's version

Underneath the growing grass,
Underneath the living flowers,
Deeper than the sound of showers:
There we shall not count the hours
By the shadows as they pass.

Youth and health will be but vain,
Beauty reckoned of no worth:
There a very little girth
Can hold round what once the earth
Seemed too narrow to contain.
(C.i.142)

**‘There remaineth therefore a Rest
to the People of God’
Verses (1893)
Christina Rossetti’s version**

Rest remains when all is done,
Work and vigil, prayer and fast,
All fulfilled from first to last,
All the length of time gone past
And eternity begun!

Fear and hope and chastening rod
Urge us on the narrow way:
Bear we now as best we may
Heat and burden of the day,
Struggling, panting up to God.
(C.ii.277)

**‘There remaineth therefore a rest’
New Poems (1896)
W. M. Rossetti’s Version**

In the grave will be no space
For the purple of the proud—
They must mingle with the crowd:
In the wrappings of a shroud
Jewels would be out of place.

There no laughter shall be heard,
Nor the heavy sound of sighs:
Sleep shall seal the aching eyes:
All the ancient and the wise
There shall utter not a word.

Yet it may be we shall hear
How the mounting skylark sings
And the bell for matins rings:
Or perhaps the whisperings
Of white Angels sweet and clear.

What a calm when all is done,
Wearing vigil, prayer, and fast!
All fulfilled from first to last:
All the length of time gone past
And eternity begun.

Fear and hope and chastening rod
Urge us on the narrow way:
Bear we still as best we may
Heat and burden of the day,
Struggling, panting up to God.
(C.iii.226, 448)

Appendix B

Translation of 'Il rosseggiar dell' Oriente'* (C.iii.301-12)

The reddening of the East¹ Songs 'To the distant friend'

1

Love sleeping?

Farewell, beloved friend; love is not allowed me because my beloved lover already killed my heart long ago.

And yet, because of the other life, I dedicate hopes to you; for this life, so many and so many more memories.

2

Are you awake, lover?

In the new spring an old disposition is reborn; love whispers 'Hope' to you — even though I don't say so.

*I gratefully acknowledge the help of Jean Ellis D'Allessandro and Bob Cummings who checked my translation. This translation aims to be as literal as possible. Selected poems have been translated into English verse by James A. Kohl ('Christina Rossetti's *Il Rosseggiar dell'Oriente*', *The Antigoniish Review* 2 (1971), 46-61), and the biographies also include verse translations of parts of the sequence. 'Il rosseggiar' benefits, however, from a closer prose rendering which suggests the mysticism, ellipsis, and non-referentiality. Unfortunately, what is lost in a literal translation is the musicality of the original: the almost excessive use of anaphora, alliteration, assonance, and feminine rhymes (Rosenblum, *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance*, p. 51). In a letter to D. G. Rossetti dated 17 September 1878, Christina Rossetti suggests a concern with sound above sense in the translation of the nursery rhymes in *Sing-Song* into Italian (*CR: FL*, p. 77).

¹The title refers to Cayley's love sequence *The Purple of the West*, composed in 1862 and published in 1863. See Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, pp. 290-91.

If love says to you 'Love', if he encourages you, Friend, swearing
'that heart is yours' — even yet I don't say so.

On the contrary, who knows if that heart really is worth a fig? I
believe so, at least I hope so; but yet I don't say so.

3

'La tocca-caldaja' is sent back²

Far away from me the thought of inheriting the object that knew
how to raise love once in your heart. If you don't want to use it
any longer, if you can't smoke it even, sweet be your duty to keep
it always.

4

'Blumine' replies:³

If I were to meet you again in the eternal peace, it would be
peace no longer, but delight to me; if I were to meet you in the
cursed circle truly I should grieve for you more than for myself.
For you my life lies half dead, for you I spend the long nights
weeping. And yet I expect to see you again in the order of
eternity as well as that of time. And therefore to time I say
'flee', and now 'please pass by' I say to the vain world. While I
dream of what you say and do, I say to myself again and again
'tomorrow will be joyful, tomorrow we will be . . . ' — but if you
love me you know, and if you don't love, why show you the depths
of my heart?

²'La tocca-caldaja' seems to be a pipe. W. M. Rossetti notes: 'The lines were written in reply to other lines by Cayley named *Si scusa la Tocco-caldaja*. His final line contains the phrase 'S'ei mi fumma,' and hence Christina's words in reply' (*PW: CR*, pp. 493-94).

³A reference to one of the epigraphs to Cayley's translation of *Purgatorio*, in which he quotes from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. Kamilla Denman and Sarah Smith argue that Blumine is Christina Rossetti, who was the coded dedicatee to his volume (pp. 331-32). Marsh's biography of Rossetti notes that this poem seems a response to Cayley's Italian poem, beginning 'If I should meet her in the eternal peace' (p. 370).

5

**'Let our meeting each other
again up there be precious' —**

My sweet heart lost and not lost, my sweet life that left me on dying, friend and more than friend, I greet you. Remember me; because my hopes were blind and brief — but they were yours. Do not scorn this hard destiny of mine. Let me say, 'your hopes like mine languished this winter' — yet I resigned myself to it, what was was. Let me say again, 'with him I discern the day that breaks from the icy evening, the long heaven beyond the brief hell, beyond winter, spring.'

6

'I am not the rose but I stayed close to you.'

Happy house where my beloved now often sits talking and laughing; happy woman who sitting with him raises his spirits with all you say and do. Happy garden where I walked thinking of him, thinking and not saying. Happy may the day be when I return to where walking I thought of him. But if he is there when I return, if he welcomes me with his sweet laughter, every little bird will sing round about, the sweet face of the rose will blush — God give us that day in eternity, give us paradise for that garden.

7

'Up there the dear Flower' —

If God taught you His love thus, I would yield you, my heart, to the precious Flower. The precious Flower cries to you, 'make me happy one day' — the precious Flower that loves you asks you for love.

That Flower in paradise flowers always for you; yes, you will see that face again, you will be content. About the grief that has been you will ask, 'where is it?' — so that the past will pass in a moment.

And I for this sight in all eternity, I like John the Baptist will praise God: the beloved so beloved will be your guerdon, and the salvation of your soul will be my guerdon.

8
If only I knew!

What are you doing far from me, what are you doing, my heart?
What I do is always to think of you.

Thinking of you I smile, I sigh for you: and you far from me, are
you faithful too?

9
God enlighten us!

When the time comes that each of us will go along our separate
ways, a moment that will come, a last moment, whenever it
shall be:

One following the uncommon path, the other following his usual
course, let there be on that day no blushing face nor remorse felt
in the breast.

Whether you go before, all alone, or I precede you along that
path, ah let us remember then to have always told each other the
truth.

How much I loved you and how much! and I was obliged not to
express that love which I felt for you: more, much more than I
said, in my heart I loved you.

More than happiness, more than hope; I won't talk of life, it's
such a little thing: memory of you was bitter-sweet to jealous
me.

But you preferred virtue to me, the truth, friend: and won't you
know what you loved most in the end? Only the flower opens at
the rays of a sun.

If you loved Truth more than me, Jesus was that unknown love of
yours:— Jesus — you who spoke to him without revealing yourself
— conquer his heart.

10

**'Friendship:
'I am Sister of Love' —**

Come, let Friendship be welcome. Come, but not so that Love leaves us: both live in the gentle heart that never refuses pilgrims room. The former [friendship] a sweet and perfect handmaid, the latter [love] no tyrant but a pious master. Let him reign and never show himself. Let her reveal herself in fitting humility. Today and also tomorrow for friendship, and even the day after tomorrow also if she wants, because she brings sweet things and not bitter: and then let the day of love come, but not with moon or sun, day of great delight, day which breaks never to set.

11

'Luscious and sorrowful' —

Bird of roses and of sorrow, bird of love, happy and unhappy, is that song of yours laughter or tears? Faithful to the unfaithful, you keep a thorn for a nest on the cold shore.

12

'Oh the irresistible force of the humble prayer' —

What shall I give You, Jesus my good Lord? Ah that which I love the most I will give You: accept it, Lord Jesus, my God, my only sweet love, indeed my heart; accept it for Yourself, may it be precious to You; accept it for me, save my groom. I have nothing but him, Lord, do not scorn him, keep him dear in Your heart among precious things. Remember the day upon the cross, you prayed thus to God, with a wavering voice, with panting heart: 'Father pardon them, for they know not' — he too, Lord, does not know whom he scorns, he too will love You if he's taught. If all things displeasing to You appear like seafoam, like mist; if success or adversity, content or pain, if all is vanity except You Yourself alone; if he who does not pray to You calls in the void; if love is not love that doesn't love You; — give Yourself to us, we will be rich. Then deny as much as You want, for we will have everything. You are sweeter than honey, that well suffices us, loveable more than love, You that love us.

13

**My eastern window
(In sickness)**

I turn my face towards the east, towards the midday sun, where he dwells:— you do well who live on the edges of dawn; those who live with you seem happy people. I turn a languid eye toward you, the spirit that fears and still hopes; you turn towards the one who honours you, she loves you, she yearns for you, in heart and mind. Weak and tired I turn towards you: whatever can it be that I feel, friend? I recall every dear memory of you — how much I'd like to tell you! but I don't say it. I am grieved for the days spent far from you. If only we were together in the [a] sunny land!

If we were together! What would it matter where we had made our nest? It would almost be paradise, that shore.

Ah if I were with you, with a heart certain of being loved as it would like to be, so that the desert would burst into flower.

14

(Yet then you came)

Oh slow and bitter time! — when are you coming, my heart, when, but when? If I were dear to you as you are dear to me, would I go looking for you?

15

For Choice

Happy your mother, your sisters happy, who hear all you say, who live with you, who love you by right - in love contented and wise. Yet this advantage of theirs I would not want for myself.

That serious face of yours to see from time to time, meanwhile to go round thinking, 'one day he'll come back'; to repeat in my heart (what rose is without thorns?), 'he knows that I love him in the end, but does he still love me?' Who knows!

This is much sweeter than the other, in my opinion: to be, in true desire, all or nothing* to you. Nor do I want to complain too much that you are now separated from me if one day in Paradise you will celebrate with me.

*But no; if not a lover be my friend: what I'll be for you I'll not tell you beforehand.

16
Today

It would not be possible for me not to love you, oh darling: whoever would forget their own heart? If you make bitter the sweet, sweet you make the bitter; if you give me some love, I give you love.

17
(If you had gone to Hastings)

I say good-bye to you, my friend, for weeks that seem long: I entrust you, from now till then, with square circles, oblong [stretched out] thoughts.

18
Repetition

I thought I'd see you again and I'm still waiting; from day to day I'm continually longing for you: when will I see you again, beloved of my heart, when but when?

I said again and again with everlasting thirst, and I resay it and want to resay it again, like the nightingale which sings and repeats itself till dawn.

19
'Friend and more than my friend' —

My heart towards which the other heart of mine turns like a magnet to the pole, and can't find you: the birth of my new life was with crying, with shouting and with pain. But the sharp grief was the precursor of a gracious hope that sings and broods. Yes, whoever feels pain, does not feel love, and whoever does not love does not live. Oh you who are in God for me, but after God, all my world and much of the sky, think whether it's not painful for me under a veil: to speak to you and never tell you that I long for

you:— you yourself, say it to yourself, my sweetheart, if you should love me, tell yourself that I love you.

20

'Our quiet wills Virtues of charity' —

Gentle breeze that towards the south goes blowing, take a sigh of mine, telling one what I must not say, with a sigh saying to him thus: she who said 'no' wanting to say 'yes' (wanting and not wanting - why say it again?), she sends you these words: the flowering of this life that we lead down here is vanity. Hear what she says weeping: earthly love that is born and dies is vanity. Ah, lift up your eyes, I want to raise up my eyes towards the realm where not in vain God is loved to the limit of love, and the whole of creation in charity.

21

(If it were thus)

I loved you more than you loved me:— Amen, if thus the Lord God wanted; Amen, although it breaks my heart, Lord Jesus.

But You who remember and know all, You who died for love, in the other world give me that heart that I loved so much.

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