Katja Brandt

Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"

Milton Revised or Revived?

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To Elsa

Abstract

Katja Brandt: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market": Milton Revised or Revived?

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The present study examines Christina Rossetti's (1830-94) best-known poem "Goblin Market" (1859) as a response to John Milton's (1608-74) *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1674). Rossetti's poem relates to Milton's twin epics with a surprising degree of complexity, something that the thesis demonstrates through a large number of hitherto unexplored textual parallels. In its recontextualisation of Rossetti's poetry, this study balances interpretative strategies evolved by feminism with more historicist readings.

Since Gilbert and Gubar's landmark feminist work of 1979, it has become something of a critical commonplace that Milton was a figure of patriarchal oppression whom women writers have challenged through revision. As a consequence, intertextual Rossetti studies have tended to emphasise such a revisionist element in her achievement. But if we place "Goblin Market" within the larger context of Rossetti's thoughts on religion and poetry throughout her writing, and if we de-emphasise the dichotomy between Rossetti and her male precursor, alternative patterns of reading begin to emerge.

This thesis argues that Rossetti's aim was not only to revise Milton but also to *revive* him. It develops this point in several ways: first, by introducing the subject and theoretically arguing that literary allusiveness is not necessarily a matter of oedipal or feminist envy only (Chapter One); second, by determining the nature and extent of Rossetti's Miltonic allusions in terms of theme, imagery and language (Chapter Two); and third, by examining their function in terms of argument (Chapters Three and Four).

In an age of increasing religious doubt, Rossetti's poetry provided a subtle challenge not so much to Milton as to the emerging scepticism and aestheticism in Victorian society and its art-world, and not least to the secular tendencies of the second generation of Pre-Raphaelites, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Christina Rossetti was ahead of her time (and perhaps ours) in seeing the feminist potential in both John Milton and the Christian message. In the soul's relation to Christ, gender does not matter. What matters is the individual's quest for salvation, a quest in which poetry is a sacramental act, with a transformative, unifying function. Rossetti's poems both depict and constitute such a quest for union with God, on the assumption that God's word offers a pathway that is open to men as well as women.

Contents

Notes on the Text

1. The name "Rossetti" when standing alone always refers to Christina Rossetti, while her family members are referred to by their first names in addition to their family name.

2. All excerpts from Christina Rossetti's poetry are from *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition,* 3 vols., ed. R.W. Crump, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979-90. The volume, page and line numbers are given in brackets throughout the text.

3. All excerpts from John Milton's poetry are from *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire, London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

4. All excerpts from the Bible are from the *Authorised* ("King James") *Version,* New York: New American Library, 1974.

5. All bracketed dates for Rossetti's works in the running text are dates of *publication* in the case of prose, and dates of *composition* in the case of poetry.

Abbreviations and Referencing

The following abbreviations will be used with relevant line or page references throughout the text. For all other references, "The English Department Style Sheet" of the Åbo Akademi University is used. Full details of items cited can be found in the bibliography.

GM	Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market" in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition,* vol. I, ed. R.W. Crump. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979-90.
PL	John Milton, *Paradise Lost* in *The Poems of John Milton*, reprinted from Milton's second edition, published 1674, ed. Helen Darbishire. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
PR	John Milton, *Paradise Regained* in *The Poems of John Milton*, reprinted from Milton's second edition, published 1674, ed. Helen Darbishire. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
Memoir	*The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes by William Michael Rossetti.* London: Macmillan & Co, 1904.
Letters	*The Collected Letters of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Anthony H. Harrison, vol. I-IV. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997-2005.

Acknowledgements

When my daughter Elsa, then four years old, first visited the Louvre and saw the Mona Lisa, she tugged at my sleeve, crying enthusiastically: "Look, Mummy, look. Christina Rossetti!". This was met with perplexed adult smiles. The visitors could not know that little Elsa was already conditioned to see any arresting Italian beauty with a secretive smile as Rossetti. I dedicate this study to her, for the joy she brings to my life and for her unfailing trust in my capacities.

I owe special thanks to my long-time supervisor Professor Roger D. Sell for his patience and help during the many phases of this work. I am grateful to Professor Sell for his careful readings of the manuscript in its many different versions, especially for his painstaking attention to detail and care for the English language. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to my previous supervisor Professor Anthony W. Johnson for taking the trouble to read and comment on the thesis in early draft, and for his friendly guidance and invaluable encouragement. I would also like to thank my former departmental colleague Professor Maria Olaussen for giving me useful suggestions at an early stage of my research. Thanks also to Dr. Gertraut Motzko in Vienna for her kind interest in my topic.

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Lille, April 2005
Katja Brandt

Preface

During a state visit to France in 2002, Tony Blair is to have expressed his admiration for the country's president by declaring *"J'ai envie de Chirac*" (I desire/want Chirac). The nature of Blair's feelings for his French colleague is, of course, beyond the scope of this thesis. What is interesting about this anecdote is the fact that the French for "envy" can stand for both rivalry (*envier*) and desire (*avoir envie).* In the language of Baudelaire, then, the word has positive as well as negative connotations.

In the English language "envy" is a thoroughly negative feeling, denoting a "painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage" (*Webster's Online Dictionary*, s.v. "envy"). Both the English and the French go back to the Latin *invidia,* a word rooted in the verb *videre*, which is simply "to see". Such a neutral definition, without notions of malevolence, serves my purposes, for my study explores the possibility that (artistic envy or) imitation is not only the severest criticism but also the greatest flattery. It is not just a matter of envy, whether Oedipal or feminist, but also of agreement.

In Rossetti's poem "The Lowest Room", a discussion on Homer written three years before "Goblin Market", the female speaker admits to feeling envious regarding her literary forefather. She describes this feeling as "A silent envy nursed within, / A selfish, souring discontent / Pride-born, the devil's sin" (ll. 171-73, I: 204). This is a direct reference to Satan in *Paradise Lost*, who fell on account of envy and pride (*PL* I.34-37). Rossetti, in other words, apparently relates artistic envy to sin, but by her speaker's example she also shows that it is a feeling that has to be overcome.

Rossetti's words about silent envy ring a personal bell for me. During the years I have spent in the company of Rossetti and her critics, I

have painfully come to realise that much of what I wanted to say had been said already by previous scholars. And worst of all: being native speakers and professional academics, they had said it better than I could ever hope to. How could I, a foreigner and a student, contribute to the discourse of these talented forebears in literary criticism? In my own anxiety of influence Roger D. Sell and his theory of communication as "co-adaptation" provided me with some comfort. In Sell's view, each new reading has a value, for each reader brings in a new perspective on the topic.

If, as this thesis assumes, one of the chief missions of the humanities is to preserve and interpret our cultural heritage, and thereby to promote freedom and democracy, this must involve perpetual negotiation between self and other selves. In the grammar of literary criticism, each piece of literary criticism is a comma, not a full stop. Mankind's quest for understanding will always be a journey - not a destination.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. General Background

[C]an it be sin to know,
Can it be death?
(*PL* IV.517-18)

Is it death or is it life?
Life out of death.
(GM 523-24)

In the excerpts juxtaposed above, Christina Rossetti repeats and answers one of John Milton's questions about knowledge in *Paradise Lost*. The present enquiry attempts to deal with "Goblin Market", Rossetti's best-known poem, precisely as a response to Milton. The idea of comparing a shortish fairy tale poem by a 29-year-old Victorian woman poet with a twelve-book epic by a seventeenth century male poet twice her age may, at a first glance, seem far-fetched. But they have more in common than immediately meets the eye. Both Christina Rossetti and John Milton were accomplished poets, successfully combining poetic vocation with religious devotion. Rossetti, like Milton, knew the Bible by heart and held a firm Protestant belief in the primacy of the word of Scripture and its direct relation to the pious individual. Despite barriers in time and gender, they speak the same language, that of Scripture and Christian morality. Finally, Milton is profoundly and frequently allusive to the Bible and classical literature, and although Rossetti's allusions may be more hidden, the more we discover them, the richer and subtler her writing seems to be.

A close analysis reveals that the example above is only one of many neglected parallels that can be found between the two works. Both

poems deal with the themes of Temptation, Fall and Redemption. Both poems recreate the first drama of humankind, featuring evil forces in non-human shape. And the climax of the central plot in both works is a woman seduced to eat forbidden fruit with disastrous consequences.

Above all, there is a striking number of verbal similarities. "Greedily she ingorg'd *without restraint*", says Milton of Eve tasting the forbidden fruit. When Laura gives in to temptation, Rossetti notes that the girl's "last *restraint* [was] *gone*". "Such delight till then, as seemd / In Fruit she *never tasted*", writes Milton of the fallen woman. "She *never tasted* such before", writes Rossetti. When Milton's Eve tastes the forbidden fruit she feels "as with new *Wine* intoxicated". Rossetti's fruit is described as "stronger than man-rejoicing *wine*". The next time the fruit is eaten it has a bitter taste. Milton writes that Satan's followers "instead of Fruit / Chewd *bitter* Ashes". Rossetti says that Laura "gorged on *bitterness* without a name". Both Milton and Rossetti describe the tempter as an ingratiating juggler with words. Milton's tempter uses "a *bait of honied words*". Rossetti's tempters speak with "*sugar-baited words*". But when the tempters run out of words, they turn to violence. While Satan "*ended parle,* and [...] addrest for fight", Rossetti's goblins "*without further parleying* [...] began to scratch their pates".[1] These are just a few examples of the large number of verbal parallels which will be discussed and analysed in this study. And already at this stage, it is possible to assert that Rossetti's response to Milton is a complex one, creating an intricate pattern of allusiveness.

A sceptic might of course point out that some of the textual affinities may be caused by tradition: Rossetti and Milton necessarily build upon similar sources, such as the Bible and St. Augustine. One might equally argue that indirect or general references reflect Milton's influence upon ordinary English speech rather than any direct borrowing on the part of Rossetti. But in fact, not all of the textual affinities between Rossetti and

1 Italics added throughout. For a discussion and references see Chapter Two.

Milton belong to the commonplaces of Christian theology, and they are simply too precise and numerous to be fortuitous.

Christina Rossetti was a prolific and in many respects successful writer. Her poetic career extended over half a century, from the private printing of her first verses in 1842 to the publication of a collection of her devotional poetry in 1893. By the end of her life she had composed over a thousand poems and published over nine hundred of them, including some sixty lyrics in Italian. And she was astonishingly versatile: apart from poetry she published children's rhymes and stories, prose fiction for adults, and six widely read volumes of devotional commentary.[2] Her successive volumes helped to secure her reputation as one of Victorian England's greatest poets. The literary critic Sir Edmund Gosse (1893: 212) praised her as "one of the most perfect poets of the age", and many contemporaries shared his opinion. When Lord Alfred Tennyson died in 1892, she was even a candidate to succeed him as Poet Laureate.

For many decades Rossetti suffered readerly and critical neglect.[3] The centenary of her birthday in 1930 did spark a temporary revival of interest in her work. But, as Anthony Harrison (1988: ix) observed, in the fifty years that followed "only one major critical book" was devoted to her work.

But with the rise of feminist literary criticism and theory in the 1970s, Rossetti's literary reputation enjoyed a massive revival. As a consequence of this renewed interest, efforts were (and are still) made to provide new standard editions of her works. Rebecca Crump's invaluable three-volume variorum edition of Rossetti's complete poetry (1979-90) is but one example. Another important contribution is Anthony Harrison's edition of Rossetti's correspondence (1997-2005).[4]

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2 For a list of her work, see "Works by Christina Rossetti" in "Annotated Bibliography".

3 For an extended discussion on the twentieth century critical neglect of Rossetti, see McGann 1980.

4 Rossetti's prose works have been out of print for more than a century. For accessible though limited selections of her prose, see Marsh 1994c and Kent and Stanwood 1998. For a collection of four of Rossetti's rare prose works in their entirety, see Keaton 2003.

Over the past two decades developments in critical theory have helped give a new depth and breadth to Rossetti scholarship. Since Crump began publishing the new edition of Rossetti's poetry in 1979, some twenty monographs and a hundred or so articles or chapter-length studies have been published on Rossetti and her work. The quantity and sophistication of modern Rossetti criticism bear witness to the current process of revaluation. Now, over a century after her death, she has regained the interest and admiration she elicited from her contemporaries. This "gifted minor" (Curran 1971: 298) now re-emerges from comparative critical obscurity as a "pivotal figure" (Kent 1987: ix) and a "major Victorian poet" (Harrison 1988: 63).

Rossetti has suffered the rather common fate of nineteenth-century women authors, that of being regarded as an unlearned and spontaneous writer who could not and did not take pains to work within the literary tradition. In line with the Victorian preconception that woman's faculties were intuitive rather than investigative, William Michael Rossetti portrays his sister as a poet by instinct, with no real intellectual interest in the literary process. He "cannot remember ever seeing her in the act of composition" (Bell 1898: 146), yet is able to inform us that she wrote verses as easily as if they formed themselves, simply and spontaneously, and that she rarely stopped to revise them:

> Christina's habits of composing were entirely of the spontaneous kind. I question whether she ever once deliberated with herself whether or not she would write something or other, and then, having thought out a subject, proceeded to treat it in regular spells of work. Instead of this, something impelled her feelings, or "came into her head," and her hand obeyed the dictation. I suppose she scribbled the lines off rapidly enough, and afterwards took whatever amount of pain she deemed requisite for keeping them right in form and expression. (Rossetti, W. M. 1900: xii-xiii)[5]

5 William Michael Rossetti expresses the same idea in only slightly different terms in *Memoir* lxviii-lxix: "I have said elsewhere, but may as well repeat it here, that her habits of composition were entirely of the casual and spontaneous kind, from her earliest to her latest years. If something came into her head which she found suggestive of verse, she put it into verse. It came to her (I take it) very easily, without her meditating a possible 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. If the thing did not present itself before her, as something craving a vesture of verse at her hands, she did not write at all".

Subsequent critics have tended to adopt William Michael Rossetti's representations of his sister as inexperienced in aesthetic matters - a conception that matched so well with her image as a virgin. It is thus a persisting public assumption that she was a retiring spinster, both uninterested in and uninfluenced by literary tradition. Such a view was adopted by Thomas Burnett Swann, who in comparing "Goblin Market" and "The Forsaken Merman" concludes that "the wonder of Christina's poem is shown to be *intuitive*, while the wonder of Arnold's poem is *conscious*" (Swann 1960: 16, Swann's italics). And Stuart Curran (1971: 298-99), in giving what he claimed to be a "true estimate" of Rossetti's powers, postulated that "a great poet cannot be unpretentious: *he* dares and questions; *he* attempts to answer [...] *She* is neither an intellectual nor an imaginative woman [...] *She* falls back on pretty language, the bane of so many women poets [...] this woman's tone is too often merely effeminate, weak and nebulous" (italics added). As late as 1972 Lionel Stevenson claimed that Rossetti's poetry "contains a minimum of intellectual substance" (p. 88). Judging by such examples, the undervaluation that "this woman" has endured until quite recently is partly based on gender prejudice. Feminist criticism has since gone a long way towards making further underestimation of Rossetti's achievement unlikely.

Rossetti seems to have known what she wanted from the start. According to her brother and biographer, she began composing poetry before she could even write. And from the beginning, she made allusions to earlier texts, for he notes that "one of the earliest things Christina Rossetti wrote was the beginning of a tale on the model of *The Arabian Nights* called 'The Dervise'" (*Memoir* I). She started writing poetry at the age of six and selections of her first collections of poems were privately

printed when she was eleven and sixteen.[6] At the age of seventeen she succeeded in placing two poems in a literary review, the *Athenaeum*. Although modest and shy, she was confident of her talent and regarded her vocation seriously. What survives of her correspondence with her publishers and editors[7] provides unmistakable evidence that she was a persevering artist, deliberately cultivating a public literary career. When still a "nameless rhymster" of twenty-three, she presented some of her work to an editor, soliciting publication, and declaring with a remarkable mix of modesty and determination that

> 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 works of others teaches me that there is something above the despicable in mine; [...] I do not blush to confess that [...] it would afford me some gratification to place my productions before others, and ascertain how far what I do is expressive of mere individualism, and how far it is capable of approving itself to the general sense. (*Letters* I: 98)[8]

Rossetti's words here attest to her belief in her own vocation as a writer, and in her correspondence with her publishers she was habitually businesslike, professional and ambitious, taking pride in her work as a poet, making it her "hobby" to defend her "dear Copyright" (Packer 1963b: 134). From remaining letters and notes we also know that she was a scrupulous reviser of her work and that many of her poems (especially the longer ones) have a carefully constructed plot and imagery.[9] Her correspondence with Dante Gabriel Rossetti concerning "The Prince's Progress" in the spring of 1865 is particularly illuminating as regards not only her painstaking and careful attention to details of composition and revision but also her ideal of artistic perfection. The spontaneity and

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6 Christina Rossetti's maternal grandfather Gaetano Polidori published her single sheet poem *To my Mother on the Anniversary of her Birthday* in 1842 and a selection of her juvenile poems in 1847. For publishing details, see "Bibliography".

7 Approximately 300 business-letters survive (*Letters* I: xv). For a selection (96 letters), see Packer 1963b.

8 From a letter from Christina Rossetti to William Edmonstoune Aytoun, the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, dated 1 August 1854. The solicitation was rejected.

9 Critics who have made this observation include: Packer 1963b: vi; Rosenblum 1986: 45; Harrison 1988: 1-22; Marsh 1994a: 325.

apparent lack of craft exhibited by her composition are an illusion, then. Her poems are not the spontaneous utterances seen by the conventional view of feminine inspiration. And her alleged lack of erudition is a myth, possibly encouraged by the author herself, since it helped protect her both from negative reviews and from accusations of pride.

Rossetti's interest in literary tradition is beyond question. She published over two thousand pages of Biblical commentary, testifying to her expertise on Scripture and religious writings. She published dozens of biographical articles, including two long ones on Dante.[10] She assisted her friend Charles Bagot Cayley in his translation of Dante's *La divina commedia.*[11] She also helped her sister Maria Francesca Rossetti write *A Shadow of Dante*, widely used as a classroom text in the nineteenth century.[12] She is also known to have initiated a project for the influential literary critic Alexander B. Grosart, tracing allusions to Petrarch and Boccaccio for his edition of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Unfortunately it is not known how this commission emerged, but according to the biographer Jan Marsh (1994a: 457) "it may have been passed on from William". Yet for some reason her brother repeatedly denies that she had ever read Boccaccio (Bell 1898: 319; *Memoir* lxix). The fact that she was given the employment for Grosart in the first place seems to overthrow his claim. Her repeated references to Boccaccio in her 1884 article on Dante provide added evidence that she was acquainted with and interested in the field.

An analysis of Rossetti's poems against the background of the literary tradition shows that she was a far more conscious and careful artist than she has previously been given credit for. Her poetry is the work

10 Christina Rossetti contributed thirty entries to the *Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography* (1857-63). She also published articles on Dante, including one for *The Churchman's Shilling Magazine* and one for the *Century* in New York. For further details, see "Bibliography".

11 Cayley published a three-volume translation of the *La divina commedia* in terza rima (1851-54) as well as translations of Petrarch's songs. For Rossetti's involvement in this project, see Denman and Smith 1994: 315-38.

of a self-conscious and professional writer. She was not a naive "song-bird"[13] writing poetry "with no mental effort",[14] but a dedicated artist who knew what she was doing and who consciously polished her art.

Underneath what Jerome McGann (1980: 240) has called Rossetti's "deceptively simple poetic surfaces", we find an intricate network: a web of allusion and literary reference. Her reputation as a major English poet is now well established, but her real achievement as a writer will not have been fully recognised until full account is taken of the range and diversity of her allusive technique. She entered into dialogue with the past, both borrowing elements and commenting on them. As this thesis will seek to show, there are a great number of echoes still unexplored. The direct line of descent runs from the Bible, by far her most important source, through St. Augustine, who makes a very large contribution to her aesthetic, to the sensuous depictions of Pre-Raphaelite art. Her style is characterised by whole phrases drawn verbatim from the Bible, and many specific and direct references to other literary works, creating an intricate pattern of cross-reference. So much so, that these pervasive borrowings and allusions appear to be a conscious strategy with her.

Among the first modern literary critics to suggest a parallel between "Goblin Market" and *Paradise Lost* were Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their influential *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).[15] Unfortunately, they provide little evidence to support this important claim. Their only analysis of the relationship refers to a single scene in *Paradise Lost,* that of Eve's eating the apple, and consists of a twelve-line argument to the effect that Laura, like Milton's Eve, may have hungered for intellectual as well as sexual selfhood (pp. 567-68). Sylvia Bayley Shurbutt makes a similar observation in her five-page article "Revisionist

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12 Rossetti, W. M. 1908: 75; 171.
13 For a five-item list of references to Rossetti as a songbird, see Lootens 1996: footnote 13.
14 Reverend Glendinning Nash quoted in Bell 1898: 145.
15 For another early (albeit lesser known) comment to similar effect, see Martin 1976: 31.

Mythmaking in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'" (1992: 40-44). But like earlier commentators she provides little explicit *textual* support for her claim, and an extensive study of Milton's influence on Rossetti has so far not been undertaken. Also, what critics have hitherto tended to emphasise is the revisionist element in Rossetti's achievement. Ever since Gilbert and Gubar's feminist classic, it has been a critical commonplace that Milton is a primary figure of patriarchal oppression whom women writers have challenged through revision.

The aim of this study is to extend our understanding of the nature and function of Rossetti's allusions, and of her relationship with Milton and other earlier and contemporary poets. By tracing her allusions it becomes possible to reconstruct the complex creative network of interactions underlying her poetry. By investigating those instances where Rossetti makes specific reference to Milton's work, and by showing the frequency and manner of her direct verbal dependence upon him, I hope to promote an increased appreciation of Rossetti as a poet, by offering a more solid basis for an analysis of her poetry's more ambiguous and disputed lines.

"Goblin Market" is going to be the main focus of my thesis as a whole, but I am going to interpret it partly by referring to a range of other work by Rossetti. This means that I shall in fact be giving an overall assessment of her achievement in relation to her larger historical and cultural context. Though she did once mention that she could not "warm towards" Milton (quoted in Stuart 1930: 106), I shall argue that her aim was not only to revise, but also to *revive* Milton's version of Genesis. This is certainly not an anti-feminist argument but it seeks to balance interpretative strategies evolved by the feminism of the late twentieth century with more historicist readings. In this way we can begin to understand some previously underemphasised connections between Rossetti and her predecessor. This study may eventually bring Rossetti closer to Milton than she has ever been allowed to be, permitting her to shake hands with him as a precursor in the tradition of religious poetry in

England. It depicts Milton as a constructive model rather than a literary antagonist.

I make my case in several ways: first, by introducing the subject and theoretically arguing that literary allusiveness is not necessarily a matter of oedipal or feminist envy only (Chapter One); second, by determining the nature and extent of Rossetti's Miltonic allusions in terms of theme, imagery and language (Chapter Two); and third, by examining their function in terms of argument (Chapters Three and Four). The main points are then re-emphasised in a conclusion (Chapter Five).

2. Critical Background: From Biography to Feminist Revision

> What can it mean? you ask. I answer not
> For meaning, but myself must echo, What?
> (Christina Rossetti, "My Dream", ll. 49-50, I: 40)

"Goblin Market" is one of Victorian literature's most discussed and intriguing poetic tales; one that, according to William Michael Rossetti "always held a certain primacy amid her poems" (*Memoir* 459). Christina Rossetti's brother literally placed it foremost among her works, for he chose to put it first among the 995 poems collected in his edition of her *Poetical Works* (1904). It was also the poet's own favourite piece of writing, and gave its name to her first volume of poetry, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, which became an instant critical and popular success when it appeared in 1862. Christina Rossetti, then thirty-one, had already written some of her best lyrics but it was with the publication of "Goblin Market" that she was recognised as a poet of genius. As Jan Marsh (1994a: 229) aptly puts it: "without this poem, she would have been an accomplished poet; with it, she became an exciting one".

Christina Rossetti allegedly insisted that she did not intend to attribute any profound meaning or moral to the poem. Her brother reports that he had "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" (Bell 1898: 207). Yet as her brother famously understated, the incidents are "suggestive, and different minds may be likely to read different messages into them" (*Memoir* 459). He hardly knew how right history would prove him to be. The poem is the subject of endless debate. Given the amount of intense critical scrutiny and scholarly decoding that has attended it, "Goblin Market" could claim to be among

the most complex and enigmatic poems in English. A great number of widely divergent readings have been proposed, ranging from the strictly biographical and psychosexual to the metaphysical and socio-political and beyond. The poem has been interpreted as, among other things, a fairy tale (Watson 1984), a nursery fantasy of oral desire (May 1992), and a feminist manifesto (Gilbert and Gubar 1979; Shurbutt 1992). The cravings described have been related to phenomena as varied as erotic starvation (Greer 1975), lesbian eroticism (Homans 1985), *anorexia nervosa* (Cohen 1985), vampirism (Morrill 1990), and Victorian capitalism (Menke 1994). Other critics have considered the poem in relation to issues such as sisterhood (Mermin 1983; Watson 1986; Casey 1991) and motherhood (Marshall 1994a).

Before analysing the nature and function of the Miltonic allusions in "Goblin Market", it is useful to consider the history of such interpretative divergences, for there is much to learn from the critical efforts of the past. The following section will provide a critical survey of Rossetti criticism up to our day with a focus on critical problems and pitfalls. The purpose here is to document and discuss the variety of existing critical readings of Rossetti's poems in general and of "Goblin Market" in particular.

> One face looks out from all his canvasses,
> One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;
> [...]
> A saint, an angel; - every canvass means
> The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
> (Christina Rossetti, "In an Artist's Studio", ll. 1-2; 7-8, III: 264)

Four years after Christina Rossetti's death, her close friend and admirer Mackenzie Bell published the first book-length biography. Bell documents the "poetess" as standing by the "little four-cornered window" of her bedroom at Penkill Castle, where she could be observed, chin cupped in her hands, "for hours meditating and composing" so that the window "exactly framed her" (Bell 1898: 51). This description, as noted in a study by Alison Chapman, is "highly suggestive of a portrait" (Chapman 1996: 201). It literally provides a likeness of the poet as a young woman - framed and all. The picture that emerges from contemporary depictions is one of buttoned-up piety and passivity, and it has had an enormous impact on the public image of the poet. Virtually every subsequent biographical representation has adopted this accepted portrait. In this tradition of reception, Christina Rossetti is a pious recluse, a modest and spontaneous songbird and an artless non-professional. The image is enforced by the fact that she was the model for the image of the Virgin in two well-known works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (first exhibited in 1849) and *The Annunciation* (*Ecce Ancilla Domini*) (1850).

Christina Rossetti is admittedly an intriguingly Garbo-like figure. The scope for imagination is illustrated by Antonia Byatt's *Possession* (1990), a novel about the discovery of a lost manuscript revealing a secret love affair between two fictional Victorian poets, whom reviewers have widely associated with Christina Rossetti and Robert Browning. The 2001-movie adaptation of the same title stars Jennifer Ehle as Rossetti's alter ego

Christabel LaMotte. The film-character is a radiant brunette with a prim smile and a twinkle in her eyes. George Eliot may also have had Rossetti in mind in creating Dorothea Brooke, the protagonist of her *Middlemarch* (1871), a woman with religious scruples.[16]

The imaginative approach to Rossetti has not limited itself to fiction. As is the fate of many female writers of the nineteenth century, the life story has tended to overshadow the work. Until fairly recently critics have taken more interest in Christina the woman than Rossetti the author. In fact, as Katherine Mayberry (1989: 1) notes, twelve out of fourteen full-length studies published on Rossetti in the years between her death in 1894 and 1989 were biased towards biography.[17]

The biographical studies that long dominated Rossetti research tended to fasten on the fact that Rossetti did not marry and never had children. At the age of twenty she was engaged to the young Catholic Pre-Raphaelite artist James Collinson, but she broke off the engagement because of religious scruple: he was a Roman Catholic, while she was devoted to the High Church within the Church of England. Fourteen years later, in 1866, the Italian scholar and linguist Charles Cayley proposed to her, but again she refused - though she loved him "deeply and permanently" - for the (official) reason that he was a sceptic (*Memoir* liii). Many early biographers filled in missing information with sheer speculation, imaginative interpretations of the extant documents, and biographical readings of her poems. Rossetti's poetry has been read as

16 Eliot's heroine, just like Christina Rossetti, would not wear any jewellery, except for a crucifix. And as Dorothea looked forward to giving up riding because she enjoyed it so much, so Christina gave up chess because she was too fond of winning. Both Dorothea and Rossetti objected to nudity in art. Whether Eliot was familiar with the Rossetti anecdotes that she seemingly alludes to in *Middlemarch* is, of course, difficult to prove.

17 Mayberry does not name the biographies she refers to, but her calculation seems to be accurate. For a list of eleven book-length Rossetti biographies published between 1930 and 1982, see Crump1985: 145. For a twelfth full-length biography from the period, see Rosenblum 1986.

the outcome of sexual frustration or as revealing a secret love affair.[18] This mode of biography has since been strongly criticised (see e.g. Jones 1992: xii). Jan Marsh, in what has become the standard modern Rossetti biography, criticises the "sensational speculations" of the old school of biography. Yet even Marsh herself speculates that Rossetti's self-abnegating poetry stems from an incestuous relationship with her father (Marsh 1994a: 237; 258-64). There is clearly a risk that misdirected biographical curiosity can push the works themselves out of view, reducing Rossetti's artistry to the traumatic self-expression of an incest-victim or sex-starved spinster. Instead of looking for "the skeletons of Christina's various closets", to use her brother Dante Gabriel's phrase (Bell 1898: 320), it is more fruitful to concentrate on the contents of the drawers of her writing desk.

There is a need to unmask the once-presumed objectivity of biography with its distanced, authorial voice that provides the illusion that the life actually was as it is presented. Rossetti's verses may appear autobiographical or confessional, but first person narrative is almost a genre requirement in devotional poetry, and her poems probably reveal less of the person she was than of the many personae she created. As Eric Griffiths (1997: 117-18) reminds us, the person who used to sign herself Christina G. Rossetti and who humorously defined herself as a "fat poetess [...] seated by the grave of buried hope"[19] both filled and parodied a public role. This role does not necessarily correspond to her empirical self.

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18 Violet Hunt (1932) claimed that Rossetti still loved her second suitor Cayley when he was a married man and that she even attempted an elopement with him. But according to Lona Packer (1963a), Rossetti's first modern biographer, the author was secretly in love with another married man: the poet and family friend William Bell Scott. Packer consequently interprets Rossetti's poetry as the expression of this life-long but secret love affair.

19 Christina Rossetti in a letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti dated 4 August 1881. See e.g. Rossetti, W. M. 1908: 95 and Doughty and Wahl 1965: 2.289.

How, then, does biography in the post-modern era differ from traditional biography? It adds an awareness of the limitations of biography: sensitivity to the fact that biography is speculative, and can offer subjective clichés only. These clichés, as the etymology of the word suggests,[20] are but snapshots of the author: snapshots that (to adapt Rossetti's own words) depict their object not as she is but as she fills the biographer's dream.[21] The illusion of objectivity and of a unified self can be overcome by avoiding assertions of final truths about the self/subject: that is, by acknowledging that there are many Christina Rossettis, not just "the" Rossetti. It is admittedly a difficult task, but this is one way of enabling her to slip out from the one-dimensional interpretative frames in which she has too long been entrapped.

20 In English, a cliché is a stereotype: a trite, banal or commonplace description. The word is borrowed from the French *cliché*, also signifying a negative photographic image (*OED* s.v. "cliché").
21 Adapted from Rossetti's poem "In an Artist's Studio" (l. 14, III: 264).

> Golden head by golden head,
> Like two pigeons in one nest
> Folded in each other's wings,
> They lay down in their curtained bed:
> [...]
> Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
> Locked together in one nest. (GM 184-98)

The erotic subtext of the passage describing Laura and Lizzie asleep has been much commented upon. In 1972 Maureen Duffy read the passage as a "homosexual fantasy". "This double female image", she wrote, "is an interesting component of the period's criticism akin to heterosexual male desire to see blue films about lesbians" (p. 322). Still today this notorious passage from "Goblin Market" appears on a lesbian poetry web site.[22]

The psychosexual approach came into vogue in the seventies, following the mid-twentieth century development of psychoanalytic and especially Freudian criticism. Early psychoanalytical critics produced readings focusing on Rossetti's presentation of the divided self. Lona Packer (1963a), for example, treated the three female protagonists of "Goblin Market" as three sides of Rossetti's personality. And two years later, in Winston Weathers's article "Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self" (1965), "Goblin Market" was read as an allegory of the poet's self-division. In Lionel Stevenson's (1972) words, the poem showed the conflict between "the two sides of Christina's own character, the sensuous and the ascetic". Finally, Georgina Battiscombe's *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (1981) saw the conflict between passion and restraint as internalised aspects of her Anglo-Italian heritage.

Others, like Jonathan Cott, detected expressions of repressed sexuality. In his study of Victorian literature for children, he defines "Goblin Market" as "the most extreme and most beautifully elaborated example of repressed eroticism in children's literature" (Cott 1974: 465). Subsequent

critics have continued to treat "Goblin Market" as sexual fantasy, assuming that it is a children's poem with latent psychosexual meaning (Golub 1975: 158-65; Greer 1975: vii-xxxvi).

Post-Freudian interpretations of "Goblin Market" have had an enormous impact on the popular reception of the poem. As a consequence, adult magazines such as *Playboy* magazine (1973) and *Pacific Comics* (1984) have reprinted "Goblin Market" with erotic illustrations, presenting scenes of lesbian coupling, where the women's naked bodies and close embrace are offered for voyeuristic pleasure.[23] In the *Playboy* version, directly and expressly informed by Cott's scholarly work, the poem was given the epithet: "the all-time hard-core pornographic classic for tiny tots" (p. 117). Rossetti would surely turn in her grave if she knew about such renderings of her work. She disliked vulgarity in all forms, and representations of nude children would particularly have upset her, for she was sensitive to the fact that Victorian child pornography could be disguised as innocent fairy lore. When presented with Gertrude Thomson's drawings of child fairies "attired only in gauzy wings", Rossetti responded in her polite but firm manner: "I do admire the grace and beauty of the designs, but do not think that to call a figure a 'fairy' settles the right and wrong of such figures" (Marsh 1994a: 478-79). Virginia Woolf (1932: 239) has suggested that Rossetti's attitude to nudes was over-scrupulous. But Rossetti was anything but naive in realising that many Victorian fairy paintings were distinctly salacious, covering up their salaciousness only by having their nubile maidens sport gossamer fairy wings.[24] What is more, she was involved in the campaign for the "Protection of Minors", signing a petition urging that the age of consent for sexual intercourse be raised

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22 Alix North, "Isle of Lesbos", http://www.sappho.com/poetry/c_rostti.htm#top

23 For a discussion, see Kooistra 1994. For accessible reprints of the original illustrations appearing in *Playboy* (1973: 20.9: 117) and *Pacific Comics* (1984: 15-18), see Kooistra 1999.

24 For a modern treatment of children and sexuality in Victorian culture, see Kincaid 1992.

from twelve to fourteen so as to outlaw child or juvenile prostitution (Marsh 1994a: 17-20). Bearing these facts in mind, it seems completely impossible that "Goblin Market" would have been intended salaciously by Rossetti herself.

When she describes the sisters as sleeping together "like two pigeons in one nest" (GM 185) this clearly recalls a nursery rhyme composed by Gabriele Rossetti (Bell 1898: 7) for his two daughters: "*Christina e Maria […] Son tortore belle, / Nel nido d'amor*". This is a vision of innocent sisterly love, rather than of lesbian sex, for Gabriele Rossetti's touching words about turtledoves in a nest of love can hardly describe an incestuous relationship between his two little daughters. It seems likely that the Rossettian image of sisters tucked in a cradle of love recalls the safety of two little siblings in a happy home, and contrasted to the dangers of the outside world. "It is one of the ironies of literary history", as Sarah Fiona Winters (2001: 19) notes, "that present-day readers inevitably see lesbian eroticism in this scene where the sisters embrace. For Rossetti it may well have seemed that the representation of two sisters automatically excluded any hint of eroticism from the physical expression of love".

The "pornographic" approach to Rossetti's poetry does not limit itself to the world of adult magazines. Cora Kaplan (1979), for example, classifies "Goblin Market" as an exploration of "women's sexual fantasy that includes suggestions of masochism, homoeroticism, rape or incest". And if one wants to build on this list of alternative sexual behaviour (with its unfortunate juxtaposition of homosexuality and incest) one might add group sex and sex with animals. Seen in this way, "Goblin Market" is, indeed, a "deeply perverse" poem, as Germaine Greer (1975: xxxvi) provocatively puts it. But to what extent are post-Freudian ideas of psychological repression anachronistic? Are erotic readings our own creations or Rossetti's? Is it fair to treat her poem as perverse fantasies?

In a relatively recent psychosexual reading of "Goblin Market", Roger Wiehe (1992: 110-21) sees vaginas everywhere. He sees Lizzie's

mouth as "womb-like" and the penny in her purse as symbolic of virginity. He does not explain why. (If anything, one might argue that the penny in Lizzie's purse is a symbol of *lost* virginity, given the phonetic similarity between penny and penis.) And though the poem tells us that Lizzie closes her mouth to temptation (GM 431-32), Wiehe manages to identify "an oral-vaginal cavity" in which the goblins instil their fruit (Wiehe 1992: 117). Since he does not give reference to the text to support his claim, it remains unclear where he gets this cavity from. The poem does mention that the pulp is "lodged in dimples of her chin" (GM 435), but unless Lizzie is suffering from some highly unusual skin condition, the association between her pores and vaginal cavities seems somewhat far-fetched. What is worse, Wiehe misquotes Rossetti, distorting her poetic words about the "hugged lies" of an earthly paradise in "From House to Home" (l. 9, I: 82) into "hugged flies":[25]

> The enclosed garden in Christina Rossetti's poetry shows the clash of Christian spirituality with unsatisfied but compulsive emotional needs [...] "From House to Home" has a *hortus deliciarum* [...] This inner landscape "hugged flies" [*sic*] and offered "fair delusion". (Wiehe 1992: 14)

Wiehe's suggestion that Rossetti is suffering from compulsive emotional needs and that she is "perverse" (p. 117) could easily be turned against himself. A vulgarised pseudo-Freudian reading of the critic's own interpretation of Rossetti might further suggest that the slip of his pen reveals an insulting attitude towards women, more precisely a preference for "hugging" his "flies" in public. This is what one gets if one confounds the analysis of a text with speculation about the private life of the person who wrote it. Although imaginative and entertaining up to a certain point,

25 In Christina Rossetti's own words, her garden was "a pleasure-place within my soul; / An earthly paradise supremely fair / That lured me from my goal. / The first part was a tissue of hugged lies; / The second was a ruin fraught with pain: / Why raise the fair delusion to the skies / But to be dashed again? (ll. 6-12, I: 82). For a discussion of this passage, see Chapter Four, Section 5.

such speculations do not really rise above the intellectual level of the tabloid press.

Whether the sexual allusions in "Goblin Market" are enough to indicate repressed sexuality, latent homosexuality or incest in Rossetti (or in her critics) remains an open and, as far as this thesis is concerned, irrelevant question. Adapting the title of Robert Buchanan's famous article of 1871, such studies could be classified as a "fleshly school of criticism". Reducing "Goblin Market" to a perverse fantasy is to miss the deeper layers of meaning with which Rossetti invested her poem. If we put aside psychosexual interpretations, choosing instead to look at her own preconceptions, we shall find other layers of meaning.

To many modern critics the disturbing scene in "Goblin Market" where goblins try to force-feed Lizzie with their fruit (GM 390-436.) has sexual implications (e.g. Andrews 1984: 171-75). The goblins' assault on Lizzie has been classified as attempted oral rape. More than one critic reads in the passage an ejaculatory allusion with overtones of enforced fellatio (Duffy 1972: 321; Moers 1976: 102; Jones 1992: 97; Wiehe 1992: 117). The possibility for sexual interpretation was there from the poem's first publication, and contemporary reviewers, from Caroline Norton (1863: 401-2) onwards, seldom failed to notice the sensual nature of Laura's temptation. But unlike many modern readers, many of Rossetti's first readers were able to see beyond the erotic motif to passion of a more spiritual kind. Take a second look at the scene of physical harassment, in which Lizzie is attacked by goblins, who

> called her proud,
> Cross-grained, uncivil;
> [...]
> [...] trod and hustled her,
> Elbowed and jostled her,
> Clawed with their nails,
> Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
> Tore her gown and soiled her stocking. (GM 394-95;399-403, I: 21)

As is often the case in Rossetti, the apparently sexual intonation is mixed with religious overtones. In fact, Lizzie's suffering bears a strong resemblance with the hardships endured by the steadfast pilgrims in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), a work with which Rossetti would certainly have been familiar (*Memoir* lxix). Rossetti's furious goblins react like Bunyan's merchants of earthly wares in "Vanity Fair":

> [T]here was an occasion to despise the men the more; some mocking, some taunting, some speaking reproachfully, and some calling upon others to smite them [...] they took them and beat them, and besmeared them with dirt (pp. 90-91).

The elements of contempt, mocking, beating and soiling are there in both passages; even the repetitive rhythm of the tempters' attacks is similar. Rossetti's "Goblin Market", like Bunyan's "Vanity Fair", is a worldly market place of delusive distraction. When the goblins call "come buy", this vividly recalls the cry of the merchants of earthly wares in Bunyan's "Vanity Fair": "what will ye buy?". And like the Christian pilgrims who, following the moral message of Psalms 119:37, "would put their fingers in their ears and cry, Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" (p. 90), Rossetti's female pilgrim refuses the merchandise offered to her at the market of the goblins, putting her fingers in her ears (GM 67-68) in order not to be tempted in the first place. Like a good Christian, she endures the humiliation.

Today's readers are at a disadvantage to Rossetti's original readers when it comes to grasping the full implications of her religious imagery, since she would have taken for granted a depth of knowledge which is nowadays rare. For Rossetti and her contemporaries, who were generally well versed in the Bible and theological writings, the goblin fruits are likely to stand not only for sexual pleasure, but also for earthly pleasures and self-indulgences of more various kinds. The temptation to read Rossetti's verse as psychobiography must be tempered by her literary allusions,

which speak of other realities beyond the personal experience of the moment.

Feminist Readings: Paradise Renounced or Revised?

> We must not look at goblin men,
> We must not buy their fruits. (GM 42-43)

The emergence of feminist literary criticism and theory in the 1970s rescued Rossetti from critical oblivion and brought about a veritable renaissance of critical interest in her works. Feminist theory has expanded our understanding of what it meant to be a woman poet in Victorian England and has thus drawn attention to the ways in which Rossetti's poetry both reflects and responds to that situation. "Goblin Market" has since become canonical for the feminist thematics of female desire, raising questions about woman's sexual as well as intellectual and aesthetic needs.[26] The fruit offered by Rossetti's merchantmen has been taken to represent a variety of possibilities tempting to women, ranging from sexual pleasure to economic, emotional, intellectual and artistic self-assertion.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) was among the first studies to suggest that the goblin fruit not only has sexual meaning but that it is also the intellectual fruit of art that women have longed for (pp. 569; 574). In her chapter on Rossetti, Gilbert argues that Laura, like Milton's Eve, may have hungered for "intellectual (or poetic)" selfhood (pp. 567-68). In this analysis, the mouth-watering urgency of Laura's longing for the ripe fruits, which seems expressive of sexual desire, is also that of creative need. The fruit she craves is the fruit

26 Rossetti entered the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, that most canonical of indicators, in 1986. For a discussion on the canonisation of Rossetti, see Lootens 1996: 158-82.

of the mind, the fruit of language and speech. But since it is reserved for men, women consequently have to give up.

Gilbert and Gubar, then, placed Rossetti's poetry firmly within the "Aesthetics of Renunciation", their chapter heading for pages 539-80 of their book. Following their example, early feminist scholarship produced full-length studies with telling titles such as *The Art of Self-Postponement* (Blake 1983), *The Poetry of Endurance* (Rosenblum 1986) and *The Language of Exclusion* (Leder and Abbott 1987). As suggested by their titles, readings of this kind considered Rossetti's poetry as a device for overcoming the difficulties of being a woman in a patriarchal society, as an instrument for self-postponement and renunciation, or an outlet for the poet's frustrated sexuality and creativity. Dolores Rosenblum (1986: 84), for example, argues that "Goblin Market" expresses the frustration of a woman poet shut out from the male banquet of poetry, for (so the argument goes) Rossetti as a woman was per definition excluded from the aesthetic *brother*hoods of her time. In this reading, Rossetti's goblin glen represents the realm of authorship, whose fruit women have to renounce because it is forbidden to them.

Yet is it accurate to define Rossetti's poetry as a woman's resigned lament for a forbidden poetics? Did Rossetti really have to renounce the banquet of poetry? Was she really banned from the realm of authorship? From the beginning of Rossetti's career, her grandfather supported her literary activities. So did the rest of the family. Her brother actually offered her the opportunity to become a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. If we are to trust Dante Gabriel Rossetti, it was his sister's own choice not to join them, for she allegedly "object[ed] to" his proposition (Doughty and Wahl 1965: I.45). She was not only allowed, but also encouraged to write and to publish her poetry. Her artistic brother's influence was crucial in positively inducing her to publish with some regularity. And when she did so, her works were welcomed and admired by family, friends, publishers, critics and readers alike. She did not even

feel obliged to write under a male pseudonym in order to be accepted, and the sheer bulk of her poetry testifies to the fact that she did not choose to suppress poetry or to renounce the pleasure of developing her poetic talent. In view of these facts, it seems somewhat inappropriate to regard Rossetti's forbidden fruits as metaphors of *renounced* authorship.

From the 1980s onwards, critics detected subversive elements in Rossetti's work. Margaret Homans, for example, contends that Rossetti's rhetoric subverts constructions of gender: at the same time as Rossetti reads and responds to "the rhetorical conventions of traditional love lyrics, [she] also negotiate[s] the passage between literary form and social theme in such a way as to alter both" (Homans 1985: 569). Sylvia Bayley Shurbutt (1992: 40) suggests that "Goblin Market" is a creative revision of Milton's epic, asserting that the poem "significantly contributes to a tradition of revisionary mythmaking". And to Colleen Hobbs (1994: 411-2), Rossetti's revision of Scripture points the way towards Christian feminist literature and criticism, prefiguring modern feminist theology. Within a century, then, the image of Rossetti has oscillated from that of a woman whose talents were restricted by her ideological conformity to that of a radical revisionist.

Increasingly, however, critics are beginning to question the claim that she was engaged in subversive feminist critique. In a lecture of 1997, Eric Griffiths takes a firm stand against depictions of Rossetti as an ideological anarchist. Without mincing words he postulates that

> [T]he relation presumed between literary and social conventions does not exist, and, even if it did, it would not follow that a literary variation entails a critique of convention – artists vary on the past of their arts for many reasons, including a desire to refresh the conventional and keep it alive. What is traditional in Rossetti's poetry is quite as much hers, and hers as a woman, as is her re-inflecting of the tradition [. …] Readers nowadays may be disappointed by her lack of socio-political pugnacity but these regrets do not excuse misprision of her work. … [T]he pretence that she was engaged in feminist critique just recycles a slack and canting sentimentalism (pp. 119; 125).

The problem of seeing Rossetti as either "oppressed" or "revisionist" is that we study her in relation to an anachronistic issue, with the risk that we shall project our contemporary concerns back into the artistic productions of another age. Her apparent lack of support for women's interests may indeed be disappointing to modern readers, but gender issues do not seem to be a major concern for her. What really mattered to her was religion. Many Freudians and early feminists alike have tended to separate "Goblin Market" from the rest of her achievement, and especially from her religious concerns, which are so evidently central to the devotional poetry and prose. The post-Freudian view that all longing must be sexual (especially if it is the longing of a Victorian spinster) has obscured the extent to which Rossetti's poetry is an expression, not of romantic longing, but of intense religious yearnings. Critics have often either ignored her faith, or deemed it as limiting or damaging her creativity, as did Virginia Woolf, who famously remarked that if she were to bring a case against God, Rossetti would be her first witness (Woolf 1993 [1929]: 12-13). Christina Rossetti would hardly have accepted an invitation to her more secular critic's courtroom.

How then should criticism of Rossetti proceed? Very recently, scholars have begun to explore Rossetti's faith as itself part of Victorian woman's situation. Full-length studies of this kind include *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (1999) by Diane D'Amico and *Rossetti's Feminist Theology* (2002) by Lynda Palazzo. Both these works deal with Rossetti as a *woman* poet of faith, providing useful insights into the values that shaped her work. What is still missing is an adequate account of Rossetti as a *poet* of faith. To study her poetry in relation to faith is not a new undertaking, but it does deserve new emphasis, in the light of the tendency to under-represent the enabling devotional component of her whole output. If we place "Goblin Market" within the larger context of Rossetti's thoughts on religion and poetry evident throughout her writing,

and if we de-emphasise the dichotomy between Rossetti and her male precursors, alternative patterns of reading begin to emerge.

As critics have also begun to indicate, Rossetti's poetry is allusive, drawing from extremely diverse and sometimes ostensibly incompatible literary sources. One relevant approach, already touched upon by Anthony Harrison (1988) among the major critics, uses socio-historical and literary contexts to illuminate her works. Harrison advocates historically informed ways of comprehending how Rossetti's poetry and prose engage with not only nineteenth century debates of woman, but also with religious and aesthetic issues. From an analysis of her texts, and by drawing on established historical evidence, we can place Rossetti within the rapidly developing Victorian debate about aesthetic values, and can begin to discover the kind of values - religious and literary - that inspire and inform her own poetry. We can also better establish her true position in relation to other poets, past and contemporary.

The recontextualisation of Rossetti's poetry, to which the present study is intended as a contribution, attempts a new understanding of the complex interrelations between tradition, faith and the life journey of an individual soul.

3. Theoretical Background: Allusion as Creative Co-Adaptation

Before investigating Rossetti's work in relation to Milton, there are a number of theoretical questions that need to be considered. How should we define the different kinds of possible relationships between literary texts? Is it a matter of conscious borrowing, unconscious anxiety or simply of diffuse echoes and memories of other texts? And if consciously allusive, is the intention parodic? Or is it possible to imagine literary influence of a more constructive kind?

In this section I seek to discuss these questions, the aim being to develop a terminology and approach. I shall outline the relation between texts as defined by literary theorists such as Harold Bloom, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, and explore the ways in which these seemingly opposing views might be reconciled in order to establish a framework for my thesis. I shall argue that it is possible for an author self-consciously to exploit tradition not only for revisionary pusposes but also to express admiration and agreement with that tradition. My theory of "creative adaptation" is based in Roger D. Sell's notion of the "social individual" and of all writing as a "co-adaptive" process (Sell 2000).

Misreading the Map

In Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (1973: 19-23) the interrelationships between poems are seen as deeply rooted in literary tradition and author anxiety. Bloom illustrates his theory by describing Milton's Satan as an allegory of the modern poet, who dares to reinterpret or "misread" the words of his forefathers in literature. Bloom suggests that influence works like the father-son relationship in Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex:

poets struggle against their precursors in order to establish their own poetic voice.

In Bloom's definition, the process of creative misreading is partly an unconscious one. The poet, says Bloom, does not even have had to read the poem that his poem is a misinterpretation of. This may sound like a paradox, but in Bloom's theory, writers work within an established tradition, consciously or unconsciously misreading and reinterpreting the masters in order to create imaginative space for themselves.

Bloom has since had to defend his theory against claims that it applies only to Dead White European Males (Bloom 1994: 8). Women, too, need literary models to rebel against. If Bloom related literary influence to an Oedipal struggle between father and son, feminist critics such as Gilbert and Gubar (1979) described women's writing in terms of a revolt against patriarchal literary tradition. As we saw in the previous section, Rossetti's work has consequently been trawled for subversive revisions of patriarchal prototypes. But are we to believe that literary relationships are always negative, that they are rooted in envy and wounded pride, vindicated through theft and transformation? Does literature always have to be a break with the literary past?

Bloom's Map of Misreading can itself be misread, in order to focus less on Freudian anxiety than on the events and images in a poem and their historical background. Anthony Harrison does this in *Christina Rossetti in Context* (1988), where he picks up Bloom's theory and recycles it. "At work in her awareness of literary precedents", he asserts, "is a phenomenon more complex than mere 'anxiety of influence' or the inescapable activity of interpretation (though both of those are involved in Rossetti's endeavours)" (p. 152). For Harrison, Rossetti is deliberately parodic, operating "at a self-consciously intertextual level", her aim being "simultaneously to revive, sustain and critique" literary tradition (p. 160).

Although Harrison's approach is especially relevant to Rossetti's work, and very close to the one I shall adopt myself, I do not share his

terminology. He compares Rossetti's allusiveness to *bricolage,* a concept originally defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* (1966: 16-36). In Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology, *bricolage* relates to the "naive" and "primitive" process by which myths are created. Though very suggestive, the term (along with its cousin *bric-à-brac*) may bring in rather unfortunate associations as it can be taken to refer to odd domestic repair jobs executed by non-professionals. In my usage, the allusive poet is definitely not an unskilled handy-woman or literary bag lady "yoking together" (Harrison 1988: 160) "whatever is at hand" (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 19), but a responsible, organised professional, self-consciously using literary tradition in order to create something stable and strong, which in its turn can be recycled in a cultural continuum.

Reviving the Author

Approaches such as Harrison's had long been out of fashion. They lost credibility with the rise of literary theories proclaiming that one cannot prove authorial intention or speak of autonomous authorship. During the century in which William K. Wimsatt identified "The Intentional Fallacy" (1954) and Roland Barthes announced "The Death of the Author" (1968) it had become problematic to speak of an author's intertextuality as self-conscious. Literary theorists therefore tended to shift their attention from the creative function of the author to the perceptive function of the reader. Michael Riffaterre, for example, described intertextuality as "a modality of perception, the deciphering of the text by the reader in such a way that he identifies the structures to which the text owes its quality of work of art" (Riffaterre 1980: 625). And he went on to say that "intertextuality" "refers to an operation of the *reader's* mind" (Riffaterre 1984: 142, italics added). As Linda Hutcheon asserted, "the role of the author in contemporary discussions of intertextuality has proved to be minimal". She suggested that the intertextual dialogue is not so much one between the author and the reader as "one between the reader and his/her memory of other texts,

as provoked by the work in question" (Hutcheon 1986: 231). Some commentators went beyond ignoring the activity of the author to actually denying it. In the words of Barthes' seminal essay of 1968, "the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others" (Barthes 1968: 143).

But among the more recent theorists and critics Harrison has not been alone in showing a renewed interest in the *people* whose knowledge the human sciences are supposed to analyse and explain. As Katherine J. Mayberry notes, "the contextuality - historical, biographical, social and religious - that earlier in the century was seen as limiting Rossetti's work is now being restored and restudied, offering a rich revision of Rossetti's art" (Mayberry 1989: 1). There seems to be a feeling that the author was prematurely put to sleep, and needs to be awakened.

We may never be able to know exactly what the author intended. But this does not mean that we can or must exclude the author's intentions altogether. Authors are human beings like ourselves, and we know that our own intention to communicate, and what we intend to communicate, are still important to us as individuals. Barthes may have reduced the author's contribution to "mixing" writings that are "already written" by language or textuality itself (Barthes 1968: 143). Lévi-Strauss may have dismissed it all as *bricolage* (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 19). But even this is to admit that the author somehow shapes the text, and we can well ask whether an author might not do so in a creative spirit that deserves scrutiny. The author may consciously seek to create meaning by alluding to or adopting various sources, and may positively fashion the work so as to exploit its ambiguities and suggestiveness. This is particularly true in poetry, which can be extremely rich despite a strict verbal economy. The reader, moreover, may recognise an allusion and find pleasure and significance in this recognition. In short, the author and the reader can be participants in a productive dialogue. Reading and writing can be a kind of

self-conscious interplay between two perspectives that is not only intercultural but also interpersonal.

A theoretical grounding for such an approach is now available in Roger D. Sell's *Literature as Communication: The Foundations of Mediating Criticism* (2000). Sell sees literary writing and reading as forms of interpersonal activity, in which communication does not simply flow in one direction (for example from sender to receiver), but is bi-directional within a situation that is basically triangular: two parties talking about a third entity. Sell's communicative pragmatics is based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of fusion of horizons, a seminal account of how the relative truths of different situationalities can enter into negotiation. For Sell, "[t]he writing of a literary text is a deed with an interpersonal valency across time and space, which can only be realized, furthermore, by a second kind of human act, an act of reading" (p. 107). He also stresses that what takes place between readers and writers has affective and ethical dimensions, and that a need can even arise for mediation between the writer's and the current reader's different positionalities. In fact he sees such mediation as one of the most important tasks of literary scholarship or criticism and literary education.

As a basis for mediation Sell proposes a historical yet non-historicist literary pragmatics, firmly stressing that "human beings are social individuals, partly determined by their own situationality, but also imaginatively, intellectually, emotionally, morally and temperamentally capable of distancing themselves from it, and capable of co-adaptations between the social and the individual" (p. 254). In other words, he views human beings not just as social *beings*, profoundly influenced by, and inevitably adapting themselves to prevailing social conventions, but also as social *individuals,* to some extent capable of adapting the conventions themselves to their own more individual perceptions, desires and goals. In this view, literature is a semiotic process by which human beings negotiate the world and human life, and bring about a change.

Such a formulation of communication as co-adaptation should, I believe, allow us to address allusion not so much in terms of creative misreading, as in terms of creative co-adaptation. In the act of inhabiting someone else's work and empathising with it in a constructive way, something new naturally begins to appear. It is not just a matter of envy, whether Oedipal or feminist. Rather, it is possible for a poet's complex web of allusion not simply to be a sign of derivativeness or of anxiety of influence, but to reflect a positive and enthusiastic response to a predecessor: a desire, both to *revise* something experienced as inhibiting, and to *revive* something experienced as profoundly influential and profoundly enabling and even liberating.

Intertext and Context

One way to discuss the relation between texts is in terms of intertextuality. Is the present thesis, then, a so-called intertextual study? That depends on our definition. The concept enjoys no single agreed meaning in current usage and is often used as an umbrella term for a whole variety of different approaches to the ways in which texts interrelate with each other. Introduced into literary discussion by theorist Julia Kristeva (1980 [1969]: 15), the term has often been misunderstood as a matter of sources and influences between writers. But Kristeva's intertextual analysis differed from traditional comparative studies since it traced more than just literary antecedents borrowings and parallels that are virtually unconscious. To her, all texts were made of multiple transpositions from one signifying system into another, and every text was the absorption and transformation others. Intertextuality included conscious borrowing or allusion to a specific text, as well as every conceivable unconscious citation of any other signifying-system, literary as well as non-literary.

Somewhat later the French philologist Gérard Genette (1982) adopted the term *transtextuality*. His term could be mistaken for just another name for intertextuality, but intertertextuality was just one of five

subtypes in Genette's typology, of which the four remaining ones were paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality and hypertextuality.

The problem with terms such as inter*textuality* and trans*textuality* is that they suggest that literary space is reduced to a domain exclusively made up of relations between *written texts*. Compelling though such terms are, they may therefore be slightly misleading, for unless I am mistaken, the matter of literary influence is far more complex. In line with Sell's notion of the social individual, I see every utterance as a co-adaptation between the "individual" and the "social". In this view, texts may draw on other texts but also on wider *con*texts, including the cultural, social and historical world in which they participate and in which people live. Texts are like ripples on a pond, which spread out and intersect with other ripples and form new patterns. These "ripples" may be other texts or other signifying-systems. In the intersection, these disparate systems interfere or interact with one another. So what we are dealing with is actually not just a matter of inter*text* but of something that could rather be described as (semiotic) inter*face*. It can be a matter of two or more independent systems that meet and act on or communicate with each other. For the purposes of this study I shall therefore employ the more neutral term *allusion* to denote any direct or implied literary reference. The word comes from the Latin *allusus*, past participle of *alludere*, meaning simply "to play with". Even though it is admittedly sometimes impossible to determine whether an allusion is deliberate, I do not exclude the consciously allusive.

Facing the Human Factor

Traditional comparative studies often aimed at revealing the intention of authors, as well as their influences and sources, by digging deeply enough into the sediment of historical tradition and convention. How does a contextualising study in the postmodern era differ from traditional source study? What it adds is an awareness that we may never be able perfectly to grasp the meaning of a text. This is not to say that we can never know

or say *anything* about a text. Neither does it mean that we can make a text mean whatever we like. The point is simply that meaning, in the sense of communication, is always bought at a price: it can only result if some interactions are privileged and others are silenced. All interpretations must necessarily delimit a text's possible references in order to come up with a coherent meaning.

In order to avoid the illusion of objectivity, and for the sake of honesty, I will admit that my own reading is affected by my situation as a female Finland-Swedish post-graduate student at the dawn of the third millennium, and by my predilection for the Anglo-Italian fruit growing in Rossetti's Victorian garden: a garden where "apple spray" did not refer to pesticide. By recognising their subjectivity scholars can reveal their attachments and detachments, but this does not prevent them from maintaining a critical, scholarly stance. Part of the beauty of the human sciences lies in the fact that such commentators dare to face the human factor and, ultimately, respect it in others and themselves. Differences in perspective are a potentiality, not a limitation.

As Sell puts it, "the inevitable contextual disparity [between the positionality of one communicant and another], great or small, is what can make an act of communication at once difficult and worthwhile in the first place. It actually helps to constitute the act as a historical process, communication being a matter of negotiating the contextual disparity, and perhaps even lessening it" (p. 107). When developed along these lines, literary scholarship, like any kind of communication, ideally becomes a constructive dialogue across differences. Or to use Sell's terms, an act of "positive mediation".

Literary influence is complex, slippery and circuitous. Yet it should be possible, even in postmodern times, to attempt a literary study that recognises the relationships between different authors and their backgrounds. We may never be able to know exactly what the author intended. But this should not discourage us from trying to understand each

other. As I see it, the key to understanding Christina Rossetti is much the same as that to understanding other writers, male or female: a willingness to take her as a writer, coupled with a sensitive reading of the works, enhanced as may be by external information including the historical and biographical, but finally resting in the works themselves.

"Silent Envy" or "Echoes of Delight"?

> As I have met with no adventure
> Of wonder and refulgence,
> I must write plain things at a venture
> And trust to your indulgence.
> (Christina Rossetti, "Lines to my Grandfather", ll. 10-13, III: 131)

Some of Christina Rossetti's works, her early writings in particular, display artistic and historical self-consciousness. "Lines to my Grandfather", for example, a little-known epistolary poem that Rossetti wrote in 1845, when she was just fourteen, expresses a writer's anxious quest for novelty. The poem's "Dear Grandpapa" (l. 1) has traditionally been interpreted biographically, as referring to Gaetano Polidori, Christina's maternal grandfather. In a discussion about literary influence it may be useful to keep in mind that he was also her first publisher: that is, a literary-institutional as well as a biological forefather. Though humorous, the passage seems to express a mild sense of frustration caused by the poet's futile attempts to find new poetic materials, the uneventfulness of the writer's life possibly adding to this challenge.

Rossetti's historical self-awareness is even more explicitly displayed in "The Lowest Room" (1856). The poem operates openly and directly in the sphere of literary historical relations, as it describes a debate between two sisters about Homer. The original title, "A Fight over the Body of Homer", no doubt refers to the sisters' argument relating to their precursor in poetry. Betsy Erkkila (1992), among others, reads the poem as a reflection of female competition in Victorian social and professional

life. But there is more to this poem than rivalry and envy between two sisters. Their fight is also implicitly a struggle for creative materials, for the sisters' life is twice described as "blank" (ll. 70; 117), and their work as a "waste of white" (l. 80), which evokes empty canvases and blank paper. It is a struggle in which the prospective Victorian artist is greatly in disadvantage, since "those days were golden days, / Whilst these are days of dross" (ll. 35-36, III: 202). The passage seems to reflect the idea that history, simply by having run its course, exhausts possibilities, leaving those who study it with a despairing sense of their own belatedness and impotence. The frustration of coming second is further heard in the much-quoted Rossettian lament: "some must be second and not first", a mantra that is repeated as "not to be first: how hard to learn" (ll. 17; 265, I: 202; 207).

The necessity of seeking the "lowest place" is of course the aim of any humble Christian, as Luke 14:10 makes clear. But given the Homeric context, the lowest room in the title of the poem, as well as the passages on coming second, could also be taken to refer to the position of the poet disadvantaged by her belatedness: the position of one who is second in history and time, and whose creative space is limited by literary forebears. This kind of interpretation has been offered by Marjorie Stone (1994), though she reads "The Lowest Room" not as a response to Homer or literary precursors in general, but as a specific challenge to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. If by 1850 Browning had already established herself as the first great female poet in England, the argument goes, then Christina Rossetti could only be second.

Importantly, Rossetti's words about coming second are followed by a reference to a "fall", thus evoking the first crime of humankind. Rossetti lets her speaker say,

> All cannot be the first of all:
> Is not this, too, but vanity?
> I stumble like to fall. (ll. 18-20, I: 202)

In addition, the speaker admits to a "silent envy nursed within, / A selfish, souring discontent / Pride-born, the devil's sin" (ll. 171-73, I: 204) *vis à vis* her literary forefather. This is a direct reference to Satan in *Paradise Lost*, who fell on account of envy and pride (*PL* I.34-37). Rossetti, in other words, apparently relates artistic envy to sin, and a passage from "The Lost Titian" seems to confirm this. This short story, written in the same year as "The Lowest Room", tells the story of Gianni, a painter who "ranked second" in Venice after Titian (Rossetti 1870: 146). When Gianni gets hold of an unknown masterpiece by the elder rival, one could discern

> [T]he gnawing envy of a life satiated: a thousand mortifications, and thousand inferiorities, compensated in a moment [...] Taking coarse pigments, such as, when he pleased, might easily be removed, he daubed over those figures which seemed to live, and that wonderful background, which not Titian himself could reproduce; then, on the blank surface, he painted a dragon, flaming, clawed, preposterous. One day he would recover his dragon, recover his Titian under the dragon, and the world should see. (Rossetti 1870: 153)

Gianni transforms Titian's magnificent original into a painting of a grinning dragon, a painting whose artistic merits are apparently on a par with an inn-sign. And the dragon, Rossetti later explains, is the emblem of satanic envy (Rossetti 1892: 20). Rossetti's story shows that envy, theft and the transformation of originals is not her ideal of artistic influence.

Returning to "The Lowest Room", towards the end it describes the belated speaker's position in terms of graven lines and (pencil) strokes, evoking again the world of sculpture and painting.

> Not to be first: how hard to learn
> That lifelong lesson of the past;
> Line graven on line and stroke on stroke;
> But, thank God, learned at last. (ll. 265-68, I: 207)

Rossetti shows that artistic envy can and must be overcome. For in the end, the poem's rebellious speaker finally claims to have learnt her lesson

and to be "Content to take the lowest place, / The place assigned me here" (ll. 271-72, I: 207). Unlike Milton's satanic rebel and the envious Gianni, she comes to terms with her position. So, it seems, did Rossetti herself, for even while expressing striking conflicts, she did continue to write. Her poem ends in a forceful vision of elevation in the afterlife:

> Yea, sometimes still I lift my heart
> To the Archangelic trumpet-burst,
> When all deep secrets shall be shown,
> And many last be first. (ll. 277-80, I: 207)

That many last will be first in heaven is precisely what Jesus promised any humble Christian (Matthew 19:30, 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). But by referring to Christ's words and accepting her position as not first in the most obvious sense (in the world's eyes as the world saw things in the mid-nineteenth century), Rossetti may also be expressing a quiet, Christian confidence that in the long run she will be as important as anyone else. Homer and other poetic forebears are not ultimately a threat. In the end she can even afford to revive them, because she will eventually make the grade as well.[27]

In "From House to Home" (1858) Rossetti describes a thoroughly positive vision of communication and influence. The speaker recalls her male companion, and how

> We sang our songs together by the way,
> Calls and recalls and echoes of delight;
> So communed we together all the day,
> And so in dreams by night. (ll. 53-56, I: 83)

This passage depicts communication as what I am calling a co-adaptive process, here between a man and a woman. In this fruitful artistic interplay, involving "calls and recalls" and "echoes of delight", allusions

27 In the year before Rossetti died she was indeed recognised as "a writer to whom we may not unreasonably expect that students of English literature in the twenty-fourth century may look back as the critics of Alexandria did toward Sappho" (Gosse 1893: 212).

take on a positive flavour instead of expressing literary envy. The creative process appears to be part conscious ("all the day"), part unconscious ("in dreams by night"). The passage shows that it was possible for Rossetti to imagine a man and a woman, walking step by step along the same roads, and communicating with each other in an energising and inspirational way. The constructive aspect of artistic influence expressed here has so far been underestimated in Rossetti studies dealing with intertextuality.

In the present study literary allusiveness is not just a matter of a male writer's anxiety about the father, or of a woman writer's feminist subversion. Rather, it is a process common to all authors, both men and women. Allusions may be expressions of "silent envy". But they can also be "echoes of delight", deliberate expressions of agreement and admiration. This thesis will suggest that Milton served, not so much as a target of Rossetti's criticism, but as a constructive source of influence that was warmly embraced as positive and encouraging.

CHAPTER TWO

"GOBLIN MARKET", *PARADISE LOST* AND *PARADISE REGAINED*

1. Prospectus

Among the first modern literary critics to suggest a parallel between "Goblin Market" and *Paradise Lost* were, as I mentioned earlier, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), who identify Milton's epic as one of many male sources or "patriarchal" traditions that Rossetti's poem relates to. Unfortunately, as I also mentioned, they provide little evidence to support this important claim. Gilbert and Gubar, who regard Milton as the primary figure of patriarchal oppression for women writers (p. 188), conclude that "Goblin Market" is Rossetti's resigned response to oppressive male myth: a cautionary tale about the need for women to renounce art.

Their image of the woman artist pathetically crushed under the weight of patriarchal tradition has had long-lasting appeal for many subsequent critics, who have persistently assumed that Milton's influence on Rossetti and other literary women must have been negative. Christine Froula, for example, in her article "When Eve Reads Milton", singles out *Paradise Lost* as the very prototype of a patriarchal mythology that women writers have struggled with (Froula 1983: 321). Froula does not mention Rossetti in her article, but her argument reinforces Gilbert's and Gubar's

image of Milton as a bogeyman who has cast a long dark shadow over women's writing.

In her article "Revisionist Mythmaking in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", Sylvia Bayley Shurbutt (1992: 40-44) argues that women have amended patriarchal myths, and especially the Biblical myth, which is so much a part of our ethical system. These revisions or reconstructions, she claims, are "sometimes blatantly overt", as for instance in Amelia Lanier's apology for Eve and in Florence Nightingale's declaration of the emergence of a female Christ in *Cassandra*, and "sometimes subtly muted", as for instance in Mary Shelley's Gothic misreading of *Paradise Lost* (Shurbutt 1992: 40).[28] Shurbutt identifies "Goblin Market" as an example of the subtler revisionist process and describes the poem as a "conscious effort to turn Biblical and Miltonic myth with its misogynistic intent, into heroic affirmation of the female, Christ-like principle of loving self-sacrifice and creative self-assertion through rebirth and resurrection" (p. 41). In Shurbutt's reading, "Goblin Market" is a creative revision of Milton's epic, a significant contribution to "a tradition of revisionary mythmaking" (p. 40). This is a claim to which I shall return, not least because Shurbutt's five-page article provides little explicit *textual* support for it.

The idea that Rossetti was engaged in feminist critique has been adopted by an entire generation of critics. In a relatively recent article, Catherine Maxwell, too, reads "Goblin Market" as an allegory of the woman writer's negotiations with her male precursors' texts. To Maxwell, the poem's "produce" is the "male fruit of poetry" that Rossetti tries to resist through theft, transformation and revision (Maxwell 1999: 80). Similarly, Sarah Fiona Winters reads Rossetti's goblin poem as a challenge to male authority, a "heretical fantasy" and a "daring rewriting on

28 Shurbutt here presumably refers to Amelia Lanier's twelve-stanza poem "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women" (1611), the concluding prediction of Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* (1933 [1859]: 230) that the next Christ will perhaps be female, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

Paradise Lost" (Winters 2001: 14), in which Rossetti not only questions Milton, but also finds herself "questioning God". Again and again, then, "Goblin Market" is seen as a woman writer's subversive response to a patriarchal mythology.

So until very recently, intertextual Rossetti studies have tended to emphasise the *difference* between Rossetti and Milton or other male predecessors. It is assumed that Rossetti reacted to oppressive male myth either by renunciation (Gilbert and Gubar 1979) or resistance (Shurbutt 1992; Maxwell 1999; Winters 2001).

But what is the exact extent of Rossetti's alleged revisionism? One of the few critics to question the assumption that Milton's influence on Rossetti (and other women writers) must necessarily have been negative is Kathleen Vejvoda, who in a fresh and original reading of Lizzie as a creative appropriation of Sabrina in Milton's *Comus*, sees Milton not as an oppressive forefather, but as a positive model for Rossetti (Vejvoda 2000: 555-78). My own study, though not directly inspired by Vejvoda, takes a similar position. I shall argue that Rossetti's aim was not only to revise, but also to *revive* Milton's version of Genesis.

Gilbert and Gubar do note that the fruit-eating scene in "Goblin Market" parallels the *Paradise Lost* scene "in so many" ways (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 567). But before we can draw far-reaching conclusions about Rossetti's possible aims in using Milton a more comprehensive study of the alleged parallels is called for. In this chapter I shall therefore examine the *nature and extent* of Rossetti's Miltonic allusions in terms of theme, style, imagery and language. This will be arranged in four main sections: the first three deal with Rossetti's representations of Temptation, Fall and Redemption respectively, and the fourth discusses some relevant stylistic points.

2. Temptation: "Fruit Forbidden"

> Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
> Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
> Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
> With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
> Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
> Sing Heav'nly Muse. (*PL* I.1-6)

Milton's epic of the Fall of Man starts with the fall from Heaven of the rebel angels, and continues through Satan's temptation of our primordial parents and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The work culminates in Book IX when Eve is deceived by the serpent and reaches out her rash hand to pluck the forbidden fruit. The story continues in the brief epic *Paradise Regained* through Christ's temptation to the promised final redemption of humankind. Temptation, Fall and final Redemption, the major concerns of Milton's twin epics, are also found in "Goblin Market".

As for genre, David B. Drake classifies Rossetti's poem as an *epyllion*, that is: "a poem that emulates the classic epic in subject matter and technique", but is shorter and narrower in scope (Drake 1992: 22).[29] To prove his point, he identifies Lizzie as an epic heroine and observes that "Goblin Market" features some of the stylistic devices commonly employed by epic poets, such as the epic simile and epic catalogue. In Rossetti's miniature epic, the first human drama reaches new complexity in fairy-tale form.

The story line of "Goblin Market" is familiar from many traditional sources. The pedigree of the goblins includes the folk and fairy tales that had fed Rossetti's imagination as a child. Most obviously, perhaps, the "little men" that tramp down her poetic glen (GM 55) recall Snow White's

29 According to *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, the term *epyllion* was first used in the nineteenth century. It is defined as a short poem in the classical style that tells a story whose subject is love, featuring mythical allusions and at least one major plot digression. The term is also applied to post-classical literature, especially erotic treatments of mythological narratives in Renaissance poetry, such as Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*.

dwarfs coming home from work, while the nasty fruit resembles the poisoned apple eaten by Snow White. The story was known to Rossetti through the folk tales newly collected by the Grimms.[30] But Rossetti's fairy tale poem, like Milton's twin epics, is also rife with what has been recognised as Christian imagery and allusions to the Biblical account of creation (Packer 1963a; McGann 1983).

There is no explicit mention of the Bible, of *Paradise Lost* or of other Christian texts in "Goblin Market", but the poem does feature both a "tree of life" (GM 260) and a "fall" (GM 521). And the goblin wares seem to correspond to the interdicted fruit of Genesis. Rossetti explicitly calls it "fruit forbidden" (GM 479). Last but not least, the opening lines of the first two stanzas of "Goblin Market" ("Morning and evening [---] Evening by evening") replicate the formula repeated throughout the first book of Genesis ("And the evening and the morning [...] were the first [/second /third etc.] day").[31] Although "Goblin Market" is widely regarded as a secular poem, the influence of the Bible is actually present from line one, as in Milton's epic.

The climactic incident in *Paradise Lost* is the tasting of forbidden fruit, which proves disastrous. This fruit is crucial enough to be present from the very first line of Milton's twelve-book opus. And once the main ingredients have been listed, the drama can begin. In "Goblin Market", as in Milton, fruit is present from the start. And in Rossetti's poem, as in Milton, the climax of the central plot is a woman being lured to eat forbidden fruit.

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30 For discussions of the fairy tale sources of "Goblin Market", see Evans 1993: 156-65; Marsh 1994a: 230-31; Marsh 1994b: 235-37. Professor Anthony W. Johnson has also drawn my attention to a number of interesting parallels between "Goblin Market" and Johann Ludwig Tieck's early story *The Elves* (1812), translated by Thomas Carlyle in *German Romance* (1827). In Tieck's story a girl called Mary, not unlike Laura in "Goblin Market", finds herself in a land which is guarded by strange forms with misshapen heads "not unlike those of white owls". Mary is invited by fairies to "take and eat" of the "fairest fruit" which is sweeter than any she has "ever tasted" before.

31 See GM 1; 32 and Genesis 1:5; 8; 13; 19; 23; 31. This parallel has also been noted by Kathleen Vejvoda (2000: 567).

A problem that both Milton and Rossetti had to face in re-presenting the Biblical account of the Fall of Man was the lack of descriptive detail in Genesis. As Rossetti rightly notes in her study of Biblical plant imagery in *Seek and Find:* "'[e]very tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food' (Gen. II.9) grew in the Garden of Eden: but one only of those still accessible to us is named [...] the fig tree" (Rossetti 1879: 98). Milton's Eden, by contrast, displays greater botanical diversity, rendering the world of creation in more detailed poetic descriptions. His luxuriant narrative extends the dreamlike qualities of Genesis, replacing its assurance of plenitude with a fantastically articulated display of specific life.

In Milton's Eden, a place of everlasting harvests, we find "all seasons, ripe for use" (*PL* V.323) and "Blossoms and Fruit at once" (*PL* IV.148). Rossetti seems to rely in part on Milton for the detail missing from Genesis. Echoing Milton, the fruits in Rossetti's market - though deriving from a corrupt and worldly paradise rather than from an innocent Garden of Eden - are "all ripe together" (GM 15). Rossetti stresses this point by adding that they ripen "at all hours" (GM 152).

The forbidden fruit of Genesis is not clearly identified. But while the apple is not even mentioned in Genesis, the "Fruit of that Forbidden Tree" in the first lines of Milton's epic is precisely an apple, which is later spelt out again in the scene where Satan is rejoicing at his victory over Adam.[32]

32 To modern readers, who are used to interpreting the forbidden fruit of Genesis as an apple, Milton's choice of an apple to represent temptation may seem an obvious one. Yet neither early Hebrew nor Mohammedan works clearly identify the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Modern botanists argue that the apple was not known in Palestine in Biblical times: a fig, an apricot or a fruit of the vine may have been intended. The apple found its place in the Eden of western consciousness, appearing in poetry and iconographical depictions of the Fall from the fourth century AD. One of the most convincing explanations as to why this happened is that Greek mythology led the first Christians to confuse the forbidden fruit with the Hesperidean golden apples. Furthermore, the apple was a sacred fruit in many ancient religions and the connection of apples with immortality was widespread in Europe. Thus, when the Biblical legend of Adam and Eve reached North Western Europe, the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge was understood as an apple, instead of a fig, in spite of the reference to vestmental fig-leafs in Genesis 3:7 (Brandt 1999: 33-35).

He proudly informs his devilish subjects about his success by boasting that

> 'Him by fraud I have seduc'd
> From his Creator, and the more to increase
> Your wonder, with an Apple; he thereat
> Offended, worth your laughter, hath giv'n up
> Both his beloved Man and all his World,
> To Sin and Death a prey'. (*PL* X.485-90)

Satan is clearly content to have been able to destroy humankind, but what particularly seems to amuse him is that he has managed to do so through the means of a single paltry apple. "Alas how simple", Satan exclaims, "[w]as that crude Apple that diverted Eve" (*PR* II.348-49). A fatal bite cost mankind a paradise.

As for Rossetti's "fruit forbidden", it does include apples. But all in all she names twenty-nine tempting orchard fruits, including no less than a dozen varieties of berries.[33] Milton may not even have known some of the fruits that Rossetti mentions. To him, Rossetti's "pine-apple" (GM 13) would probably first have brought to mind the cones of the pine-tree rather than an actual fruit (*OED s.v.* "pine-apple"). But the apple is always first on Rossetti's list of forbidden fruit. This is the case in the opening lines, where goblins cry "apples and quinces, / Lemons and oranges", and in their repeated offer, "look at our apples" and so on (GM 5-6; 352). One can perhaps infer from this that she wished to give the apple prominence so as to emphasise the kinship of her forbidden fruit with its Miltonic and traditional counterparts.

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33 Berries are formally thought of as fruit. In *Webster's New Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1996), for instance, a berry is defined as "a small pulpy and usually edible fruit" while a fruit is defined as "the usually useful product of plant growth" and the examples given include grain, vegetables, strawberries and even cotton. Betty S. Flowers might suggest that the poem's fruits are thirty in number, for in her notes to "Goblin Market" she glosses "russet" as a "variety of eating apple" (Flowers 2001: 887). A closer look at the context in which the word appears, however, ("Look at our apples, / Russet and dun", GM 353) indicates that the word is used as an adjective rather than a noun, referring to the red-brownish colour rather than to a particular variety of fruit.

Milton's Satan describes the forbidden fruit to Eve as being "Ruddie and Gold", having a "savorie odour" (*PL* IX.578-79). In Rossetti, too, the fruit is colourful and bright, being "russet and dun" and "fair or red" (GM 353; 128), and the mead upon which it feeds appears to be "odorous" (GM 180). In Milton the forbidden fruit is appealing to the senses, as it is "Fair to the Eye, inviting to the Taste" (*PL* IX.777). In Rossetti it is described in similar terms, as "sweet to tongue and sound to eye" (GM 30).

The fruit in Milton's Eden seems to lead a life of its own. In the scene where Adam meets Eve "scarse from the Tree returning", Milton explains that the fallen one is carrying a "bough of fairest fruit that downie smil'd" (*PL* IX.850-51). Rossetti picks up Milton's animistic description, as well as his reference to down, by letting her goblins advertise tempting but forbidden fruits, which are "bloom-down-cheeked" (GM 9).

After the introductory passages of *Paradise Lost,* the reader is presented with the fallen archangel and his legions as they awake after the Fall and gather for a council in Hell. Milton draws on his vast learning to fill half a book (*PL* I.331-798) with bestial idols of different cultures and times under the leadership of their proud satanic commander. His epic legions take on mythical and heroic proportions, partly thanks to their magnificent attributes: dazzling arms, spears, shields and trophies. Milton writes of numberless "bad angels", summoned by Satan,

> in even ballance down they light
> [...] and fill all the Plain [---]
> First, Moloch [---]
> Next Chemos [---]
> Next came [Dagon]
> Him follow'd Rimmon [and other gods, including Azazel]
> Who forthwith from the glittering Staff unfurld
> Th'Imperial Ensign [...]
> With Gemms and Golden lustre rich imblaz'd. (*PL* I.349-538)

In Rossetti, Milton's colourful military parade of "trooping" idols or despicable foes "in troop" (*PL* I.760; 437) turns into a cavalcade of "evil

people", who also "trooped" (GM 437; 88). And Rossetti's goblin antagonists, like Milton's diabolical legions, are repeatedly described by means of epic catalogues itemising the enemy's forces (GM 55-76; 97-114). In what reads as a facetious abstract of Milton's Book I, Rossetti writes

> Down the glen tramp little men.
> One hauls a basket,
> One bears a plate,
> One lugs a golden dish
> Of many pounds weight. (GM 55-59)

Milton's devils are able to change appearance from immense giants to "less than smallest Dwarfs […] or Faerie Elves" (*PL* I.779-81), and it is in this size that we meet the tempters in Rossetti. They are reduced to a physical status mirroring their spiritual decadence.

Rossetti refers to her evil forces as "goblins". Traditionally, in fairy lore and mythology, goblins are often associated with the devil and as such are named among Satan's crew in *Paradise Lost*. For it is precisely a "Goblin", meaning an evil spirit, that guards the gate of Milton's Hell (*PL* II.688). In reference to the Lady's resistance to this evil crew, Milton also writes in *Comus* that "No goblin, or swart Faëry of the mine, / Hath hurtfull power o're true virginity" (ll. 436-37). Being small and unarmed, Rossetti's little men come down to us as caricatures of the monstrous cohorts of Milton's tempters.

As for physical characteristics, Rossetti's goblins are described as a band of half-animals, half-men, for "One had a cat's face, / One whisked a tail, / One tramped at a rat's pace" etc. (GM 71-73). They seem, in part, to derive from Milton's sorcerer Comus, with his "rout of Monsters headed like sundry sorts of wilde Beasts, but otherwise like Men" (stage direction between lines 92 and 93). Rossetti's evil forces also recall Milton's Satan and his devilish league of fallen angels, who could assume various animal shapes and who are described as "bestial Gods […] disguis'd in brutish

forms / Rather then human" (*PL* I.435; 481-82). Milton employs bestial imagery to describe Satan himself, variously compared to such animals as the wolf, cormorant, lion, tiger and toad (*PL* IV.183; 196; 402; 403; 800). Satan is "now one, / Now other, as thir shape servd best his end" (*PL* IV.397-98). While Milton's animals are mostly predators or scavengers, Rossetti's animals are mostly domestic, and thus less threatening.

Rossetti's goblins are specifically characterised as "sly", "grinning" and "leering" (GM 96; 370; 93). Milton uses all of these words in his description of hellish creatures. Milton's serpent is repeatedly referred to as being "sly" (*PL* IV.347; 537; 957; IX.256; 613). Milton's Death, "Grinnd horrible a gastly smile" (*PL* II.846). And Satan is described as having a "jealous leer maligne" (*PL* IV.503). Even the way in which Rossetti's goblins move recalls Milton's tempter. One of them is "prowling" (GM 75), a word Milton used of Satan when he sneaked into Eden as a "prowling Wolfe, / Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey" (*PL* IV.183-84). And when Satan undertakes his voyage to the newly created world he "with head, hands, wings or feet pursues his way, / And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flyes" (*PL* II.949-50). Rossetti's devilish forces came toward Lizzie "hobbling, / Flying, running, leaping […] Fluttering like pigeons, / Gliding like fishes" (GM 331-32; 346-47). Both Milton's and Rossetti's satanic beings appropriately slink, crawl and slither their way into the reader's consciousness.

3. Fall: Wine Turns Bitter

> She clipp'd a precious golden lock,
> She dropp'd a tear more rare than pearl,
> Then suck'd their fruit globes fair or red:
> Sweeter than honey from the rock,
> Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
> Clearer than water flow'd that juice;
> She never tasted such before,
> How should it cloy with length of use?
> She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more
> Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
> She suck'd until her lips were sore. (GM 126-36)

It is in the climactic fruit-eating scenes that the parallels between "Goblin Market" and *Paradise Lost* can perhaps best be seen (GM 126-36; *PL* IX.780-94). Here, the respective female protagonists finally give in to the repeated and persuasive arguments of the evil forces. Both passages correspond to Genesis 3:1-7, but Rossetti turns to Milton for additional detail.

In the Genesis account, Adam is present when Eve accepts the serpent's fruit. Rossetti borrows a "stage-effect" from Milton's version of the human drama in letting Laura be separated from her sister when she falls, just as Adam and Eve are separated at the moment when the first woman falls in *Paradise Lost.* Laura's failure to accompany Lizzie out of the glen at twilight echoes, as Sarah Fiona Winters (2001: 16) notes, Eve's ill-fated decision to wander away from Adam. As any present-day viewer of horror films knows, bad things happen when people part company. Similarly, readers feel that Adam and Eve's separation will inevitably lead to a disaster.

In Genesis, the serpent argues that the fruit is good, but he does not formally invite Eve to dine. Milton's snake, however, calls her by saying: "Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods" (*PL* V.77). In an echo of this, Rossetti's tempters "bade her taste" (GM 99; 107), showing

her a leafy crown suggestive of fame and glory. Before the Fall, at the thought of sin, Milton's Eve drops "precious drops" (*PL* V.132). Before succumbing to temptation Laura, in a distorted echo, "dropped a tear more rare than pearl" (GM 127). Milton says of the apple-eating woman that "such delight till then, as seemd / In Fruit she never tasted" (*PL* IX.787-88). Rossetti paraphrases Milton in her description of Laura, who "never tasted such [fruit] before" (GM 132). In Genesis Eve simply "ate" the fruit, but in Milton the way in which she consumes it involves a sense of urgency, and the quantity devoured appears to be considerable. Milton says of Eve: "Greedily she ingorg'd without restraint [...] Satiate at length" (*PL* IX.791-92). Similarly, Laura's "last restraint [was] gone" (GM 86) and as a result she "sucked and sucked and sucked the more [...] sucked until her lips were sore" (GM 134-36). In Milton's words, the sinners ate their "fill" of the enticing apple (*PL* IX.595; 1005). Indeed, Laura, after her succulent supper, repeating Milton's words, tells her sister that she "ate and ate" her "fill" (GM 165).

Milton adds sensory detail to the forbidden fruit of Genesis by claiming that it has an inebriating effect. Milton's Eve, having tasted of the fruit, feels "hight'nd as with Wine, jocond and boon" and the effect on Adam is that he feels "as with new Wine intoxicated" (*PL* IX.793; 1008). The association between forbidden fruit and wine is not made in the Biblical account of the Fall. It is only with Noah that wine is introduced in Genesis 9:20-21, where it is ultimately associated with nudity and shame, as is the consummation of forbidden fruit in Genesis 3.[34] So if Milton associates wine and drunkenness with the loss of rationality resulting from the Fall this is natural. Indeed, this association is, as John Carey points out, traditional in Christian thought from at least the time of St. Bernard

34 In Proverbs 23:31-32 the action of fermented wine is linked with the action of the serpent: "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goeth down easily. In the end it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder". In this passage, the word *serpent,* in the original Hebrew, is the same word as is similarly translated in Genesis 3:1.

(Milton 1968b: 903). And in the Bower of Bliss episode in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* II.xii (stanzas 54-57), one of the most important fore-texts to *Paradise Lost*, Christian tradition combined with the classical myth of Circe and her poisoned cup to give us Acrasia tempting Guyon with the cup into which she crushes the "sappy liquor" of the overhanging grapes. Acrasia is perhaps even more directly behind Milton's Comus, child of not only Circe but Bacchus (l. 523), tempting the Lady with his "cordial julep" (l. 671). Since Rossetti's fruit is "plucked from bowers" and includes "grapes fresh from the vine" (GM 151; 20), Spenser's Bower of Bliss and Acrasia seem to be very much in the background here as well. But even so, the connection Milton makes between alcoholic inebriation and the forbidden *apple* is very unusual in English poetry.[35] When Rossetti describes the goblin fruit as "stronger than man-rejoicing wine" (GM 130) she seems therefore to be adapting Milton's words about the apple that made Eve "jocond and boon" and "hight'nd as with Wine" (*PL* IX.793). Once again, the events and imagery of "Goblin Market" recall Milton's epic rather than Genesis.

Both Milton and Rossetti were careful to make clear that the results of eating the forbidden fruit are negative. In their pre-lapsarian existence, Adam and Eve had slept embracing in a nuptial bed, clothed by Eve. To add to their comfort, they are "lulld by Nightingales" and fanned "with coole Winds" capable of creating "Melodious Hymns" (*PL* IV.771; V.655-56). Similarly, before the fruit has had its effect on the fallen sister, Laura and Lizzie slept in one another's arms in a curtained bed, while "wind sing to them lullaby" (GM 193). As noted before, this is an image of domestic safety. But once the fruit has had its effect on the sinners these innocent and peaceful nocturnal scenarios change. If Milton's sinners wake up from

35 As part of my research for a full-length study of the cultural history of apples (Brandt 1999), I studied more than two hundred literary apple references, and my general impression is that the association between forbidden fruit and wine is very unusual. Apart from the passage by Milton discussed here, I cannot think of a single example of this in pre-Rossettian poetry.

their post-lapsarian nap "as from unrest" (*PL* IX.1052), Laura can no longer sleep at night, and in the morning she is still "in an absent dream" (GM 211). She is as unrefreshed by her post-lapsarian sleep as Adam and Eve by theirs.

Meanwhile Lizzie, the unfallen sister, remains as content as ever, "warbling for the mere bright day's delight" (GM 213). Lizzie's "day-warbling" provides a tantalising point of contrast with the passage where Milton's Satan tempts Eve with nocturnal delights, including the love song of "night-warbling" birds. Satan says,

> 'Why sleepst thou Eve? now is the pleasant time,
> The cool, the silent, save where silence yields
> To the night-warbling Bird, that now awake
> Tunes sweetest his love-labor'd song'. (*PL* V.38-41)

Satan tries to persuade Eve that night "is the pleasant time", just as the goblins manage to cause in Laura a "longing for the night" (GM 214). Her passionate craving is one of the first symptoms of her corruption.

In Genesis 3:14-21 the immediate result of the Fall is exile, while the long-term sentence (for Adam) is to toil and (for Eve) to give birth in sorrow. It is also implied in Genesis 3:19 that man is subjected to physical decay and death. Following the Biblical model, Milton's first human couple, having tasted of the fruit, become subjected to death and "loathsome" sickness. More precisely, and as Michael tells Adam, they must outlive their youth, strength and beauty, which will change to "witherd weak and gray" (*PL* XI.540). Borrowing Milton's palette of fading decay, Rossetti's Jeanie "pined away […] dwindled and grew grey" (GM 154-56). The same punishment awaits Laura, whose hair "grew thin and grey; / She dwindled" (GM 277-78).

Finally, in Milton as well as in Rossetti, the second taste of the fruit is "bitter". Satan's hissing crew turns into a grovelling mass of repulsive

reptiles gorging upon mouthfuls of sickening ashes of Sodom fruit. Milton explains how

> parcht with scalding thurst and hunger fierce,
> [...] on they rould in heaps, and up the Trees
> Climbing, sat thicker then the snakie locks
> That curld Megæra: greedily they pluck'd
> The Frutage fair to sight, like that which grew
> Neer that bituminous Lake where Sodom flam'd;
> This more delusive, not the touch, but taste
> Deceav'd; they fondly thinking to allay
> Thir appetite with gust, instead of Fruit
> Chewd bitter Ashes, which th' offended taste
> With spattering noise rejected: oft they assayd,
> Hunger and thirst constraining, drugd as oft,
> With hatefullest disrelish writh'd thir jaws
> With soot and cinders fill'd. (*PL* X.556-70)

The "scalding thirst" of Milton's serpents, and the delusive nature of the fruitage they covet anticipate the image of Laura who, longing for the fruit, "as a traveller sees / False waves in desert drouth / With shade of leaf-crowned trees, / And *burns the thirstier* in the sandful breeze" (GM 289-92, italics added). When Milton's serpentine devils finally touched the fruit they chewed "bitter" ashes and "writh'd" their jaws in disgust and loathing.[36] When Laura got her second taste, it is like "wormwood to her tongue, / She loathed the feast: / *Writhing* as one possessed" and she "gorged on *bitter*ness without a name" (GM 494-96; 510, italics added). Once again, the similarity between Rossetti's phrasing and Milton's is striking.

36 *OED* s.v. "writhe". Milton uses the verb in a transitive sense (the serpents "writh'd thir jaws"), while in present-day English it is an intransitive verb. In Rossetti's time, both uses were still possible. Thus, for example, in her poem "The Prince's Progress" a temptress "twisted her hair [...] And *writhed* it shining in serpent-coils" (l. 94, italics added).

4. Redemption: Lizzie and Milton's Christ

> [Laura remembers how Lizzie] stood
> In deadly peril to do her good,
> And win the fiery antidote (GM 557-59)

A substantial number of critics have noted the relation between the unselfishness of Lizzie in "Goblin Market" and Christ's sacrifice of himself.[37] In Lizzie, who resists temptation and who suffers for her sister, Rossetti creates a Saviour-character who, like Christ, has to suffer and bear the sins of humankind (here represented by Laura). Regarding Lizzie as a female Christ is by now something of a critical cliché. I shall suggest here that Lizzie is not just any Christ figure. Rather she is, in part at least, modelled on Milton's Christ.

The much-discussed analogy between Lizzie's sacrifice for her sister and that of Christ is sustained by the section where Lizzie heroically endures the goblins' attack. Here Lizzie - like a true epic hero - is described by means of extended similes, and the many enjambements give a Miltonic feel to the writing. A count of the enjambements in "Goblin Market" shows that the average frequency is fairly high (c. 22%).[38] In the passage to which I am now referring it is even higher, because there are

37 For Lizzie as a female Christ figure, see Shalkhauser 1956: 19-20; Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 572; Mermin 1983: 107; Rosenblum 1986: 80; Bentley 1987: 73-76; Harrison 1988: 115; Shurbutt 1992: 41; Drake 1992: 22; Leighton 1992: 138; Peterson 1994: 219-20; Marsh 1994a: 237.

38 By an enjambement is usually meant the running over of a sentence from one line of poetry into another, so that closely related words fall into different lines. For convenience, I have based my calculation of enjambements on the punctuation of "Goblin Market", counting as enjambements all unpunctuated line-endings. According to this count, there are 126 enjambements in a total of 567 lines (i.e. 22%). The edition used is Crump's edition of 1979, which uses as copy-text the first English editions of Rossetti's poems, which incorporate the numerous changes that she and her brother Dante Gabriel made in the manuscript versions. Where the editions differ from the manuscript, Crump restores manuscript punctuation. In other words, the punctuation is Rossetti's original manuscript punctuation.

seven enjambements in fourteen lines (50 %). Sense flows from line to line with fluidity and continuity of thought familiar from Milton's work:

> White and golden Lizzie stood,
> Like a lily in a flood,-
> Like a rock of blue-veined stone
> Lashed by tides obstreperously,-
> Like a beacon left alone
> In a hoary roaring sea,
> Sending up a golden fire,-
> Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree
> White with blossoms honey-sweet
> Sore beset by wasp and bee,
> Like a royal virgin town
> Topped with gilded dome and spire
> Close beleaguered by a fleet
> Mad to tug her standard down. (GM 408-21)

The immediate effect of Rossetti's clustering of similes, David B. Drake notes, is the same as in the epic simile: the primary object is de-emphasised, decentred, slipping away behind an elaborate dance of similes (Drake 1992: 22-24). Drake does not make a connection between "Goblin Market" and Milton, but in Rossetti's extended description of Lizzie's ordeal, simile breeds simile in Miltonic fashion.

When Rossetti compares her protagonist with a "lily", a "rock" and a "beacon" this for the poet herself would have evoked three scriptural images that she elsewhere identified with Christ: the "lily of the valley" (Song of Solomon 2:1-3), the "true rock" (Matthew 16:18), and the "light of the world" (John 8:12). Though not traditional or immediately obvious to readers, a Christian significance in these images was a regular part of Rossetti's own private thought world. As for the Old Testament "lily of the valley", Rossetti explicitly uses it as an emblem of Christ in six poems,[39] including "Thou art Fairer than the Children of Men" (l. 5), "Long Barren" (l. 13) and "I Know You Not", which opens as follows:

39 For a list of six references to the lily of the valley in Rossetti's poetry, see Jiménez 1979: 250. For a prose reference, see *Seek and Find* (Rossetti 1879: 263).

O Christ the Vine with living Fruit,
The twelvefold fruited Tree of Life,
The Balm in Gilead after strife,
The valley Lily and the Rose. (ll. 1-4)

As for the "rock", Rossetti makes an extensive list of Bible verses about Jesus as a rock in her prose, explaining that it symbolises "his unfailing strength" (Rossetti 1885: 15; Rossetti 1879: 260). The "beacon" reinforces the Christian significance, as it evokes Christ as "the light of the world", an emblem familiar to Rossetti from Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1852), an immensely popular painting of Christ, for which she is known to have posed (Bell 1898: 19).

Some of Rossetti's images seem to be adapted not from the Bible but more directly from Milton. As for the similes of Lizzie being like a rock "lashed by obstreperous tides" and like "sweet" bait beset by "wasp and bee", they bear a strong resemblance to the epic similes employed by Milton to describe Christ's temptation in *Paradise Regained.* More precisely, they recall the scene where Milton's Satan pursues Christ

[…] as a swarm of flies in vintage time,
About the wine-press where sweet moust is powr'd,
Beat off, returns as oft with humming sound;
Or surging waves against a solid rock,
Though all to shivers dash't, the assault renew. (*PR* IV.15-19)

Lizzie, like Milton's Christ, is metaphorically assaulted by a swarm of insects and surging waves.

That Rossetti took over the allusions directly from Milton rather than from Scripture seems likely on other counts as well. Of the five temptations of Christ featured in *Paradise Regained*, three were taken from the Bible: to turn stones into bread, to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and to worship Satan in exchange for the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 55; Luke 4). Over and above these, Milton

interpolated two temptations of his own devising: the banquet (*PR* II.302-405) and the storm (*PR* IV.394-483). And significantly, it is precisely these two challenges that Rossetti chooses to depict in "Goblin Market". Rossetti's Lizzie, like Milton's Redeemer, goes into the wilderness to be tempted. When she confronts the goblins, their repeated entreaties to "take a seat with us, / Honour and eat with us" and "sit down and feast with us" (GM 368-69; 380) echo the tempter's persistent invitations to Christ to "sit and eat [...] sit down and eat" (*PR* II.336; 368; 376). And like Milton's Christ, who "stoodst unshaken [---] as a rock of Adamant" (*PR* IV.420-21; 533-34) through a metaphorical storm, Lizzie stood "like a rock of blue-veined stone" (GM 410) through a storm-like attack.

A possible Shakespearian parallel would perhaps be *The Tempest*, a play which opens and continues with ideas of storm, and includes a magical banquet, which *dramatis personae* are invited to taste (III.iii). In this play, however, the storm and the banquet are not so much moral tests as symbols of Prospero's magic, and of the frightening, potentially malevolent side of his power.

To sum up, then, Lizzie in many respects appears to be modelled on Milton's Christ as well as the New Testament Saviour. She is associated through metaphors and through her action with the steadfast Christ of *Paradise Regained.*

5. Goblin Measure: A "Jingling Sound of Like Endings"

> Morning and evening
> Maids heard the goblins cry:
> "Come buy our orchard fruits,
> Come buy, come buy". (GM 1-4)

The first sound mentioned in "Goblin Market" is the haunting cry of fruit-mongers. Their commercial message is "come buy, come buy". This catchy refrain recurs no less than nine times in this poem of 567 lines.[40] It is accompanied by the irregular beat of goblin feet. The beat, as indeed the peculiar rhythm of the poem itself, varies from a snail-paced crawl to a hectic hurry. I shall now consider some of the implications of the measure of Rossetti's poem in a Miltonic context.

With its swift pace, colloquialisms and freewheeling rhymes, "Goblin Market" demands to be read aloud. Half of the pleasure lies in the way the poem sounds. The tumbling variety of the metre delights and astounds the ear. This is the case in the passage where Rossetti describes the goblins,

> One tramped at a rat's pace,
> One crawled like a snail,
> One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
> One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry. (GM 73-76)

But though the "hurry skurry" of Rossetti's goblins has delighted readers, the unpredictable beat of their tramping feet seems to have dissuaded scholars from analysing the poem's intriguing formal and stylistic elements. Only a handful of studies deal with the language of "Goblin Market", and scholars who have ventured to analyse Rossetti's goblin measure have not always been impressed.[41]

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40 The refrain "come buy, come buy" occurs throughout "Goblin Market" (GM 4; 19; 31; 90; 104; 232; 256; 273; 305). In addition, the phrase "come buy" occurs alone on three occasions (GM 3; 46; 304), twice in connection with the "refrain" (GM 3; 304).
41 For a rare full-length study of Rossetti's style, see Dubslaff 1933. For articles dealing with the language of "Goblin Market", see e.g. Homans 1984 and Connor 1984.

Rossetti, like Milton, who felt obliged to add a note on "The Verse" of *Paradise Lost* defending his blank verse,[42] has sometimes been criticised for taking liberties with style. John Ruskin, for instance, was initially offended by the lack of metrical discipline in "Goblin Market". Showing a marked preference for what he saw as Miltonic regularity of metre, he told Dante Gabriel Rossetti in a now notorious letter regarding his sister's poems that

> no publisher [...] would take them, so full are they of quaintness and other offences. Irregular measure [...] is the calamity of modern poetry. The *Iliad*, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Aeneid*, the whole of Spenser, Milton and Keats are written without taking a single license or violating the common ear for metre; 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 Form first. (Ruskin 1909: 36.354-55)

Ruskin was perhaps never so wrong, and he later came to think better of Christina Rossetti's verse. The public has appreciated the poem precisely for the eccentricity of its metre - its delightful intonations suggestive of nursery rhyme. When the editor Alexander Macmillan read the poem at a men's club, his experience was that "they seemed at first to wonder whether I was making fun of them; by degrees they got as still as death, and when I finished there was a tremendous burst of applause".[43]

While Milton defined the measure of his epic as English Heroic Verse without Rhyme, George Saintsbury (1923: 353) described the metre of Rossetti's masterpiece as a "dedoggerelised Skeltonic": "Skeltonic", no doubt, because of the poem's colloquial speech rhythms; "dedoggerelised" because of its playful irregularities. The basic form is iambic but throughout the poem, trochee, iamb, dactyl and anapaest follow each other with apparently indiscriminate abandon. Line length expands and contracts with what appears to be whimsical irregularity, varying from

42 Milton's defensive preface was added in the fourth issue of the first edition of 1668.
43 For this letter from Alexander Macmillan to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, dated January 1861, see Macmillan 1908: 94-95; Packer 1963b: 7.

three syllables ("Spun about", GM 518) to eleven ("One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry", GM 75). Such a free formal structure is rarely, if ever, met with in Rossetti's devotional works. Indeed, the metrical unpredictability of "Goblin Market" distinguishes it from virtually everything else she ever wrote, for most of her poems studiously adhere to a metrical pattern.

But the measure in "Goblin Market" is not as whimsical as it at first glance appears. Rossetti's goblin verse shows that she was a master of technique, making conscious creative efforts, rather than spilling out words at random. What Ruskin conceived to be a lack of order and discipline, turns out to have its own kind of artistic justification.

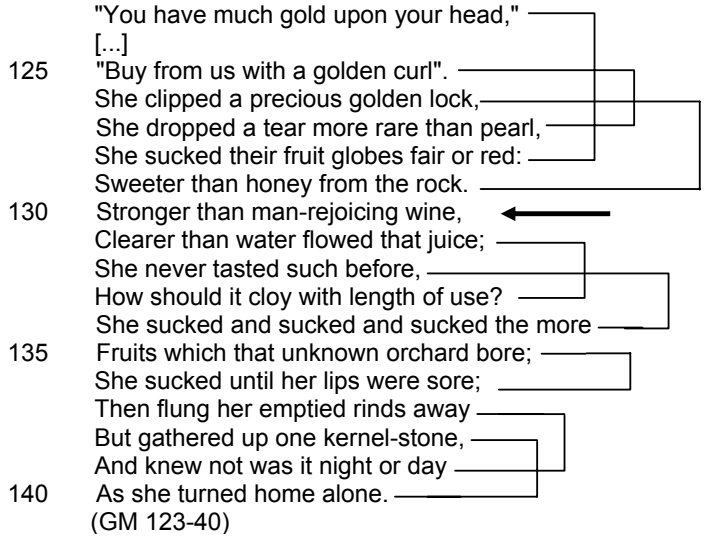
The playfulness of her metre is kept in check, as it were, by the rhyme structure. Though there is no regular pattern of rhyme as such, Rossetti is fairly consistent in finding rhymes for the terminal sounds of each line, since 95 % (534 out of 567) of the line-endings of the poem do rhyme.[44] On the whole, the rhyme pattern goes on regularly, but a systematic examination reveals a number of interesting exceptions to this rule. When Rossetti breaks the rhyme scheme, the effect is powerful. Her startling deviations stand out not as capricious or accidental but as conscious highlighting of words and events. Thus, in line three, for example, she leaves line-terminal "fruits" unrhymed. The effect of this, to my own ear at least, is to emphasise that fruit is the major subject of the stanza. Had Rossetti wanted to find a rhyme for this word, this could have been easily arranged, for as her poem later twice demonstrates, "fruit(s)" can be rhymed with the very appropriate word "root(s)" (GM 95; 260). Similarly, in stanza two, the characters of the poem, "goblins", "Laura" and "Lizzie" (though this last is rhymed with "busy" in a later stanza) are among the line-ending words lacking rhymes, which, I think, causes a shift

44 My count of rhyming line-endings includes off-rhymes, half-rhymes and eye-rhymes, counting line-endings that are within a maximum of fifteen lines from each other.

of attention (both in content and form) from the tempting fruits to the poem's *dramatis personae*.

Sometimes Rossetti's poetic highlights seem to serve a parodic function, underlining phrasings that are familiar from *Paradise Lost*. We know, for instance, that Milton disliked what he called the "troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming". In his introductory prose note on "The Verse" (added in 1668) he dismisses rhyme by complaining against the "jingling sound of like endings". As if in objection to Milton's criticism, Rossetti not only lets her poem have "like endings" or end rhymes, but also twice allows her rhymes to have a "jingling" sound. This happens in the section where Laura laments that she can no longer hear the "iterated jingle" of the goblin-cry (GM 233) and in the passage where we can hear a joyful "jingle" in Lizzie's purse (GM 452). In both cases the word "jingle" is line-terminal. So at the same time as Rossetti adopts Miltonic concepts to add detail to her own version of the Fall, she seemingly rejects some of his ideas about poetic form. By employing a fairly regular rhyme scheme and by literally letting two of her rhymes "jingle", she humorously defies Milton's depreciation of rhyme as a mere jingling sound of like endings. In this apparent mockery of his words, Rossetti seems to make an important stylistic point. Unlike Milton, who in his epic saw rhyming as "bondage", Rossetti apparently saw in the rhymes a musical quality that her poetry could benefit from. She even describes the jingle of Lizzie's penny as "music to her ear" (GM 454). And this begins to suggest that there are other issues at stake than just questions of gender.

Rossetti offers long passages containing perfect rhymes, each line ending finding a phonetically matching partner, the rhymes falling neatly into place. But there are striking exceptions to this rule. First, in line 130, there is a break in the rhyme scheme:



Interestingly, Rossetti leaves the word "wine" unrhymed, although it is a word for which it is easy to find a matching partner (one thinks of "dine", "fine", "mine"). Within a long passage of neat rhyming, somebody reading or listening to the poem will tend to expect a swift rhyme here, and the absence of such a rhyme will create an instant effect of suspense and final frustration. After this line, the rhyme pattern continues perfectly for more than half a stanza (GM 131-62). To me, the fact that Rossetti lets an easily rhymed word such as "wine" stand out from her rhyme scheme has the effect of highlighting the wine-like character of the forbidden fruit. This, I think, is the more significant in that the apple's wine-like properties are, as we have seen, borrowed from Milton, in whose epic the fruit makes Adam and Eve intoxicated and heightened "as with Wine" (*PL* IX.1008; 793). The forbidden fruit is not directly associated with wine in the Bible. Nor is such an association a straightforwardly standard feature in English poetry.[45]

45 See fn 35 p 53.

Similarly, the fact that Rossetti's goblins are "parleying" (the final word of GM 385) is highlighted by the fact that the word does not rhyme with other nearby line endings, though the surrounding lines do rhyme with each other (waits-pates, me-fee, many-penny). This word-choice, to denote a discussion of terms with an enemy or opponent, is particularly interesting. While the verb does not occur in Genesis, it is used by Milton in the context of the tempter and his arguments. Just as, in Milton's phrasing, Michael and Satan "ended parle" before they "addrest for fight" (*PL* VI.296), Rossetti's alien forces, when Lizzie refuses to negotiate with them, "Without further parleying [...] began to scratch their pates" (GM 385; 390) in preparation for their attack. So "parleying" was a Miltonic term (*OED s.v*. "parle") that Rossetti wanted to use, even though it did not fit into her rhyme scheme. The fact that she places her Miltonic borrowing at the end of a line, yet thus breaks her own rhyme scheme, again begins to suggest a certain amount of consciousness from her side. After this Miltonic highlight, Rossetti's rhyme scheme continues with relative regularity until the end of the poem.

6. Summary

"Goblin Market" is a highly allusive poem, even if not at first glance. Rossetti instructs her readers in the dangers of succumbing to temptation, through the use of symbols bearing much weight of Christian tradition, extrapolated from Genesis along with renderings of the Fall myth transmitted through centuries of Christian literature, including Milton.

An analysis of the nature and extent of Rossetti's allusions suggests that "Goblin Market" depends heavily on Miltonic terminology and imagery. The poem reads as a response to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, for there are numerous similarities - thematic, verbal and in imagery - between Rossetti's allegorical narrative and Milton's epics about the Fall and Redemption of Man. The abundance of Miltonic allusions indicates that Rossetti turned to Milton as a literary model, rather than just recycling Scripture directly. And already at this stage of my argument, it is possible to assert that Rossetti's response to Milton's work is a complex one, creating an intricate pattern of allusiveness.

To recapitulate some of the main similarities, Milton's twin epics, like Rossetti's miniature version of them, deal with Temptation, Fall and Redemption. In both works, forbidden fruit is central to the plot. This fruit is ripe all year round, being bright and attractive in appearance, and having an odorous and mellifluous sap. Just as the tempting fruit is described in animistic terms, being lifelike and having "downy" cheeks, the tempters offering it are described by means of animal personifications. They are eloquent word-jugglers, "crying", "parleying" and using sweet verbal "baits". They repeatedly beg woman to taste their fruit and she is finally deceived. She sheds a precious or pearl-like tear, then eats her "fill" without "restraint". She has "never tasted" anything like it: the fruit appears to be wine-like, but the aftertaste is "bitter". And in the long run the fruit turns out to be dangerous: its victim fades away, turning "sick" and "grey",

writhing in torment, yet thirsting for more. She is finally saved from perdition by a strong selfless character who, unlike the fallen woman, stands strong and resists the false allurements of a tempting banquet.

From her predecessor, Rossetti seems to have borrowed the idea of the forbidden fruit as having a "wine"-like character and of the goblins' speech as "parle". The fact that she makes these Miltonic concepts line-terminal yet leaves them unrhymed may begin to suggest that her allusiveness is the result of a conscious effort from her side. Also, by twice letting her line-terminal rhymes literally have a "jingling" sound, she seemingly defies Milton's dismissal of rhyme as a mere jingling sound of like endings. Some of Rossetti's stylistic choices, then, seem to indicate conscious rhetorical strategy rather than an uncontrolled anxiety of influence.

CHAPTER THREE

ROSSETTI, MILTON AND CHRISTIAN AESTHETICS

1. Prospectus

My aim so far has been to establish beyond doubt the existence of a dialogic network, at the verbal, formal and thematic levels, between "Goblin Market" and Milton. The aim of this chapter is to examine the *function* of Rossetti's Miltonic allusions in terms of argument, and thereby emphasise her own initiatives. I shall argue that the Miltonic elements come in for creative adaptation rather than parody.

As we have seen, intertextual Rossetti studies so far have tended to focus on gender issues, treating Milton as an oppressive male chauvinist whom a subversive woman poet has had to challenge through revision. I do not wish to curtail the feminist potential of Rossetti's texts. Rather, my aim is to extend the scope to include the spiritual aesthetic which the poet herself affirms. For if we place "Goblin Market" within the larger context of Rossetti's thoughts on religion and poetry as evident throughout her writing, and if we de-emphasise the dichotomy between Rossetti and her male precursor, alternative patterns of reading begin to emerge. We may better comprehend how her writings engage with not only nineteenth century debates on woman, but also with religious and aesthetic issues. This will also allow us to explore more fully the similarities between Milton and Rossetti which have far too long been

ignored, and the extent to which Rossetti not only diverges but also agrees with him.

To regard Milton, the radical Puritan polemicist, as a positive influence on Rossetti, the Anglo-Catholic conformist, may at first seem far-fetched. Milton, as we know, was a politically active and hard-hitting controversialist, disliking the tradition of religious and civil affairs in England, defending education, free speech, a free press, and divorce. Rossetti's faith, by contrast, was in uniformity with the Church of England and she rarely engaged in contemporary controversies. But despite different religious and political allegiances, both can be placed within a long Christian tradition in English poetry. Both, after all, were religious poets, successfully combining their poetic vocation with religious devotion. Both had the Bible in their blood stream and held a firm Protestant belief in the absolute truth and primacy of the word of Scripture and its direct relation to the pious individual. They spoke the same language, that of Scripture and Christian morality.

Before analysing "Goblin Market" in this light, it may be helpful to outline the socio-historical and literary contexts out of which Rossetti's aesthetic values and procedures, and her religious faith, evolved. I shall therefore try to trace the basic ideas and philosophical background of her aesthetics to various sources ranging from the Bible through St. Augustine to Keble and Ruskin. My suggestion is that Milton is one of many Christian writers whom Rossetti draws on to support her own spiritual aesthetics: her aim to write "true" poetry for God's glory.

I shall argue that "Goblin Market", although typically regarded as a secular poem, has much religious depth. The discussion is backed up by detailed analyses of representative examples from her poetry, including "A Birthday" and "A Prince's Progress". Despite the aesthetically pleasing and sensual depictions of these works, they both exemplify and express the *spiritual* aesthetic in which her poetry is so deeply rooted, and her concern that nature must be scrutinised for its moral and sacred meanings. This

ultimately brings her close to Milton, whose aim was equally to write poetry for the glory of God, rather for art's own sake.

During Rossetti's lifetime, art and literature were developing in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the arrival of the Romantics, and at the same time technological invention and scholarly research were fundamentally changing the human life-world. From an analysis of her texts, and by drawing on established historical evidence, we can place Rossetti within the rapidly developing Victorian debate about aesthetic values, and can begin to discover the kind of values - religious and literary - that inspire and inform her poetry. I shall attempt to show that the way in which she uses Miltonic tradition can be seen as a subtle challenge to the emerging scepticism and aestheticism in Victorian society and its art-world, and not least to the secular tendencies adopted by the second generation of Pre-Raphaelites, including her own brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

2. Rossetti's and Milton's Background of Values

Rossetti's Knowledge and Opinion of Milton

Rossetti was early exposed to Milton's works. As a child she spent her holidays with her maternal grandparents in their country-cottage in Holmer Green in Buckinghamshire, an area of high Protestantism. Not far from the Polidori cottage was Chalfont-St. Giles, where Milton took refuge from the Plague in a cottage in 1665. The cottage was still standing in the years when the young Christina Rossetti visited Holmer Green. Dante Gabriel Rossetti actually visited Milton's residence in September 1842, reporting that it was "unquestionably the ugliest dirtiest building in the whole village" and that it was "now occupied by a tailor" (Rossetti, W. M. 1906: II.5).

Rossetti's grandfather Gaetano Polidori was an Italian emigrant and scholar, and in Kathleen Jones's words "a genuine eccentric [...] who could be found translating Milton into Italian before lunch and indulging in his passion for carpentry in the afternoon" (Jones 1992: 71). He published an Italian translation of Milton's works in 1840. It was also about this time that he began to encourage his granddaughter in her early literary endeavours, and she later ascribed the origins of her literary impulse precisely to the carefree childhood holidays that she spent at her grandfather's place in Holmer Green. To Edmund Gosse she wrote that

> If any one thing schooled me in the direction of poetry it was perhaps the delightful idle liberty to prowl all alone about my grandfather's cottage grounds some thirty miles from London, entailing in my childhood a long stage coach journey. The grounds were quite small, and on the simplest scale - but in those days to me they were vast, varied, and worth exploring. (Jones 1992: 7)

Did Polidori's passion for Milton rub off on his granddaughter? Kathleen Vejvoda (2000: 558) contends that "Rossetti's love for her grandfather [...] her grandfather's appreciation for Milton, and the poetic inspiration she

enjoyed in the orchard and garden of Holmer Green no doubt made Rossetti more open to Milton's influence, at least early in her career, than critics have yet acknowledged".

Milton's works were readily available to her in her grandfather's library. There she could also come across her uncle John Polidori's "The Vampyre" (1819), a novel with Miltonic connections. Uncle Polidori was a physician, now best remembered as having accompanied Lord Byron on his famous trip to Europe in 1816. He was part of the group who stayed at the Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva during the summer of that year with Percy and Mary Shelley. The mansion where they stayed had been the home of Charles Diodati, a close friend of Milton, who had resided there for several months during *his* continental tour in 1639. And it is in this suggestively Miltonic setting that Byron, on one rainy night in June, challenged them all to write a ghost story. It was also here that Mary Shelley famously dreamt the plot of *Frankenstein* with its open allusions to *Paradise Lost*.[46] John Polidori's contribution was "The Vampyre", a short story that seems to have inherited features from Milton's epic, too, for the protagonist Lord Ruthven, like Milton's Satan, knows well "how to use the serpent's art" (p. 20).

John Polidori was the favourite brother of Christina's mother Frances, but after he committed suicide in 1821 "[h]is name was never mentioned in the Rossetti and Polidori households" (Zaturenska 1949: 14).

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46 Mary Shelley incorporates *Paradise Lost* into her novel by letting it be one of the works that the monster studied. The monster is strongly affected by "the picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures" and goes on to relate his own situation to that of the characters of the classic: "Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy, and prosperous, guarded by, the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature, but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition, for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me" (p. 112). The monster is, at first, willing to accept his position as Man in the God/Man relationship with Frankenstein, and he goes, like Adam, to ask his creator for a mate. Yet with Frankenstein's failure to comply, the creature evolves into a self-acknowledged Satan who swears eternal revenge and war upon his creator and the entire human race.

But he remained a possible influence for his niece and "his portrait hung in Christina's house and was in the room where she died" (p. 14). And David F. Morrill (1990), among other critics, has detected elements of vampirism in "Goblin Market" and related them to the supernatural motifs in her uncle's novel. Undoubtedly, there are intriguing parallels between Polidori's novel and the poem written by his niece forty years later. Apart from the similarities noted by Morrill (the elements of seduction and desire, female victims pining away and longing for the night), one could note the resemblance between Polidori's Ianthe, a young vampyre-victim, the "object of so many bright and fairy visions", who falls "with the flower of life that had died within her" (p. 10), and Rossetti's Jeanie who, in a similar fashion, pines away in her gay prime, so that even the daisies planted on her grave wither away (GM 147-61; 312-19).

We also know that Professor David Masson, one of the most important Victorian Milton scholars, was a personal friend of Rossetti as well as her editor at *Macmillan's Magazine.*[47] Masson's critical essays were published throughout the 1850s and his highly influential seven-volume *Life of John Milton* began appearing in 1859 - the same year as Rossetti wrote "Goblin Market". As Rossetti's editor, as Kathleen Vejvoda suggests, he "surely recognized in her and her work the vocational intensity and Miltonic 'seriousness' of a great religious poet" (Vejvoda 2000: 559). Interestingly, Rossetti's first two editors - Gaetano Polidori and David Masson - were both passionate about Milton.

Rossetti was notoriously reticent about her poetic influences. As David A. Kent observes, "she rarely mentions other poets" (Kent 1987: 252). All we know about her stated opinions of Milton is her brother's allegation that a "great thing which she disliked was Milton's *Paradise Lost*: the only poems of his which she seems to me to have seriously loved were the sonnets" (*Memoir* lxx). She also makes a passing

47 For a direct reference to their "personal acquaintanceship", see Rossetti's letter to Masson (*Letters* I: 141).

reference to Milton in a letter, stating that she cannot "warm towards" him, "even let alone all theological questions" (quoted Stuart 1930: 106). But despite her brief epistolary disclaimer, Milton's artistic influence on Rossetti is considerable, as we saw in the previous chapter. And if Rossetti, as she herself claims, could admire Milton's sonnets and share his interest in "theological questions", this suggests that her dislike of his epic was based on other than purely doctrinal grounds.

What exactly was it then about Milton that left her cold? This is something we can only speculate about. Kathleen Vejvoda (2000: 557) suggests that the phrasing "warm towards" indicates that Rossetti, like many of her contemporaries, was repelled by Milton's "cold classicalism", as William Morris called it (quoted in Nelson 1963: 89). My own suggestion is in part that Rossetti disagreed with Milton's depiction of Satan. In *Face of the Deep* she writes,

> Take the history of the Fall. The question of the mortal sin shrinks into the background while we moot such points as the primitive status of the serpent: did he stand somehow upright? did he fly? What did he originally eat? How did he articulate? (p. 170)

This passage can be read as a direct criticism of the theological speculation of the kind that Milton sometimes displays. Milton explains, for instance, regarding the nature of the serpent's physical functions, that he moved "not with indented wave, / Prone on the ground, as since, but on his reare" (*PL* IX.496-97), and that he spoke "with Serpent Tongue / Organic, or impulse of vocal Air" (*PL* IX.529-30). Rossetti herself, by contrast, avoids the knotty issues that Milton faced in his combination of typological symbolism and scientific realism. By writing what she called "just a fairy story" (Bell 1898: 207), she does not have to decide, for instance, how to represent Satan, God, Jesus and the human couple.

Later in *Face of the Deep* she also indicates that she disapproved of the majesty Milton allows Satan. She quotes her sister, who found

Milton's "Arch Angel ruind" (*PL* I.593) a dangerous representation of evil, one that might seduce the soul:

> Whilst studying the devil I must take heed that my study become not devilish by reason of sympathy. As to gaze down a precipice seems to fascinate the gazer towards a shattering fall; so is it spiritually perilous to gaze on excessive wickedness, lest its immeasurable scale should fascinate us as if it were colossal without being monstrous. A quotation from my sister's Shadow of Dante speaks to the point: -
>
> "Some there are who, gazing upon Dante's Hell mainly with their own eyes, are startled by the grotesque element traceable throughout the Cantica as a whole, and shocked at the even ludicrous tone of not a few of its parts. Others seek rather to gaze on Dante's Hell with Dante's eyes; these discern in that grotesqueness a realized horror, in that ludicrousness a sovereign contempt of evil [...] Dante's Lucifer does appear 'less than Archangel ruined,' immeasurably less; for he appears Seraph wilfully fallen. No illusive splendour is here to dazzle eye and mind into sympathy with rebellious pride; no vagueness to shroud in mist things fearful or things abominable. Dante's Devils are hateful and hated, Dante's reprobates loathsome and loathed, despicable and despised, or at best miserable and commiserated [...] Dante is guiltless of seducing any soul of man towards making or calling Evil his Good". (pp. 321-22)

It is quite likely, then, that Christina Rossetti, like her sister, concluded that Milton made Lucifer too sympathetic.[48] While Milton's fallen archangel is a dashing rebel, a satanic hero freed from hoofs and horns, there is no equivocal beauty about Rossetti's own depictions of evil. As we saw in Chapter Two, her queer little goblins have nothing colossal or majestic about them, which goes well with the opinion she expressed in *Face of the Deep*.

Rossetti's and Milton's "Puritanism"

Rossetti is known as an Anglo-Catholic, that is: a representative of what is commonly called the High Church. It is less known that she, her mother Frances and her sister Maria actually first belonged to the opposite extreme: the Evangelical branch of the Church of England, heir of the seventeenth century Puritans. William Michael Rossetti reports that at his sister's birth "the dominant tone" of their devotion was "the 'evangelical,' the 'high church' being as yet dormant" (*Memoir* lxvi). Only in 1843 did they move their allegiance from the Evangelical St. Katherine's Chapel to

48 I owe the inclusion of this idea to Professor Diane D'Amico.

Christ Church, the London-centre of High Anglicanism. Little is known about this conversion, but in Jan Marsh's biography it is not depicted as a dramatic event (Marsh 1994a: 55-56). This indicates that for the Rossetti women, the step between the so-called low and high church was not as big as one might imagine. It also shows that they were not afraid of extremes.

Rossetti was defined by her atheist brother as "an Anglo-Catholic, and, among Anglo-Catholics, a Puritan" (*Memoir* lxiv). Here, he presumably uses "Puritan" to denote one, who practices or follows a stricter moral code than that which prevails generally. And in so doing, William Michael Rossetti obviously places her among the radicals among radicals, for in the mid-century the Anglo-Catholic church was considered a radical movement (Harrison 1990: 96). Rossetti seems to have been aware of the perceived radicalism of her religiosity. "To do anything whatsoever, even to serve God", she ironically remarks in *Letter and Spirit*, "brings us into continual collision with that modern civilised standard of good breeding and good taste which bids us avoid extremes" (Rossetti 1883: 19). Rossetti, in other words, was seen and saw herself as an "extreme" Protestant, a position in its own way not so different from that of Milton. Lukewarm Anglicanism was not to their taste.

If Rossetti was seen as a "puritan" among Anglo-Catholics, Milton's Puritanism was of a different kind. In the context of Milton the term usually denotes a sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestant group in England that opposed as unscriptural many customs of the Church of England. Milton did associate himself closely with the Puritan cause led by Oliver Cromwell, under whose Commonwealth government he held an official post as Latin Secretary. But the extent of his Puritanism has been debated. It had nothing of the traditional rigidity associated with the term. It did not prevent him from drinking (moderately) and smoking (heavily), being particular about his looks, or from a real love of music and poetry. He wrote the eloquent tracts defending education, freedom of speech, free

press, divorce, and religious tolerance. J. Max Patrick has even argued that Milton "cannot unreservedly" be called Puritan at all, and that "Protestant is a more apt term" (Milton 1967: xiv). This is not the place to enter into critical debate as to whether or not Milton was a Puritan sympathiser. Let us simply note that Milton was clearly an adherent of Protestant religion, but that his exact religious position is difficult to pin down.

Although there is some question in the twentieth century as to what extent Milton was a Puritan, there was no uncertainty in the minds of Victorians. And Milton the stern "Puritan" was not necessarily the man to whom High Anglican sympathies would immediately go out. In his study of the Victorian reception of Milton, James G. Nelson notes that "Dissenters, Evangelicals, and Whigs were generally lavish in their praise", but High Churchmen "damned him with faint praise or with outright scorn and disapproval" (Nelson 1963: 11-12). As Vejvoda explains, a church party devoted to clerical domination and Catholic-style worship reforms was predisposed to dislike Milton (Vejvoda 2000: 561).

But as for Milton the poet, the Victorian attitude was generally favourable, even among those who did not appreciate Milton the Puritan. John Keble allegedly had "no love for" Milton (quoted in Chapman 1970: 69). Yet his undergraduate enthusiasm for "that poet" is seen in the heavily Miltonic diction of *The Christian Year.* Thus, for example, Keble's "vain deluding mirth" (l. 81) in the fifth stanza of "Second Sunday in Advent" is an open allusion to the "vain deluding joys" banished in Milton's "Il Penseroso" (l. 1).

The unconditional admiration expressed in Thomas Macaulay's essay "On Milton" (1825), commissioned as a review of *De Doctrina Christiana,* typifies much Victorian Milton-criticism. It is here, and with reference to Milton, that we find the familiar quotation: "We hold that the most wonderful and splendid proof of genius is a great poem produced in

a civilized age".[49] And David Masson, the distinguished Milton-expert, was at least as enthusiastic. He even defended Milton's notorious "Puritanism" and moral "seriousness" as assets. Masson felt that Milton's connection with the Puritans "reinforced those qualities one might properly expect to find in a great religious poet and prophet" (quoted in Nelson 1963: 93).

Puritans believed (in sharp contrast to the High Church Tractarians) that the church hierarchy and church ritual are not as crucial to individual salvation as a personal conversion based on emotion and imaginative comprehension of Christ's redeeming sacrifice. Milton seems to share this ideal, for he felt that one could dispose with a priestly system mediating between priests and God, stating that: "If, then, any believer can preach the gospel, so long as he is endowed with certain gifts, it follows that any believer can administer baptism, because baptism is less important than the preaching of the gospel" (quoted in Honeygosky 1993: 201).

Curiously, Rossetti was not less radical than Milton on this point. Little has been made of the actually surprising fact that she baptised her nephew Michael at his death on 24th January 1883 with her own hand. Instead of calling for a priest she herself assumed the role of a clergyman. William Michael Rossetti reports how "Christina implored me to allow her to baptize him; to this I raised no objection, and she performed the rite unwitnessed, and I doubt whether any act of her life yielded her more heartfelt satisfaction" (*Memoir* lxviii). In removing the sacrament from the church building and institutional control and in relocating this sacrament within her own home for herself to administer, Rossetti in fact levels what could be seen as a powerful blow to church hierarchy, since she reduces the exclusivity and importance of the ministerial function. In performing an in effect nonconformist act, she seems to have paid mere lip service to the High-Anglican idea of ministerial hierarchy. An observation by William Michael Rossetti confirms this impression: "It should be said that, while

49 Milton's lost theological treatise *De Doctrina Christiana*, an unpublished Latin manuscript in three volumes (date of composition unknown), was found in 1823.

she had an intense reverence for the priestly function, she cared next to nothing about hierarchical distinctions: anything which assimilated the clerical order to a 'learned profession' forming part of the British constitution left her indifferent, or rather inimical" (*Memoir* lv).

To sum up, John Milton's religious position, just like Christina Rossetti's, is difficult to define. Milton was not necessarily a typical low-church Puritan and Rossetti was not a typical high church Anglo-Catholic. Both of them, however, were devout Christians, which had an enormous impact on their work.

The Truth and Primacy of Scripture

Christina Rossetti, like John Milton, held a firm belief in the absolute truth and primacy of the word of Scripture. But this was a belief that was increasingly undermined by scientific discoveries. The period we call the Enlightenment, which followed the Protestant Reformation, marked the beginning of a turning away from religion as the basis for European life. Since people no longer agreed about religious matters and there was no authority to rule on disputed questions, the search was on for a new authority in reason and science. When Milton was working on his epic, the heliocentric world-order was being questioned by Galileo Galilei, who provided scientific evidence of the inaccuracy of the Bible. Milton met Galilei during a visit in Tuscany in 1638-39, and the visit has left its mark in *Paradise Lost*, for example in Book VIII, where Milton incorporates a discussion on the two competing cosmonologies (the Ptolemaic and the Copernican).[50] Scientific development, rivaling traditional theology, may partly have motivated Milton to write his epic in the first place, with its attempt to justify Gods ways to Renaissance man.

50 When Adam enquires concerning celestial motions, he is exhorted by Raphael to search instead for more worthy knowledge: "whether Heav'n move or Earth, / Imports not" (*PL* VIII.70).

Rossetti, like Milton, had to face scientific challenges to her faith in the literal truth of the Bible. Up to the mid-Victorian period a literal interpretation of the Bible was just as common as in Milton's time. But by the late Victorian period science had begun seriously to challenge the historical accuracy of the gospel and, as a consequence, religion as the dominant epistemology. The discoveries of Charles Darwin, whose *The Origin of Species* (1859) was published the same year as Rossetti wrote "Goblin Market", definitely supplanted the old idea of a seven-day creation with the new concept of human evolution from lower organisms. Darwin's scientific revision of the creation story was in conflict with the concept of creation derived from the Bible, putting in question the concept of God's creation. The Biblical account of creation was also being undermined by astronomy, geology and archaeology. Although many English scientists were men of strong religious convictions, the impact of their scientific discoveries seemed damaging to established faiths. Even theologians were beginning to question scriptural certainties.[51] To many thinkers it no longer seemed possible to believe in God. As the *Westminster Review* pointed out, for the ordinary believer "all the bases of his creed are undermined; the whole external authority in which it rests is swept away; the mysterious book of Ruth fades into an old collection of poetry and legend; and the scheme of Redemption in which he has been taught to live and die turns out to be a demoralising invention of man" (quoted in Marsh 1994a: 317).

Though Darwin's account is scientific and Rossetti's poetic, their discourses were not incompatible at the time. Articles on Darwin's evolutionary theory and poems by Rossetti were both published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, a liberal monthly also launched in 1859. With the

51 German Bible critics such as David F. Strauss supposed that the Bible was a collection of writings from many different historical contexts and therefore not the word/work God in any straightforward sense. His controversial *The Life of Jesus* (orig. *Das Leben Jesu*) was translated into English by George Eliot in 1846.

publication of Darwin's great thesis, Genesis lost some of its authority. Rossetti like Milton, then, had to face a paradigm-shift where the very concept of creation was given a new meaning, contradicting a literal interpretation of the Bible.[52] *Paradise Lost* - based on the conviction that the Biblical creation account was literally true - was part of this endangered legacy. Ever since Milton retold the story of the Fall, it gradually became less essential to the Christian faith. In an age of religious doubt Milton was a source that Rossetti as a devout Christian could use to support her Biblical worldview. It was hardly in her interest as an orthodox Christian to undermine the creation account further. If she turned to Milton's version of the story of Man's Fall, it was to assume imaginative space for herself. Her version of the Fall and Redemption myth in is no more a satire on Milton than Milton's epic is a satire on Genesis.

Art for God's Sake

The aspect of Milton that Rossetti would have found especially congenial is his moral commitment to writing. He was dedicated to "great" poetry, against petty and pretty aestheticism, frequently expressing his spiritual aesthetic in both prose and verse. Rossetti's familiarity and agreement with some of Milton's aesthetic values is visible in the very first entry in *Time Flies* (1885), where she comfortably draws on Milton to support her own hermeneutics. In a discussion about translation of God's Word, she writes that

> Christians need a searching self-sifting on this point. They translate God's law into the universal tongue of all mankind: all men of all sorts can read them, and in some sort cannot but read them.
>
> Scrupulous Christians need special self-sifting. They too often resemble translations of the letter in defiance of the spirit: their good poem has become unpoetical.[53]

52 For a comprehensive discussion of Darwinian plots in Victorian fiction, see Beer 1983.
53 From the entry for January 2. For an accessible version of this passage, see Kent and Stanwood 1998: 296-97.

As noted by Kent and Stanwood (1998: 392), Rossetti here alludes to Milton's dictum in "An Apology Against a Pamphlet" (1642) about the true poet himself being a "true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things" (I. 890). Rossetti uses Milton's words to speak for and defend the vocational seriousness of a "true poet", thereby exposing the extent to which her aesthetics actually agrees with Milton. If Milton's aim was to write "true poetry" for God's glory, Rossetti, from the beginning of her career, knew her "aims in writing to be pure, and directed to that which is true and right" (*Letters* I: 98). By using Milton's words she not only reveals her agreement with Milton, but also, by extension, offers a justification for her own continuing artistic productions.

In *Paradise Lost* the narrator asserts that the tragedy of the Fall is an argument "not less but more Heroic" than the subjects of the epics of Homer and Virgil or epic romance (*PL* IX.14). And in *Paradise Regained* Milton lets Christ assert that Greek literature is "unworthy to compare / With Sion's songs, to all true tasts excelling" (*PR* IV.346-47). Such judgments may seem odd to a modern reader, but it should be remembered that for Milton "true tastes" were those "from God inspired". A passage from Rossetti's poem "The Lowest Room" expresses a similar idea. In their argument about Homer, one of the two sisters teasingly rebukes the other for idealising the golden age of ancient times, reminding her nostalgic sister that

> Homer, tho' greater than his gods,
> With rough-hewn virtues was sufficed
> And rough-hewn men: But what are such
> To us who learn of Christ? (ll. 153-56, I: 204)

Rossetti lets her speaker voice an argument resembling that of Milton's statement that Greek myth, for all its assets, is unworthy of compare with the beauty of the songs of Zion, which were composed for God's glory. Art

for Art's sake? "Art for God's sake", Milton would have answered. This is originally Christopher Ricks' (Milton 1968a: xiv) witty gloss for Milton's poetics. But it could just as well be applied to Rossetti. She, like Milton, saw poetic abilities as inspired gifts from God, gifts to be used with responsibility. And like Milton, she saw it as her self-appointed role, yes, her duty to contribute poetry for religious purposes. By writing six volumes (*c.* 2250 pages) of devotional commentary, she insists on the individual Christian's rightful role as faithful reader of Scripture. This conviction is based in the Protestant doctrine, where Scripture is regarded as the word of God authored by his Holy Spirit, encouraging the virtue of individual interpretation of the Bible. This appropriately draws attention to the links between Milton and the writings of Rossetti in terms of their common Word-based piety. This insight may shed important light on the basic similarities between Milton's and Rossetti's literary aims and preoccupations.

3. Rossetti, Milton and St. Augustine

Christina Rossetti was early drawn to the subject of paradise lost. Transgression, punishment and final exculpation, the major themes of Milton's works, were subjects which fascinated her and to which she increasingly returned in both poetry and devotional prose. As orthodox Christians both Milton and Rossetti were in their religious sensibility deeply influenced by the theology of St. Augustine, especially with regard to the nature of the Fall. So even if the Bible was the basic doctrinal source for both of them, their poetic dramatisations of worldly temptation also draw on the theology of St. Augustine and his acute awareness of worldly temptations and of man's sinfulness. In this section I shall try to outline their common background in Augustinian theology.

What is the Apple?

The forbidden fruit is a controversial object that raises a number of questions. The apple in woman's hand is like the skull in *Hamlet*, giving physical shape to the riddles of our existence. A salient question is what it stands for. In the course of time the significance of the Genesis-account came to be subjected to dramatically different interpretations. One of these is that the apple symbolises the danger of giving in to forbidden physical temptation. After all, *jada/yada*, the Hebrew word for gaining knowledge, often indicates gaining carnal knowledge, a sense which has been caught in translation:

> And Adam *knew* [my emphasis] Eve his wife;
> And she conceived, and bare Cain. (Genesis 4:1)

It is also implied in the Bible that after tasting the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve became sexually aware and realised that they were naked. This may

explain why the view was common among Christian teachers that the sin of Adam and Eve was to indulge in sexual intercourse (Fiore 1981: Chapter III). The idea of the Fall as a carnal fall was rejected by St. Augustine, however, for whom Adam's sin was in disobeying God's command. In his *Confessiones* the plucking of forbidden fruit is dramatised in the famous pear tree incident, where he tells how, as a boy, he and his friends stole pears from a farmer (II.iv). Here fruit appears as the symbolic inducement to sin. And for Augustine, this irresponsible act of a mischievous boy represents the first free choice of the evil will. As suggested in his autobiography, human sin included intellectual pride, the desire for worldly fame, and sensual indulgence: vices that Augustine himself had to overcome during the last stage of his conversion.

In *De Civitate Dei* Augustine goes on to undertake an extensive exegesis of the first chapters of Genesis. Here he explains that tasting the forbidden fruit signifies "bad using of free-will" (XII.xiv). Adam's and Eve's disobedience was a fundamental crime, an act that included all sins: "distrust, unbelief, ingratitude, disobedience, gluttony" *et cetera* (XIII.xiv) but, as Augustine stresses, "the fountainhead of all these evils is pride" (XIV.iii). The Tree of Knowledge is good when the law is obeyed, but evil if the prohibition is transgressed. None of this stemmed from the intoxicating power of the fruit; Augustine explains that God was testing man's fidelity by forbidding "an act in its own nature indifferent" (I.x). The fruit of knowledge is not bad in itself, "for God would not have planted any hurtful thing in that delicious Paradise" (XIII.xii), but it is placed in the garden to teach man the primary virtue of obedience.

From Augustine onwards the Christian church believed that God created all things without exception good and that badness is good things perverted. This perversion arises when a conscious being becomes more interested in itself than in God, and wishes to exist on its own (XIV.xi). In other words, the forbidden fruits are not evil in themselves. It is all a question of how they are used. The Augustinian concept of the forbidden

fruit became widespread and influential in Western thought. Following St. Augustine, most Jews and Christians agreed that God gave humankind the gift of moral responsibility, and that it was man's misuse of free will which caused the Fall.

From *De Doctrina Christiana* we know how Milton, as a theologian, interpreted the eating the fruit. Milton's version of the Fall is substantially that of St. Augustine,[54] which is that of the Christian Church as a whole. In *Paradise Lost* as well, Milton picks up the Augustinian idea that God left the will free, that we are "both will and deed created free" (*PL* V.549). Raphael explains to Adam,

> That thou art happie, owe to God;
> That thou continu'st such, owe to thy self,
> That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.
> This was that caution giv'n thee; be advis'd.
> God made thee perfet, not immutable. (*PL* V.520-24)

Milton also shared the Augustinian view that the fruit of knowledge is not bad in itself, but that it is a moral test, "the proof of thir obedience and thir faith" (*PL* IV.520). That the Fall consisted in disobedience is also stated in the very first lines of *Paradise Lost.*

As already mentioned, there is a tradition that the Devil seduced Eve sexually (rather than morally and intellectually). Milton was fully aware of this tradition, and there are even sexual implications throughout the scenes in *Paradise Lost* where Satan tries to corrupt Eve (*PL* V.28-94; IX.532-732). The tempter's final conquest of Eve is in many ways presented as a seduction, leaving Eve "deflourd" (*PL* IX.901). As noted by Peter Amadeus Fiore (1981: Chapter III), however, Milton makes sure to point out that the Fall was not primarily *caused* by lust. Milton's Satan explicitly falls for "Pride" and "Ambition" (*PL* IV.40), and so does Milton's Eve. She is seduced by Satan's description of her as a goddess (*PL* V.77-

54 For a study on St. Augustine's influence on Milton, see Fiore 1981.

81). And when she tastes the fruit it is, as Milton clearly states, for "expectation high / Of knowledg; nor was God-head from her thought" (*PL* IX.789-90). As C.S. Lewis explains in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1960 [1942]: 66), this is the sin of pride, and the first creature who committed it was Satan. Such desire is prideful, not lustful.

Who is to Blame?

When Milton's Adam understands that Eve is lost, he communes with himself and decides that he is lost with her. This, according to C.S. Lewis, is because of the "social bond" between him and Eve. Milton's Adam yielded not only because of lust, but also out of love. We remember the exquisitely tender words of Adam refusing to forsake Eve in her extremity: "How can I live without thee, how forgoe / Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joyn'd" (*PL* IX.908-9). God could create another Eve, but Adam wants this one. Without her, Eden turns into "these wilde Woods forlorn" (*PL* IX.910). In other words, Milton did not blame woman alone as the cause of sin and death. As Lewis (p. 67) argues, Milton, following Augustine, believed that Eve sinned, eating the apple in the hope of attaining superiority over Adam (*PL* IX.821-25), but that Adam sinned in his way, too, eating the apple in his desire to stay with Eve (*PL* IX.908-17; 998-99). Eve was first, but not more guilty.

The theology of St. Augustine also exercised a profound influence on Rossetti. We know that his *Confessiones* was one of her favourite texts after the Bible (Packer 1963a: 42). And her brother suspected that, apart from Augustine, she never read (nor desired to read) "any 'father', Latin or Greek" (*Memoir* lxix). Extending this remark, Anthony Harrison (1988: 97) names Augustine as one of the cornerstones of her philosophical, theological and aesthetic principles. And from her religious prose we know that, like Milton before her, she adopts the Augustinian view of Adam's and Eve's Fall as the result, not of carnal sin but of disobedience, a crime that included a breach of all God's commandments. In *Time Flies*, she writes:

"Adam by one sin broke the whole law: offending in one point he became guilty of all" (p. 243). In *Letter and Spirit* she, like her predecessors, identifies Adam's and Eve's sin as disobedience, not lust or sexual desire: "Whatever else may be deduced from the opening chapters of Genesis, their injunction of obedience is plainly written; of unqualified obedience, of obedience on pain of death" (p. 19). In *The Face of the Deep* she also explains that Eve ate the fruit because she wanted to "become like God" (p. 249). In other words Rossetti's Eve, like Milton's, falls for pride, not fleshly desire.

As for Rossetti's view of Adam's sin, she explains in *Letter and Spirit* that he diverted his "heart" from God (p. 18). In the sonnet sequence "Later Life" she expresses the belief that he did this not because of lust, but because of love, a misdirected and earthly love, perhaps, but love nonetheless: "Did Adam love his Eve from first to last? / I think so; as we love who works us ill, / And wounds us to the quick, yet loves us still" (15.9-11). In other words Rossetti, like Milton, emphasises the affectionate element in Adam's motive instead of depicting the apple as a Viagra-like medicament with negative side-effects.

In *Letter and Spirit* she offers one of her most extensive prose meditations on the Fall, arguing that

> Adam and Eve illustrate two sorts of defection (I Tim. ii.14). Eve made a mistake, "being *deceived*" she was in the transgression [*sic*]: Adam made no mistake: his was an error of will, hers partly of judgement; nevertheless both proved fatal. Eve, equally with Adam, was created sinless: each had a specially vulnerable point (pp. 16-17, Rossetti's emphasis).

Rossetti, like St. Augustine and Milton before her, allots great responsibility to Adam, since Eve was "deceived" while Adam's was "an error of will". Later in the same work, she asserts that we need not "attempt to settle which (if either) committed the greater sin" (p. 56). So

instead of making Eve alone culpable for the Fall, like St. Augustine and Milton before her, she advocates shared guilt.

What is also significant about Milton's and Rossetti's interpretations of the first human sin is that they do not present the Fall in sexual terms or specifically equate forbidden fruit with sex. They do have very imaginative and sensuously attractive passages in their writings, which may seem paradoxical. But their aim was not to obliterate sensuality and imagination. Both belong to a long Christian tradition, rooted in St. Augustine, in which sensual temptation is portrayed only in order to turn the human passions toward the search for God's grace. Rossetti's adherence to this tradition finds one of its earliest poetic expressions in "The Dead City".

"The Dead City": The End of "Practised Art"

Rossetti's juvenile poem "The Dead City" (1847), complete with the Augustinian allusion of its title, could be seen as the prototype in a long succession of works where she deals with forbidden fruit. Here, in embryo, are orchard fruits whose rich sensuousness prefigures "Goblin Market". And here, as so often, the poet practically bombards the reader with sensory information:

> In green emerald baskets were
> Sun-red apples, streaked and fair;
> Here the nectarine and peach
> And ripe plum lay, and on each
> The bloom rested every where.
>
> Grapes were hanging overhead,
> Purple, pale, and ruby-red;
> And in panniers all around
> Yellow melons shone, fresh found,
> With the dew upon them spread.
>
> And the apricot and pear
> And the pulpy fig were there;
> Cherries and dark mulberries,
> Bunchy currants, strawberries,
> And the lemon wan and fair. (ll. 181-95, III: 68)

The compulsory apple along with the grapes, melons, figs and berries are all familiar from traditional paradises, such as Milton's Eden. The floral imagery, too, seems to be stripped from Milton. In Rossetti's city

> All the floor was strewn with flowers
> Fresh from sunshine and from showers,
> Roses, lilies, jessamine;
> And the ivy ran between
> Like a thought in happy hours. (ll. 201-5, III: 68-69)

The fruits are spread on a flowerbed, recalling Milton's depiction of Adam's and Eve's nuptial bed with its "Iris all hues, Roses, and Gessamin" (*PL* IV.698). This in its turn recalls Spenser's *Amoretti* 64, in which the Lady's "sweet odour" (l. 14) is compared favourably to that of fragrant flowers, including roses and jasmine. But as it turns out, Rossetti's banquet-place is no "blissful Bower" (*PL* IV.690) like Milton's Eden. Nor is it a Spenserian garden of sensuous pleasure. It does feature an Edenic banquet, but all the feasters, having eaten forbidden fruit, have turned into sculptures, painfully out of reach of a tantalising banquet of splendid fruit. They are spellbound in a false paradise.

In this respect, the setting of Rossetti's banquet resembles the tables spread with all dainties in *Comus*. It is in such luxurious surroundings that the title character of Milton's masque tries to tempt the lady with a magic potion, threatening to turn her into a statue: "If I but wave this wand, / Your nervs are all chain'd up in Alabaster, / And you a statue" (ll. 659-61). But the plot fails because of the Lady's purity. In "The Dead City", however, the feasters have turned into sculptures. Unlike the virtuous Lady in *Comus* they have not given up the empty pleasures of this world. One man is even still holding "[i]n his hand a drinking cup; / Wine cup of the heavy gold" (ll. 242-43). So there is a sense in which Rossetti's poem is *Comus* inverted.

What, then, is the nature of the feasters' crime? What do the fruits that they have fatally consumed stand for? For Jan Marsh "the voluptuous fruits represent soul-destroying pleasure for which the frozen banqueters have forfeited eternal life […] the greedy pleasures of which Rossetti, as a child, had never been able to have enough". To Marsh, then, the fruit is "an emblem of fleshly lust, with immediate sensuous appeal to sight, smell, touch and taste. It also […] contains an implicit image of corruption. Ripe fruit is soon rotten […] the rosy apples harbour worms […] What seems fair can also be foul" (Marsh 1994a: 73-74). This is a beautiful, though somewhat insufficient definition. There is more at stake than just greed and fleshly lust. What needs to be stressed is that the fruits stand for more various kinds of earthly pleasure, and for the fundamental sin of pride.

As the poem's original title "The City of Statues" perhaps suggests, it can be read as a response to St. Augustine's *The City of God.* In that work Augustine explains that "the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God" (XIV.28). In his treatment of the earthly city, Augustine emphasises its tendency towards the sin of pride: "the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord" (XIV.28). Against this background, Rossetti's city of statues is not an ideal heavenly city of god, but of godlessness. To leave no doubt, Rossetti twice spells out that her banquet-scene illustrates the end of "pride", as the wind tells the speakers: "Go and see the end of pride" and "see / How for luxury and pride / A great multitude have died" (l. 100; 162-64, III: 66; 68). In other words, the banqueters have been punished for vices other than mere lechery and gluttony.

Rossetti's fatal banquet is a work of "Practised Art", and is beautifully "displayed" and has "a thousand fair devices" (ll. 170-73, III: 68). It is literally a still life displaying "golden" vessels set with "gems" and "ruby-coloured" grapes in "emerald" baskets (ll. 176-77; 181; 187, III: 68).

What is more, this artificial banquet is placed under a false sky: that is, not under the firmament that God created but beneath man-made draperies, in the reflection of "curtains' *skyey* blue" (l. 200, III: 68, italics added). The real thing is apparently not good enough for these dinner-guests. Their artificial feast consists of "careless joy at best" and "gladness without care" (ll. 210; 215, III: 69).

"The Dead City" portrays a group of feasters who, because of their careless indulgences, have turned into statues, victims of their own vanity. The poem's artfully represented fruit may, at first, appear tempting, but it turns out to be an image of spiritual nullity. It epitomises luxurious desire, including artistic self-indulgence, including vainglorious indulgence in godless art. It is the worldly fruit of a hedonistic art, leading to corruption.

On one hand, the pursuit of poetic beauty itself could serve as a distraction from higher moral and spiritual endeavours. On the other, success in writing posed a whole constellation of moral problems associated with vanity and ambition. In Rossetti's work a concern with these obstacles to moral purity and religious devotion appears repeatedly. In what reads as a belated commentary on "The Dead City" with its statue-like characters frozen in mid-gesture in an aesthetic setting, she explains in *Seek and Find* that

> an artist may paint a lifelike picture, but he cannot endow it with life like his own; he may carve an admirable statue, but can never compound a breathing fellow man. Wise were those ancients who felt that all forms of beauty could be but partial expressions of beauty's very self: and who by clue of what they saw groped after Him they saw not. (p. 14)

Among the "wise ancients" that Rossetti refers to here we find Augustine who, as we have seen, indeed "groped for God" in devoting his life and works to the service of the Lord, preferring a heavenly city created for the glory of God to an earthly city for the glory of self. And at the same time as "The Dead City" and its "prose commentary" reveal her indebtedness to Augustine, they implicitly reflect the extent to which Rossetti's aesthetics

agrees with Milton. Like Milton's masque and his epics, her poetry belongs to a long Christian tradition, from St. Augustine via Spenser to the early Tennyson, in which sensual temptation is portrayed only in order to turn the human passions toward the search for God's grace. In this tradition sexuality is not repressed, nor is creativity. But the true expression of creativity is shown to be in good works, including good artistic works.

4. Tractarian or Pre-Raphaelite?

This section is particularly concerned with Rossetti's relationship to Tractarian and Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics. It attempts to show that her poetry can be seen as a subtle challenge not so much to Milton as to the emerging scepticism and aestheticism in Victorian society and its art-world, and not least to the secular tendencies adopted by the second generation of Pre-Raphaelites, including her own brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Rossetti and Tractarian Aesthetics

Christina Rossetti came under the influence of the Tractarian movement from early on. By 1843, "at the impressionable age of twelve", as Anthony Harrison (1998: 135) puts it, she had begun regularly attending the services at Christ Church, Albany Street with her mother and sister. Christ Church was then what Lona Packer has termed a "principle centre of High Church religionism" in London and it was "noted at the time for the incendiary sermons of Reverend William Dodsworth, one of the chief preachers of the Oxford Movement, a man closely associated with both Newman and Pusey" (Packer 1964: 6-7). Dodsworth, Pusey's intense, passionate and charismatic disciple, was Perpetual Curate, as the vicar was then called, of Christ Church from 1837 until his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1850.

Rossetti's familiarity with the Tractarian sensibility would have been strengthened by the poetry of John Henry Newman, Isaac Williams and, above all, John Keble. The evidence for her knowledge of Newman and Williams is ample. Her first biographer tells us that she had "great regard for" Isaac Williams (Bell 1898: 184), an observation supported by a letter she wrote in 1881 to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in which she approvingly quotes a short passage from one of Williams's poems (Rossetti, W. M.

1908: 103). She had already acknowledged "the late Reverend Isaac Williams" in her preface to *Seek and Find* (1879), where she also admits her "indebtedness to Cardinal Newman", for whom she was to write an elegy in 1890. Like many Victorians she owned a copy of Keble's *The Christian Year* (1827), which had over ninety reprintings and was one of the widest selling books of poetry in the nineteenth century. An examination of her copy reveals that she gave it considerable attention. As a young reader she underlined numerous lines and composed pencil drawings to accompany every poem (D'Amico 1987: 36-41).

What, then, was Tractarianism? The Tractarian or Oxford Movement within the High Church came about in 1833 with Reverend John Keble's momentous assize sermon on "National Apostasy", in which he criticised the increasing secularisation of the Church of England. The movement he headed is known as "the Oxford Movement" because it originated at Oxford University. It is also known as "the Tractarian Movement" because some of its followers developed their arguments in a series of pamphlets called *Tracts for the Times* (1833-41). The leader was John Henry Newman, a fellow of Oriel College and Vicar of St. Mary's, the university church in Oxford, who had been influenced by Keble's sermon. Other prominent members were Archdeacon Henry Edward Manning, Edward Pusey, and Robert Wilberforce. The Tractarians aimed to revive the High Church traditions of the Anglican Church, arguing that only a powerful, dogmatic and traditional religious institution could withstand the attacks of opponents such as the Utilitarians, to whom religious belief was merely an outmoded superstition. The movement, in which the Rossetti women were closely engaged,[55] constituted an impressive crusade to strengthen the Church of England, and it was perhaps the most important religious development of the entire nineteenth century.

55 For Rossetti's engagement in the Oxford Movement, see Marsh 1994a: 55-64.

The forces behind the Oxford Movement were simultaneously literary and religious, aesthetic and theological. John Keble was not only a priest, but also Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1831 to 1841. Although less widely known than his successor Matthew Arnold, Keble was more important to nineteenth century literary criticism than his subsequent neglect would suggest (Martin 1976: 104). One of the most fundamental assumptions underlying his poetic theory was the belief that the created world is capable of communicating moral and spiritual meaning. The practice of searching for God's truth and of finding spiritual meaning in material reality, and moral lessons in all experience, was for Keble both a religious and a poetic activity, which could lead poet and reader alike to a fuller understanding of a divine and moral universe. In his theory, poetic utterance was seen as an attempt to express the spiritual dimension of existence, giving life to objects and commonplaces by providing them with higher significance. This theory was rooted in the Romantic idea, introduced into English criticism by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, of natural objects as symbols of a higher life of reason, belonging to an inner or spiritual world, an idea which finds its equivalent in Romantic poems such as Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode": "To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears" (ll. 207-8). Developing this Romantic tradition, Keble advocated moral and mystical interpretation of objects and situations in nature. For him, the real artist was able to see the deep spiritual significance of common things and to depict them in his art. The artistic aim was to interpret nature so that it becomes a pathway to God. In *The Christian Year* he deals with this poetic theory in some detail, advocating "the power and proper use of poetry within a Christian context". By the same token he saw writing as a moral responsibility, in that the writer could help to create a consciousness of reality.[56]

56 For discussions of Keble's theological position and poetic theory, see Beek 1959; Martin 1976: 62-105; and Tennyson 1981.

Fundamental to Keble's poetic theory and perspective on nature were the sacraments, and especially the Eucharist. He believed that the direct link between the natural and supernatural worlds was severed as the result of the Fall, but that the gap between the material and spiritual is bridged by Christ's Incarnation. The Eucharist, God's gift of grace, can bring about a right perception of nature, allowing man to see the supernatural world within the physical world that God has created. In other words, Tractarian thought included as a central tenet an intense sacramentalism, for which things visible in the natural world symbolised things invisible and divine, so encouraging worshippers to "read" material signs for their spiritual significance.

Keble set a pattern for a new generation of Christian poets. His sacramental aesthetic was important for Rossetti since it legitimated a poetry which might otherwise have been accused of sensuousness, free thought and immorality. He laid out a devotional path which her literary impulses could commendably follow. In *The Christian Year* those "whose hearts are beating high / With the pulse of Poesy" were urged to sing for God's sake ("Palm Sunday", ll. 1-2). This view gave Rossetti her cue.

In saying this I do not lay claim to originality. Rossetti's poetry has often been seen as the very epitome of Tractarian ideas. Jerome McGann notes (albeit with some reluctance) that "it is a commonplace of Rossetti criticism that her poetry is the best expression we have of the ideas and attitudes of Tractarianism" (McGann 1983: 143), and Raymond Chapman (1970) sees her symbolism as "directly and fully a product of the Oxford Movement". Following in Chapman's footsteps, George B. Tennyson - in what remains a very full treatment of Rossetti in a Tractarian context - asserts that she was the "true inheritor of the Tractarian devotional mode in poetry. Most of what the Tractarians advocated in theory and sought to put into practice came to fruition in the poetry of Christina Rossetti" (Tennyson 1981: 198-99). More recently, Katherine J. Mayberry (1989: 107) has argued that Rossetti's poetry is "partially a reflection of a wider

aesthetic movement in Victorian England - Tractarian poetic theory". Mary Arsenau (1993: 80) goes so far as to claim that "by far the most important influence" on Rossetti "was the impact of the intense incarnationalism and sacramentalism of the Oxford Movement".

The belief that God is veiled behind natural surfaces is apparent throughout much of her writings, as for example in "Who has seen the wind" (1872), a children's poem that appears to be designed to illustrate the analogical mode of perception:

> Who has seen the wind?
> Neither I nor you:
> But when the leaves hang trembling
> The wind is passing thro'.
>
> Who has seen the wind?
> Neither you nor I:
> But when the trees bow down their heads
> The wind is passing by.
> ("Who has seen the wind", ll. 1-8, II: 42)

The lines are a simple yet intense expression of the poet's belief in the divine origin and significance of all things. The idea recurs in openly devotional verses, such as the following brief lyric, which was published untitled in her devotional study *Face of the Deep*:

> Lord, purge our eyes to see
> Within the seed a tree,
> Within the glowing egg a bird,
> Within the shroud a butterfly:
>
> Till taught by such, we see
> Beyond all creatures Thee,
> And hearken for Thy tender word,
> And hear it, "Fear not: it is I". (Rossetti 1892: 285)

The writer Theodor Watts-Dunton perceptively notes that "She loved the beauty of this world, but not entirely for itself; she loved it on account of its symbols of another world beyond" (Watts-Dunton 1895: 16-17). She believed in a morally coherent universe, where all experience has spiritual

significance. Her aesthetics has firm roots in the sacramental view, in which the bodily and physical are seen as inseparable from the divine or spiritual. The Tractarian idea that nature is an analogy of God was fundamental to her entire intellectual life.

Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelite Aesthetics

Through her mother and her sister Rossetti was early introduced to, and closely engaged in, the Tractarian Movement. Through her brothers and her short-time fiancé James Collinson, she was also close to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, founded in London in September 1848, largely through the efforts of her charismatic brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti. William Michael Rossetti, who was a civil servant with literary and artistic interests, was also one of its members. Apart from her brothers and her fiancé, its seven original members were the painters William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais, the sculptor Thomas Woolner and the art critic Frederic George Stephens. As a group the Brotherhood was short-lived, lasting for only five years. French intellectuals scornfully claimed that the Pre-Raphaelites had nothing in common except that all of them liked Shakespeare and that they frequented the same café (Faxon 1989: 50). And because of its exponents' blatant idiosyncrasies and clashing loyalties, Harold Bloom (1986: 1) refers to the Brotherhood as a "highly confused nonmovement". Yet this association of mid-nineteenth century *avant garde* artists was to lead European and American art in quite new directions.

From the age of eighteen, then, Rossetti was surrounded by a lively group of artists and painters whose art came to be greatly influential both in England and abroad. Her relationship to the Brotherhood was important, and her participation was considerable. She served as an enthusiastic

model for some of the most significant early Pre-Raphaelite paintings.[57] She took classes in Ford Madox Brown's experimental drawing school for young ladies (Packer 1963a: 64). Her poems were read at the Pre-Raphaelite meetings and seven of them were published in the four 1850-issues of the Brotherhood's journal *The Germ*. Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti actually co-operated, giving and receiving feedback and comments on each other's works. And it was Christina, not her brother, who gave the group its first literary success, with her collection of poems *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862). Edmund Gosse declared that the avant-garde poetry was unable to win the public ear until "at last came Christina Rossetti with her brilliant, fantastic and profoundly original volume of 'Goblin Market'" (Gosse 1896: 158). Marya Zaturenska (1949: 77) sees the famous title poem not only as "one of the masterpieces of English literature" but also as "a Pre-Raphaelite show piece".

But to what extent was Christina Rossetti really a Pre-Raphaelite? This is a matter of debate. Depending on their definitions, critics have variously counted her in and counted her out.[58] It all depends on how one defines Pre-Raphaelitism. The term, which refers to both art and literature, is confusing and more or less arbitrary, since it is the result of the need to cluster and categorise a certain group of English nineteenth century artists. The seven members of the "Pre-Raphaelite" bachelor's club were young, promising art students, whose aim was to bring back a pre-Renaissance purity of style through a realistic and detailed representation of outdoor settings. This group could be said to represent the overt Romantics among the Victorians who, following John Ruskin's motto in the

57 As previously noted, Christina Rossetti modelled for the image of Virgin in two well-known works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (first exhibited in 1849) and *The Annunciation* (*Ecce Ancilla Domini*) (1850). Mackenzie Bell's biography (1898: 19) further informs us that she posed for the facial expression of Christ in William Holman Hunt's immensely popular *The Light of the World* (1852).

58 For studies considering Christina Rossetti as a Pre-Raphaelite, see e.g. Zaturenska 1949; Stevenson 1972; Bump 1980; Apostolos-Cappadona 1981. For arguments against this, see e.g. Swann 1960, Chapman 1970; Hönnighausen 1972; Tennyson 1981; Smulders 1996.

first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843), "Go to nature in all singleness of art, selecting nothing, rejecting nothing", aimed at a detailed depiction of real nature. Their original aim, then, was to paint directly from nature with objective truthfulness, in sympathy both with Italian pre-Renaissance art and with Ruskin. Much like the Romantics before them, the Brotherhood wanted to "return to nature", although in a very stylised way. Such a return called for a precision in depicting natural details, so as to produce an aesthetically pleasing effect. Pre-Raphaelite poetry tended to exhibit many of these same characteristics, paying meticulous attention to natural minutiae, and with poets attempting to use metre and melody playfully to delight the senses.

How close is Pre-Raphaelite Aesthetics to the aims of Tractarian poetic theory? Both movements came about in a time of political and social unrest, culminating in manifestations throughout Europe in 1848. In their nostalgic medievalism and in their emphasis on emotion, both movements were reactions against the Victorian establishment. When the Tractarians rebelled against the materialism and lack of faith in Victorian England, the Pre-Raphaelites protested against academic rules within the Victorian art world. Both attempted to resurrect the sublime and the mystical, being inspired by the Romantic Movement. Both held in high esteem the poetic, the sentiments and the emotions. Both used representations of nature for a transcendental aim. The ground they shared can be summed up by the following words: "poetry", "nature", "symbol" and "medievalism". Juxtaposed like this, their aims seem so close that scholars such as Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (1981) seem to believe that they were more or less identical.

There were, however, a number of differences. One of the most important is that the religious direction of the Pre-Raphaelites was never clearly defined. Both Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti and their friend Algernon Swinburne became open agnostics. In their desire to depict genuinely significant themes they did initially turn to the Bible for

inspiration, and used nature symbolism for transcendental purposes. But their transcendentalism was vaguely defined.

Ruskin, who cannot have been unaware of Tractarians during his time as an Oxford undergraduate in 1836-40, had a deeply moral vision of art and its role in society. The great Victorian art critic not only advocated a carefully detailed study of nature, as expressed in the first volume of *Modern Painters*. He also wanted such depiction of nature to become a responsible and moral act, as expressed in the second volume of his influential series. Ruskin here defines "beauty" theocentrically as

> either the record of conscience, written in things external, or […] the symbolizing of Divine attributes in matter, of […] the felicity of living things, or […] the perfect fulfillment of their duties and functions. In all cases it is something Divine; either the approving voice of God, the glorious symbol of Him, the evidence of His kind presence, or the obedience to His will by him induced and supported. (Ruskin 1909: 4.210)

His sacramental aesthetic reflects the Romantic and post-Romantic attitude towards nature: that one's surroundings are resplendent with symbolic truth and spiritual meaning.

Early Pre-Raphaelite art did picture sacred scenes, following Ruskin's sacramental ideal. But the Brothers had different interests, talents and temperaments and in the end did not seem to agree on their aims. The original high-minded ideal proved insufficient to hold the interest of their restless talents, and they gradually replaced Biblical inspiration with other sources which involved complex religious, mythical and literary connotations. For Thomas J. Collins, James Collinson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and John Everett Millais, their early experiments with typological symbolism had little follow-through in their later careers (though both Collins and Collinson were deeply religious). Paradoxically, it was as if the Pre-Raphaelites were not deeply impressed by the nature they set out to depict so truthfully. Especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti developed a style full of mysterious undertones, suggesting mood and feeling rather than describing nature realistically. In both his visual and verbal art, he

increasingly turned away from the original aim of describing and spiritualising nature towards a more aesthetic position, which separated artistic creativity from religious concerns. His approach to artefacts and images came to focus more on surfaces than on religious or allegorical meaning. He gradually moved towards writing and painting as a sensualist, producing aesthetic artefacts which do not invite a religious response. In his biography, Holman Hunt describes how Dante Gabriel Rossetti "completely changed his philosophy, leaving Stoicism for Epicureanism". He "executed heads of women of voluptuous nature with such richness of ornamental trapping and decoration that they were a surprise coming from the hand which had hitherto indulged itself in austerities" (Hunt 1905: II.143). Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sensuous "Bocca baciata", painted in 1859, is now seen as "a landmark in the emerging Aestheticism of the post-Pre-Raphaelite era" (Marsh 1999: 212).

A second generation of Pre-Raphaelites arose under the influence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the late 1850s, and Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris were among its central figures. These artists gradually replaced biblical inspiration by that of poetry and medieval legends, presenting beauty for nonreligious and purely aesthetic purposes. The aesthetic form of Pre-Raphaelitism was henceforth supposed to stir up new ideas and attitudes, defined by Walter Pater in his declaration of Aesthetic principles in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1868). Pater, who was a friend and admirer of the Pre-Raphaelites, advocated a philosophy of cultural hedonism and art for art's sake. The second generation of Pre-Raphaelites thus nurtured the seeds of the Aesthetic and Symbolist Movements.

While Tractarian poetics insisted on an explicit linking of art and religion, or more precisely on a subordination of art to religion, the Pre-Raphaelites finally subordinated religion to art. Their use of nature symbols became primarily aesthetic, not devotional. At the risk of

oversimplification, one could say that the Pre-Raphaelites aimed at "truthfulness to nature" by creating images of the sublime, whereas the Tractarians used images of nature in order to achieve "truthfulness to God". Christina Rossetti definitely belongs to the latter school, since as Edmund Gosse (1893: 214) points out, her devout religiosity sharply distinguishes her from the Pre-Raphaelites:

> [N]either Gabriel Rossetti, nor Mr. Swinburne, nor Mr. Morris has shown any sympathy or decided interest in, the tenets of Protestantism. Now Miss Christina Rossetti's poetry is not merely Christian and Protestant, it is Anglican; nor her divine works only, but her secular also, bear the stamp of uniformity with the doctrines of the Church of England.

More than a century later Anthony Harrison confirms that "Rossetti's aesthetic values were, like Ruskin's, Romantic, transcendental, and even Platonic, but" unlike the art of the second generation of Pre-Raphaelites "also sacramental and, unlike Ruskin's, sacramental in radically conservative, often Tractarian ways" (Harrison 1988: 65).

Rossetti seems to have been aware of the transition from the sacramentalism and religious motivation of the early Pre-Raphaelite ambience to the avant-garde aestheticism of the second generation of Pre-Raphaelites. When the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was breaking up in November 1853, she honoured its memory with the following satirical epitaph:

> The P.R.B. is in its decadence: -
> for [*sic*] Woolner in Australia cooks his chops;
> And Hunt is yearning for the land of Cheops;
> D.G. Rossetti shuns the vulgar optic;
> While William M. Rossetti merely lops
> His B.s in English disesteemed as Coptic;
> Calm Stephens in the twilight smokes his pipe
> But long the dawning of his public day;
> And he at last, the champion, great Millais
> Attaining academic opulence
> Winds up his signature with A.R.A.:-
> So rivers merge in the perpetual sea,
> So luscious fruit must fall when over ripe,
> And so the consummated P.R.B. ("The P.R.B.", ll. 10-14, III. 223-24)

If we consider the Pre-Raphaelite environment as an orchard from which Rossetti draws some of her nature imagery, the parallel between falling fruit and the downfall of the Brotherhood is fitting indeed. The initial reference to the "decadence" of the Brotherhood is doubly appropriate in that most Pre-Raphaelites increasingly turned from their original ideals towards a more aesthetic direction, a development truly abhorrent to Rossetti, the Anglo-Catholic. The Pre-Raphaelite treatment of nature may not have been irreligious originally, but to her the inherent aestheticism of the movement pointed to a dangerous rootlessness. In Tractarian poetry, in the sacramental symbolism of the early Pre-Raphaelites, and in the writings of John Ruskin, religious and aesthetic influences combined to impart an idea fundamental to Rossetti's notion that "All the world over, visible things typify things invisible" (Rossetti 1879: 244). She early parted company with those Pre-Raphaelites for whom the natural world had become an escape rather than a seal of commitment, and so remained true to the sacramental aesthetics of first generation Pre-Raphaelitism.[59]

If we want to make a connection between the Pre-Raphaelites and Christina Rossetti's aesthetics, William Holman Hunt is the best example to pick – and maybe the only one. In both theory as well as in practice, he was the only one to stick to the Brotherhood's original aims and ideals (Watkinson 1970). He continued to paint religious pictures, creating an art replete with spiritual meaning. In his bitter biography, Hunt portrays Dante Gabriel Rossetti as a pupil who misunderstood the ideals of the Brotherhood and its zeal for reform (Hunt 1905: II.143). Hunt continued to use nature as a vehicle for religious sensibilities in open disagreement with Dante Gabriel Rossetti,[60] whose art became less devotional, despite his early use of sacred motifs and religious materials.

59 For a view in harmony with the one expressed here, see Schwartz 1999: 196.
60 For a discussion on Hunt's opinion of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's aestheticism, see Gaunt 1976 [1942]: 204-9.

When it comes to Pre-Raphaelite poets such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his friends George Meredith, William Morris and Algernon Swinburne, Christina Rossetti is far removed from them. She had to paste paper strips on the anti-orthodox passages of Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon" in order to enjoy his work. She is also known to have left the reading-room when her brother read aloud from his erotic poem "Eden Bower" (1869), because she was upset by its serpent-sex symbolism (Packer 1963a: 263). On the other hand, Dante Gabriel for his part teasingly called his sister a "born apostle", while William Michael Rossetti omitted some of his sister's poems from a collection because he found them too "preachy" (Marsh 1994a: 33; 61).

Christina Rossetti became an important poetic foremother to later writers, who in various ways appropriate, resist, and transvaluate her texts, as she herself had done with those of her predecessors. Because of the dreamy, almost surrealistic character of poems such as "Goblin Market", she herself may even have helped prepare for the art for art's sake movement. In an article in *Westminster Review* Alice Law expressed her admiration for Rossetti's poetry as follows:

> We are all at times conscious of the passing of certain swift and fugitive emotions which only a very gifted minority among us is qualified to express. Miss Rossetti is one of these; she has […] condensed into word-crystals the mind's melancholy vapours, its evanescent clouds of dream, that indescribable 'nothingness' which eluding our clumsier mental grasp floats tantalisingly about us, but threatens to melt imperceptibly at a touch. (Law 1895: 444-45)

Aesthetes in the 1890s were clearly attracted by the typically Pre-Raphaelite characteristics of her poetry: its realistic pictorial descriptions of nature; its commonplace details; its concern with the psychology of passion; its medievalism; and its pursuit of stylistic and formal innovations (cf. Harrison 1988: 62). Along with Pater and her brother, she can finally be seen as mediator, albeit an unwitting one, between Ruskinian and decadent aesthetics. Yet in admiring and perhaps even imitating Rossetti's

manifestly symbolist poems, aestheticist writers of the nineties seemed to ignore the ultimately sacramental purpose behind her ostensibly aestheticist practices. As Marsh (1994a: 358) observes, it is one of the ironies of literary history that Rossetti should be a harbinger of aestheticism, because she was expressly opposed to the Aesthetic or Decadent projects of the late nineteenth century. The amorality of these movements was totally abhorrent to her sensibility. Towards the end of *Face of the Deep*, her last prose work, she urges artists to "strip sin bare from voluptuousness of music, fascination of gesture, entrancement of the stage, rapture of poetry, glamour of eloquence, seduction of imaginative emotion [...] Study sin, when study it we must, not as a relishing pastime, but as an embittering deterrent" (Rossetti 1892: 399).

Why is it, then, that Pre-Raphaelite components are so apparent in Rossetti's poetry? In her work we find "carved pomegranates" and "gold and silver grapes" ("A Birthday", ll. 11-13, I: 37) as well as a veritable still life of statuesque fruit in an uncanny banquet of the dead ("The Dead City", ll.176; 181, III: 68-69). The colourful abundance and photographic detail of her fruit indeed recalls the decorative fruits of Pre-Raphaelite art. And the Pre-Raphaelite influences shaping Rossetti's verse would certainly have heightened her desire to represent faithfully and at length the variety in the natural world. But her desire to revel in and poetically glorify the splendour of the natural world was mitigated by her religious apprehension that nature must be scrutinised for its moral and sacred meanings - a belief characteristic of the writings of Tractarians such as Keble and Newman. She blends the use of precisely described sensory detail with a sacramental aesthetics, in which spiritual truths are always described through physical symbols. And the literary potency of such an attitude is seen even in poems such as "A Birthday", which many readers have taken to be entirely secular.

5. "A Birthday": Turning Religious Inspiration into Art

> My heart is like a singing bird
> Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
> My heart is like an apple tree
> Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
> My heart is like a rainbow shell
> That paddles in a halcyon sea;
> My heart is gladder than all these
> Because my love is come to me.
> ("A Birthday", ll. 1-8, III: 36-37)

"A Birthday" (1857) with its sixteen lines of distilled beauty is one of Christina Rossetti's most popular poems and one of the most frequently quoted and anthologised of all her works. It is an unusual poem in Rossetti's production as it expresses pure, undarkened joy. Its happiness and its ringing melody have delighted readers and critics ever since its first publication. Today the poem is often used in greeting cards and wedding invitations. But there is more spiritual depth to it than the pretty surface suggests. Once it is identified as a devotional poem, alternative patterns of reading begin to emerge. "A Birthday" can in fact be seen as a poetic vision of transcendent love, in which Rossetti combines intense sensuousness with Christian devotion, and in ways which are not incompatible with Milton's Protestant poetics.

Traditionally, "A Birthday" has been read as a sensual (Packer 1963a; Festa 1973) or aesthetic poem (Zaturenska 1949: 84). Anthony Harrison goes so far as to read "A Birthday" as one of Rossetti's most "aesthetic" poems, a poem in which she advocates the "value of beauty created for pleasure" (Harrison 1988: 111-12; 20). But I shall argue here that Rossetti would not have signed her name under the purely aesthetic motto so often ascribed to her poem.

Despite the poem's lack of direct references to the Bible, Scripture resounds from its very title. For the titular birthday hardly refers to just some merry event with a cake and candles on the table. Rather, it refers to

the birthday of the soul, whether by being "born again" in Christ while alive, or by being resurrected, that is, lifted by Christ out of literal death into eternal life. The concept of spiritual rebirth goes back to the Bible. In St. John's gospel, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that

> Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. / Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? / Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. / That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. / Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. / The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:3-8)[61]

As noted by Michael Wheeler (1990: 162-63) in his study of Victorian eschatology, "the great birthday" was a favourite concept among Victorian writers of sacred poems and novels. The fact that Christina Rossetti uses the word in this sense becomes more obvious if we compare her title and her words about the "birthday of my life" (l. 15) to the resurrection scene in her poem "From House to Home", which describes people "newly-begotten from the dead / Whom the great *birthday* bore" (ll. 187-88, I: 87, italics added). Dante Gabriel Rossetti, though more secular than his sister, uses the idea of a spiritual "birthday" as well. In his famous "The Blessed Damozel", for example, there is a passage where Mary's handmaids in heaven are "Weaving the golden thread, / To fashion the birth-robes for them / Who are just born, being dead" (ll. 112-14).

In the first stanza of "A Birthday" the joyful heart is described through three similes from the world of nature: a bird, a tree, and a shell.

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61 The soul's birthday is also discussed in I Peter 1:22-23, which reads as follows: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: / Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever".

These symbols have previously been widely taken to represent fertility, as by Lona Packer (1963a: 199) and Conrad Festa (1973: 51-56), both of whom presumably read the imagery as purely sensual or physical. Similarly, in Anthony Harrison's brief reading, the natural images in the first stanza stand for the mutability of earthly love. For Harrison, the images actually take on a strangely sinister character. For some reason he thinks of the bird's nest as "surrounded by dangerous turbulence" and the "thickset fruit" as bearing "weighty resonances of the Fall" (Harrison 1988: 112). In this reading even the peaceful image of a shell paddling in an explicitly "halcyon" (*i.e.* calm, tranquil) sea somehow comes to represent the vulnerable object, which is subject to "the changing moods of the potentially destructive object" (p. 112). Judging by Rossetti's own words, however, the images express the gladness of a joyful heart (ll. 7-8). The point that Harrison tries to make is that Rossetti, in the second stanza, withdraws from the transience of earthly love into a world of art. He draws the conclusion that "the only true and permanent fulfilment of love is to be found in the art it gives birth to" (p. 112). But in my own understanding of Rossetti, she found the only true and permanent fulfilment of love in God, not in art. What "sensualising" and "aestheticising" readings of "A Birthday" seem to overlook is its imagery's spiritual potential.

As for the first image, that of the "singing bird", I would suggest that this is a veiled allusion to the singing birds in Song of Songs 2:10-12:

> My beloved spake, and said unto me,
> Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
> For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;
> the flowers appear on the earth;
> the time of the singing of birds is come,
> and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

Here, as throughout the Song of Songs, the lovers address each other as "my love". So when the speaker of "A Birthday" twice exclaims that "my love is come to me" (ll. 8; 16) this, too, seems to echo the words about the

time of the singing birds that "is come". A similar echo of this passage is heard in Rossetti's "The Chiefest among ten thousand", a poem directly alluding to Canticles in its fourth stanza: "The long-desired is come at length, / The fullness of the time is come" (ll. 31-32).

The second image, that of an "apple tree", can be read as an allusion to the apple tree in Song of Songs 2:3. The passage was one to which Rossetti returned, both in a prose commentary (Rossetti 1874: 102) and in a poetic one, entitled "As the Apple Tree among the trees of the wood". The biblical passage itself is as follows:

> As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,
> so is my beloved among the sons.
> I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
> and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

So when Rossetti in "A Birthday" employs the image of an apple tree, she is hardly alluding to the ominous apple tree of Genesis, as Harrison (1988: 112) suggests. Rather, she evokes the eroticism and mystic sensuousness familiar from Canticles. The atmosphere of Rossetti's poem resembles the Song of Songs as well, for like the Song it throbs with heartfelt happiness.

At the same time as the apple tree in "A Birthday" resonates with Canticles, it recalls the tree of life in Proverbs 13:12: "hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life". This was Rossetti's favourite biblical text (Turner 1990: 123). From her prose diary *Time Flies* we know that she understood the tree in Proverbs as referring to the "Cross of Christ", promising compensation for present sorrows in the fulfilled desires of heaven (pp. 80-81).

The third image, that of a "rainbow shell / That paddles in a halcyon sea" (ll. 5-6) evokes the story of the flood in Genesis 9:12-17, where the rainbow is a sign of God's promise and a symbol of hope. The "shell" itself could be read as an allusion to Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" (c. 1485), a

painting greatly admired by the Pre-Raphaelites, in which the goddess of love rises from the sea standing in a shell. Admittedly, the shell from which Botticelli's Venus arises is a giant gilded *scallop* shell, not a *rainbow* shell, which is the name for an American freshwater mussel, discovered only in 1829. Also, the sea from which Venus rises does not appear to be "halcyon", for the west wind Zephyr and Chloris are shown puffing vigorously in the upper-left corner of the painting. But even so, the poem's resemblance to Botticelli's painting is arguably close enough for its speaker's heart to be the shell in which love is born. Scholars have not yet conclusively deciphered Botticelli's painting, but given that many of his works reflect an intense religious devotion, it would not be unusual to see Venus as a symbol of both pagan and Christian love. For Botticelli, no less than for Milton, Greek or Roman mythology and biblical narrative could intertwine.

As for the "halcyon sea" in which the shell floats, this recalls the "still waters" of Psalms 23:2. The presence of a "bird" in a "watered" nest in the introductory lines may contribute to a secondary meaning, for the "halcyon" is also the name of a fabulous bird of Greek myth, which was known to brood in a floating nest. It is with reference to this myth that Milton writes in the fifth stanza of the hymn of "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity",

> But peacefull was the night
> Wherin the Prince of light
> His raign of peace upon the earth began:
> The Windes, with wonder whist,
> Smoothly the waters kist,
> Whispering new joyes to the milde Ocean,
> Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
> While Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmed wave. (ll. 61-68)

Milton's "birds of calm", like Rossetti's "halcyon sea", recall the classical belief that the sea remained calm during the days preceding and following the winter solstice to enable the birds to brood on their floating nests. In

ancient belief, the halcyon is related to "the birth of the new sacred king, at the winter solstice" (Graves 1948: 187). It has later been adopted as a Christian image, as in Milton's "Nativity Ode", where it heralds the newborn Christ.

"A Birthday", then, begins with a series of natural images, familiar from various sources, which bring resonance to the poem as a devotional work. These symbols point to the hope of redemption and eternal union with the Saviour. Granted, the speaker's "love" is never identified. But even the poem's title can suggest that it is a love lyric to Christ, anticipating reunion in heaven. Rossetti's allusions to Canticles could also indicate that "my love" is Christ, because the most popular interpretation of Canticles was as a description of the spiritual relationship between Christ and His church or the soul of the believer, and Christ was often seen as the embodiment of the Lover or Bridegroom. In "The Chiefest among ten thousand" Rossetti makes the association explicit by letting the speaker demand

> That where Thou art I too may be
> Bride of the Bridegroom heart to heart;
> Thou God, my Love, the Fairest art
> Where all things fair and lovely are. (ll. 21-24)

In "A Birthday", as in Rossetti's popular Christmas carol "In the Bleak Mid-Winter", Christ is never mentioned or directly addressed. This leads to an ambiguity, which has given both poems such universal appeal and imaginative reach. The joy of human love and the spiritual ecstasy of the soul are indistinguishably fused together, as in the Song of Songs.

There is a strong tradition in English poetry of sensual and sacred love as each other's metaphors. In the poetry of John Donne, for example, in poems such as "Batter my heart" and "The Canonization", there is a metaphorical interchangeability of sensual and divine love. A similar tradition is reflected in baroque artistic representations such as Bernini's

"Ecstasy of St. Theresa" (1647-52), a sacred statue displaying explicit sensuality. Within the larger interpretative context of such a tradition, "A Birthday" can be seen as an expression of religious euphoria in which *eros* and *agape*, profane love and spiritual, are not in opposition but metaphors of each other.

The vital but widely neglected religious subtext of "A Birthday" becomes clearer if we compare it with "A Better Resurrection", an openly devotional poem in three stanzas which Rossetti composed just a few months before she wrote her more well-known birthday-poem. "A Birthday" (dated 18 November 1857) replicates the structure of "A Better Resurrection" (dated 30 June 1857) and inverts some of its imagery as well. The many parallels between the two poems seem to have gone unnoticed, but reading them side by side proves helpful. The earlier poem, like the latter, begins with the speaker describing her mental state, her "heart", by means of subjective similes:

> I have no wit, no words, no tears;
> My heart within me like a stone
> Is numbed too much for hopes or fears;
> Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
> I lift mine eyes, but dimmed with grief
> No everlasting hills I see;
> My life is in the falling leaf:
> O Jesus, quicken me.
>
> My life is like a faded leaf,
> My harvest dwindled to a husk;
> Truly my life is void and brief
> And tedious in the barren dusk;
> My life is like a frozen thing,
> No bud nor greenness can I see:
> Yet rise it shall, the sap of Spring;
> O Jesus, rise in me. (ll. 1-16, I: 68)

The speaker uses different images of spiritual sterility, moving from a stone through a withering leaf to an undefined frozen "thing". The repeated image of a fading leaf (ll. 7; 9) is familiar from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, towards the end of which play the title character bitterly speaks of how his

"way of life / Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf" (*Macbeth* V.iii 22-26), and from Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, which opens:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang. (ll. 1-4)

Within this context, the pattern of imagery in "A Better Resurrection" seems to represent the speaker's quest for spiritual renewal, from mortality and corruption described in terms of the faded leaf in the two first stanzas to fulfilment and perfection described in terms of a bowl in the third and last stanza:

> My life is like a broken bowl,
> A broken bowl that cannot hold
> One drop of water for my soul
> Or cordial in the searching cold;
> Cast in the fire the perished thing,
> Melt and remould it, till it be
> A royal cup for Him my King:
> O Jesus, drink of me. (ll. 17-24, I: 68)

The broken bowl is a recurrent Biblical image and a direct reference to Psalms 31.12: "I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel". In Rossetti's prayer book *Annus Domini* (1874) the prayer accompanying this biblical passage petitions Christ to teach "all persons who in this world feel themselves neglected or little loved, or forgotten" to find him "in Thy Blessed Sacrament" (p. 56). In Rossetti's poetic vision, then, the broken bowl is not just any aesthetic object. It emblematises the need of redemption. Christ's sacrament can mend the broken bowl. It is purged by divine fire, which Rossetti regarded as "one of the chief symbols of the Divine presence" (Rossetti 1879: 206). The sacramental meaning of "A Better Resurrection" is clinched by the last line. By identifying herself with the bowl (or communion chalice), and finally with the wine (cf. Schofield 1987: 314), the speaker becomes one with the Deity and so, in a climactic moment, imaginatively steps into the promise of eternal life.

In "A Better Resurrection" Rossetti uses figurative language to express strong religious emotions, and my suggestion is that the same applies for "A Birthday", though this poem initially appears to be less devotional. In "A Birthday" the revolution that grace makes in the consciousness of the poet is described as a radical change in nature, for in the second stanza Rossetti's speaker suddenly demands that happiness find some outlet, petitioning:

> Raise me a dais of silk and down;
> Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
> Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
> And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
> Work it in gold and silver grapes,
> In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;
> Because the birthday of my life
> Is come, my love is come to me. (ll. 9-16, I: 37)

Suddenly, the distancing similes turn into metaphors, the static indicatives into imperatives, and the natural objects into artificial objects. The singing bird and the apple tree of the first stanza reappear in the shape of carved doves and pomegranates in the second. Numerous critics have identified Rossetti's images of carved and gilded fruits as reflections of Pre-Raphaelite needlework designs, tapestries and furniture (Battiscombe 1965: 21; Kumar 1969: 176; Rosenblum 1987: 134). Indeed, peacocks, pomegranates, grapes and fleurs-de-lys are all familiar from the medievalist designs created by, for example, William Morris. But what critics have perhaps failed to notice is that the "dais" itself seems to be allusively modelled on the extended and detailed description of the dais in the opulent mansion of Cederic the Saxon in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819). Here, as in "A Birthday", the dais is embellished by purple hangings, carvings and embroidery. Even Rossetti's reference to "vair" (l. 10), the bluish grey and white fur of a squirrel prized for ornament during the Middle Ages, also called "minever", finds its counterpart in the passage, which goes as follows:

For about one quarter of the length of the apartment, the floor was raised by a step, and this space, which was called the dais, was occupied only by the principal members of the family, and visitors of distinction. For this purpose, a table richly covered with scarlet cloth was placed transversely across the platform [...] Massive chairs and settles of carved oak were placed upon the dais [...] The walls of this upper end of the hall, as far as the dais extended, were covered with hangings or curtains, and upon the floor there was a carpet, both of which were adorned with some attempts at tapestry, or embroidery. [---] [The dress of Cedric the Saxon was] furred at the throat and cuffs with what was called minever; a kind of fur inferior in quality to ermine, and formed, it is believed, of the skin of the grey squirrel [...] Behind his seat was hung a scarlet cloth cloak lined with fur, and a cap of the same materials richly embroidered (Scott 1994: Chapter Three).

So what Rossetti depicts in the second stanza of "A Birthday" strongly resembles a Gothic (or neo-Gothic) decor for festivities. The main difference is that the dais in Rossetti is to be raised not for an earthly sovereign, but for the King of Kings.

In his seminal study *The Gothic Revival* (1962 [1928]), Kenneth Clark has traced the neo-Gothic impulse of the Victorian era from its origins in eighteen-century literature to the Oxford Movement, August Pugin and John Ruskin. In the Victorian age the neo-Gothic and Pre-Raphaelite styles flowed together in many architectural, painterly, and literary examples to give just the kind of thing we find in the second stanza of "A Birthday": a sensuous and aesthetic richness resplendent with symbolic truth and spiritual meaning. One thinks of the church architecture by William Butterfield and Gilbert Scott, and of early Pre-Raphaelite religious paintings and medievalist church designs. Like the members of the first Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Christina Rossetti was inspired by the "sacramental aesthetic" that Ruskin developed in his second volume of *Modern Painters.* But whereas Pre-Raphaelite art gradually evolved towards Decadence, Rossetti's spirituality remained only became stronger with age.

Because the first stanza of "A Birthday" uses natural imagery while the second stanza describes a world of artificial objects, both Anthony Harrison (1988) and Katherine J. Mayberry (1989) have suggested that

the poem is a statement on art. To Mayberry, the poem expresses creative activity itself: the process by which emotion is transformed into art (pp. 38-39). This far I agree. Indeed, "A Birthday" shows how the poet's imagination turns the transience of nature and human emotion into permanent artefacts. Rossetti takes the songbirds and apples of poetic inspiration and refines them. But the creative process outlined is not arbitrary and self-sufficient. "A Birthday" does *not* advocate "the value of beauty created for pleasure", as Harrison (1988: 20) claims. The beauty is not only there for our own pleasure. It is created for the glory of the Lord. It is deeply rooted in religious inspiration.

As we have seen, the artistic imagery of gilded and carved fruit that we find in the second stanza is perfectly weighed against the Biblical imagery of fruit in the first. "A Birthday" transforms objects into symbols, the bird, tree and seashell assuming on repetition the status of emblems in a redemptive move away from casual things to a universe of sanctified objects. The poem's perfect symmetry between religious and artistic imagery illustrates Rossetti's poetic ideal of justifying the use of figurative language through religion.

My reading of "A Birthday" as expressing a spiritual aesthetics is corroborated by Rossetti's meditation on the Babylonian merchants of the earth and their perishable worldly goods. Revelation 18: 11-13 reads as follows:

> And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: / The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, / And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.

Rossetti comments:

> Christians find ways to redeem these other creatures despite their evil tendency. Gold and silver they lend upon the Lord: He will pay them again. Precious stones and pearls they dedicate to the service of His Altar. With fine linen, purple, silk, scarlet, they invest His Sanctuary; and fragrant 'thyine' wood they carve delicately for its further adornment. (Rossetti 1892: 420)

This passage reads as an indirect commentary on "A Birthday", whose speaker takes the perishables of this world and calls for a decorative structure of praise and devotion to be raised in the honour of the arrival of her Lord. Just like the good Christians in Rossetti's prose passage, the speaker in her poem wants it to be beautifully carved and worked in gold and silver and hung with "purple" and "silk" (ll. 9-10). Such luxuries are not aesthetic for their own, but for God's sake.

"A Birthday", then, can be read as a comment on the art of poetry itself. Rossetti does not reject nature in favour of art. Rather, she sees both nature and art as potential pathways to God. In Rossetti's vision, the creative act is subject to the inadequacy that mars ordinary human life, unless it is rooted in faith. Rossetti takes the transient objects of this world and finds a way to re-adapt them in a Christian context, employing sensuous imagery according to a spiritual, rather than an "aestheticising" model. In so doing, she provides a subtle challenge, not so much to Milton, Donne and other predecessors in the tradition of religious poetry, as to the secular use of biblical symbolism that many of her contemporaries were turning to in their art.

Going back now to Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (1629), there are interesting points of comparison. The "Nativity Ode", as it is popularly called, is Milton's first English poem on a religious theme, written when he was a young man of twenty-one. In order to indicate its importance in his spiritual and poetic development he placed it first in his 1645 and 1673 *Poems*. This early poem marks Milton's move toward a more serious and spiritual conception of poetry. Like "A Birthday" it evokes the redemptive promise of Christian faith. And like Rossetti's poem it is decidedly Protestant in character, for it provides a scenario of redemption,

rather than an icon. The object of adoration is absent: there is no physical flesh-and-blood Jesus. The glimpses of the baby (ll. 29; 151) are brief and quickly dissolve into a reminder of his destiny. The infant is the Christ "[t]hat on the bitter cross / Must redeem our loss" (ll. 152-53). Finally, the poem ends in a note of promised redemption and resurrection. As in "A Birthday" (l. 5), redemption is heralded by the rainbow (l. 143), and the halcyon days of Nature are made to embody the power of Christ. What emerges in both poems is a sense of mystery by which a passionate aesthetic colouring is developed, not for its own sake, but as a heightened response to religious doctrine.

6. "Goblin Market" and the Question of Interpretation

> Who knows upon what soil they fed
> Their hungry thirsty roots? (GM 44-45)

"Goblin Market" raises the question as to the nature and origin of the goblins' fruits. This is indirectly a question about interpretation itself. In order to know whether the fruit is good, one needs to know where it comes from. Also, when Lizzie asks her sister to make "much of" her (GM 472), this could be taken as a literal invitation to interpret. And when Laura finally collapses after her climactic meal, this is followed by the question: "Is it death or is it life?" (GM 523). In many ways, then, Rossetti's enigmatic poem challenges, invites, or even demands interpretation.

The problematic and elusive nature of "Goblin Market" cannot be overemphasised. It is my contention that it reaches into the very heart of Rossetti's literary enterprise, in which poetry and religion have the same aims. In her view of the Word, the reward for reading the Bible was not earthly *jouissance* but eternal joy, and the punishment for misreading was eternal perdition. So the question of correct interpretation was significant. In what follows, I shall argue that "Goblin Market", although typically regarded as a secular poem, has much religious depth. It both exemplifies and expresses Rossetti's spiritual aesthetic, and her concern that nature must be scrutinised for its moral and sacred meanings.

Paradoxically, the vivid evocation of taste and smell in "Goblin Market" has often been taken to celebrate temptation. Despite the poem's moralising closure, one contemporary critic wrote that readers could almost forgive "poor Laura" for yielding to the seductions, while another declared Rossetti's goblin poem to be "purely and completely a work of

art".[62] And in Eric S. Robertson's anthology of *English Poetesses* (1883) the poem is described as a "delicious dream". This is a definition that Rossetti herself protested against with great indignation: "Why 'delicious' dream? Nothing can be further from my intention (*see* original text!)".[63]

Despite Rossetti's firm religious convictions, critics have persisted in regarding the "fruit forbidden" (GM 479) as a diet that the poet would have recommended. According to Jeanie Watson, for example, the reader learns that "maidens have the right to buy the fruit of 'Goblin Market'". Watson claims that "Goblin Market" is an extremely subversive poem, where the "immoral moral" triumphs, so that imagination exalts over convention (Watson 1984: 75). Similarly, in Angela Leighton's (1992: 140) analysis, Rossetti gives women "the aesthetic playfulness, the freedom of art for art's sake, which had seemed to be reserved for men".

Katherine J. Mayberry (1989) and Mary Arsenau (1993) seem to be on much firmer ground when they relate Rossetti's poem, not to immorality or art for art's sake, but to Rossetti's *moral* aesthetic. Mayberry argues that "Goblin Market" is about the need to give clear moral order to the disordered creations of the artistic imagination. And for Arsenau, the poem is "a paradigm of the kind of symbolic interpretation in which Rossetti wanted her readers to engage". She goes so far as to see the process of moral reading as one of the poem's "organizing features" (Arsenau 1993: 79). Developing these readings, I shall argue here that "Goblin Market" expresses and advocates a hermeneutics which encourages the individual to read things and events in a spiritual light. In this context, Rossetti's allusions to Milton and other Christian sources point to the significance which she as a devout Christian attributed to a correct interpretation of the Word.

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62 A contemporary critic in the *Athenaeum* as quoted in Jan Marsh 1994: 282 and an anonymous reviewer of an article titled "Review of Goblin Market and Other Poems" in *British Quarterly Review* 36, 1862: 230.
63 From a letter by Christina Rossetti to Eric S. Robertson, dated August 27, 1883. See Troxell 1937: 170, Rossetti's emphasis.

> Our grapes fresh from the vine,
> Pomegranates full and fine,
> Dates and sharp bullaces,
> Rare pears and greengages,
> Damsons and bilberries,
> Taste them and try:
> Currants and gooseberries,
> Bright-fire-like barberries,
> Figs to fill your mouth,
> Citrons from the South. (GM 20-29)

From the outset of "Goblin Market" temptation is presented in the form of catalogues. The first stanza lists no fewer than twenty-nine types of goblin fruit. Miriam Sagan (1980: 71) notes that the list is the poem's major rhetorical device, and in her view it is used to suggest abundance. The effect upon the senses is indeed overwhelming. The lists construct a vision of a bounteous and abundant nature that is seductive in its infinite variety. But while the common reading has seen the fruits listed as together symbolic of the "fruit forbidden" (GM 479) of Eve's fall in Eden, thus rendering the poem wholly allegorical, the case is not quite so simple. To assume that these meticulously structured lists are strictly symbolic is to underrate the breadth and clarity of Rossetti's poetic vision. Had she simply wanted to her fruit to symbolise forbidden temptations, a single apple would have done the job. As I see it, Rossetti's lists of overwhelming sensuality are relevant within the context of her spiritual aesthetic. In cataloguing the goblin fruits, she seems to suggest that revelling in the variety in the natural world is dangerous because it may confuse moral judgment, thereby imperilling salvation.

Her lavish catalogues of natural phenomena may, at first, seem to be a typical example of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, aiming to represent nature faithfully and with precision of detail. Jerome Bump (1980), for example, observes that her fruits are plump, thickset, colourful, bright, golden,

velvety - the clarity and vivid colours resembling Pre-Raphaelite art and painting. According to Sylvia Bayley Shurbutt (1992: 41) "the vivid words Rossetti employs to describe the fruit and, most important, uses in Laura's own description of her voluptuous feast are rich with Pre-Raphaelite colour, the details as brilliant as a Burne-Jones painting". Yet whereas the main aim of many of the Pre-Raphaelites was ultimately to depict nature so as to produce an aesthetically pleasing effect, Rossetti's natural depiction was coloured by a religiously motivated moral doctrine. For her the desire to celebrate the variety of nature clashed with the necessity of viewing nature morally. So even if Pre-Raphaelitism did influence Rossetti's depiction of natural variety, it was religion that informed her sense of *interpretation* with regard to the natural world.

In "Goblin Market" both Laura and Lizzie are initially capable of morally proper interpretations and decisions. It is actually Laura, not Lizzie, who first points out that they "must not look at goblin men", and "must not buy their fruits" (GM 42-43). But then she does take a look at the goblins and sees their multitude: "One hauls a basket, / One bears a plate, / One lugs a golden dish / Of many pounds weight" (GM 56-59). It is the sheer variety and number of the goblins and their fruits that confuse her intellectual and moral instincts. She soon jumps to logically reasonable, yet spiritually very distracting conclusions:

> How fair the vine must grow
> Whose grapes are so luscious;
> How warm the wind must blow
> Through those fruit bushes (GM 60-63).

Focusing exclusively on the senses, she allows herself to be blinded by the sensory temptations of the material world. She ceases to look beyond the physical world to the more spiritual and moral issues. The sensuous delights she sees before her lead her to imagine even more such delights in the fruits' place of origin. In my reading, the lavish depiction of fruit is not

only meant to produce an aesthetically pleasing effect. Rather, it reflects the poet's concern that the material world can lead one away from God and serve as a distraction from higher moral and spiritual endeavours.

"Down-Cheeked" and "Velvet-Napped": Seduced by Animism and Artifice

> 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. (GM 5-15)

It is probably not entirely without significance that Rossetti describes the forbidden fruit in terms of plant personifications, as "down-cheeked", "swart-headed" and "free-born". As noted before, the downy cheeks of her seductive fruit recall the "downie" smile of the forbidden fruit that Milton's Eve brought back to her husband (*PL* IX.851).

In English literature there seems to be a tradition by which animistic fruit – at least when coquettishly smiling – represents temptation. As for animistic fruit in general, the tradition is admittedly not as unambiguous. Milton's Eden, for instance, sports creeping vine, murmuring waters and dancing leaves (*PL* IV.259-67). And in Marvell's "The Garden", where "The nectarine and curious peach, / Into my hands themselves do reach" (ll. 37-38), the animistic fruit does not belong to a garden of temptation, but to a *locus amoenus*, a "delightful place" of safe retirement from public life with all *its* temptations. But when it comes to flirtatiously smiling fruit, the tradition does seem to indicate danger. In Joseph Beaumont's "Psyche" (1648), for example, "[t]he dangling Apples smil'd, and seem'd to say / Madam, behold we meet you half the way" (II.16.101-2). More telling still

is Spenser's description of the "laughing" grapes in the Bower of Bliss. In this passage, a temptress sits under a porch

> Archt over head with an embracing vine,
> Whose bounches hanging downe, seemed to entice
> All passers by, to tast their lushious wine,
> And did themselves into their hands incline,
> As freely offering to be gathered:
> Some deepe empurpled as the Hyacine,
> Some as the Rubine, laughing sweetly red,
> Some like faire Emeraudes, not yet well ripened.
>
> And them amongst, some were of burnisht gold,
> So made by art, to beautifie the rest,
> Which did themselves emongst the leaves enfold,
> As lurking from the vew of covetous guest,
> That the weake bowes, with so rich load opprest,
> Did bow adowne, as over-burdened. (II.xii.488-501)

The image of the vine bending under the weight of golden grapes - "so made by art" - illustrates how nature is distorted by artifice, just as human nature could be distorted by entering the Bower of Bliss. The Bower itself is also artfully constructed. It is a "place pickt out by choice of best alive, / That natures worke by art can imitate" (II.xii.381-82). The artifice of the garden is admired for its skill, but condemned for being used to excess. Spenser points out that "mother Art, as halfe in scorne / Of niggard Nature" adorned it "too lavishly" (II.xii.456-58). The stimulation of pleasurable sensations is almost pornographic. Spenser ensures that we get the message by the use of the words "embracing", as in the passage quoted above, and "lascivious" and "wantones", as in the passage below, where a trail of artificial ivy of gold

> Low his lascivious armes adown did creepe,
> That themselves dipping in the silver dew,
> Their fleecy flowres they tenderly did steepe,
> Which drops of Christall seemed for wantones to weepe. (II.xii.555-58)

In Spenser, then, Art itself is not being condemned, but the use of art to stimulate wasteful unproductive lust. So, it seems, is the case in Rossetti.

The goblins' fruit, like art, is on display. It is stacked in baskets and piled on heavy golden dishes (GM 58; 176). To enhance the artificial aspect of the goblin fruit, Rossetti attributes to it an artificial, man-made quality. Being "golden" (GM 102-3) and having a "velvet" nap (GM 178), it is clearly the fair fruit of decorative art. It causes in Laura a "passionate yearning", so that she stays up at night, gnashing her teeth for "baulk'd desire" (GM 267). But it is sterile, as it fails to root:

> One day remembering her kernel-stone
> She set it by a wall that faced the south;
> Dew'd it with tears, hoped for a root,
> Watch'd for a waxing shoot,
> But there came none. (GM 281-85)

If we relate "Goblin Market" to the larger interpretative context of Spenserian tradition, the poem's lists of animistic and artificial fruit come to express the danger of idolatry in sensuous experience: the danger that the pursuit of sensuality and beauty themselves could serve as a distraction from higher moral and spiritual endeavours, so leading to the heresy of regarding nature as an end in itself. Rossetti, like both Spenser and Milton, does have very sensuously attractive passages in her writings, and this sensuousness and imaginativeness may seem surprising. But in both Milton and Spenser virtuousness which is not based on actual experience (and rejection) of strong temptation has no value. One crucial statement of this idea is found in Milton's tract *Areopagitica* (1644):

> He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian.
>
> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat (Milton 1967: 113).

Rossetti would have agreed. Her aim was not to obliterate sensuality and imagination. Rather, like Spenser and Milton before her, she portrays

sensual temptation in order to turn the human passions toward the search for God's grace.

While acknowledging that nature, contemplated typologically, may be a mirror of religious mysteries, she is also concerned lest the material and sensory distract the individual from the higher purpose of achieving salvation: lest an overdeveloped aesthetic sense can distract attention from God. Beauty must sometimes be swept aside in order to experience God. Like many Protestants, she regards nature as merely a sign of God, good only as a stepping-stone to help the individual towards a love of God.

"Sound to Eye" but "Sugar-Baited": Deceptive Ambiguity

> Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;
> Come buy, come buy. (GM 30-31)

The tempter's power of rhetoric and argumentation is well recorded in literature, from Genesis onwards. Following this tradition, Milton's seducer, like Rossetti's tempters, can be regarded as eloquent corrupters, strayed from the right path. Satan's eloquence and the goblins' praise of the fruit reinforce the link between the fall and verbal temptation. There are nasty strings attached to the edibles they advertise.

The fact that the tempter corrupted woman with his speech is a vital point in *Paradise Lost*. He misleads Eve into believing that the forbidden fruit provides divine knowledge and his line of argument is very strong (*PL* IX.532-732). He contemptuously refers to the "rude" and "low" beasts, implying that Adam and Eve are also "low and ignorant": a state for which – in Eve's deduction - the apple becomes a "Cure" (*PL* IX.704; 776). Satan's argument may seem reasonable enough, but as Milton himself points out, it is "replete with guile" (*PL* IX.733). Milton's fiend is an artist with words, juggling with the truth.

In "Goblin Market", as in *Paradise Lost*, the tempters' persuasions are precisely verbal in character. In fact, their customary "cry" is the first activity mentioned in the poem, being repeatedly heard from line two onwards. The goblins' praise of the fruit goes on for stanza after stanza. So it is not the fruit's actual appearance that first attracts the girls. They "hear" it described (GM 2-34), before they actually see it ("Look, Lizzie, look", GM 54). The fruit that the goblins celebrate is not unequivocally beautiful. It is only described as such. As the poem later demonstrates, the goblins' rhetoric misleads people.

Rossetti flavours her poem with a number of sophisticated puns to draw attention to the doubleness and perversion of the goblins' language. This is the case in the ambiguous use of "sound" in the passage where the goblins claim their fruit to be "sweet to tongue and sound to eye" (GM 30). This, in fact, is an open, though widely neglected, allusion to the crucial Miltonic passage, in which Eve, yielding to her tempter, sadly takes the forbidden fruit to be "fair to the Eye, inviting to the Taste" (*PL* IX.777).

In the speech of Rossetti's goblins the delusive character of the fruit is linguistically reinforced, since it is not simply "*fair* to the Eye", as Milton's Eve has it, but more ambiguously "*sound* to eye". The first meaning of "sound" here is "firm", "healthy", but the word's second meaning is "free from flaw, defect or decay", which suggests that the fruit is (morally) good. This makes Rossetti's fruit more deceptive than Milton's. Also, because of "tongue" (related to taste) and "eye" (related to sight), a third interpretation of "sound" (related to hearing) superimposes itself on the word's first meaning, which makes it even more deceptive. In this skilful play with words and syntax, the auditory ("sound") and the visual ("eye") merge, leading to a confusion of the senses. The verbal ambiguity of the goblins' advertisement of their merchandise may lead the poem's reader to suspect that fruits so ostensibly healthy might nevertheless be less straightforward than they are made to seem.

To Laura's ear Rossetti's tempters speak with "tones as smooth as honey" (GM 108). The narrative voice, however, tells us that their words are "sugar-baited" (GM 234). Catherine Maxwell (1999: 82) traces Rossetti's phrasing to poets such as Keats (whose Belle Dame sans Merci fed men with "wild honey"), Coleridge (who in "Kubla Khan" wishes his inspiration could make him seem fed on "honey-dew") and Tennyson (who describes the apples of "The Hesperides" as filled with "liquid gold, honeysweet"). Maxwell's argument is suggestive, but in view of the fact that none of the passages she lists explicitly mentions a "bait", while Milton repeatedly does so, I am inclined to think that Rossetti could have been directly indebted to Milton.

In many of Milton's works the corrupter's sweet words are defined precisely as a trap. The title character of *Comus* speaks with "well plac't words of glozing courtesie / *Baited* with reasons not unplausible" (ll. 161-62, italics added), and in *Samson Agonistes* Delila captures the hero with a "*bait* of honied words" (l. 1066, italics added). So in speaking of "sugar-baited words" Rossetti seems to paraphrase Milton's mellifluous lines about sweet verbal baits.

We know from her prose work that she distrusts puns, figurative language, fantasy and make-believe for its own sake. In Ephesians 5.6 St. Paul warned: "Let no man deceive you with vain words". In *Time Flies* Rossetti comments

> Can a pun profit? Seldom I fear. Puns and such like are a frivolous crew likely to misbehave unless kept within strict bounds. 'Foolish talking' and 'jesting', writes St. Paul, 'are not convenient'. Can the majority of puns be classed as wise talking? (Rossetti 1885: 13)

If, for Rossetti, puns are a "frivolous crew likely to misbehave", so is her crew of goblins. Not only is their speech described as deceptively ambiguous. The versification of the passages related to the tempters is unpredictable as well. The stanza in which Laura meets the goblins (GM 32-47) is also the one in which we find the greatest number of lines lacking

end-rhymes. The rhyme scheme here is less rigid than in the rest of the poem, and it breaks up in similar fashion in the later stanza where Lizzie meets the goblins (GM 343-68), a section which also has no end stops for more than thirty lines (GM 329-62). This matches the disturbing disorder that the goblins represent. Whenever the girls confront the goblins, the ordinary rules of Rossetti's rhyme scheme no longer seem to apply, which suggests the threatening unpredictability of the goblins. Rossetti thereby adapts both language and form to meet the requirements of the point she is conveying.

"Dove-Like Voices": Mistaking the Goblins for Heavenly Messengers

> She heard a voice like voice of doves,
> Cooing all together:
> They sounded kind and full of loves
> In the pleasant weather. (GM 77-80)

When curious Laura approaches the goblins, she thinks that they sound like kind and loving doves. Doves, of course, connote peace and love. But the dove is also the traditional Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit, and as such is invoked by Milton in the opening of *Paradise Lost*:

> O Spirit [...] Thou from the first
> Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
> Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
> And mad'st it pregnant. (*PL* I.17-22)

Introductory invocations to the muse were part of epic tradition, but in line with Milton's Christian faith, his muse comes in the shape of a dove, thus relating it to the Holy Spirit who was active in creation (Genesis 1:2), and who, dwelling in the heart of the faithful Christian, is the source of all inspiration. In the words of St. Paul:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: [...] Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (I Corinthians 2:9-13)

We may further note here that Milton also uses the dove as symbol of the Holy Spirit in the opening of *Paradise Regained*. He describes how the heaven opened upon the Lord "and in likeness of a Dove / The Spirit descended" (*PR* I.30-31). This refers to the dove which descended upon Jesus at the beginning of his ministry.[64] By referring to the dove in his introductory invocations, Milton makes it clear that he thinks of his epics as divinely inspired.

Milton's point was hardly lost on Rossetti, who openly associates the dove with the Holy Spirit in a great number of poems. In "After this the Judgment", for example, she lets her speaker beg God to brood over her "with yearnings of a dove" (l. 27). And in a short poem called "After Communion", the speaker praises the Lord for having made her a nest for dwelling of his dove (l. 8). Most significantly, in her discussion of religious imagery in *Seek and Find*, Rossetti describes the Holy Ghost precisely as "like a dove" and "dove-like" (pp. 116-17).

In "Goblin Market" Rossetti seems to pick up the dove-simile of Milton's invocation, giving it an interesting twist. If Milton urges his dove-like muse to sing, the voice we can hear in the opening of "Goblin Market", though appearing to Laura like that of peaceful and loving doves, is much more ominous, as it turns out to belong to malevolent fruit-mongers. There is dramatic irony here, for when the girl associates the goblins with gentle doves, the reader will normally know that she is involved in a dreadful

64 All four Gospels depict the spirit of God appearing as a dove when John baptised Jesus. See Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10, John 1:32-33 and Luke 3:21-22. Thus, for example, Luke 3:21-22 reads: "When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. / And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased".

misinterpretation. As Mary Arsenau (1993: 85-86) has pointed out, Laura's comparison of the goblin voices with the cooing of doves indicates that her moral discernment has been muddled. The creatures in Rossetti's poem may initially be cooing, but they are neither benevolent nor divine messengers. When they encourage Laura to eat, the goblins no longer sound like cooing doves. Theirs is a cacophonic babble, literally parroting empty messages:

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

As the poem advances, the goblins become increasingly threatening. When Lizzie meets them, they come towards her

> Flying, running, leaping,
> Puffing and blowing,
> Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
> Clucking and gobbling,
> Mopping and mowing. (GM 333-36)

This is a scene that could almost be taken from a movie by Hitchcock. To Laura, the goblins initially sound like harmless doves, but to Lizzie their voices sound like aggressive animal grunts, purrs and whistles. Laura's perception of the goblins' apparent harmony contrasts sharply with Lizzie's morally discerning recognition of their discordant voices. Lizzie interprets the goblins not as benevolently cooing like doves but as "Parrot-voiced and whistler, / [...] / Chattering like magpies, / Fluttering like pigeons" (GM 343-46), birds with a less attractive reputation than the dove and lacking Christian resonance. And Lizzie is right. As it turns out, the bird-like creatures are not muses of divine inspiration, even though they initially may *sound* like that.

"Sweet-Tooth Laura Spoke in Haste": A Hedonistic Approach to the Word/World

When "sweet-tooth Laura" met the goblins she "spoke in haste", and eagerly paid for the goblins' dubious merchandise with "a precious golden lock". She then drops "a tear more rare than pearl" (GM 115; 126-27). The "precious" and pearl-like quality of Laura's sacrifice recalls Eve in *Paradise Lost* who, in Milton's phrasing, sheds "precious drops" at the thought of sin (*PL* V.132).[65] In the Genesis-account, woman makes no such pre-lapsarian sacrifice.

What, if anything, are we to make of Laura's pearl-like tear? As for the symbolic significance of the pearl, Rossetti herself notes in *Seek and Find* (p. 279) that it is "an emblem of heavenly treasures" used by Jesus in the exemplary story of a "merchant man" who, having found "one pearl of great price", went and sold all that he had to buy it (Matthew 13:46). But when Rossetti's "merchant men" (GM 70; 241; 474; 553) sell *their* perishable goods, it is for far less spiritual reasons. And when Laura cuts a golden lock and sheds a pearly drop to pay for their fruit she does so to satisfy her worldly desires and ambitions. As Mary Arsenau (1993: 90) puts it, she is symbolically trading in her heavenly inheritance for earth's desire.

When Laura finally tastes of the goblin fruit, it appears to her as sweet*er*, strong*er* and clear*er* than anything she has ever tasted before:

> Sweeter than honey from the rock,
> Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
> Clearer than water flowed that juice;
> She never tasted such before,
> How should it cloy with length of use? (GM 129-33)

65 Milton's phrasing "precious drops" reads like a derivation of the etymology of *margarita*, the Latin for "precious stone" or "pearl". Rossetti was apparently familiar with the association between the *margarita* or pearl and the tear, as she seemingly alludes to it in the opening lines of her poem on the fallen young woman "Margery" (1863): "What shall we do with Margery? / She lies and cries upon her bed" (ll. 1-2).

As the comparatives suggest, she seems to believe that it is not the fruit of this world. In fact, Rossetti's word-choice in the passage describing Laura's experience suggests that the girl associates the goblin fruit with the spiritual food of Scripture. As Linda Marshall (1994: 443) notes, the lines recall the "spiritual food" offered to those who would feast on God - the honey which the Israelites sucked from the rocks (cf. Deuteronomy 32:13: "He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock"); the wine which rejoices the heart of the mighty man, Israel (cf. Zecharaiah 10:7: "And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD"); and the living water which flows from Jesus (cf. John 7:37-38: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water").

I would add to Marshall's comments that Rossetti's formulation "sweeter than honey" not only recalls the scriptural honey from the rocks, but is a direct reference to Psalms, where the true and righteous words of the Lord are repeatedly said to be "sweeter than honey". In Psalms 19:9-10, "[t]he judgments of the Lord are [...] sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb"; and in Psalms 119:103, "[h]ow sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth". Following Biblical precedent, Rossetti herself, in many poems, relates honey to the Lord, the source of spiritual nutrition. In "Advent", for example, the Lord is addressed as "most sweet, / Sweeter than honeycomb" (ll. 31-32).

In letting Laura associate the goblin fruit with the honey, wine and water of Scripture, Rossetti indicates that the girl makes a dreadful misinterpretation. She is wrong in associating the self-centered pleasures that the goblins advertise with spiritual nutrition. There is even a sense in which she is taking part in a false communion. As mentioned earlier, Rossetti's phrasing "stronger than man-rejoicing wine", recalls Milton's first

humans in *Paradise Lost* who, having tasted of the fruit, feel "hight'nd as with Wine, jocond and boon" and "as with new Wine intoxicated" (*PL* IX.793; 1008). Because of the wine-reference, Laura's meal in "Goblin Market" could be understood as a travesty of the regenerative meal offered by the Lord (Matthew 26:26-29).

Having tasted of the fruits, Laura describes her experience to her sister in extravagant, aesthetic terms. Her description appears to be modelled on the discourse of the goblin-men and their listing of their wares in stanza one:

> You cannot think what figs
> My teeth have met in,
> What melons icy-cold
> Piled on a dish of gold
> Too huge for me to hold,
> What peaches with a velvet nap,
> Pellucid grapes without one seed. (GM 173-79)

In both cases the catalogue of fruits is more than an imitation of nature; it tries to surpass nature by exaggerating the most pleasing aspects. The artificial quality is enhanced by the fact that the fruit is velvety and served on a golden dish. The seedlessness of the grapes may seem pleasing at first, but Laura overlooks the fact that this also makes them unnatural and sterile. She pretends that the fruit is always harmless. She should know better. She had been told of Jeanie's sad fate (GM 147-52) and of the strange sterility of the soil in which she rests:

> While to this day no grass will grow
> Where she lies low:
> I planted daisies there a year ago
> That never blow. (GM 158-61)

But Laura wants to believe that the fruit's wellspring is pure, and she imagines innocent lilies by its brink:

> 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. (GM 180-83)

The word "odorous" here evokes a Miltonic Eden, whose trees "wept odorous Gumms and Balme" (*PL* IV.248), and whose "odorous sweets" and other olfactory splendours Milton describes in great length and detail (*PL* IV.152-71). To Laura, the fruit appears Edenic, but it is revealed as potentially dangerous, at least in the hedonistic use that the goblins put it to.

Over and over again, Laura lets herself be betrayed by her senses. She believes that the goblins *sound* entirely harmless. And when they claim that their fruit *looks* and *tastes* sweet and sound, she believes them. She even goes so far as to imagine that the fruits *taste* and *feel* like the spiritual food of Scripture. She thinks that they *smell* odorous, as if they came from a pure and innocent paradise. She knows that the fruit was fatal to Jeanie, but she does not seem to care. Blinded by the empty promises of material things, she neglects to look beyond the things of this world for deeper understanding. Failing to read according to the spirit, she is guilty of narcissistic allegorism. She turns to the world instead of God, trading in her heavenly inheritance for temporary hedonistic pleasure. Her lack of moral discernment serves as a monitory example, warning against superficial interpretations which fail to see symbolic significances. Exploring the physical world is not forbidden as such, but the search is shown to be futile, even potentially fatal, if the exploration lacks a higher moral aim.

"For Your Sake": A Christian Approach to the Word/World

Lizzie, the moral protagonist, never loses her capacity for moral interpretation. When she goes to see the goblins it is "for" her sister's, not for her own "sake" (GM 473; 479). And when she speaks to them of her

desire to buy their fruits she does not do so eagerly and hastily as Laura had done (GM 115). Rather, she is "mindful of Jeanie" (GM 364). The goblins try to persuade Lizzie to share their meal, encouraging her to

> take a seat with us,
> Honour and eat with us,
> [...]
> Sit down and feast with us,
> welcome guest with us,
> Cheer you and rest with us. (GM 368-69; 380-82)

Their words echo Christ's invitation to the Eucharistic meal (Matthew 26:26-29), and could consequently be interpreted as an invitation to a spiritual banquet. But unlike her sister, who lets herself be misled by their language, associating their fruit with Christ's redemptive blood, Lizzie sees through the tempters' deceptive language. Having heard enough, she demands that they give her money back "without further parleying" (GM 385). She simply refuses to enter into a discourse of spiritual nullity. Unlike her sister, she closes her mouth, refusing to commune with the tempters. She resists the fruits that are sweet and sugar-coated but empty of content. She is steadfast. She does not fall. In Rossetti, the second attack of the evil forces fails, and the tempter is finally conquered.

Lizzie's approach is fundamentally different from her sister's because of their different motivations in dealing with the goblins. When Laura cuts a golden lock and sheds a pearly drop she does this to satisfy her own worldly desires and ambitions. She makes a sacrifice for her own sake, not for the sake of others. Whereas Laura's experience of the goblin fruits is based on self-indulgence, Lizzie's is based on self-sacrifice. She uses the fruit for unselfish reasons, for a higher purpose. If she "has to do" with the goblins, and endures their furious assault, it is for the salvation of her sister:

> Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
> Squeez'd from goblin fruits for you,

> Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
> Eat me, drink me, love me;
> Laura, make much of me;
> For your sake I have braved the glen
> And had to do with goblin merchant men. (GM 468-74)

When Lizzie, smeared all over with antidotal sap, asks her sister to "make much of" her, this could literally be taken as an invitation to interpret: to make (moral) sense of her experience (cf. Arsenau 1993: 90). There is a sense in which Lizzie invites Laura to read or interpret her actions, an invitation which ultimately results in Laura's ability to make spiritual sense of her experience. Lizzie's act restores her sister's spiritual consciousness and moral sense. The poem ends in Laura giving a moral interpretation to her experience. She

> Would talk about the haunted glen,
> The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
> Their fruits like honey to the throat
> But poison in the blood. (GM 552-55)

Laura's temporary misinterpretation of the moral significance of her actions and choices re-enacts the Christian's difficulty in reading the signification of the Bible and of the signs and concepts that have a special significance in Christian theology. Lizzie's wise and unselfish choices, by contrast, exemplify the kind of interpretation in which the poet wanted her readers to engage: an interpretation which gives a moral and symbolical value to things and events, and in so doing, looks beyond the physical toward an analogous spiritual realm.

Laura's initial taste of the fruits produced an evil result, primarily because her approach to that experience was self-indulgent and, if not immoral, at least amoral. The dangers of hedonism are seen in that Laura, having tasted of the goblin fruit, becomes statue-like or "cold as stone" (GM 253) and "silent": a silence which is described with significant emphasis, through three-fold repetition (GM 261; 265; 271), recalling the statues in "The Dead City".

But when the same experience is encountered with a discerning moral eye and a pure heart, as Lizzie approached it, the result can be spiritual rejuvenation and moral salvation, or "[l]ife out of death" as Rossetti herself puts it (GM 524). Thus Laura's failure to scrutinise nature for signs of a greater purpose is redeemed by Lizzie's fundamentally Christian approach to the problem of redemption and salvation. Enacting the moral of the poem, Lizzie reconciles the escapist tendencies of the imagination with its moral potential. Such a hermeneutics was consonant with Rossetti's faith. And with Milton's. "Goblin Market" can actually be seen as *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* rolled into one.

7. "The Prince's Progress": A Journey of Misreading

> Is it death or is it life? (GM 523)

> Is there life? – is there hope?
> [...]
> Does she live? – does she die?
> (Christina Rossetti, "The Prince's Progress", ll. 324; 385, I: 104-5)

"The Prince's Progress" (1866) is in many ways a sequel to "Goblin Market". This long fairy tale poem, like its precursor, enjoys the status of title poem, for it gave its name to Rossetti's second collection of poems *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866). Though it never achieved the popular success of its predecessor, it deals with the same kind of interpretative questions.

It tells of a Prince, who is instructed by a "voice" to go off and claim his bride. Like Milton's Christ in *Paradise Regained*, the Prince has to face a number of temptations. But unlike Milton's Christ, Rossetti's dilatory protagonist is unable to resist the distractions of his journey, letting himself be detained by two women and an alchemist. Meanwhile, the heroine dies of a broken heart because her indolent fiancé takes too long in coming to claim her. The Prince arrives only to see the Princess carried out feet-first to the sound of a dirge lamenting "Too late, too late!" (l. 482, I: 108).

Both Dante Gabriel Rossetti's biographer Oswald Doughty (1949: 289) and his sister's biographer Georgina Battiscombe (1981: 116) suggest that the poem is an allegorical description of the lives of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his model Lizzie Siddal. The pining princess would then recall Lizzie and her declining health, the bride for whom the groom had so fatally delayed. But as always, biography cannot account for all the implications. Later critics have therefore suggested that the poem relates to the more universal issues of hermeneutic activity itself. To Mary Arsenau (1994: 279) it "is primarily concerned with the individual for whom

incorrect interpretation of symbolic events and figures has dire and mortal consequences". Similarly, to Linda Peterson (1994: 222) "the Prince fails as a faithful reader of Scripture – and of the literary and artistic traditions in which, for centuries, Christians have been taught to interpret typologically". Drawing on these insightful readings, I shall go on to argue here that "The Prince's Progress", like "Goblin Market" and many other seemingly secular poems by Rossetti, expresses the poet's spiritual aesthetic: the religiously motivated moral responsibility of writers and readers, whether male or female.

The male protagonist of the poem, the Prince who sets off for the waiting Princess, is first distracted by a milkmaid. Significantly, it is actually the sight of the maid, not the milk that makes him thirsty. We are told that

> A milkmaid loitered beside a stile,
> Set down her pail and rested awhile,
> A wave-haired milkmaid, rosy and white;
> The Prince, who had journeyed at least a mile,
> Grew athirst at the sight. (ll. 56-60)

If Rossetti's milkmaid looks healthy, this is not original. Before vaccination became compulsory with the Act of Parliament of 1853, milkmaids were known for having a good complexion. This was in part due to the fact that their exposure to cowpox gave them immunity to smallpox, so they did not have the "pockmarked" complexion common to smallpox survivors.

If the Prince wishes to quench his thirst with milk, this may seem innocent enough, especially when compared to the dangers of drinking the wine of Spenser's temptress Acrasia or the magic potion of Milton's sorcerer Comus. But a milkmaid is not always innocent. In romanticised fantasy, the rustic chores of pastoral shepherds and maidens were held to be almost wholly undemanding, leaving the shepherdesses and their swains in a state of almost perfect leisure. This made them available as vehicles for romantic and erotic fantasies. As a result, poetry and painting

- from Virgil's *Eclogues* (c. 42-29 BC) to Holman Hunt's *The Hireling Shepherd* (1851) – are full of lusty swains and naughty nymphs frolicking in neatly tended hills and woods.[66] In "Lycidas", for example, Milton writes:

> Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
> To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,
> And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,
> Were it not better don as others use,
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
> Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair? (ll. 64-69)

Folk songs and ballads similarly tend to endorse the idea of milkmaids as objects of sexual fantasy. True, Victorian folk songs typically strike a didactic note, describing a pretty and innocent countryside virgin, whose virtue is put to the test by a man of higher social class, and whose resistance to his sexual advances finally pays out in the form of an advantageous marriage. Typical examples include "Pretty Bessy Milkmaid" and "Mowing the Barley", with its telling verses,

> A Lawyer he went out one day,
> A for to take his pleasure,
> And who should he spy but some fair pretty girl -
> - So handsome and so clever.
> [---]
> Oh keep your gold and silver too
> And take it where you're going;
> For there's many a rogue and scamp like you
> Has brought poor girls to ruin.
>
> But now she is the Lawyer's wife
> And the Lawyer loves her dearly
> They live in the happiest content of life
> And will in the place above. (st. 1; 6-7)

66 The pastoral as a genre of sexual fantasy seems now to have grown out of fashion, but there is still a hint of latent eroticism of this kind in Peter Webber's film *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003), since a subtly suggestive tension can be detected in its depiction of the relationship between the beautiful housemaid Griet and her master Jan Vermeer, a Dutch painter also known for a painting called *The Milkmaid* (1658-60). And according to Webster's Online Dictionary, the term "milkmaid" is still used in sexual fetishism or paraphilia about a woman who supplies milk for sexual purposes (http://www.webster-dictionary.org, s.v. "milkmaid"). The Swedish *herdestund*, literally "shepherd's moment", is a euphemism for a sexual interlude.

But Coventry Patmore's "The Woodman's Daughter" (1844), by contrast, tells the tale of how the acquaintance between Maud, a poor woodman's daughter, and the squire's son leads eventually to her seduction and ends in tragedy. As it happens, this poem had a particular appeal to the young members of the early Pre-Raphaelite circle. It received an eloquent reading from Dante Gabriel Rossetti at the first meeting of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood four years after its publication, and it was one of the poems that he liked to recite from memory (Hunt I.145). John Everett Millais's painting "The Woodman's Daughter" is directly inspired by Patmore, as it depicts a childhood meeting of the young "cottage-girl" and the squire's son.

Almost all of the early Pre-Raphaelites created works about the sad fate of betrayed lovers. Christina Rossetti herself wrote a poem in this vein. In her "Cousin Kate" (1859), the speaker is a simple countryside girl, who has been seduced by a nobleman and abandoned for the sake of her prettier and more virtuous cousin. The opening stanza sets the tone:

> I was a cottage maiden
> Hardened by sun and air,
> Contended with my cottage mates,
> Not mindful I was fair.
> Why did a great lord find me out,
> And prise my flaxen hair?
> Why did a great lord find me out
> To fill my heart with care? (ll. 1-8)

If we compare the milkmaid in "The Prince's Progress" to the country maids in "Cousin Kate", we find that the former is neither virtuous like Kate, nor a helpless victim like her lovelorn cousin. When the Prince finds her she is not working, but "loitering" (l. 56), an activity (or *non*-activity) proscribed throughout "Goblin Market": Lizzie repeatedly warns her sister not to "loiter" (GM 145; 162; 244). It is also interesting to recall that, before the fruit has had its disastrous effect on Laura, she and her sister were "modest maidens" happily occupied with domestic work, including dairy-

related chores such as milking the cows, churning butter and whipping up cream (GM 209; 203; 207). Afterwards, however, Laura "no more" tended "the cows" (GM 293-8), but "loiter'd still among the rushes" (GM 226).

Following Rossetti's logic in "Goblin Market", the loitering dairywoman that the Prince encounters is not a "modest maiden", but a corrupt one. He drinks from her pail, but the sweetness of the drink is delusive, for the narrating voice comments: "Was it milk now, or was it cream? / Was she a maid, or an evil dream?" (ll. 67-68, I: 97). Apparently the latter is the case. As it turns out, the milkmaid is a cunning temptress with an eye for both a good time and a bargain. She boldly asks the Prince for the following fee:

> You may give the full moon to me;
> Or else sit under this apple-tree
> Here for one idle day by my side. (ll. 80-82, I: 97)

In Packer's creative analysis (1963a: 199), the Prince is given the choice between offering the maid either pregnancy (the full moon) or sexual dalliance under the apple tree. Less fancifully, however, if we choose simply to regard the gift of the moon as an example of the impossible, the shameless maid leaves the Prince with a Hobson's choice: he can have a "one-night stand" or appear ungrateful and leave. A similar choice is offered in Rossetti's "Ballad" (1854):

> Come hither and play with me
> For I am lonesome and I am tired
> Underneath the apple tree. (ll. 2-4, III: 225)

In this ballad the true Christian is not lured away from the right track by tempting cupidity and idleness. The pilgrim of "The Prince's Progress", however, forgets about his quest, preferring the apple tree of casual sex to the alternative of full commitment to his promised spouse. The narrator tells us that "he would have gone, but he stayed instead" (l.70, I: 97).

The Prince, as the title implies, can be taken to correspond to Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and, indeed, the heroes of countless ballads and quest romances. But contrary to precursors such as Spenser's Red Cross Knight, Bunyan's good Christian or Milton's Christ, Rossetti's Prince forgets about his quest and falls for the temptation of indulging in soul-destroying pleasure. Like the hireling shepherd in Hunt's painting,[67] the Prince is led astray by earthly delights, choosing embraces and idleness under the wrong apple-tree:

> So he stretched his length in the apple-tree shade,
> Lay and laughed and talked to the maid,
> Who twisted her hair in a cunning braid
> And writhed it in shining serpent-coils,
> And held him a day and night fast laid
> In her subtle toils. (ll. 91-96, I: 97)

The Prince seems unaware of any symbolic clues as he blissfully relaxes under the apple tree. The reader will know that the apple is iconographically associated with temptation, disobedience, the Garden of Eden and the Fall. But when the Prince sees the shady apple tree and a maid with serpentine hair, he fails to see that the scene represents earthly temptation. He does not see the similarity between the maiden's hair and the serpent in the garden, nor does he make a connection between the apple and the forbidden fruit. The Prince clearly picks the wrong tree for, as the poem tells us, the true Tree of Life is elsewhere: the Bride's "tree of life drooped from the root" (l. 260, I: 102).

In the familiar passage from Canticles, the happy Bride sits with her Bridegroom under the pleasurable shade of an apple-tree. But in "The Prince's Progress" the apple-tree of love takes on a totally different meaning, as the tardy "Bridegroom" chooses to forget about his "Bride" (l. 329), amusing himself instead with the false pleasures of another woman under the wrong apple-tree. There is dramatic irony here for, unlike the

67 *The Hireling Shepherd* has, in fact, been mentioned as a possible pictorial inspiration for "A Prince's Progress" (Peterson 1994).

reader, the Prince does not recognise the danger. He fails to interpret the maid's invitation as a moral temptation. This reveals the Prince's failure to see the deeper significance of the actions and figures of this world.

As for the second temptation of his journey, the elixir that the Prince wants to bring back to his Princess, it is clearly a sham. It is implied in a bracketed aside that the old alchemist "mistook or lied" (l. 248, I: 102) about its effect. In any event, the elixir did not do the alchemist himself any good. Though he drank his fill of the broth, "the old crab" was eventually "nipped" (l. 241, I: 102) by death. The Prince fills his phial to give to the Princess, but given the death of the alchemist, he is wrong to assume that it is an Elixir of Life.

As for the third interruption of the journey - the woman that saves the Prince from drowning in the river - she seems kind and innocent enough. But while he lets himself be pampered by this woman and her handmaids, the Bridegroom forgets his promises to his true Bride. "Had he [but] stayed to weigh and to scan" (l. 355, I: 105), the narrator laments, but the Prince is blind and deaf to what is happening around him.

Making conscious use of allusions - with references to Canticles, Bunyan, Milton and Hunt among others - Rossetti employs major literary and pictorial works as touchstones by which she comments on and measures the achievement of her protagonist. As it turns out, the pilgrim in "The Prince's Progress" is an anti-hero: a 'sluggard' of 'purpose weak' (ll. 112; 47, I: 96). Ironically, his titular 'progress' turns out to be a lack of moral progress. Unlike Bunyan's good Christian or Milton's Christ, Rossetti's pilgrim is led astray from the right path: first by an invitation to pleasure and idleness, then by the false promise of eternal life, and finally by the prospect of a carefree existence in the arms of a woman other than his fiancée. His pilgrimage is fatal because it misses the moral mark. The poem's verdict is:

Let him sow, one day he shall reap,
Let him sow the grain.
"When there blows a sweet garden rose,
Let it bloom and wither if no man knows:
But if one knows when the sweet thing blows,
Knows, and lets it open and drop,
If but a nettle his garden grows
He hath earned the crop". (ll. 269-76, I: 102)

A good harvest will be denied the Prince, who will reap only what he sows. He lacks moral purpose, and creates a "garden of nettles". His reluctance is all the more serious, as he knows that he has a bride to claim, but lets her fade away. The tragedy could have been avoided had the Prince taken greater responsibility to probe the spiritual and moral dimensions of his journey.

For Rossetti nature is a mirror of spiritual mysteries. She was not only schooled in the figural tradition of religious iconography extending back to the Middle Ages and Renaissance. She was also, as Gisela Hönnighausen (1972: 1-15) has shown, familiar with the emblematic Victorian "language of flowers".[68] In Rossetti's philosophy, flowers are endowed with didactic ability. In her poem "I have a message unto Thee" she explains that

They show us symbols deep
Of how to sow and reap;
They teach us lessons plain
Of patient harvest gain.
They still are telling of
God's unimagined love. (ll. 91-96, III: 237)

Similarly, in a poem called "Consider the Lilies of the Field" (1853) she explains how

Flowers preach to us if we will hear:
The rose saith […]

68 For articles on Rossetti's floral symbolism, see also Goody 1990: 133-52 and Haass 1998: 241-68.

> The poppy saith […]
> The lilies say […]
> Men scent our fragrance on the air,
> Yet take no heed
> Of humble lessons we would read. (ll. 1-2; 6; 11; 15-17, I: 76)

This flower-imagery recurs in "The Prince's Progress", for around the waiting Princess "lilies and rosebuds […] red and white poppies grow" (ll. 25; 31, I: 95-96). But the Prince does not listen to what the flowers "preach". As a consequence, even his farewell-gift to the dead Princess is inappropriate, so that her attendants feel compelled to remark: "Your roses are too red: / Let be these poppies, not for you / Cut down and spread." (l. 538-40, I: 110). And this is how the poem ends, as if to underline the point that the Prince, until the end, fails to see any deeper spiritual significance in the actions and figures of this world.

For Rossetti the attempt to see moral and spiritual significance in physical signs is crucial to right action in this world, and a fundamental part of the Prince's pilgrimage, and by extension of any individual's journey towards salvation. Her poem shows the fatal consequences of overlooking the moral significance invested in nature. While the irresponsible Prince is distracted from his pilgrimage, his Bride fades away. But the Prince is not the only guilty party in this story of interpretative neglect. The Princess is wrong, too, for she wastes her life waiting for an earthly lover, ignoring the demands of spiritual growth. She languishes

> As a lily drooping to death,
> As a drought-worn bird with failing breath,
> As a lovely vine without a stay,
> As a tree whereof the owner saith,
> 'Hew it down today'. (ll. 386-90, I: 105-6)

The passage contains multiple scriptural references: "the lily of the valley" (Song of Songs 2:1-3), the "singing bird" (Song of Songs 2:10-12) and "the living vine" (John 15:5). As for the lily and the song-bird, they are (as noted

before) images that Rossetti identified with Christ. As for the third image, that of the vine, it is used by Jesus in the parable in John:

> I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15: 5-6)

Jesus explains that the true believer is a branch of the living vine. While those that take root in the world wither, those who are grafted into Christ shall be fruitful. In "The Prince's Progress", however, the lily is drooping, the bird is out of breath and the vine lacks support. Rossetti's inversion of the Christian references suggests that the passive Princess fails to act as a true believer. The poem's second verdict, "Hew it down today", is a direct reference to Matthew 7:19: "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire". This scriptural allusion, too, reveals a criticism regarding the passive Princess. She is like a fruitless tree that is rightfully "hewn down" following the logic of Jesus' sermon on the Mount. As Dawn Henwood puts it, "the Prince may be a poor reader, but the bride hardly even opens her eyes" (1997: 83-94). Because of her passivity, the Princess is morally responsible for her own spiritual barrenness. So the final effect of "The Prince's Progress" is actually to renounce the perversely irresponsible and selfish mentality of *both* of its central characters. While the Prince fails to recognise and resist the moral temptations of his journey, his fiancée does not even bother to look for signs invested in nature. By focusing instead on their own enjoyment (as does the Prince) and suffering (as does the Princess), both of them turn their attention away from God. The important point to Rossetti, then, is not whether a Christian is male or female but that he or she is able to interpret correctly such things as moral temptation, and to act as a true believer. The implications of Rossetti's emphasis on the egalitarian nature on Christian salvation will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

8. Summary

Christina Rossetti, like many of her contemporaries, was struggling for certainty in a world seemingly determined to subvert all traditional doctrines and to undermine all accepted truths: a world of increasing fragmentation. Her poetry documents the process through which dissatisfaction, confusion and despair are transformed into a positive, coherent condition. The outlook of Rossetti, who inherited theological and aesthetic principles from St. Augustine and the Tractarian movement, is both poetic and religious, aesthetic and ethic. Rightly practised, the poetic act turns nature into artefact, the transient, temporary and mortal into something permanent and divine. It creates sense from nonsense, unity out of ambiguity. In Rossetti the agonies and anxieties of modern consciousness are transformed through the poetic process into something pure.

So it was ultimately religion that was the dominant epistemology for both Milton and Rossetti. Both were devout Protestants with a deeply moral outlook on the world. Although representing what could be seen as extreme ends of Protestantism, they share a great number of religious and aesthetic beliefs and values. The Bible was the doctrinal source for both and their poetic dramatisations of worldly temptation belong to a long Christian tradition in English literature. Their common attitude towards the uses of language is based in a firm Protestant belief in the primacy and absolute truth of Scripture, the importance of the individual's interpretation of the Word, and the sacramental power of God's promise. Rossetti's preoccupation with the emotional and spiritual reality of her text corresponds to the concern of Milton with the poet's responsibility to write "true poetry" for the glory of God. Both saw poetic abilities as inspired gifts from God, gifts to be used with moral responsibility and hermeneutic sensibility.

The Miltonic influence was not incompatible with the Tractarian and other literary strains that modeled Rossetti's art. Her poetry is deeply rooted in the tradition of Protestant poetry with its emphasis on sacramental symbolism: the belief that the material world is an analogy of the spiritual world. In adopting the Tractarian model of analogising she provides a subtle challenge to the aesthetic tendencies in Victorian England, including the second generation of Pre-Raphaelites. An examination of some of the poems in her production confirms this impression.

In a great number of poems Rossetti's fruit is artfully displayed in Pre-Raphaelitic fashion. One need only think of the sun-red apples, nectarines, peaches and ripe plums that along with other luscious fruit are idealised in "The Dead City" and glorified even more bountifully in "Goblin Market". But when Rossetti uses the kind of artificially perfect and aesthetically pleasing nature imagery familiar from Pre-Raphaelite contexts it is for orthodox purposes. Either she transforms the ostentatious fruits into art according to the Tractarian model as in "A Birthday" and "A Better Resurrection", so that poetry becomes a sacramental union with Christ. Or she demonstrates the fatal results of irresponsible self-indulgence as in "The Dead City", "Goblin Market" and "The Prince's Progress". She shows that self-indulgence leads to corruption, death and decay, thereby correcting the Pre-Raphaelites' departure from the sacramental aesthetics of the first-generation of Brothers.

Rossetti's poetry and prose, including her so-called secular verse, has a fairly uniform emphasis. The groundwork for much of her work is the irrepressible belief in the power of God's Word and the value of renouncing the non-spiritual satisfactions of this world in favour of mediating the Word through her own verbal art. She instructs her readers in the dangers of succumbing to temptation, by using symbols which bear much weight in Christian tradition, and are extrapolated from Genesis along with renderings of the Fall myth transmitted through Christian

literature and art. Milton turns out to be a significant segment in the long tradition to which her work belongs.

Much of Rossetti's poetry dramatises a Christian's spiritual journey from emptiness, estrangement and confusion to enlightenment and redemption: to metaphorical union with God. The act of interpretation becomes a spiritual quest, an interior journey towards spiritual regeneration and understanding of his Word. Rightly practised, the poetic act is sacramental: it transforms, regenerates and unifies. As we shall see in the following chapter, such a view of poetry as a means of transformation - though seemingly conservative - can bring about some surprising ideological effects.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROSSETTI, MILTON AND THE WOMAN QUESTION

1. Prospectus

As we saw in Chapters One and Two the feminist criticism of the late twentieth century focused attention on the ways in which Christina Rossetti's work engages with gender-issues. The present chapter returns to that discussion, because the position of women in nineteenth century ideology is directly relevant to a reading of "Goblin Market", even if some of the feminist arguments are open to question or modification.

When Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar placed Rossetti's poetry firmly within the "Aesthetics of Renunciation" (1979: 539-80), they said that Rossetti, banqueting on bitterness, "must bury herself alive in a coffin of renunciation" (p. 575). Their thesis that a self-abnegating Rossetti stifled her creative potential was picked up by many early feminist scholars. In speaking of Rossetti's "art of self-postponement" (Blake 1983), her "poetry of endurance" (Rosenblum 1986), and her "language of exclusion" (Leder, Sharon and Abbott 1987), they suggested that her work is an instrument for artistic renunciation, a way of accepting woman's place as defined by patriarchy.

But many woman writers had a more complicated relationship to the male tradition of literature than such negative formulations would suggest. As Nancy Armstrong argues in *Desire in Domestic Fiction* (1987), women

did not lose status or remain without power in the Victorian period. Women's writing, particularly fiction, actually flourished, creating an important cultural space. Women were major contributors to Victorian literary culture in terms of sheer numbers, and sometimes in terms of recongised literary merit. Many women, like the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot, became successful writers. And Christina Rossetti herself, in writing over one thousand poems and over two thousand pages of devotional commentary, insisted on woman's right to speak and be heard in both literary and religious discourse.

Later Rossetti critics have increasingly focused on the subversive elements in Rossetti's work. Sylvia Bayley Shurbutt (1992), for example, asserts that "Goblin Market" is a creative revision of the traditional Christian myth of Fall and Redemption, a subtle but "conscious effort to turn biblical and Miltonic myth, with its misogynistic intent, into heroic affirmation of the female Christ-like principle of loving self-sacrifice and creative self-assertion through rebirth and resurrection" (p. 40). Even Anthony Harrison, who approaches the intertextuality of Rossetti's work from a historical rather than feminist point of view, has emphasised the revisionary element in her achievement. In a book-chapter entitled "Renunciation as Intervention" Harrison, though on the one hand arguing that "Christina Rossetti wrote her works from a genuinely marginalized ideological position, that is, a position fundamentally opposed to the moral, economic, and political values that effectively dominated her culture" (Harrison 1198: 125), on the other hand goes on to position her as a social critic, who "vigorously rejects the patriarchal values dominant in Victorian England" (p. 128). In this reading her "rhetoric of orthodoxy" gradually modulates into a "rhetoric of resistance" (p. 134).

Within twenty years, then, the image of Rossetti has oscillated from that of a woman whose talents were restricted by her ideological conformity to that of a radical revisionist. But still more recently, critics have begun to question the claim that Rossetti was engaged in subversive

feminist critique. In *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (1999) Diane D'Amico recognises Rossetti as "a complex woman poet who changed and developed in response to her faith, her gender, and her time, and who therefore can not be easily classified as Victorian saint or frustrated woman or subversive feminist" (p. 17). And Kathleen Vejvoda (2000) openly challenges the assumption that Milton's influence on women writers must necessarily have been negative. She argues that critics, in claiming that Rossetti "either reinscribes an oppressive Miltonic injunction against female creativity, or that she needs to radically revise Milton in order to celebrate female creativity and spirituality" (p. 555), have persistently misunderstood Milton's influence on Rossetti.

I agree with Vejvoda that we need a fresh assessment of how women writers such as Rossetti may have read and used Milton, an assessment which does not oversimplify the complex relations of female readers and artists to Milton and which takes into account his *positive* influences on woman artists. I shall argue that Rossetti is neither "oppressed" nor "revisionist", but that she could conceive of biblical and Miltonic tradition as a vital resource for women, and found creative ways to adopt it to suit her own needs as a woman, poet and Christian. I shall suggest that she uses this tradition to counter what she saw as a spiritually dangerous aestheticism in the artistic productions of many of her contemporaries.

"Goblin Market" still remains my main focus, but I shall be referring to other work by Rossetti to support my interpretation of the poem. I will also try to contextualise Rossetti in her own time, so as better to assess whether alternative ideas about woman's role were historically possible in her lifetime, and the extent to which her ideas about gender roles might actually be original.

2. Rossetti and Woman's Sphere

In western culture and religion, the Genesis story has established and dominated views about gender roles. The question of woman's subordination was a problem that Rossetti stumbled on in the very first chapter of the Bible. From the moment of Eve's creation Genesis assigned woman a certain place in this world, subordinate in some respects to man:

> And the Lord God said,
> It is not good that the man should be alone;
> I will make him an help meet for him. (Genesis 2:18)

The idea of female submission is also implicit in the biblical verdict:

> Unto the woman he said,
> I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception;
> in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children;
> and thy desire shall be to thy husband,
> and he shall rule over thee. (Genesis 3:16)

For a long time the church controlled the formation of opinion, so very much influencing the development of social roles and norms. The subordination of women to men came to be the norm throughout much of church history. For the believer Rossetti, faithful to the Bible, a dilemma arose. On one hand, she thirsted to write. On the other, she was doomed to silence and subjection following interpretations of Genesis such as that of St. Paul:

> Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. / And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.
>
> [---]
>
> Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. / But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. / For Adam was first formed, then Eve. / And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression (I Corinthians 14:34-35; I Timothy 2:11-14).

St. Paul uses the temporal order of creation as a ground for his argument against a woman's teaching or exercising authority over a man in church. Even when the concept of priesthood in the Catholic church was replaced by the concept of ministry in the Protestant setting, women were accordingly excluded from "teaching" and "preaching". This system of hierarchy, though rooted in Genesis, goes against the message of Christian unity expressed elsewhere in the Bible. St. Paul may instruct women to obedience and silence. Yet according to Galatians 3:28, "[t]here 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". Again and again Rossetti battles with this ambiguous legacy.

In nineteenth-century England, as we saw in Chapter Three, intellectual and material developments conspired to cut man off from God. And as the critic Nina Auerbach (1986) observes, "the disappearance of God" (cf. Hillis Miller 1963) made a space that was replaced with the Victorian cult of the so-called angel in the house. The traditional metaphors of the sacred were replaced with secular figures of women, so that the self-sacrificing and angelic woman became a paradigm of renunciatory Christian love.

Most aptly epitomised in the telling title of Coventry Patmore's immensely popular verse novel *The Angel in the House* (1854), the Victorian concept of womanhood stressed woman's purity and selflessness. The ideal woman he envisioned - submissive, decorous and ethereal - became a standard against which every Victorian woman's conduct was measured. She was valued for qualities considered particularly characteristic of her sex: tenderness, domestic affection and submissiveness.

At its most extreme, the nineteenth century ideal of the frail, even sickly female led to a glorification of the dead or dying woman. Edgar Allan Poe pronounced in 1846 that the death of a beautiful woman was "the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe 1984 [1846]: 19). And four years

later, in an answer to Poe's "The Raven", Dante Gabriel Rossetti offered a post-mortem vision of a seductive angel-lady in "The Blessed Damozel" (1850). The Victorian concept of the angel of the house was more than familiar to Christina Rossetti, not only through the haunting angelic women in Poe's writings and in the work of her own brother, but also directly through Patmore, who was her fellow-contributor to *The Germ* and whose *Angel in the House* was reviewed in *Macmillan's Magazine* alongside "Goblin Market" (Norton 1863: 401-2).

Following Dante Gabriel Rossetti's example, many Victorian poets and painters produced sentimentalised depictions of dead and dying women, including poetic and pictorial representations of favourite Pre-Raphaelite subjects such as the drowning Ophelia and The Lady of Shalott dying in her barge. Such works depicted the suffering woman as an aesthetic object, and endowed her with the preferred "angelic" qualities.

In secular Pre-Raphaelite paintings, women could sometimes be portrayed as goddesses, as in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Proserpine" (1874) and "Venus Verticordia" (1864-68). Such female subjects were powerful symbols but not true agents of power. As Frank Kermode observes, woman is merely a "Romantic Image" of beauty: an impersonal and passionless mask-like face (Kermode 1985 [1957]: Chapter IV).

For a Victorian woman espousing Christian beliefs, being an author was a far from unproblematic choice. If a woman was supposed to be subordinate and silent, how could she allow herself to make the kind of self-confident claims for her own creativity that empowered her male colleagues? Milton did not attempt to conceal his ambitions. "You ask what I am thinking of?" he quipped in a letter to his friend Charles Diodati. "So may the good Deity help me, of immortality!"[69] Likewise, John Keats famously prophesied: "I think I shall be among the English Poets after my

69 John Milton in a letter to Charles Diodati, dated 23 September 1637 (Hanford 1946: 27).

death."[70] Female poets had to be more careful in their self-definitions. The most talented literary women were constrained by cultural norms which implied that any intellectual ambition might mean they were sinful. How did the apparently orthodox Rossetti deal with a tradition that, interpreting Genesis (and Milton's version of it) misogynistically, excluded women from the active world? Did she adopt tradition or break with it?

70 John Keats in a letter to his brother George, dated 25 October 1818 (Keats 2001: 133).

3. Rossetti: A Feminism of Her Own?

In the 1850s and '60s, when Rossetti was a young woman, there was a heated debate over woman's appropriate role, and pleas for the removal of unjust laws and artificial restrictions. In 1857 women saw a small change in their status with the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, which gave them legal right to petition for divorce. And the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 (which came into force in 1882) gave them control over their own property. These measures were early steps in the process of democratisation which later led to partial women's suffrage in 1918 and full suffrage in 1928.

Many figures contributed to the woman's movement. Florence Nightingale, for one, was concerned with female employment, and through her own example offered a concrete model of heroic womanhood. Her cousin Barbara Leigh Smith (later Bodichon) and other professional women writers such as Anna Mary Howitt and Bessie Parkes urged women to make themselves useful to themselves and society beyond housekeeping and needlework. Christina Rossetti was acquainted with these women "in the vanguard of a new feminism", as Jan Marsh (1994a: 365-66) calls them, because Dante Gabriel Rossetti had introduced her to them in April 1850 (Marsh 1994a: 151-52). She even contributed to their literary efforts by submitting "A Royal Princess" to the *English Woman's Journal*, founded by Smith in 1857. These connections suggest that she was fully aware of a variety of gender issues.

But was Christina Rossetti a feminist? Trying to define her position with precision is a challenge. And using the term "feminism" about mid-Victorians, as does Marsh in her discussion of Barbara Leigh and her circle, is actually anachronistic. The word "feminism" (or *feminisme*) was not coined until the 1880s, in France only, by Hubertine Auclert, a key

figure in France's suffrage movement. It was not introduced in Britain until the very end of the nineteenth century.

So was Rossetti a proto-feminist, then? Officially, at least, she was far from endorsing contemporary campaigns for female emancipation. She did not, for example, support a proposed women's college at Cambridge, because it was not connected to the church (Marsh 1994a: 365-66). She also declined Augusta Webster's appeal to sign "The Suffrage Bill" in 1878, in a long letter explaining her decision by reference to biblical authority on the distinction between the sexes:

> Does it not appear as if the Bible was based upon an understood unalterable distinction between men and women, their position, duties, privileges? Not arrogating to myself but most earnestly desiring to attain the character of a humble orthodox Xtian, so it does appear to me; not merely under the Old but also under the New Dispensation. The fact of the Priesthood being exclusively man's, leaves me in no doubt that the highest functions are not in this world open to both sexes: and if not all, then a selection must be made and a line drawn somewhere. - On the other hand if female rights are sure to be overborne for lack of female voting influence, then I confess I feel disposed to shoot ahead of my instructresses, and to assert that female M.P.'s are only right and reasonable. Also I take exceptions [*sic*] at the exclusion of married women from the suffrage, - for who so apt as Mothers - all previous arguments allowed for the moment - to protect the interests of themselves and their offspring? I do think if anything ever does sweep away the barrier of sex, and make the female not a giantess or a heroine but at once and full grown a hero and giant, it is that mighty maternal love which makes little birds and little beasts as well as little women matches for very big adversaries. (*Letters* II: 158)

Rossetti's reply to Webster is hedged with ambivalence. On one hand, she is radical enough to believe that female MP's would be "right and reasonable": that is, that women (or at least mothers) should be able to stand for election. But on the other hand,she finds scriptural arguments against female suffrage. As already discussed, many passages in both Genesis and the Pauline epistles could be taken to endorse the idea of separate spheres for men and women (Genesis 2:18; I Corinthians 14:34-35; I Timothy 2:11-14). Hence, no doubt, her reference to the Old and New Testaments here. "I have not [...] gone deep into the question" but "my objection", she continues, "seems to myself a fundamental one underlying the whole structure of female claims [...] I do not think the

present social movements tend on the whole to uphold Xtianity [*sic*], or that the influence of some of our most prominent and gifted women is exerted in that direction: and thus thinking I cannot aim at 'women's rights'" (ibid.). So it was primarily for religious reasons that she did not ally with those involved in feminist campaigns, for in her eyes they were not guided by her own kind of Christian concerns. The fact that she puts "women's rights" in inverted commas indicates that she here means women's rights as interpreted by Augusta Webster and other contemporary suffragettes. That there are such things as "female rights", and that she feels strongly about them in her own way, is clear, for she openly acknowledges the need to "protect the interests" of women and children. She even seems to hope that maternal love is a major force which one day may "sweep away the barrier of sex".

Her apparent lack of support for women's political interests may be disappointing to modern readers, but gender issues do not seem to have been a major concern for her. What really mattered to her was religion. For her, gender was a devotional rather than political issue. And her faith was not entirely compatible with the production of social critique, especially where this would put Christianity itself into question. As she points out in her letter, her most earnest desire was not to "arrogate herself", but to be "a humble orthodox Xtian". Towards the close of her life, in 1889, she went so far as to sign the Women's Protest or "Appeal Against Female Suffrage". For David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood (1998: 8) this suggests that "Rossetti's feminist tendencies were in uneasy tension with the tenets of her faith, and [that] she was not fully able to resolve the conflict".

Judging by her poetry, she was indeed ambivalent on gender issues. In her devotional poems she seems to accept, and even welcome, the idea of woman's submission implicit in Genesis 2:18, for she

repeatedly paraphrases the words about woman as man's "helpmeet".[71] She even wrote a short poem entitled just that: "A Helpmeet for Him" (1888), asserting that "Woman was made for man's delight / […] / His shadow by day, his moon by night" (ll. 1; 3). Similarly, in "All Thy Works Praise Thee O Lord" (c. 1879), she lets the women say: "God makes our service love", while the men answer: "God gives us power to rule" (ll. 171; 174). And in "An Afterthought" (1855), another poem about the "lost Paradise" (l. 7), she refers to Adam as having "the accustomed hand for leading" and to Eve as having "the accustomed heart for love" (ll. 27-28). The dynamic of such poems vividly recalls Milton's ideal of paradisal order between the sexes: "Hee for God only, shee for God in him" (*PL* IV.299). To a present-day reader it may seem surprising that Rossetti should perpetuate the notion of female meekness and subordination at a time when women were working to claim their rights. But her position, like Milton's, can be explained in part by her reading of Genesis: women were from the beginning assigned a certain place in this world, subordinate in some respects to man.

But though Rossetti may have accepted the idea of female submission, some of her poems suggest that she dreamt of something else. In "From the Antique" (1854), for example, she lets her speaker openly express female discontent:

> It's a weary life, it is; she said: -
> Doubly blank in a woman's lot:
> I wish and I wish I were a man;
> Or, better than any being, were not. (ll. 1-4, III: 231)

Apart from displaying the speaker's wish for death, the poem also underlines her wish to be a man. The speaker implies that being a man is

71 The predominant view was that Eve was made from Adam's rib to be his helpmeet as described in Genesis 2:18, as opposed to the view that Eve and Adam were created by God in his image at one and the same time, as described in Genesis 1:27 (D'Amico 1987b: 178).

the second best alternative after death, for man's lot in this world is at least better than woman's. As Dolores Rosenblum (1986: 82) notes, "she said" allows Rossetti to reveal opinions she may have considered but could not as a Victorian woman have held. The poem's title also provides another protective frame against accusations of ungodly female ambition, for it suggests that the poem is not actually a work by Rossetti, but a translation of an ancient text, dealing more with preoccupations of the past than with Victorian gender realities. The words about a "weary life" do have their origin in a translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, but, as I see it, Rossetti readopts them here in the context of a gender discussion, as did Felicia Hemans before her.[72] She may have borrowed this way of "distancing" from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who four years earlier had published *Sonnets from the Portugese* (1850), whose title is deliberately misleading, intended to disguise the intensely personal nature of these love lyrics, written prior to her secret marriage in September 1846 to Robert Browning.

In "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children" (1865), Rossetti lets the female speaker make a slightly cynical comment on the lack of equality in Victorian society:

> "All equal before God" -
> Our Rector has it so,
> And sundry sleepers nod:
> It may be so; I know
> All are not equal here,
> And when the sleepers wake
> They make a difference.
> "All equal in the grave" -
> That shows an obvious sense. (ll. 501-9, I: 177)

And in her sonnet sequence "Monna innominata" (1881), she lets the

72 Betty Flowers (2001: 1128) notes that "to free him from a weary life" is a phrase occurring in the translation of *The Odyssey of Homer* by William Cowper (1731-1800), Book XV.429, and that Felicia Hemans picks it up in "Woman on the Field of Battle" (1830), whose speaker says that some women come to the battlefield "to fling away / A weary life" (ll. 47-48).

female speaker, having first stated that "[w]oman is the helpmeet made for man" (5:14), go on to imagine man and woman as "happy equals" (7:3). It is tempting to draw the conclusion that Rossetti herself, like so many of her *dramatis personae*, did not believe that it was possible to achieve equality in this world, but hoped for justice in heaven. As we shall see in the following section, some of her writings even suggest that she dreamt of revenge in the afterlife.

Woman's Place: From "Lowest" to "First"

In "The Lowest Room" (1856), that poem which reads as a poetic dialogue between two sisters on poetry and gender positions, Rossetti proposes two alternative strategies for women to deal with the assumption that women are inferior to men. One is to accept and make the most of the situation; the second is to brood on injustice. As we saw earlier, the "wicked sister" of the poem, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, is possessed by "[a] silent envy nursed within, / A selfish, souring discontent / Pride-born, the devil's sin" (ll. 171-73, I: 204). She openly expresses discontent, voicing claims such as "A shame it is our aimless life", "Why should not you, why should not I / Attain heroic strength" and "Not to be first: how hard to learn" (ll. 81; 115-16, 265, I: 202-3; 267). But in the end, despite such bitter comments, she seems to accept her subordinate position. Rossetti's rebellious sister, unlike Milton's rebel, finally claims to be "[c]ontent to take the lowest place, / The place assigned me here" (ll. 272-73, I: 207), even if a seed of rebellion survives as she dares to dream of justice or even revenge in the afterlife. The poem ends:

> Yea, sometimes still I lift my heart
> To the Archangelic trumpet-burst,
> When all deep secrets shall be shown,
> And many last be first. (ll. 277-80, I: 207)

The last line is a reference to Christ's words "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" in Matthew 19:30.[73] In having the rebellious sister imagine that "many last be first", Rossetti actually suggests that gender roles might be inverted in heaven, thus cleverly overturning traditional gender hierarchies. But this subtly subversive hint did not slip by unnoticed. Dante Gabriel Rossetti recognised in his sister's poem a "modern vicious style" typical of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and advised her to exclude from her works a poem so "tainted" with "falsetto muscularity" (*Memoir* 460-61). She ignored the advice, but did become more cautious with time. In her later years, she avoided overtly political topics in her poetry, at least, and asserted that "[i]t is not in me, and therefore it will never come out of me, to turn to politics or philanthropy with Mrs. Browning" (*Letters* I: 348), though as we shall see, she frequently returns to this potentially subversive idea in her devotional prose.

In *Time Flies* (1874) Rossetti says of St. Hilary's "unknown" wife that although her name may have been less known on earth than that of her husband, "in Paradise it may well be of equal account". Despite woman's subordination in matters of worldly reputation, Rossetti insists on her ultimate equality with her spouse. Here, too, she refers to Matthew 19:30: "Moreover it is written: 'many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first'" (pp. 11-12). Similarly, in *Letter and Spirit* (1883), she acknowledges that the "rule is prominence for the husband, retiredness for the wife", only to qualify this dogma by adding, "nevertheless, the Source and Author of all rule once emphatically declared, 'Many that are first shall be last; and the last first'" (p. 276).

Earlier in *Letter and Spirit* she does affirm that at a "wife's paramount duty is indeed to her husband, superseding all other human obligations" (p. 43), but then immediately goes on to say, "yet to assume this duty, free-will has first stepped in with its liability to err; in this

73 See also Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30 and Matthew 20:16.

connexion woman has to reap as she has sown, be the crop what it may". As noted by Anthony Harrison (1998: 141), she implies here that woman's choice to marry can be a mistake. So even if her insistence on accepting the notion of female subordination seems to uphold the dogmas of the patriarchy, her repeated qualifications of these dogmas ultimately undercut orthodox notions of male supremacy.

In *Seek and Find* (1879) Rossetti returns to the idea of woman as man's "helpmeet" (p. 30). But instead of using the term in order to emphasise the notion of woman's subordination, she painstakingly compares several biblical passages in order to establish an identity between woman's position and that of Christ:

> [i]n many points the feminine lot copies very closely the voluntarily assumed position of our Lord and Pattern. Woman must obey: and Christ "learned obedience" (Gen. 3.16; Heb. 5.8). She must be fruitful, but in sorrow: and He, symbolised by a corn of wheat, had not brought forth much fruit except He had died (Gen. 3.16; St. John 12.24). She by natural constitution is adapted not to assert herself, but to minister; He came not to be ministered unto but to minister; He was among His own "as he that serveth" (I St. Peter 3.7; I Tim. 2.2, 12; St. Mark 10.45; St. Luke 22.27). Her office is to be man's helpmeet: and concerning Christ God saith, "I have laid help upon One that is mighty" (Gen. 2.18; 21, 22; Ps 89.19). And well may she glory, inasmuch as one of the tenderest of divine promises takes (so to say) the feminine form: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (Is. 66.13). (p. 30)

In Rossetti a parallel can be drawn between Christ-like and feminine suffering. By comparing expectations of woman's behaviour with the example of Christ, she insists upon the spiritual potential, and perhaps even the spiritual superiority, of women (cf. Harrison 1998: 132). And though she goes on to tell her female readers that their pride must be "stayed […] by the limit of God's ordinance concerning our sex", she immediately goes on to remind them that "one final consolation yet remains to careful and troubled hearts: in Christ there is *neither male nor female*, for *we are all one*" (pp. 31-32, Rossetti's italics). As her prose commentaries suggest, her own attitude concerning the woman question seems to be "careful" and "troubled". She compares woman's position to

that assumed by Christ, so cleverly turning the notion of feminine weakness into a statement of woman's spiritual strength. The statement is reinforced by the fact that she also emphasises the egalitarian spirit of the Christian message, where men and women are "all one".

We have seen in this section that Rossetti's remarks about the new earth to come evoke reflections on the egalitarian society that God intends Christians to experience. She transcends gender through emphasising the egalitarian nature of Christian salvation. In her vision of heaven, men and women are ultimately "all one" as in the prose passage discussed above, "all equal before God" as in "The Iniquity of the Fathers" (l. 501) and "happy equals" as in "Monna innominata" (7:3). In "The Lowest Room" (l. 280) and in the prose passages I have quoted from *Time Flies* (pp. 11-12) and *Letter and Spirit* (p. 276) she repeats Christ's words about "many a last being first", thus suggesting a vindication of woman's earthly suffering in heaven. In other words, she is able to reconcile herself to women's subordination to men in worldly affairs by looking forward to an eventual equality of the sexes in the afterlife.

4. Milton: On Eve's Side without Knowing it?

> [Satan, on seeing the beauties of the newly created Adam and Eve:]
> Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd;
> For contemplation hee and valour formd,
> For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
> Hee for God only, shee for God in him. (*PL* IV.296-99)

Milton, because of his deliberate subordination of Eve to Adam in *Paradise Lost*, has often - and still is - held to be an example of what the present age calls a male chauvinist attitude to women. In Milton's hierarchical system, woman was created inferior and is subordinated to Adam because of her innate weakness and ignorance. Milton believed that Satan attacked Eve rather than Adam because he knew she was less intelligent and more credulous. In the opening of *Paradise Regained* she is referred to as Adam's "facil" consort (*PR* I.51), and in *Paradise Lost* as our "credulous" Mother (*PL* IX.644), meaning that she is easily led and misled. This is why Satan is pleased to find the woman "opportune to all attempts", separated from man, whose "higher intellectual" he shuns (*PL* IX.481-83).

Even before the Fall, Eve's lot is to obey her husband and take care of domestic duties such as collecting fruit, crushing grapes and preparing meals and drinks, as well as entertaining guests on Adam's command (*PL* V.303-4; 313-16; 326-349). According to Adam, "nothing lovelier can be found / In Woman, then to studie household good" (*PL* IX.232-33). Her task is to assist and please man. To make things clear, Milton lets her say: "O thou for whom / And from whom I was formd flesh of thy flesh, / And without whom am to no end, my Guide / And Head" (*PL* IV.440-43).

In Milton, hierarchy can be destroyed in two ways: by ruling or obeying natural equals (tyranny/servility) or by failing to obey a natural superior or failing to rule a natural inferior (rebellion/abdication). When Adam admires Eve as one who "Seems wisest, vertuousest, discreetest, best […] As one intended first, not after made" (*PL* VIII.550; 555), Raphael

is quick to correct his praise. He reminds Adam that Eve is not worthy of his subjection. After the Fall Adam realises his mistake and says, "Thus it shall befall / Him who to worth in Woman overtrusting / Lets her will rule" (*PL* IX.1182-84).[74] And at the judgment the Lord tells Adam that he was wrong to listen to Eve, for "Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey […] was shee made thy guide, / Superior". He reminds Adam that "God set thee above her made of thee, / And for thee, whose perfection farr excell'd / Hers in all real dignitie" (*PL* X.145-51).

Milton has received much criticism for his alleged objectification of women. Charges of misogyny go back at least as far as Samuel Johnson, who deplored Milton's "Turkish contempt of females" (Johnson 1905 [1779]: I.157). A few years later in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft criticised him for promulgating pernicious images of women. She objected to his depiction of gender roles, not least in the love scene where Eve meekly surrenders to Adam while he "in delight / Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms / Smil'd with superior Love" (*PL* IV.497-99). She also "read with indignation" (p. 28) the famous passage where the fallen Adam curses Eve, calling her a "fair defect / Of Nature" (*PL* X.891-92). And when Milton lets Satan assert the authority of man over woman (*PL* IV.295-99), a "grossly insulted" Wollstonecraft remonstrates: "I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless […] he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation" (p. 17). As

74 See also Abdiel's response to Satan in *Paradise Lost* VI.172-88. He explains here that Satan is in Hell because he rebelled against God: "Apostat, still thou errst, nor end wilt find/ Of erring, from the path of truth remote: / Unjustly thou deprav'st it with the name / Of Servitude, to serve whom God ordains, / Or Nature; God and Nature bid the same, / When he who rules is worthiest, and excells / Them whom he governs. This is servitude, / To serve th' unwise, or him who hath rebelld / Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee, / Thyself not free, but to thy self enthrall'd; / Yet leudly dar'st our ministring upbraid. / Reign thou in Hell thy Kingdom, let mee serve / In Heav'n God ever blest, and his Divine / Behests obey, worthiest to be obey'd, / Yet Chains in Hell, not Realms expect: mean while / From mee returnd, as erst thou saidst, from flight, / This greeting on thy impious Crest receive".

another example of how Milton grants woman the human right of beauty only, and the role of a child, she quotes *Paradise Lost* IV.634-38:

> To whom thus Eve with *perfect beauty* adorn'd.
> My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst
> *Unargued* I obey; So God ordains;
> God is *thy law, thou mine*: to know no more
> Is Woman's *happiest* knowledge and her *praise.* (p. 17, Wollstonecraft's italics)

Wollstonecraft expostulates: "Probably the prevailing opinion, that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses's poetical story; yet, as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject, ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground" (p. 22).

Christina Rossetti, like any educated Victorian, was familiar with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. But Wollstonecraft's treatment of the Bible as just a "poetical story" would not have sat well with her, and Wollstonecraft's posthumously published love letters gave her a scandalous reputation so enduring that, throughout the Victorian era, advocates of equality of women circumspectly avoided references to her work (Caine 1997). As George Eliot observed in an article on Wollstonecraft, "[t]here is in some quarters a vague prejudice against The Rights of Woman as in some way or other a reprehensible book, but readers who got to it with this impression will be surprised to find it eminently serious, severely moral" (Eliot 1968 [1855]: 170-85). She also observed that no edition had been published between 1796 and 1855. But despite Eliot's vindication of *A Vindication*, even John Stuart Mill, in his classic essay *On the Subjection of Women* (1869), neglected to mention Wollstonecraft's work. In fact, it is only in recent decades that it has been awarded classic status within the literature not only of women's rights, but of social analysis as well. It seems unlikely, then, that Rossetti would have turned to Wollstonecraft for feminist arguments against Milton.

In Milton's epic, woman is admittedly highly polarised. At her best she is as noble-minded as the Lady in *Comus*. At her worst, she allows her head to be turned, so falling into sin, and winning almost as much disapproval as the "Traytress" Delila in *Samson Agonistes* (l. 725). The attributes that go together with "woman" - the few times the word occurs in Milton's epics - are "deceitful", "false", "frail" or simply "bad" (*Samson Agonistes* ll. 202; 227; 749; 783; *PL* X.837). Such stereotypes do not, however, necessarily reflect Milton's own views, but belong to the epic genre. In myth, as Alicia Ostriker (1985: 316) notes, woman must be either "angel" or "monster".

Most of the really misogynistic statements in *Paradise Lost* are put into the mouths of evil characters such as Satan (*PL* IV.295-98) or Adam when he is angry and bitter after the Fall (*PL* X.867-908). When Adam calls Eve a "serpent" and a "defect of Nature", he is in the depths of despair. Adam "soon […] relented / Towards her", admitting that there is something "sublime / And excellent" about her (*PL* X.940-41; 1014-15). And although Milton may have had personal reasons for his views on the subordination of women, he did not necessarily use the poem as a vehicle for his own opinions. His version of the Fall is simply based on tradition.

Many scholars have actually commended Milton for his depiction of Eve. Diane Kelsey McColley, for example, praises him for his treatment of the feminine. In *Milton's Eve* (1983) she argues that he consciously fashioned an Eve who exercises free will with a mixture of strength and vulnerability inherent in her character, and that he thereby sought to "redeem" Eve, and woman as well, "from a reductive literary and iconographic tradition, and to establish a regenerative reading of her role" (p. 4). According to McColley, pre-Miltonic poets and painters usually depicted the first woman as "inherently deficient in virtuous enterprise" (p. 10) and blamed her for the woes of the world. In the popular conception of Eve, McColley continues, the first woman was inclined toward sin before the Fall. This was a view that Milton hoped to reform. His portrayal of the

unfallen Eve stands in radiant contrast to the sly or naive temptresses who bore her name in the works of his predecessors and contemporaries. Before the Fall she diligently works at tending the garden and is chaste in her sexual relations with Adam. McColley argues that "[h]er prelapsarian words and acts, including those represented in the separation scene, are not foreshadowings of necessary sin, but illustrations of actual and potential virtue; they prefigure not only a possible fall, but the work of regeneration, in which a fall is always possible but never inevitable" (p. 11).

The way in which Milton develops Eve makes her more of an individual than just an epic character. She is not simply a temptress or a symbol of sin, but a complex human being, more so, perhaps, than Adam. When the fallen Eve tells Adam of her selfless decision to attempt to persuade God to place full blame and punishment upon her, she is neither weak nor evil, but a strong and heroic woman:

> […] both have sin'd, but thou
> Against God onely, I against God and thee,
> And to the place of judgment will return,
> There with my cries importune Heaven, that all
> The sentence from thy head remov'd may light
> On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
> Mee mee onely just object of his ire. (*PL* X.930-36)

Milton's portrayal of Eve as sympathetic, unselfish, determined and strong becomes all the more striking when we compare it to her repeated depiction in western culture and art as a seductress.

Since McColley published *Milton's Eve* in 1983, an increasing number of scholars have countered the traditional charge of Milton as misogynist (Phillips 1984; Davies 1986; Wittreich 1987; Gallagher 1990; Shawcross 2001). If the basic assumption of early feminists such as Sandra Gilbert (1979) and Christine Froula (1983) was that Eve's creativity and voice were silenced by a "Miltonic" patriarchy, later critics argue that it is a mistake to confuse patriarchy with its male-dominated gender

hierarchy, with Christian hierarchy. In the latter, subordination is not a sign of inferiority, but of spiritual strength, and even superiority. One thinks of Christ, whose willingly assumed position of subjection and humility was as a sign of his greatness. It can and has been argued, then, that the Christian tradition in which Milton was writing inherently provides freedom and agency for Eve, because it emphasises the understanding that all rational beings are equal in their responsibilities to God. Eve does have *moral* power, and can be equal to Adam by following God's law. Philip J. Gallagher, for example, devotes his full-length study *Milton, the Bible, and Misogyny* (1990: 171) to defending Milton not only as a humanist, but as an outstanding feminist of his time. And in his *Feminist Milton* (1987), Joseph A. Wittreich demonstrates Milton's support for sexual equality through a careful examination of *Paradise Lost,* pronouncing Milton not just an "ally" of feminists "but their early sponsor" (ix). He not only argues that a feminist discourse relating to Milton is possible, but that feminist readings of Milton actually existed very early on in the history of Milton interpretation. In surveying women's reactions to Milton's works during the years 1700-1830, he concludes that female readers and writers were not stifled by Milton, but engaged him as an authority. He shows that quite a solidly feminist-oriented critical discourse was current from the time of Milton's death until approximately 1750, even though this discourse became obscured and altered as a masculinist critical discourse took hold, deliberately attempting to efface feminist interpretations, so that misogynistic readings came to characterise both male and female criticism of *Paradise Lost*. One could argue, then, that it was some of Milton's critics, rather than Milton himself, who hushed up Eve's ambitious demand to be rendered "more equal" (*PL* IX.823).

5. Rossetti's Eve: Defended and Redeemed

Christina Rossetti was early drawn to the subject of fallen women, including Eve, the original sinner, and it was a subject she returned to in both poetry and prose. Sometimes she dramatises the story of Eve's transgression and punishment indirectly, as in "Goblin Market", sometimes explicitly, as in poems of expulsion such as "Eve", "Bird or Beast", "An Afterthought" and "Shut Out". Regardless of her own intentions, her interest in Eve and fallen women actually places her in the middle of public debates on one of the period's central issues - the woman question.

In Rossetti's work, Eve is portrayed as inherently weaker than Adam, as also in Milton's epics. In *Letter and Spirit* Rossetti declares that Eve diverted her "mind" from God (p. 18) and in *The Face of the Deep* that her "curiosity […] brought sin into the world and death by sin" (p. 520). In the latter work, she identifies "temptation" and "curiosity" as typically "feminine" sins. She states that "[w]e daughters of Eve" should be humble because of "that common voice which makes temptation feminine" (p. 357). Curiosity is "a feminine weak point inviting temptation, and doubly likely to facilitate a fall when to indulge it woman affects independence" (p. 520). This representation of woman as gullible and curious may seem traditional.

But these characteristics represent only one side of Eve's character. As noted by Diane D'Amico (1987b: 178), in Rossetti, Eve is always a sympathetic figure, never a seductress. The early poem "Shut out" (1856), for example, opens with her touching lament:

> The door was shut. I looked between
> Its iron bars; and saw it lie,
> My garden, mine, beneath the sky,
> Pied with all flowers bedewed and green:

From bough to bough the song-birds crossed
From flower to flower the moths and bees
With all its nests and stately trees
It had been mine, and it was lost. (ll. 1-8, I: 56)

In this poem the first woman appears, not in any of the traditional poses – as listening to the snake or offering Adam the forbidden fruit – but as mourning the loss of Eden. In a later poem simply entitled "Eve" (1865), Rossetti again imagines the first woman's sorrow, as she confesses her remorse:

While I sit at the door
Sick to gaze within
Mine eyes weepeth sore
For sorrow and sin:
As a tree my sin stands
To darken all lands;
Death is the fruit it bore.
[...]
The Tree of Life was ours,
The twelvefold-fruited,
Most lofty tree that flowers,
Most deeply rooted:
I chose the tree of death. (ll. 1-7; 13-17, I: 156-57)

Though Eve is clearly a sinner, her touching confession makes it possible to sympathise with her, as do the animals of the poem (ll. 40-65), who answer her "grief by grief" (l. 66). And the fact that the poem is written in the first person hints at identification with the fallen one. As C.M. Bowra puts it, "Eve" is effective "because of the passionate conviction which Christina Rossetti puts into it, and becomes a symbol of all men and women who understand that the evil of the world is their own fault" (quoted in Charles 1985: 125).

If so, the same could be said of John Milton, for both "Shut Out" and "Eve" seem to be modelled on the section in *Paradise Lost* where Milton lets the fallen Eve lament the loss of Eden and everything she holds dear:

> O unexpected stroke, worse then of Death!
> Must I thus leave thee Paradise? thus leave
> Thee Native Soile, these happie Walks and Shades[.]
> […]
> [H]ow shall we breath in other Aire
> Less pure, accustomd to immortal Fruits? (*PL* XI.268-70; 284-85)

Milton may have concluded from his reading of Genesis that woman must be more passive and submissive than man, but he did not deny any woman her humanity or spirituality, quite regardless of her sins. The fact that Eve's touching words are presented in the first person invites a reader to empathise. In her poems about Eve, Rossetti seems to draw on this side of Milton's response to the first woman.

Even some of her phrasing has a Miltonic ring. After the judgment in *Paradise Lost* Adam encourages his spouse, reminding her of God's promise that her seed shall crush Satan:

> [H]aile to thee,
> Eve rightly call'd, Mother of all Mankind,
> Mother of all things living, since by thee
> Man is to live, and all things live for Man. (*PL* XI.158-61)

Milton lets Adam express great love and admiration for Eve, despite her mistake. He even acknowledges her role in the future redemption of mankind. And the language correlates Eve, mother of mankind, with Mary, mother of God, for the greeting "hail, mother of all mankind" recalls the first line of the Christian prayer "Hail Mary". The association is made explicit in an earlier passage, where the angel Raphael hails Eve:

> [On Eve] the Angel Haile
> Bestowd, the holy salutation us'd
> Long after to blest Marie, second Eve.
> Haile Mother of Mankind, whose fruitful Womb
> Shall fill the World[.] (*PL* V.385-89)

And if Milton lets Eve be addressed as "Mother of Mankind" (*PL* I.36; V.388; XI.159), "Mother of human Race" (*PL* IV.475) and "our Mother Eve" (*PL* XII.624), Rossetti calls her "our fair first mother" ("An Afterthought", l. 9), "the great first mother of mankind" (Rossetti 1883: 18), and "the beloved first Mother of us all" (Rossetti 1892: 311).

D'Amico (1987b: 177) notes that Eve, the sinner, is actually a more significant mother figure to Rossetti than the Virgin mother. I would suggest that this can be explained partly by Rossetti's well-recorded resistance to "anything savouring of Mariolatry" (*Memoir* lii), partly by her tolerant view of fallen women. In her prose meditation on the meaning of the Fall in *Letter and Spirit* (1883) she offers a striking defence of the first mother. We need not, she writes, "attempt to settle which (if either) committed the greater sin" (p. 56). Rather than making Eve alone culpable for the Fall, she advocates shared guilt:

> Adam and Eve illustrate two sorts of defection (I Tim. ii. 14). Eve made a mistake, "being *deceived*" she was in the transgression [*sic*]: Adam made no mistake: his was an error of will, hers partly of judgement; nevertheless both proved fatal. Eve, equally with Adam, was created sinless: each had a specially vulnerable point, but this apparently not the same point. (pp. 16-17, Rossetti's emphasis)

She argues here that both sexes have positive and negative attributes. And like St. Augustine and Milton before her, she allots great responsibility to Adam, since Eve was "deceived", while Adam's was "an error of will". But she does not explicitly concede Milton's point about the inferior female intellect. Instead, she explains that Eve's fall was the result of her innocence, boldness, generosity and intellectual curiosity:

> It is in no degree at variance with the Sacred Record to picture to ourselves Eve, that first and typical woman, as indulging quite innocently sundry refined tastes and aspirations, a castle-building spirit (if so it may be called), a feminine boldness and directedness of aim combined with a no less feminine guessiness as to means. Her very virtues may have opened the door to temptation. By birthright gracious and accessible, she lends an ear to all petitions from all petitioners. She desires to instruct ignorance [...] and she never suspects even the serpent. (p. 17)

Eve listened to the serpent out of sympathy. She made a mistake, whereas Adam made no mistake, but simply disobeyed God. This line of argument is also virtually a proposed absolution of original sin in woman. In thus defending Eve, Rossetti was calling in question the age-old tendency to blame woman. If anything, she shifted the blame for "original sin" from the weaker female to the stronger male, for she later adds:

> The meanness as well as the heinousness of sin is illustrated by Adam's apparent effort to shelter himself at the expense of Eve: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3.12). Which primitive instance serves as specimen of that law of sin, diametrically opposed to the Divine law, by which the strong inflict vicarious suffering on the weak. […] "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves (Rom. 15.1)". (p. 84)

In *The Face of the Deep*, she stresses this point again in observing that: "least of all in wicked men can there be any help. Adam seems not to have found one word to plead for Eve in the terrible hour of judgement" (p. 418).

In Rossetti's version of the Fall, Eve is not the only sinner. Rather, Rossetti insists that we are all guilty of sin. As illustrated by the following passage, she believed in hell and the devil as a force within any human being:

> There is a mystery of evil which I suppose no man during his tenure of mortal life will ever fathom. I pursuing my own evil from point to point find that it leads me not outward amid a host of foes laid against me but inwards within myself; it is not mine enemy that doeth me this dishonour, neither is it mine adversary that magnifieth himself against me: it is I, it is not another, not primarily any other; it is I who undo, defile, deface myself [...] my own inherent evil is what I have to cope with. (p. 490)

The idea is implicit in "The Lowest Place":

> Give me the lowest place: not that I dare
> Ask for that lowest place, but Thou has died
> That I might live and share
> Thy glory by Thy side.

Give me the lowest place: or if for me
That lowest place too high, make one more low
Where I may sit and see
My God and love Thee so.

The poem appears to be about achieving humility by seeking the "lowest place", as in Luke 14:10: "But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee".[75] But it is also worth pointing out that Rossetti's words about a "lowest place" and "one more low" in the second stanza can also be read as a startling echo of the lowest depths in Satan's soliloquy in *Paradise Lost*:

Me miserable! which way shall I flie
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
Which way I flie is Hell; myself am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n. (*PL* IV.73-78)

Milton's fallen archangel sees the lowest depths of hell in himself. If Rossetti takes up the idea in "The Lowest Place", and frames it as a first-person meditation, it is to emphasise her own sense of sinfulness. Another Rossettian echo of Milton's "myself am Hell" is found in "Who Shall Deliver Me?" (1864):

God strengthen me to bear myself;
That heaviest weight of all to bear,
Inalienable weight of care.
[---]

75 A major theme in Rossetti's works is the necessity of achieving humility, of accepting the "lowest place". This was also something of a theme of her life, at least according to William Michael Rossetti, who chose the second stanza of her "The Lowest Place" to be inscribed upon her tombstone (*Memoir* 475). A similar renunciatory theme of Rossetti's life is suggested in Kathleen Jones's *Learning Not to Be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti* (1992), a biography whose title is a direct reference to the words "Not to be first: how hard to learn" in "The Lowest Room" (I. 265, I: 267).

Myself, archtraitor to myself;
My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog whatever road I go. (ll. 1-3; 19-21)

In this poetic meditation on evil, Rossetti repeats Satan's words about his internal inferno. Her speaker expresses the same spiritual frustration and mental torment. So instead of blaming Satan or Eve for all the sins of the world, Rossetti's speakers humbly acknowledge that the evil of the world is their own fault.

In *The Face of the Deep* (1892) she not only defends Eve, but imagines her as standing next to the Virgin Mary among the saints:

Eve exhibits one extreme of feminine character, the Blessed Virgin the opposite extreme. Eve parleyed with a devil: holy Mary "was troubled" at the salutation of an Angel. Eve sought knowledge: Mary instruction. Eve aimed at self-indulgence: Mary at self-oblation. Eve, by disbelief and disobedience, brought sin to the birth: Mary, by faith and submission, Righteousness.

And yet […] so (I humbly hope and trust) amongst all saints of all time will stand before the Throne, Eve the beloved first Mother of us all. Who that has loved and revered her own immediate dear mother, will not echo the hope? (pp. 310-11)

If Genesis told Rossetti of Eve's weakness and shame, Revelation told her of woman's ultimate strength and glory. In her commentary on St. John's apocalyptic figure of a "woman clothed with the sun" in Revelation 12:1, Rossetti found hope for all Eve's daughters. Although lengthy, the passage deserves to be quoted in full:

A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. Whatever else may here be hidden, there stands revealed that "great wonder," weakness made strong and shame swallowed up in celestial glory. For thus the figure is set before our eyes. Through Eve's lapse, weakness and shame devolved on woman as her characteristics, in a manner special to herself and unlike the corresponding heritage of man. And as instinctively we personify the sun and the moon as *he* and *she* [Rossetti's emphasis], I trust there is no harm in my considering that her sun-clothing indicates how in that heaven where St. John in vision beheld her, she will be made equal with men and angels; arrayed in all human virtues, and decked with all communicable Divine graces: whilst the moon under her feet portends that her sometime infirmity of purpose and changeableness of mood have, by preventing, assisting, final grace, become immutable; she has done all and stands; from the lowest place she has gone up higher […] triumphant, erect, despite her own frailty. (p. 310)

Rossetti boldly interprets St. John's vision of "weakness made strong and shame swallowed up in celestial glory" as a promise of that woman will finally "be made equal with men and angels". This, in fact, is a reference to Christ's words in Luke 20:34-36 about the children of the resurrection being "equal to the angels".[76] Rossetti interprets the equality promised to the elect in Luke not only as equality between men and angels, but also as equality between the sexes. In imagining that woman finally "from the lowest place […] has gone up higher", she once more suggests that gender equality is possible in heaven.

So rather than explicitly attacking biblical and Miltonic language, she turned to her forebear in order to absolve the fallen woman and, by extension, womankind as a whole. She could conceive of "patriarchal" language as a vital resource for women and self-consciously adopted it for her own purposes as a woman. Ultimately, and perhaps paradoxically, it is her intense Christianity that gives her the authority, however qualified, to envision an egalitarian existence. Her very orthodoxy allowed her to offer a startlingly original response to contemporary gender ideology.

76 Cf. Luke 20:34-36: "And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: / but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: / neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection". Rossetti uses the words "made equal to the angels" in her description of the resurrected in "From House to Home" (l. 166).

6. Woman in "From House to Home": "The Fallen was Lifted Up"

> Midway this way of life we're bound upon,
> I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
> Where the right road was wholly lost and gone.
> (Dante, Inferno I.1-3)

> Once I rambled in a wood
> With a careless hardihood,
> Heeding not the tangled way;
> Labyrinths around me lay,
> But for them I never stood.
> (Christina Rossetti, "The Dead City" ll. 1-5, III: 63)

"From House to Home" (1858), though somewhat neglected by critics, is one of Christina Rossetti's most arresting works. According to Lionel Stevenson (1972) and Michael Wheeler (1990: 161) it was composed under the influence of Tennyson, which would account for much-noted resemblances in metre, language, theme, movement and imagery. No critic, as far as I am aware, has made a connection between Rossetti's poem and an older literary prototype: *The Divine Comedy*. Yet similarities abound. I shall argue here that Rossetti places "From House to Home" against the background of Dantean journey, adopting his theme of Beatrice as a symbol of transcendent love. In so doing, she "corrects" her brother's secularised interpretation of Beatrice as an angelic object of profane love. To trace her uses of Dante will also be to illustrate the ways in which she depended on and revived older literary models so as to challenge the secular trends of her own time.

Both in theme, technique and imagery, her work is profoundly influenced by the great Italian precursor. This is not surprising. As her biographer Georgina Battiscombe (1965: 54) put it, she was "soaked [...] in the Dante legend". She lived in an age where the writings of Dante were being revived and revalued, and throughout her life was surrounded and

influenced by Dante scholars, not least her father,[77] and all her siblings: Dante Gabriel published a collection of verse translations called *The Early Italian Poets* (1861), William Michael translated the *Inferno* (1865), and Maria Francesca wrote *A Shadow of Dante* (1871), a students' guide to *The Divine Comedy.* Christina Rossetti assisted Maria in this work (Rossetti, W.M. 1908: 75; 171), and Dante's influence also has its roots in her work for Grosart in tracing allusions to Dante in Spenser,[78] in her interest in Cayley's translation of the *La divina commedia,*[79] and in her own continuous study of Dante.[80]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was named after the family hero, was one of the most prominent Victorian admirers of Dante Alighieri and his Beatrice. His translation of *La Vita Nuova* in 1861 made Beatrice accessible to the general public. The *angiola giovanissima,* translated as "this youngest of the Angels" (p. 26), appealed to the Victorian mind, as she could be associated with the helpful domestic female angels of Victorian literature. Dante Gabriel Rossetti obviously preferred the very

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77 Gabriele Rossetti was zealously dedicated to eccentric scholarship on Dante and published several lengthy commentaries on *The Divine Comedy,* including *La Beatrice di Dante* (1842) and an oeuvre whose 33-word-title begins as *Sullo Spirito Antipapale* (1832). His works, in which he tried to prove that Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio all belonged to a secret society conspiring against the papacy, were generally discarded as "sublime and perfect nonsense" (Marsh 1994a: 37), or, as Oswald Doughty (1949: 33) diplomatically puts it, they were "bestowed upon an indifferent or contemptuous world". More recently, the Italian writer Umberto Eco, who studied Gabriele Rossetti's work for his novel *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988), has confirmed its essential nonsense.

78 As noted earlier, Christina Rossetti initiated (but never completed) a literary project of tracing allusions to Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio for Grosart's scholarly edition of Spenser's complete works (Harrison 1988: 142-43; Marsh 1994a: 457). Mackenzie Bell (1898: 36) suggests that Rossetti began assisting Grosart as early as in 1855, but his ten-volume Spenser did not appear until 1882-84.

79 Christina Rossetti's one-time suitor Charles Bagot Cayley published a three volume translation of the *La divina commedia* in *terza rima* (1851-54) as well as translations of Petrarch's songs. As a close friend of Cayley, Christina Rossetti was involved in his work (Denman and Smith 1994: 315-38). We know from family correspondence that she had the opportunity to read at least some of Cayley's translations of the *Divine Comedy* in 1850, and that she read his translations of Petrarch in proof in 1878 (Rossetti, W. M; 1908: 15; 76-77).

80 Christina Rossetti studied Dante Alighieri from 1848 (Bell 1898: 16), being enrolled in a series of Dante lectures at University College, London in 1878 (Marsh 1994a: 508). She also wrote a few prose studies on Dante, including the articles "Dante. An English Classic" (1867) for *The Churchman's Shilling Magazine* and "Dante. The Poet Illustrated out of the Poem" (1884) for *The Century* in New York, requested by Gosse.

human Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova* to the allegory of *The Divine Comedy*: the haunting memory of the *real* Beatrice the artist had met in early youth. The drama of the *Vita Nuova* - love, separation, hope of reunion - also stimulated his imagination far more than the *Comedy,* as can be seen in his treatment of the melancholy separation of the two lovers in "The Blessed Damozel". Here the damsel may well be a heavenly maiden, but she is also quite physical enough for her bosom to make the bar she leans on sensually warm. She is human and real, her hair touching her earthly lover's face. And she seems to be yearning for reunion with her loved one on earth rather than with God. What interested Dante Gabriel Rossetti is not the heavenly Love to which Beatrice raises Dante; it is rather the love between a man and woman who suffer separation: a constant theme in his poetry. Setting aside the Christian concerns in *The Divine Comedy*, he uses Beatrice to express unsatisfactory human desires. For him, Beatrice becomes, not the vehicle of divine force, but its replacement.

The emphasis we find in Dante Gabriel Rossetti differs substantially from the values extrapolated from Dante by his sister. Christina Rossetti was concerned precisely with Dante's transposition of erotic passion to a spiritual force. Instead of focusing like her brother, on *La Vita Nuova*, she early found her model in *The Divine Comedy*. As the epigraphs to the present section indicate, this influence seems to have been a factor as early as "The Dead City" (1847), a poem written when she was only sixteen. The Dantean influence is still more obvious in the sonnet sequence "Monna innominata" (1881), with its fourteen epigraphs taken directly from *The Divine Comedy*.

Christina Rossetti's consciousness of her brother's idealisations of women sometimes led her to challenge the conventional representation of women in art. Her poem "In an Artist's Studio" (1856), for example, is directly inspired by his obsession with his model Elizabeth Siddal. Here she openly criticises male artists like her brother, whose study of woman

was obsessive, but in whose art she became an icon, a silent object of desire. She notes that

> One face looks out from all his canvasses [*sic*],
> One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;
> [...]
> A saint, an angel; - every canvass [*sic*] means
> The same one meaning, neither more nor less. (ll. 1-2; 7-8, III: 264)

She concludes this perceptive comment on her brother's work by openly criticising a tradition that idealises and objectifies women, transforming them into "saints" or "angels", images of what men want to see. The male artist depicts his model "[n]ot as she is, but as she fills his dream" (l. 14), so that she is literally trapped within his idealisations.

Rossetti's awareness of the way in which lyric convention could sometimes silence and objectify women is perhaps even more apparent in "Monna innominata: Sonnet of Sonnets" (composed 1881) with its obvious allusions to lyric tradition in its prose prelude. In the prelude she briefly describes the tradition of troubadours, where Beatrice and Laura along with innumerable unnamed ladies (*donne innominate*) have been "immortalized" and "celebrated" by their poet-lovers. But, she is quick to add, these women have also had to pay "the exceptional penalty of exceptional honour, and have come down to us resplendent with charms, but [...] scant of attractiveness" (II: 86). She boldly imagines "many a lady as sharing her lover's poetic aptitude", and goes on to write a love sonnet from a woman's perspective. In making the *donna innominata* a speaking subject, she not only honours the forgotten female poets of the past. In adopting a traditionally male-oriented genre, she actually also subverts the sonnet's gender convention. In Rossetti, woman becomes, not a silent object of inspiration, but a speaking subject. In taking up the position of the silent object, she indirectly criticises idealisation and objectification of woman. This implicit critique becomes overt in the passage where she notes how the male poet "construed" her and loved her "for what might or might not be" (4:6-7, II: 88). In "Monna innominata" woman is neither a

passive object nor a Victorian angel in the house. Rossetti gives her a voice and character of her own, rather than merely idealised charms.

In *The Divine Comedy* Dante wakes up in a dark wood, after which he embarks upon a long journey of enlightenment which takes him through the depths of Hell and Purgatory to the gates of Paradise, where he is finally reunited with his beloved Beatrice. In Rossetti's own summary of the plot in her article "Dante. An English Classic" (1867),

> Dante, astray in a gloomy wood and beset by wild beasts, is rescued by the shade of Virgil, who, at the request of Beatrice, already an inhabitant of heaven, has left his proper abode in a painless region of hell, for the purpose of guiding Dante first of all through the nether-world of lost souls, that, by their irremediable ruin, he may learn to flee from evil as from the face of a serpent, retrieving his errors and amending his ways. (p. 200)

She describes the central movement in Dante's work as one in which "the lost love of earth is found again as one higher, lovelier, and better loved in paradise" (p. 201). This, I shall argue, is a point that she takes up in "From House to Home".

If Dante leads us from hell to paradise, Rossetti - as her poem's title indicates - takes us from a house to a home: more precisely, from a "house of lies" (l. 202) to a spiritual home. And if the *Comedy* shows the journey of a male poet, Rossetti's poem is a mystic vision describing the pilgrimage of a female soul. What is more - and this important point seems to have escaped critics - , the journey leads through purgation to paradise in three passages of equal length, each of them describing one stage on the journey. "From House to Home", like Dante's *Comedy,* can be divided into three parts of exactly the same length. The first part (ll. 1-76) describes a false paradise, ending with a voice calling for change: "come to the distant land", after which a clear shift occurs, and the scenery changes overnight. The second part (ll. 77-152) describes a trial of the souls culminating in the drinking of a purgatorial cup. The last third (ll. 153-228) describes the resurrected angels in paradise.

The poem's division into three parts has echoes of the Dantean attention to numerological significances. In Dante the number three is significant, not only because of the association with the Holy Trinity, but because there are three books in his *The Divine Comedy*, 33 cantos in each book, three lines in each stanza and a rhyme scheme called *terza rima*. Apart from confirming that Rossetti planned and structured her poems more carefully than has sometimes been credited, this finding also indicates her engagement with poetic tradition.

The Dantean structure of "From House to Home" is hardly coincidental, for a similar journey in three parts can be found in "An Old-World Thicket", one of her poems which openly allude to Dante. Its epigraph "*Una selva oscura*" is taken from *The Divine Comedy,* and its first lines, "Awake or sleeping (for I know not which) / I was or I was not mazed within a wood" (ll. 1-2), clearly echo the opening of *Inferno,* "I woke to find myself in a dark wood, / Where the right road was wholly lost and gone" (IL. 2-3). William Michael Rossetti sensed that the poem "bears a certain analogy to 'From House to Home'" (*Memoir* 463). As it turns out, both poems seem to be modelled on the three-part structure of *The Divine Comedy*. In "An Old-World Thicket", the first third (ll. 1-60) describes a tormented wanderer, "[s]elf stabbing self with keen lack-pity knife" (l. 45). This part is followed by an explicit "change" (l. 63), from beautiful song to "all creation / Moaning and groaning wrung by pain or fear" (ll. 74-75). So the landscape in the second part (ll. 61-120) is one of purgation, intensified by a reference to fire (ll. 88). This part appropriately ends with the speaker describing her suffering in terms of a "Mourning […] In foresight of an end" (ll. 118-19). The imagery of the last part (ll. 121-80) is clearly paradisal, for the poem ends in heavenly harmonies and a patriarchal ram with its flock "journeying" together toward the setting sun (ll. 175-80).

The three-part journeys in "From House to Home" and "An Old-World Thicket" have aspects of a mythic descent to the underworld which,

in the medieval model adopted by Dante, is an archetypal journey of redemption, an allegory of the soul's ascent to God. It is an inward journey, a progress towards spiritual regeneration. If Dante's journey begins in a dark wood, the pilgrimage in "From House to Home" begins in what seems like a mystical paradise.

> It was a pleasure-place within my soul;
> An earthly paradise supremely fair
> That lured me from my goal.
> The first part was a tissue of hugged lies;
> The second was a ruin fraught with pain:
> Why raise the fair delusion to the skies
> But to be dashed again? (ll. 6-12, I: 82)

This passage sounds like the riddles that Rossetti was so fond of.[81] But here question and answer are in reversed order: "the first" - pleasure - is a "tissue of hugged lies" of an unmistakably physical kind. "The second" - the place - is a "ruin fraught with pain". And as the clues suggest, this beautiful "pleasure-place" is not as innocent as one would hope. It is a place of vanity and distraction, a "fair delusion" that draws the speaker's attention from the right track. It is not an innocent Eden, but an earthly paradise, a house but not a home.

In *Inferno* I.32-54, Dante finds his passage blocked by three wild beasts and is forced back into the wood. The three wild animals - a panther, a lion and a she-wolf - represent the enemies of the soul: pleasure, pride and greed.[82] Rossetti's garden is full of curious little animals: squirrels, birds, mice, frogs, lizards, toads, caterpillars, snails,

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81 Rossetti wrote several "charades", as she called them. See, for example, "How many authors are my first" and the "Charade" which opens "My *first* is no proof of my *second*, / Though my second's a proof of my first" (III: 25, Rossetti's italics).

82 The imagery may come from Jeremiah 5:6: "Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased". In Jeremiah the three beasts punish people for their sins, whereas in Dante they seem to represent the human sins or passions themselves.

moles and hedgehogs (ll. 21-44). Though described with great tenderness and poetic sensitivity they, too, seem to represent worldly vices that have to be renounced. But because they are small, Rossetti's rodents and reptiles seem less threatening than the fierce mammals described by Dante, and could therefore be considered as caricatures of them.

In this earthly garden, the speaker next tells us, "one like an angel walked with me / [...] / Fulfilling my desire" (ll. 45; 48, I: 83). To biographical critics, this angel-like creature is the man of Rossetti's dreams, the ideal love she never found (cf. Packer 1963a). To Jungian interpreters, Rossetti is here describing the *animus*: the male complement to female nature in the garden of creation (cf. Rosenblum 1986: 87). To some feminist critics, the angel is a male muse inspiring Rossetti's music and versatility (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 571). All of these interpretations make sense. But the angel is arguably more than a muse, whether biographical, psychological or allegorical. If we regard the angelic companion as part of a Dantean spiritual journey, it is more precisely a Rossettian equivalent of Dante's Virgil, the figure of the poet and guide whom we meet in *Inferno*. Rossetti's speaker, just like Dante's, follows a fellow poet, for the speaker recalls how "[w]e sang our songs together by the way, / Calls and recalls and echoes of delight; / So communed we together all the day" (l. 53-55, I: 83). But here as in Dante, this figure can only take the pilgrim halfway along the journey. In due time the poetic companion deserts Rossetti's wanderer, just as Virgil left Dante. He begs the speaker to "Come home, O love, from banishment: / Come to the distant land" (ll. 75-76).

After a while, the pilgrim sees a "vision of a woman" (l. 118, I: 85), a Beatrice-like angelic apparition, described as a Christ-like martyr walking on thorns:

> […] every thorn shot upright from its sands
> To gall her feet; hoarse laughter pealed in scorn
> With cruel clapping hands.

She bled and wept, yet did not shrink; her strength
Was strung up until daybreak of delight. (ll. 130-34, I: 85)

The glorious daybreak, following sufferings involving thorns, gall and mockery, evokes the New Testament descriptions of Christ's passion (Matthew 27-28; Mark 15; Luke 23 and John 18-19). References to "thorns" and a "scorning crowd" can also be found in Rossetti's own description of Christ's sufferings in "The Love of Christ which passeth knowledge", a poem composed one month before "From House to Home" (ll. 14-16; 18). In associating the woman in "From House to Home" with Christ she seems to underline the importance of God as the final guide on the journey towards salvation.

It is not without significance that Rossetti should place "From House to Home" against the background of a Dantean pilgrimage. As Giuseppe Mazzotta (1979) has argued, the journey of Dante's wayfarer is not only a spiritual quest toward a union with God, but also a linguistic quest toward an understanding of his Word. Dante's final avocation, "[m]ake strong my tongue that in its words may burn / One single spark of all Thy glory's light / For future generations to discern" (*Paradiso* XXXII.70-72), clearly shows the central significance that the theme of language has for him. And this same concern with language has also been detected in "From House to Home" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979; Schofield 1988: 303). Both poems can be understood as journeys towards simultaneous aesthetic and spiritual purification.

Towards the end the woman in the speaker's vision chants: "My soul shall nothing want" (l. 154, I: 86). According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), this as one of many expressions of Rossetti's female "aesthetics of pain" (p. 573). Yet it is surely not a pessimistic chant of painful renunciation, but an expression of faith in God's grace. The echo of Psalms 23:1 - "the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" - is clear enough, and "wanting nothing" means "not being in want" or "lacking nothing", as when God provided Adam and Eve with everything they needed in Eden,

and as in "Spring", where Rossetti herself writes of the swallows that "God guides their wing, / He spreads their table that they nothing lack" (ll. 24-25). So the woman in Rossetti, I would suggest, does not renounce all poetic gardens, and she does not renounce authorship. If the poem's first garden has to be renounced, this is only because of its illusions and transience.

In the end, the poem shows that "The lost in night, in day was found again; / The fallen was lifted up" (l. 195-96). The speaker gives up her dreams of earthly fruit and goes in search of fruits of a more spiritual kind. The first pleasure-place is thus replaced by a garden with more heavenly fruits and rewards: a paradise of pruned but strong trees, fed by the blood of Christ. In the penultimate paragraph, the speaker proclaims:

> Altho' today He prunes my twigs with pain,
> Yet doth His blood nourish and warm my root:
> To-morrow I shall put forth buds again
> And clothe myself with fruit. (ll. 221-24, I: 88)

The poem ends in the sacramental metaphor of the vine, anticipating the heavenly reward. This echoes the wondrous vision in Dante: "The tree was renewed which before / Had its branches so bare" (Purgatorio XXXII.59-60). By adopting the Dantean journey, Rossetti transforms pain into beauty through the reshaping powers of her imagination. By poetry and faith she turns the "wilderness" (l. 158) into everlasting beauty, or "ripe eternity" as she calls it in her poem "I have a Message unto Thee" (l. 112; I. 240). The language of eros is thus taken up into the mystical language of heaven's agape - precisely the opposite of her brother's application of the Christian idea of divine love.

To sum up, then, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's art shows wandering frustrated lovers, who never find the way out of the dark wood. Christina Rossetti, by contrast, presents a journey from spiritual emptiness to fullness, from a mundane house to a heavenly home. If Dante Gabriel

Rossetti's work lets woman become the primary object of devotion, Christina Rossetti's involves religious devotion. Woman is not an angel of the house, but of a heavenly home. She is a transcendental figure of divine, rather than domestic, affection.

7. Woman in "Goblin Market": From Victim to Christ-like Hero

> Writhing as one possessed she leaped and sung,
> Rent all her robe, and wrung
> Her hands in lamentable haste,
> And beat her breast.
> Her locks streamed like the torch
> Borne by a racer at full speed,
> Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
> Or like an eagle when she stems the light
> Straight towards the sun,
> Or like a caged thing freed
> Or like a flying flag when armies run. (GM 496-506)

In the so-called redemption scene of "Goblin Market" Laura's cure is described as a development from being "one possessed" to becoming a "caged thing freed". The reference to a "caged thing" is interesting. Victorian woman's situation was often translated by Victorian poets to an image of the caged bird as in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Caged Bird" (1834) and in Emily Brontë's poem of the same name (1848). In *Aurora Leigh* (1857) Elizabeth Barrett Browning ironically wrote that the protagonist's aristocratic English aunt "had lived / A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage, / Accounting that to leap from perch to perch / Was an act of joy enough for any bird" (Book II.304-7). In what reads as a belated comment on such a futile existence, Rossetti herself writes of a caged-in linnet in an untitled nursery rhyme that was published in *Sing-Song* in 1872. The poem goes:

> A linnet in a gilded cage,-
> A linnet on a bough, -
> In frosty winter one might doubt
> Which bird is luckier now.
>
> But let the trees burst out in leaf,
> And nests be on the bough,
> Which linnet is the luckier bird,
> Oh who could doubt it now?

As twentieth century feminist criticism has demonstrated, the nineteenth century in many ways caged women in a politically and culturally patriarchal society. And for women artists of the Victorian era, the image of female enclosure often came to express social anxiety: woman's exclusion from society and art (cf. Psomiades 1993: 187).

In the early and mid-Victorian novel and narrative poem, woman's attempts at freedom remained just that: attempts. The "improper" woman is often punished mercilessly for unmaidenly activism (cf. Senaha 1997: 113-49). And the punishment is usually death, as is the case for the title character in Tennyson 's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832) and poor Nancy in *Oliver Twist* (1838). In Robert Browning's dramatic monologues "Porphyria's Lover" (1836) and "My Last Duchess" (1842), the suspected adulteresses are murdered or executed. In the latter poem, the woman is tellingly transformed into an object of art which her dictatorial husband can control. This is not to say that Tennyson , Dickens and Browning were themselves misogynists, on the contrary. Their depictions could be seen as reflections of Victorian society.

English domestic novels up to the mid-Victorian period tended to represent women as figures of angelic purity limited to a private sphere,[83] a tendency which alligned them with Patmore's sequence of poems, *The Angel in the House* (1854). Female protagonists exist, such as Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1875), and they can of course be a novel's major focus. But for the most part they are constrained by the gender-roles into which a male-dominated society has placed them. Dorothea's literary ambition, for instance, limits itself to copying out texts for her husband, in a relationship that the protagonist herself compares to that between "Milton's daughters" and their father (p. 37).

83 For discussions of the domestic novel see Armstrong 1987 and Fryckstedt 1987.

But the emerging Byronic hero, reinforced perhaps by the depiction of heroic womanhood in Robert Southey's *Joan of Arc* (1796), provided a stimulus to a new kind of literary character: the Byronic *heroine*. Whereas Romantic and early-Victorian literature often presented a portrait of passive woman's agony and yearning for a fuller and freer world of spirit, the mid-Victorian heroine increasingly takes action, attempting to leave her cage of middle- and upper-class respectability. Ambitious and courageous figures such as Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and the spirited title characters of *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Aurora Leigh* (1857), provided contrasts to insipid females like Amelia Sedley in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848).

In "Goblin Market" Rossetti proposes not only two but *three* visions of womanhood. First, there is Jeanie, who is improper and dies in accordance with the logic of the early-Victorian works mentioned above. Then there is Laura who, like Jane Eyre, Aurora Leigh and other mid-Victorian heroines of the Byronic school, refuses to lead a caged-in life and speak "as modest maidens should" (GM 209). Laura, the fallen angel of the house, like Milton's fallen archangel, is a rebel who is determined to get things for herself. But the poem demonstrates that such self-centred heroism is not necessarily Rossetti's ideal, for it ultimately leads to corruption. Finally, in Lizzie, Rossetti creates a third model of Victorian womanhood. Lizzie, like her sister, dares to leave home and demand her rights. But unlike her sister, she does this for unselfish reasons. When she crosses the boundary of passivity and takes action outside the domestic sphere, it is to help others. She not only survives but comes out as a true hero. She is neither a subdued Victorian angel, nor a radical Byronic character, but a courageous Christ-like figure, who sacrifices herself for her sister (GM 479), providing in "deadly peril" (GM 558) the fiery antidote. In Rossetti, then, both the Victorian angel and the new emancipated woman are renounced in favour of a strong redemptive Christ-figure, and in the following section I shall try to show that this concept of a female Christ was not a totally novel idea in the nineteenth century.

Florence Nightingale and the Vision of a Female Christ

Most readers of today associate Florence Nightingale with the creation of modern nursing. She became world famous for organising a contingent of nurses to take care of sick and wounded soldiers in the Crimean War, an event that provided an outlet for her nursing ambitions and for her passionate desire to change the regime of hospital treatments.

In 1854 Nightingale recruited volunteers at Christ Church, whose congregation included the womenfolk of the Rossetti family. Christina Rossetti, then twenty-three, volunteered to join Nightingale's expedition of nurses, but her application was rejected owing to her young age, lack of experience and poor health. Her aunt Eliza Polidori, however, did eventually join a group of Nightingale's nurses.

Two years earlier, in 1852, Nightingale had written a polemical tract entitled *Cassandra.* Here, though allegedly indifferent to the women's cause, she produced what could be seen as a major text of English feminism. The actual publication of *Cassandra* occurred only in 1928, when Ray Strachey included it in *The Cause*, her history of the women's movement. But a few copies of *Cassandra* were privately printed and circulated in 1859, the same year as Rossetti wrote "Goblin Market", and she may also have learnt about Nightingale's ideas through the family copy of *Notes on Nursing,* also published that year.

Nightingale, who concludes *Cassandra* with the bold prediction that "The next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ" (p. 230), played an integral role in establishing explicit references to a female Christ in late Victorian thought. And her idea of "sisterhood" and mutual help became a popular nineteenth century notion, and one that figures prominently in "Goblin Market".

The issue of sisterhood in "Goblin Market" has more than once been read as a product of Rossetti's experiences at the Anglican Sisterhoods. To D. M. R. Bentley "Goblin Market" was "originally written as

an exemplary tale made imaginative to be read aloud by Rossetti to an audience of fallen women [perhaps] at Highgate Hill" (Bentley 1987: 58). Jan Marsh takes up his theory by claiming that "Goblin Market" and its theme of sisterhood are directly inspired by Rossetti's work among the Anglican sisters in Highgate Penitentiary (Marsh 1994a; 1994b). The argument is compelling, except for a problem in dates. It is rather difficult to see how Rossetti's work at Highgate in the 1860s could have affected a poem already written in April 1859. It seems more likely that the idea of sisterhood expressed in "Goblin Market" is a result of Nightingale's influence on Rossetti, and that this influence in its turn may have led to the poet's later involvement at Highgate.

My suggestion is that Rossetti's representation of three women in "Goblin Market" is related to the Nightingalean ideal of sisterhood and solidarity between women. First of all, the poem is dedicated to "M. F. R.", that is, to Christina's own sister Maria Francesca Rossetti. Second, two sisters are its protagonists, fighting goblin "brothers" (GM 94; 96). Third, in the nocturnal scene where Lizzie kept watch by her sister's bed, she clearly assumes the role of a nurse, in that she

> Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
> Felt for her breath,
> Held water to her lips, and cool'd her face
> With tears and fanning leaves. (GM 525-29)

Janet Galligani Casey (1991: 64) has noted that the scene shows how the traditional female role of nurturer may take on heroic proportions. In addition to Nightingale's concept of heroic sisterhood, the idea of a female saviour also finds its equivalent in Rossetti. In both Nightingale and Rossetti women can be represented as potential Christs. Jeanie's death and Lizzie's resistance "Like a rock of blue-vein'd stone / Lash'd by tides obstreperously, / Like a beacon left alone / In a hoary roaring sea" (GM 410-13), dramatise Nightingale's message that

out of nothing comes nothing. But out of suffering may come the cure. Better have pain than paralysis. A hundred struggle and drown in the breakers. One discovers the new world. But rather, ten times rather, die in the surf, heralding the way to that new world, than stand idly on the shore! (Nightingale 1991 [1928]: 208)

"Yes, it is a privilege to suffer for your race – a privilege not reserved to the Redeemer and the martyrs alone, but one enjoyed by numbers in every age", Nightingale continues (p. 209). The much discussed conclusion of "Goblin Market" recalls the female Christ that Nightingale envisioned in *Cassandra*, for the poem ends in a hymn of praise to sisterly love, underlining the message that "there is no friend like a sister" (GM 562). By imagining a sisterly friend and saviour like the redemptive Lizzie, Rossetti fulfils Nightingale's bold prediction in *Cassandra* of the appearance of a female redeemer.

Lizzie: A Feminist Parody of Christ?

> Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
> Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
> Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
> Eat me, drink me, love me;
> Laura, make much of me:
> For your sake I have braved the glen
> And had to do with goblin merchant men. (GM 468-74)

Lizzie's evocative and passionate request to Laura to eat and drink her recalls Christ's invitation to the Eucharistic feast: "take, eat; this is my body [...] Drink ye all of it; / For this is my blood [...] which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:26-28).[84] Numerous critics have recognised Laura's second taste of the fruit as somehow sacramental.[85] And there is much that speaks for such a reading. The juice that Lizzie

84 Cf. also John 21:12; Mark 14:22 and Luke 22:15-16.
85 See e.g. McGann 1980: 251; Watson 1986: 50; Bentley 1987: 73-76; Morrill 1990: 12; Jones 1992.

brings back to her sister after her Christ-like self-sacrifice is indeed redemptive, bringing "life out of death" (GM 524). As a direct result of her meal, Laura's sins are swept away, and she "awoke as from a dream, / Laughed in the innocent old way" (GM 537).

Feminist critics of today tend to think of this scene as a subversive correction of male tradition. In Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's reading "Lizzie, like a female Saviour [...] offers herself to be eaten and drunk in a womanly holy communion", so that she becomes "a Eucharistic Messiah, a female version of the patriarchal [...] Word made flesh" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 573). They even suggest that Christ's redemption this time takes place through a homosexual female, and that the "strikingly sexual redemption scene between the sisters" posits "a covertly (if ambivalently) lesbian world" (p. 567). But presenting Christ as incestuous and homosexual would have been a terrible blow to orthodoxy. Could Rossetti really have allowed herself that kind of blasphemy? Clearly, the function of the so-called redemption scene still needs further exploration.

Central to understanding the fascinating passage with its life-giving kiss is the importance Rossetti as a Protestant attributed to Eucharistic beliefs. The Eucharist was a central Protestant issue and its interpretation was also one of the flash points of the English Reformation.

The essence of a sacrament for all Christians is *communion* with Christ. But controversies arose as to the nature of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Is it carnal, spiritual or symbolic? When Christ says, "this is my body" (Matthew 26:26), Roman Catholics understood this literally (the bread *is* Christ's body), while most Protestants read it figuratively (the bread merely *stands for* or *represents* Christ's body). The Protestants rejected the idea of transubstantiation but believed that Christ is mystically present at the Holy Communion. In this view, the sacrament is a mysterious joining of man and God: an overlapping of souls, an agreement in mind and heart and intent. In this view of "real presence", Christ's

presence is spiritual but "real": Christ is present in the ceremony in spirit and in faith rather than in the physical elements of the ceremony.

The sacraments, and especially the Eucharist, were fundamental to the Protestant perspective on poetry and nature. Protestants believed that the direct link between the natural and supernatural worlds was severed as the result of the Fall, but that Christ's Incarnation bridges the gap between them. In this view, the Eucharist can give a right perception of nature, allowing man to see the supernatural world within the physical world that God has created. This assumption was to have far-reaching consequences for English poetry, and forms one of the links between Milton and the writings of Rossetti in terms of their common Word-based piety.

More than one critic has noted how central and frequent an issue the Eucharist was for Milton (King 1998; Schwartz 1999; Schaeffer 2000). In *Paradise Lost* Book V, for example, Adam's and Raphael's dinner in Eden resonates with Eucharistic imagery, seemingly alluding to a long-standing contention over the celebration of the Lord's Supper:

> So down they sat,
> And to thir viands fell, nor seemingly
> The Angel, nor in mist, the common gloss
> Of Theologians, but with keen dispatch
> Of real hunger, and concoctive heate
> To transubstantiate[.] (*PL* V.433-38)

By calling to mind the concepts of Real Presence (or "real hunger"), "transubstantiation" and the issue of angels' eating,[86] Milton is continuing complex controversies. His view that Raphael physically ate is resolutely Protestant. And his use of "transubstantiate" as a digestive term reads as

86 "Seemingly" refers to the view of the Docetists (whose name derives from the Greek word for "to seem") that the earthly bodies of spiritual beings were apparent rather than real and that their eating was illusory, a heretical belief that Milton takes a stand against. At the same time he refutes the "common gloss of Theologians" that the angels ate "in mist", *i.e.* that their eating was miraculous and spiritual, rather than material and real. This is consonant with the anti-Catholic emphasis that has often been detected in the passage. For a reading of this passage as a possible parody on the Catholic service, see e.g. Schwartz 1999: 4-10.

a sardonic pun against the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, a doctrine that he regarded as grossly cannibalistic. In Milton the transformation of matter into spirit is effected neither by priests nor alchemists but happens naturally. The supper is served by Eve, who

> Ministerd naked, and thir flowing cups
> With pleasant liquors crown'd: O innocence
> Deserving Paradise! if ever, then,
> Then had the Sons of God excuse to have bin
> Enamour'd at that sight; but in those hearts
> Love unlibidinous reign'd, nor jealousie
> Was understood, the injur'd Lovers Hell. (*PL* V.443-50)

The passage reads like a reformer's parody of the Catholic concept of Holy Communion, for the supper is set on a Puritan-style communion-table, not an altar, and it is ministered by a lovely naked woman, not a male priest in vestments. As if to leave no doubt that this meal is a Communion (albeit a proleptic one, since Christ has not yet been crucified), Raphael explicitly compares it with the "communion" in heaven. This deliberately evocative word-choice, which is the result of Milton's own revision,[87] along with the multiple allusions to wine, definitely equates Adam's and Raphael's dinner table with a Eucharistic banquet, where

> Tables are set, and on a sudden pil'd
> With Angels Food, and rubied Nectar flows
> In Pearl, in Diamond, and massie Gold,
> Fruit of delicious Vines, the growth of Heav'n.
> On flours repos'd, and with fresh flourets crownd,
> They eate, they drink, and in communion sweet
> Quaff immortalitie and joy. (*PL* V.632-38)

In the "Goblin Market" redemption scene, as in Milton's Eden, the sacrament is described as a close personal encounter, sensuous and intimate. If Milton's Eve "ministered naked", Lizzie offers her sacramental juices in a torn dress. Rossetti like Milton, then, brings sensuality into the

87 The 1667-version of the two last lines of this passage ("They eat, they drink, and with refection sweet / Are fill'd, before th'all-bounteous King, who showrd") is much less charged with sacramental allusion.

mystery of the Eucharist and in both cases the erotic element is sublimated according to the Platonic ideal. When viewed in the context of Eucharistic beliefs, the suggestive redemption scene between the two sisters illustrates not so much lesbian eroticism as an embodied spirituality: the power of the spiritual over the sensual, of *agape* over *eros*. When the sisters kiss and embrace it is in sacramental union with Christ. It is a physical but non-sexual embrace.

Rather than depicting a feminist or lesbian alternative to Christ, Rossetti adopts the New Testament call to all – to men and to women - to become *like* Christ. The Christian ideal of resembling the Lord was familiar to Rossetti from Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, a work that she both knew and found important (*Memoir* lxix). This fifteenth century manual of Christian self-perfection through the imitation of Christ exalted the virtues of obedience, patience, humility, prudence and self-control to help the soul in its communion with God. In *Letter and Spirit* (1883) Rossetti herself discusses the possibility for self-perfection in this vein. "We should exercise that far higher privilege which appertains to Xians [*sic*] of having 'the mind of Christ;' and then the two worlds, visible and invisible, will become familiar to us even as they were to Him", she writes here (p. 131). And in *Face of the Deep* (1892) she asserts that "every Christian is in his or her degree Veronica (true Image) of Christ" (p. 329). Following this model, everyone can become a reflection of Christ. Or, as Rossetti poetically puts it in a poem on the Virgin Mother,

> Christ's mirror [...] of grace and love,
> Of beauty and of life and death:
> By hope and love and faith
> Transfigured to His Likeness.
> ("Herself a rose, who bore the Rose", ll. 16; 27-29; II: 238)

Seen in this context, when Lizzie endures the goblins' furious assault she shows a woman's passionate attempt to act like Christ. Rossetti does not say that Lizzie *is* Christ, *is* the lily, *is* the rock or the light of the world.

Rather, she depicts the girl as being *like* a lily, *like* a rock and a beacon (GM 409-12). Lizzie is associated through metaphors with the steadfast and redemptive Christ.

If Lizzie is associated with Christ, Laura's encounter with the goblins reads like is a *parody* of the Christ-like. If Lizzie stood steadfast "Like a lily in a flood" (GM 409), her inquisitive sister, longing for forbidden pleasures, stretches her neck "Like a lily from the beck" (GM 83). If Lizzie stood strong "Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree […] Like a royal virgin town" (GM 415; 418), Laura did not resist, but fell "Like the watch-tower of a town […] Like a wind-uprooted tree" (GM 514; 517). The inverted metaphors suggest that Laura, unlike her sister, fails to imitate Christ, and fails to act as a true Christian.

What is ultimately relevant about Rossetti's depiction of Lizzie is not that she is a *female* Christ-figure, but that she is an ordinary *human* capable of performing a redemptive act through the imitation of Christ. Such a vision is bold, perhaps, but not blasphemous.

Spiritual and Aesthetic Redemption

> Laura would call the little ones
> And tell them of her early prime,
> Those pleasant days long gone
> Of not-returning time:
> Would talk about the haunted glen,
> The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
> Their fruits like honey to the throat
> But poison in the blood;
> (Men sell not such in any town:)
> Would tell them how her sister stood
> In deadly peril to do her good,
> And win the fiery antidote:
> Then joining hands to little hands
> Would bid them cling together. (GM 548-61)

The end of "Goblin Market" has sometimes been considered as anticlimactic - as a moralising closure that seems pasted on afterwards or,

as Jeanie Watson puts it, "a moral tag that does not fit the story" (Watson 1984: 61). Stuart Curran (1971: 288) complains that "what begins as a startling complement to Poe and Baudelaire settles stiffly into a Victorian parlor". In line with these views, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar find it disappointing that the redeemed Eden of "Goblin Market" "turns out to be a heaven of domesticity" in which Laura, like her sister, has become a "true Victorian angel-in-the-house – selfless and smiling" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 567). They view the poem in the terms of a lesson in renunciation, an affirmation of the patriarchal idea of the angel in the house. Is it so? Are Rossetti's female characters merely conventional domestic angels?

While Gilbert and Gubar argue that, for Rossetti, women's poetic voice comes only through renunciation and an embrace of Victorian domesticity, later critics have emphasised the positive aspects of the final scene. Dorothy Mermin (1983: 107-18), for example, sees no disjunction, but treats the poem as embodying an ideal of sisters and daughters living and writing happily together. And Dolores Rosenblum (1986: 84) suggests that "Rossetti's rewriting […] of the texts of biblical and Romantic literary tradition, [*sic*] contributes to a female myth and, ultimately, female aesthetic".

If we take a closer look at the passage referred to, we find a marked emphasis on Laura's role as an active speaker, for she "would call the little ones [...] and tell [...] would talk [...] would tell [...] and [...] bid". This narrative frame draws attention to the act of storytelling. Rossetti lets her poem end with a scene where the female protagonist acts as a storyteller within the story. The poem that started with maids hearing goblin cries, ends in the soft voice of a female narrator. The male monologue praising fruits of earthly vanity is replaced by female narration on salvation through sacrifice. Is this maternal pep-talk really such an anticlimax? In terms of "action", maybe, but not in terms of morality. By presenting the woman, not as an idealisation, but as an active, speaking subject, Rossetti cautiously

modifies a cultural ideology that turned women into passive objects. To put it in Margaret Homans' words, "Laura is no longer the silenced victim of the romantic lyric's conventions of male desire but the narrator of her own story" (Homans 1985: 589). Finally, the fallen woman is given the last word, so that she can tell her side of the story, her own version of things and events.

Not only is Laura a narrator. She also takes the role of *interpreter* of her own story. She has reached a higher level of understanding, and is able to "make much of" (GM 472) her experience in the goblin glen. In her explanatory narrative, she shows the ability to shape the moral significance of her experience, claiming narrative a well as interpretative authority. By letting woman take her fate in her own hands and by letting her tell her own story, Rossetti indicates that the ability to transmit and interpret poetry is not gender-linked.

It may be that Rossetti's heroines do not take up a physical fight against their seas of troubles. But the heroism is there. The patterns of heroism suggested by Rossetti take the dignified shape of courage, endurance, self-sacrifice, sisterhood and story-telling. Such a vision of heroism agrees with Milton, who ends *Paradise Regained* in a vision of Christ, with appropriate discretion, returning home:

> from Heavenly Feast refresht
> Brought on his way with joy; hee unobserv'd
> Home to his Mothers house private return'd. (*PR* IV.637-39)

Christ exits the same way as he arrived, without fanfares and fireworks, but it is a decisive act of will, not of submission. Similarly, Lizzie and Laura, like true Christian heroes, return to their mundane tasks after their heroic adventure. Their unassuming humility is the ultimate sign of their greatness. The domestic sphere is finally as "epic" as the world of heroic action. When the protagonists return to their homes this is not an act of submission but a heroic alternative.

In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti observes that Christ willingly relinquishes authority and declares that strength arises from self-control rather than more conventional "weapons": "I think that in these days of women's self assertion and rivalry with men, I do well to bear in mind that in a contest no stronger proof of superiority can be given on either side than the not bringing into action all available force" (pp. 409-10). Similarly, in *Paradise Lost,* in the passage where the Son casts Satan and the angels out of Heaven, Christ could have used all of His strength, but instead "half his strength he put not forth, but check'd / His Thunder in mid Volie". He chooses "Not to destroy, but root them out of Heav'n" (*PL* VI.853-55). The hero will not utterly crush the adversary, but will use only enough strength to accomplish the task.

So in Rossetti, female action, like Christ's sufferings on earth, is ultimately tenacity, stoic acceptance and heroic perseverance. At the end of "Goblin Market" Rossetti lets Laura declare

> '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'. (GM 562-67)

Rossetti's iteration of the neutral third person pronoun ("To cheer one [...] to fetch one [...] To lift one [...] To strengthen one") clearly refers to a woman. Earlier in the poem such repetition ("One had a cat's face, / One whisked a tail, / One tramped at a rat's pace", GM 71-73) referred to the male goblins. Significantly, then, by the end of the poem, Rossetti has replaced the male actors with female "ones".

The last word of "Goblin Market" is "stands". The vision recalls Rossetti's triumphant apocalyptic figure of the "woman clothed with the sun" in *The Face of the Deep*, who "has done all and stands; from the lowest place she has gone up higher" (p. 310). It is appropriate that the poem should end on this note of promised redemption of the fallen

woman. It is with this positive vision, this gospel of love, transmitted by Laura to future generations as represented by "the little ones" (GM 548), that Rossetti concludes her poem. This is a vision where creative activity is not incompatible with motherhood, for by the end

> both were wives
> With children of their own;
> Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
> Their lives bound up in tender lives. (GM 544-47)

True, the female poet or storyteller is still bound to a domestic sphere and her audience seems to be mainly children and other women. But Rossetti does not employ the early-Victorian ending, where the fallen woman dies or goes mad. Laura suffers for her transgression but is redeemed to find a new world, turning from "one possessed" to a "caged thing freed". In this way Rossetti shows that women - even fallen ones - can be active and speaking subjects, provided that they turn to works and actions that are unselfish and morally rooted.

Read in this way, "Goblin Market" offers a positive conclusion, for it enhances the unity and equality in the Christian message and legitimises a female literary discourse. In this vision women can be poets and spiritual guides and not just angels of the house. The poem envisions an egalitarian existence where women are not banned from the literary garden of creation, but can speak for themselves, literally on their own terms. Christina, whose very name recalls a female Christ, lets her major poem end in a vision of women creating, albeit within the limitations of male society, their own myth about female heroism and fulfilment.

8. Summary

Christina Rossetti was far from being a confirmed Victorian feminist and John Milton was far from being the worst male chauvinist of his time. Being orthodox Christians, both of them adopted the idea of female subordination implicit in Genesis and St. Paul. Rossetti did not openly engage with Victorian gender debates where this would be to put Christianity itself into question. Judging by her life and letters, she tried instead to accept woman's place as defined by nineteenth century patriarchy, trusting that gender equality was possible only in heaven. In her poetry she shows that society may not provide equality, but that the idea of female submission becomes more endurable in the light of the prospect of an egalitarian heaven, where "many a last" will "be first".

Her self-postponement may, at first glance, seem disappointing to twenty-first century feminists. Paradoxically, however, it was through gendered Christian discourses that she saw a means to escape the bounds of gender. Instead of throwing Genesis and Milton aside, she tried to reconcile woman's voice with Christianity. By emphasising the egalitarian spirit of the Christian message, she tapped into the feminist potential in Christian discourses from St. Augustine, Thomas à Kempis and Dante through Milton to Keble. She also made the most of the inherent power of the female symbols found in Christian ideology, giving life and voice to strong women such as the loving Bride in Canticles, the "woman clothed with the sun" in Revelation 12:1, and even Eve, the first fallible mother. Her repeated retellings of the old story of the Fall seem to reflect a strong resistance to some of the more misogynistic interpretations of Genesis, and especially those linking woman with sin. Rather than endorsing the view that woman alone was culpable for the Fall, she emphasises the Augustinian and Miltonic point that we are all guilty of sin. She tells Eve's story from the fallen woman's perspective: she is defended

and finally redeemed. She describes the Fall as an enterprising woman's battle with the vanity, ambition and self-pride involved in literary creation - incompatible with the Bible and Victorian expectations of women. She makes clear that female authorship and social activity are defensible as long as they are rooted in religion and morality. In this way she managed to reconcile the extremes of her religious belief and her literary voice.

Rossetti does not openly criticise the Bible and Milton but readapts them in sometimes startlingly original ways. Rather than being a radical feminist, contending established religious beliefs, she seems to have reacted against something else: the decadent aesthetic values of her time. In the secular love lyric and painting of the Pre-Raphaelite period, women were powerful symbols but not agents of power. Rossetti openly challenges such idealisations of the feminine. She replaces images of woman as a passive and silent angelic object of domestic affection with images of woman as a subject and an agent in religious devotion. Ultimately, she gives women an active role within hermeneutic tradition, as interpreters and transmitters of a higher truth. Her ideal woman is neither a domestic angel, nor a subversive feminist but a spiritual guide, purging lust into holiness. The Rossetti woman is a redemptive Christ figure, recalling the female Christ that Nightingale envisioned in *Cassandra*. Rossetti's poetry both depicts and constitutes a quest for salvation and understanding of God's Word, and it is open to men as well as women.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Let us strike hands as hearty friends;
No more, no less; and friendship's good:
Only don't keep in view ulterior ends,
And points not understood

In open treaty. Rise above
Quibbles and shuffling off and on:
Here's friendship for you if you like; but love, -
No, thank you, John.
(Christina Rossetti, "No, Thank You, John", ll. 25-32, I: 50)

When Christina Rossetti composed the witty poem of rejection "No, Thank You, John" in 1860, she hardly had John Milton in mind.[88] But the poem's conclusion still nicely sums up what I perceive to be Rossetti's attitude to her precursor in poetry. Her relationship with Milton was not a passionate love affair. But he was not an enemy either. As I have argued in this study, Rossetti herself, like the speaker of her poem, seems to have wanted to "rise above quibbles and shuffling", offering her hand to Milton in a hearty handshake of respect and agreement.

Rossetti has suffered the rather common fate of nineteenth-century women authors: that of being regarded as an unlearned and spontaneous writer who could not and did not take pains to work within the literary tradition. This study has, I hope, begun to expose the full extent to which her art actually depends upon Milton and other literary models, despite the ostensibly personal voice that speaks from many of her lyrics. This is not to say that what she wrote was derivative or imitative. It is with great skill and independence that she draws from various literary, religious, and

88 Regarding "No, Thank You, John" Christina wrote Dante Gabriel Rossetti in a letter of 1875 that "no such person [as John] existed or exists" (Rossetti, W. M. 1908: 55). But William Michael Rossetti (1908: 54) identifies him as "the marine painter John Brett, who [...] had appeared to be somewhat smitten by Christina".

philosophical sources and adapts them in order to express her own preoccupations as a poet, a woman and a Christian. She gathers elements from a whole range of extremely diverse and sometimes ostensibly incompatible sources into an effortless union, expressing striking truths with apparent ease. She deals with questions that have occupied mankind for centuries: questions involving faith, gender and aesthetics. The integrity with which she responded to these complex questions contributes substantially to the greatness of her art.

Rossetti's poetry and prose, including her so-called secular verse, has a fairly uniform emphasis. The groundwork for much of her work is the irrepressible belief in the power of God's Word and the value of renouncing the non-spiritual satisfactions of this world in favour of mediating the Word through her own verbal art. She instructs her readers in the dangers of succumbing to temptation, through the use of symbols bearing much weight in Christian tradition, extrapolated from Genesis along with renderings of the Fall myth transmitted through Christian literature and art. Milton turns out to be a significant segment in the long tradition to which her work belongs.

Intertextual Rossetti studies have tended to treat Milton as an oppressive male chauvinist whom a subversive female poet has had to challenge through revision. But if we place "Goblin Market" within the larger context of the poet's thoughts on religion and poetry as evident throughout her writing, it becomes possible to see beyond the differences and explore more fully the similarities that have long been ignored. The picture that emerges is rather different from the one offered by early commentators. Rossetti's response to Milton is not so much a matter of revision or revenge as creative co-adaptation. Her poetry reflects a desire, not only to *revise* something experienced as inhibiting, but also to *revive* something experienced as profoundly influential. The Miltonic elements come in for recycling rather than iconoclasm.

"Goblin Market" represents the complexities of religious and spiritual themes such as temptation, sin and redemption through suffering, being, in many ways, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* combined. In an age of religious doubt, Rossetti - a devout and orthodox Christian - turned to Milton, not in order to undermine established religious beliefs further, but to bring conventions alive and to reinvigorate Christian tradition. Her version of the Fall and Redemption myth in is no more a satire on Milton than Milton's epic is a satire on Genesis.

Rather, she uses tradition to counter what she saw as a spiritually dangerous aestheticism in the artistic productions of many of her contemporaries. In "Goblin Market", as indeed in many of her poems, she demonstrates that irresponsible self-indulgence leads to corruption. In this way she "corrects" the aestheticism of the second generation of Pre-Raphaelites, and in so doing she ultimately challenges the secular trends in Victorian England. In representing woman, not as a passive object of profane love, but a subject and an agent in religious devotion, she also challenges the Victorian "cult" of angelic womanhood. This subtle but forceful criticism was perhaps her main contribution to the religious, aesthetic and gender discourses of her time.

Rossetti deserves fresh attention as a truly representative yet profoundly original figure of the Victorian period. She was ahead of her time, and perhaps ours, in seeing the feminist potential in both Milton and the Christian message. But though not openly fighting for the feminist cause, she could conceive of biblical and Miltonic tradition as a vital resource for women. She found creative ways to adopt tradition to suit her own needs. In "Goblin Market" she uses Milton's influential epic as a touchstone, and so retells the old story of Eve's fall from a woman's perspective. Rather than making woman alone culpable for the Fall, she, like Milton, emphases woman's and man's shared guilt. In drawing on this side of Milton's interpretation of Genesis, she managed to reconcile her religious belief with her poetic vocation. Her female protagonists in "Goblin

Market" are bold, active and heroic speaking subjects, who are ultimately forgiven for their sins. In her poem, as well as in her own life as a Victorian female writer, she shows that women can participate in hermeneutic activity, providing that they take moral responsibility within their work, resisting hedonistic impulses. Exploring the physical world is not forbidden as such, but the search is shown to be futile, even potentially fatal, if the exploration lacks a higher moral aim.

For Rossetti the act of interpretation is a spiritual quest, an interior journey towards spiritual regeneration and understanding of his Word. And in the soul's relation to Christ, gender does not matter. What matters is the individual's quest for salvation, a quest in which poetry is a sacramental act, with a transformative, unifying function. Rossetti's poems both depict and constitute such a quest for union with God and understanding of his Word, and it is open to men as well as women.

Though seemingly conservative, Rossetti's spiritual aesthetic is actually *avant garde*. In viewing poetry as transcending the limits of gender, Rossetti reverses hierarchies and offers the promise of a new world. Her paradise regained is a genderless egalitarian utopia. It is a place of salvation where woman and man are exculpated from original sin and are allowed to exercise their powers. It is heavenly home transcending the one that had been lost.

In a poem fittingly named "An Answer" she, once more, describes her ideal:

> To make it glad with a goodly crop:
> Even so One Wise deals with me:-
> Amen, say I: if He choose to lop
> Branch after branch of my leaféd tree,
> In its own ripe season more fruit shall be.
>
> Tenfold fruit in the time of fruit,
> In the time of corn and wine and oil,
> Sound at the core, firm at the root;
> Repaying the years and years of toil,
> Repaying the blood that fed the soil.
> (ll. 1-10, I: 262-63)

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Hanford, James Holly (1946) *A Milton Handbook*, 4th edn. New York: F.S. Crofts & Co..

Härdelin, Alf (1965) *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*. Studia historicoecclesiastica upsaliensia no. 8. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri.

Harrison, Anthony H. (1988) *Christina Rossetti in Context*. Brighton: Harvester.

Describes Christina Rossetti as a highly self-conscious writer within an intellectual milieu defined by Tractarianism, Pre-Raphaelitism and aestheticism. Also available at http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/crossetti/harrison2/contents.html [19 March, 2005]

Harrison, Anthony H. (guest ed.) (1994) *Victorian Poetry. Special Christina Rossetti Issue* 32.3-4.

Double issue in celebration of the centenary of Rossetti's death, bringing together essays, including several "intertextual" readings of her poetry.

Harrison, Anthony H. (1998) "Christina Rossetti: Renunciation as Intervention: Rossetti, Religious Discourse, and Feminist High Anglicanism" in *Victorian Poets and the Politics of Culture: Discourse and Ideology*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press: 125-64.

Henwood, Dawn (1997) "Christian Allegory and Subversive Poetics: Christina Rossetti's Prince's Progress Re-Examined", *Victorian Poetry* 35.1: 83-94.

Hobbs, Colleen (1994) "A View From 'The Lowest Place': Rossetti's Devotional Prose", *Victorian Poetry* 32.3-4: 409-28.

Argues that *The Face of the Deep* battles with the seeming inconsistency of religion and feminism.

Homans, Margaret (1985) "'Syllables of Velvet': Dickinson, Rossetti, and the Rhetorics of Sexuality", *Feminist Studies* 11.3: 569-93.

The last half of the article studies the relationship between metaphor and metonymy in "Monna innominata" and "Goblin Market", contending that masculine plots of desire defeat Rossetti's effort to privilege the feminine voice in "Monna innominata".

Honeygosky, Stephen R. (1993) *Milton's House of God: The Invisible and Visible Church*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Challenges the assumption that Milton ignores the visible church in his ecclesiology.

Hönnighausen, Gisela (1972) "Emblematic Tendencies in the Works of Christina Rossetti", *Victorian Poetry* 10: 1-15.

A classical article on Rossetti's floral symbolism demonstrating that Rossetti was familiar with the Victorian language of flowers.

Hunt, William Holman (1905) *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, 2 vols. London: Macmillan.

Hunt, Violet (1932) *The Wife of [Dante Gabriel] Rossetti*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co..

Unreliable biography of Elizabeth Siddal.

Hutcheon, Linda (1985) *A Theory of Parody*. London: Methuen.

Jiménez, Nilda (comp.) (1979) *The Bible and the Poetry of Christina Rossetti. A Concordance* compiled by Nilda Jiménez. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Documents the frequency with which Rossetti refers to Bible passages.

Jones, Kathleen (1992) *Learning Not to Be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti*. Oxford: Oxford University Press and New York: St. Martin's Press.

This coherent biography portrays Rossetti as a poet stifling the passions of her inner life in conformity with an external rule of religious belief.

Kaplan, Cora (1979) "'The Indefinite Disclosed': Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson" in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus. London: Croom Helm: 61-79.

Studies the elliptical strategy in Rossetti's dream lyrics and fantasy poems.

Kent, David A. (ed.) (1987) *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Useful collection of fifteen essays.

Kent, David A. and P. G. Stanwood (eds.) (1998) *Selected Prose*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

This useful selection of Rossetti's neglected prose work gives easy access to work that has been out of print for over a century.

Kermode, Frank (1986) *Romantic Image*. London: ARK, [Originally published 1957].

Identifies the artist in isolation and the emerging power of the imagination as typical Romantic characteristics.

Kincaid, James R. (1992) *Child-Loving. The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

Studies Victorian thought about children and sexuality, attacking many broadly accepted assumptions about child abuse.

King, John N. (1998) "Miltonic Transubstantiation", *Milton Studies* 36: 41-58.

Kooistra, Lorraine Janzen (1994) "Modern Markets for *Goblin Market*", *Victorian Poetry* 32.3-4: 249-77.

Reviews twentieth century production of "Goblin Market" for the juvenile, the pornographic and the academic markets, includes nine illustrations.

Kooistra, Lorraine Janzen (1999) "Visualizing the Fantastic Subject: Goblin Market *and the Gaze*" in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Arsenau, Harrison, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press: 137-69

Looks at the ways in which the poem has been variously illustrated, including the pornographic.

Kristeva, Julia (1980) *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, tr. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Rudiez. Oxford: Blackwell, [Originally published 1977].

Intratheoretical analysis of the "signifying practice" in art and literature to subvert the very theoretical, philosophical and semiological apparatus.

Kumar, Shiv K. (ed.) (1969) *British Victorian Literature: Recent Revaluations*. London [and] New York: University of London Press Limited [and] New York University Press.

Leder, Sharon and Andrea Abbott (1987) *The Language of Exclusion: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Considers Rossetti as engaged in feminist critique.

Leighton, Angela (1992) *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Devotes one chapter to Christina Rossetti, arguing that "Goblin Market" expresses the poet's conflicted desire to deviate from religious imperatives.

Lewis, C. S. (1960 [1942]) *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. London: Oxford University Press, [Originally published 1942].

Classic defence of the epic as a literary form.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1966) *The Savage Mind*, Chicago, Il.: The University of Chicago Press, [Originally published as *La pensée sauvage* in 1962].

Lootens, Tricia (1996) "Competing Sainthoods, Competing Saints: The Canonization of Christina Rossetti" in *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender and Victorian Literary Canonization*. London & Charlottesville: Virginia University Press: 158-82.

Shows that fin-de-siècle criticism subjected Rossetti to a canonical disappearance act by locking her in a competition with Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

McColley, Diane Kelsey (1983) *Milton's Eve*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Discusses Milton's re-interpretation of Eve as traditionally conceived.

McGann, Jerome J. (1980) "Christina Rossetti's Poems: A New Edition and a Revaluation", *Victorian Studies* 23: 237-58.

Reviews and analyses Rossetti's use of symbol as social criticism.

McGann, Jerome J. (1983) "The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti", *Critical Inquiry* 10.1: 127-43.

Brings a historicist awareness to the doctrinal features of Rossetti's art, and places Rossetti firmly within the context of Victorian faith.

Macmillan, George A. (ed.) (1908) *Letters of Alexander Macmillan,* ed. with introduction by his son George A. Macmillan. Glasgow: Robert Maclehose & Co..

Includes Alexander Macmillan's letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti regarding "Goblin Market"'s success in his literary club for workers.

Marsh, Jan (1994a) *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*. London: Jonathan Cape.

The standard biography of today, despite the contention that Rossetti's poetry stems from paternal incest.

Marsh, Jan (1994b) "Christina Rossetti's Vocation: the Importance of *Goblin Market*", *Victorian Poetry* 32.3-4: 233-48.

Corroborates D.M.R. Bentley's thesis of 1987 that Rossetti's work at High Gate Penitentiary prompted "Goblin Market" and aided her accession to literary success.

Marsh, Jan (ed.) (1994c) *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose.* London: Everyman.

A selection featuring several short stories as well as useful explanatory notes.

Marsh, Jan (1999) *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Painter and Poet*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

The definite source book on Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his work.

Marshall, Linda E. (1994a) "'Transfigured to His Likeness': Sensible Transcendentalism in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", *University of Toronto Quarterly. A Canadian Journal of the Humanities* 63.3: 429-50.

Draws on Irigaray to position Rossetti's treatment of the Eucharist as female genealogy.

Martin, Brian W. (1976) *John Keble: Priest, Professor and Poet*. London: Croom Helm.

Maxwell, Catherine (1999) "Tasting the 'Fruit Forbidden': Gender, Intertextuality, and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*" in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Arsenau, Harrison, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press: 75-104.

Reads "Goblin Market" as an allegory of women writers' negotiations with male precursors' texts and shows how the poem can be seen as a critical engagement with a wide variety of sources, including Shakespeare and Browning.

May, Leila Silvana (1992) "'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': Orality, Sexuality and the Fruits of Sororal Desire in "Gob(b)lin(g) Market" and *Beloved*" in *The Significance of Sibling Relationships in Literature*, ed. JoAnna Stephens Mink and Janet Doubler Ward. New York: Bowling Green: 133-48.

French feminist reading of "Goblin Market" as a Victorian nursery fantasy of (sor)oral desire threatened by external male danger.

Mayberry, Katherine J. (1989) *Christina Rossetti and the Poetry of Discovery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

A readable biography contending that Rossetti chose career over marriage. The final chapter (apparently influenced by Schofield's work) is especially illuminating.

Mazzotta, Giuseppe (1979) *Dante. Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the "Divine Comedy".* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Menke, Richard (1994) "The Political Economy of Fruit" in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Arsenau, Harrison, Kooistra. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press: 105-36.

Mermin, Dorothy (1983) "Heroic Sisterhood in 'Goblin Market'", *Victorian Poetry* 21.2: 107-18.

Contends that "Goblin Market" presents a vision of a world of heroic and self-sufficient women and children with no need for men.

Miller, Hillis J. (1963) *The Disappearance of God. Five Nineteenth Century Writers*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Surveys the intellectual and material developments that conspired to cut man off from God and studies the consciousness of an absent God in the writings of Thomas De Quincey, Robert Browning, Emily Brontë, Matthew Arnold and Gerald Manley Hopkins.

Moers, Ellen (1976) *Literary Women*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Traces literary traditions that have arisen from women's experiences.

Morrill, David F. (1990) "'Twilight is Not Good for Maidens': Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in 'Goblin Market'", *Victorian Poetry* 28.1: 1-16.

Suggests that there are elements of vampirism in "Goblin Market" and relates them to the supernational motifs in her uncle John Polidori's novel "The Vampyre" (1819).

Nelson, James G. (1963) *The Sublime Puritan: Milton and the Victorians*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Provides useful accounts of the critical tradition.

North, Alix (1995-2004) "Isle of Lesbos", http://www.sappho.com/poetry/c_rostti.htm#top [19 March, 2005].

Lesbian poetry website citing "Goblin Market".

Norton, Mrs. Charles Eliot [Caroline] (1863) "'The Angel in the House' and 'The [*sic*] Goblin Market'", *Macmillan's Magazine* 8: 398-404.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989), ed. John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Packer, Lona Mosk (1963a) *Christina Rossetti*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Well-documented biography unfortunately tainted by the now-contested thesis that Rossetti's poetry is an expression of her unrequited love for W.B. Scott.

Packer, Lona Mosk (ed.) (1963b) *The Rossetti-Macmillan Letters: Some 133 Unpublished Letters Written to Alexander Macmillan, F.S. Ellis, and Others, by Dante Gabriel, Christina, and William Michael Rossetti, 1861–1889*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

154 previously unpublished letters demonstrating Rossetti's interest in the business of publication.

Palazzo, Lynda (2002) *Rossetti's Feminist Theology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Reads Rossetti's devotional prose in the context of emerging nineteenth century feminist theology, contending that it foreshadows the work of today's leading feminist theologians.

Peterson, Linda H. (1994) "Restoring the Book: The Typological Hermeneutics of Christina Rossetti and the PRB", *Victorian Poetry* 32.3-4: 209-32.

Views "Goblin Market" and "The Prince's Progress" as forceful challenges to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's assumptions about woman's intellectual and creative work.

Phillips, John A. (1984) *Eve: The History of an Idea*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Analyses the myth of Eve and its legacy, showing how the theme elaborating woman's sinfulness can be traced all through Christian culture.

Possession (2001) Neil LaBute (dir.). USA.

Film-adaptation of A.S. Byatt's 1990-novel by the same name, starring Jennifer Ehle as Christabel La Motte, a Pre-Raphaelite poetess presumably modelled on Christina Rossetti.

Psomiades, Kathy Alexis (1993) "Poetic Privacy in 'Autumn' and 'A Royal Princess'", *Victorian Poetry* 31: 187-202.

Reads Rossetti's poems as exposing the precarious nature of both domestic and artistic privacy. In both cases autonomy is dangerously close to exclusion.

Ricks, Christopher (1963) *Milton's Grand Style*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Defence of a "dry" poet's passion and subtlety.

Riffaterre, Michael (1980), "Syllepsis", *Critical Inquiry* 6.4: 625-38.

Draws on Derrida's critical discourse on "*syllepsis*", the trope that consists in understanding the same word in two different ways at the same time, one meaning being literal or primary, the other figurative.

Riffaterre, Michael (1984) "Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse", *Critical Inquiry* 11.1: 141-62.

Explains that intertext transpires when the reader unveils patterns or modes in the text unexplainable within the context of the poem. Hence "intertextuality" refers to an operation of the *reader's* mind. In other words, it is up to the *reader* to complete the incompleteness of a literary work.

Rosenblum, Dolores (1986) *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

This influential feminist analysis building on Gilbert argues that the aesthetic of renunciation generates a "poetry of endurance". This subtle subversion of male tradition enables the woman poet to survive the discontinuities between lived and literary experience.

Rosenblum, Dolores (1987) "Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence" in Kent, David A. (ed.) *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 132-56.

Rossetti, William Michael (1899) *Ruskin and Pre-Raphaelitism*. London: Georg Allen.

Rossetti, William Michael (1900) "Introduction" in *New Poems of Christina Rossetti. Hitherto Unpublished or Uncollected*. London: Macmillan: xii-xiii.

Rossetti, William Michael (ed.) (1904) "Memoir" and "Notes" in *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes by William Michael Rossetti.* London: Macmillan.

Rossetti, William Michael (1906) *Some Reminiscences of William Michael Rossetti*, 2 vols. London: Brown, Langham.

Autobiography containing many references to Christina Rossetti.

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

Still valuable for notes and appendices.

Sagan, Miriam (1980) "Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' and Feminist Literary Criticism", *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 3.2: 66-76.

Sell, Roger D. (2000) *Literature as Communication: The Foundations of Mediating Criticism*. Amsterdam: Benjamin.

Advocates a re-humanisation of literary education.

Senaha, Eijun (1997) *Sex, Drugs and Madness in Poetry from William Blake to Christina Rossetti: Women's Pain, Women's Pleasure*. Lewiston, Lampeter: Mellen University Press.

Defines pain and pleasure as synonyms to describe woman's political and social condition in nineteenth century England.

Schaeffer, John D. (2000) "Metonymies We Read By: Rhetoric, Truth and the Eucharist in Milton's *Areopaegitica*", *Milton Quarterly* 34.3: 84-92.

Suggests that the figurative language of *Areopaegitica* is informed by Eucharistic thinking: the idea of reading and writing as sacraments.

Schofield, Linda (1987) "Being and Understanding: Devotional Poetry of Christina Rossetti and the Tractarians" in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent. Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 301-21.

Identifies Rossetti as a Tractarian poet, but argues that she differs from Keble in attitude and technique: hers is a more intensely personal and innovative rendering of Christian truth.

Schwartz, Regina M. (1999) "Real Hunger: Milton's Version of the Eucharist", *Religion & Literature* 31.1: 1-18.

Shalkhauser, Marian (1956) "The Feminine Christ", *Victorian Newsletter* 10: 19-20.

Sees "Goblin Market" as Christian fairy-tale in which a feminine cast of characters substitutes that of the biblical sin-redemption sequence.

Shawcross, John T. (1993) *John Milton: The Self and the World*, Studies in the English Renaissance. Lexington, KY.: University Press of Kentucky.

This prize-awarded biography makes a case against those who regard Milton as a misogynist.

Shurbutt, Sylvia Bayley (1992) "Revisionist Mythmaking in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market': Eve's Apple and Other Questions Revised and Reconsidered", *Victorian Newsletter* 82: 40-44.

This short but well-argued article reads "Goblin Market" as a feminist revision of biblical and Miltonic myth.

Smulders, Sharon (1996) *Christina Rossetti Revisited*. New York: Twayne Publishers and London: Prentice Hall.

Critical introduction to the life and works of Rossetti focusing on her versatility as a writer.

Stevenson, Lionel (1972) *The Pre-Raphaelite Poets*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Interpretation of these poets, their aims and accomplishments, including Christina Rossetti.

Stone, Marjorie (1994) "Sisters in Art: Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning", *Victorian Poetry* 32.3-4: 339-65.

Intertextual reading of "The Lowest Room" as inquiry into sororal relationships.

Stuart, Dorothy (1930) *Christina Rossetti*, London: Macmillan.

Swann, Thomas Burnett (1960) *Wonder and Whimsy. The Fantastic World of Christina Rossetti*. Francestown and New Hampshire: Marshall Jones Co.

Studies Rossetti's fantastic poems, a field in which she excelled.

Tennyson, George. B. (1981) "Postscript: Christina Rossetti, Gerard Manley Hopkins" in *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

The Afterword offers the first extensive treatment of the influence of the Oxford Movement on Rossetti.

Troxell, Janet Camp (ed.) (1937) *Three Rossettis. Unpublished Letters to and from Dante Gabriel, Christina and William*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Devotes two chapters to Christina Rossetti's correspondence.

Turner, Paul (1990) *Victorian Poetry, Drama and Miscellaneous Prose 1832-1890*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Introduction to Victorian literature, including a discussion of the enigmatic strain in "Goblin Market" as a reason for its popularity.

Vejvoda, Kathleen (2000) "The Fruit of Charity: *Comus* and Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", *Victorian Poetry* 38.4: 555-78.

Identifies the chaste Sabrina in *Comus* as a vital influence on the characterisation of Lizzie in "Goblin Market".

Watkinson, Raymond (1970) *Pre-Raphaelite Art and Design*. London: Studio Vista.

Evaluates the artistic ambitions and values of the Pre-Raphaelites, as they joined together to establish "a new sensibility" in European art (p. 8). Examining the diversity of the personalities and their artistic output, Watkinson demonstrates that the Pre-Raphaelites altered the course of painting, graphic and decorative arts.

Watson, Jeanie (1984) "'Men Sell Not Such in any Town': Christina Rossetti's Goblin Fruit of Fairy Tale" in *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association* 12: 61-77.

Argues that "Goblin Market"'s interplay between fairy tale and moral tale makes it into an extremely subversive poem, where the "immoral moral" triumphs, so that imagination exalts over convention.

Watson, Jeanie (1986) "'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': The Dilemma of Sisterly Self-Sacrifice", *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 7: 50-62.

Discusses "Goblin Market"'s Lizzie as a sisterly Christ-figure.

Watts-Dunton, Theodor (1895) "Christina Georgina Rossetti", *Athenaeum* 5.1.1895: 16-17.

Short commemorational article.

Weathers, Winston (1965) "Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self", *Victorian Poetry* 3: 81-89.

Seminal discussion of the duality detected in Rossetti's poetry as an allegory of the poet's self-division.

Webster's Online Dictionary, http://www.webster-dictionary.org [19 March, 2005]

Wheeler, Michael (1990) *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A good introduction to Victorian eschatology.

Wiehe, Roger (1992) "Sacred and Profane Gardens: Self-Reflection and Desire in Pre-Raphaelite Painting and the Poetry of the Rossettis" in *Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts*, ed. Liane De Girolami Cheney. New York: Lewiston: 110-21.

Psychosexual reading of the garden allegories in Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry.

Wimsatt, William K. (1954) "The Intentional Fallacy" in *The Verbal Icon*: *Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington, KY.: University Press of Kentucky: 3-20.

Landmark essay identifying the fallacy of defining the value and meaning of a work in terms of authorial intention.

Winters, Sarah Fiona (2001) "Questioning Milton, Questioning God: Christina Rossetti's Challenges to Authority in 'Goblin Market' and 'The Prince's Progress'", *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 10, Fall: 14-26.

Reads "Goblin Market" as a revision of *Paradise Lost*, questioning Milton's vision of Adam's sexual fall.

Wittreich, Joseph A. (1987) *Feminist Milton*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Views women's observations on Milton from 1700 to 1830, arguing that women have a history in Milton studies and that "Milton was not just an ally of feminists but their early sponsor".

Woolf, Virginia (1953) "I am Christina Rossetti" in *The Second Common Reader* ed. with introduction by Andrew McNeillie. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co: 214-21, [Originally published 1932].

Classic biographical sketch.

Woolf, Virginia (1993 [1929]) *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, ed. with introduction and notes by Michèle Barrett. Harmodsworth: Penguin, [Originally published 1929].

Feminist polemics on the effects of material circumstance and sexual constraint on female creativity.

Zaturenska, Marya (1949) *Christina Rossetti: A Portrait with Background.* New York: Macmillan & Co..

One of the few mid-twentieth century Rossetti biographies.

Index of Names

The name index does not include the names of characters in literary works or films.

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S

"In her dissertation, Katja Brandt effectively questions the assumption that literary relationships are always envious ones. Importantly, she offers a complex reading of the relationship between [Christina] Rossetti [1830-94] and her literary forefather [John] Milton [1608-74]. As Brandt notes, the tendency among feminist scholars has been to view Milton primarily as a figure of patriarchal oppression to be resisted by women writers. By focusing on the Christian faith that Rossetti shared with Milton, Brandt convincingly argues for a more complex understanding of Rossetti's response to Milton. This focus on Rossetti's faith places Brandt's work firmly in the most recent scholarship being done on Rossetti, a phase that is significantly altering our image of the poet and her work."

- Diane D'Amico -

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