

**‘The Prose Works of Christina Rossetti’**

by

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**A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

in the

**Department of English  
University of Durham.**

**February 1992**

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### Abstract

Christina Rossetti's prose writing was one of the major activities of her life and a study of her prose works reveals a mind in constant activity, reflecting the social, aesthetic and theological problems of her time. Initially, in her prose fiction, Rossetti works with the popular fictional forms and genres available to her, testing them against her religious ideas, and finally rejecting them. A growing interest in language and representation leads her to re-examine Romantic epistemology, and our relationship with the natural world. She proceeds in her study with a detailed examination of the scriptures and the lessons she finds there, helped by Tractarian theory and her knowledge of traditional protestant hermeneutics. She subjects a Romantic aesthetic to the rigour of Christian law, and locates a modified Coleridgean symbolism within Trinitarian theology. Although her approach resembles that of the Tractarians in its blend of traditional protestant hermeneutics and a Romantic theory of perception, she goes further in her development of the symbol. Her tentative formulation in her commentary on Revelation of a hermeneutical theory based on symbolic forms of perception is forward-looking to some of the major developments in twentieth-century hermeneutics, especially her concern with the role of ethics in the production and reception of art. Finally, her particular genius lies in her loving concern for her neighbour, and her concern to give back to her public all she has learnt, in a form which they are able to understand and cherish.

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### Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to my two supervisors, Professor J.R. Watson and Dr. David Jasper, for their advice and encouragement. I wish also to thank Professor Diane D'Amico for her friendly interest in my project and her valuable help in tracking down the unpublished Genesis Notes. Lastly, I wish to thank colleagues in the English Department, University of Natal, Durban, for their kindness and tolerance.



**Declaration**

Unless otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted in any form to another university.

The thesis conforms with the word limit set out in the Degree Regulations.

## INTRODUCTION

Christina Rossetti published nine volumes of prose and only five volumes of poetry. By 1850 she had already completed her first novella, and continued to write and publish prose throughout her long literary career. Her last and most ambitious volume of devotional prose was published two years before her death in 1894. Evidently her prose writing was one of the major activities of her life. Yet compared to the attention devoted by the critics to her poetry, critical attention given to her prose works has been almost negligible.

Rossetti's earliest prose works fell into disfavour almost from the moment of their completion. Her first attempt at fiction, *Maude*, was not published until after her death, and her first short story collection, *Commonplace*, had a hostile reception from the critics. Her devotional prose at the outset fared no better. Her regular publisher, Macmillan, turned down her first devotional prose volume, *Called to Be Saints*, in 1876<sup>1</sup> and it was not published until 1881 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, who brought out all her subsequent devotional prose volumes. Even today, although Rossetti's prose fiction, *Speaking Likenesses* especially, enjoys a certain amount of critical attention, her devotional works continue to be ignored or used only to elaborate discussions of her poetry.

The primary question which prompted this study was, 'Why is this so?' Why does the popularity now enjoyed by Rossetti's poetry (and to a lesser extent her prose fiction) not extend to her later prose works? Are her SPCK volumes intrinsically lacking in interest? It seems most unlikely that an exceptionally intelligent and sensitive poet,<sup>2</sup> should suddenly turn to writing shallow platitudes and 'easily formulated and superficially considered theological statements'.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the stumbling block lies, instead, in our own perception of her texts. Up to this point the major critical approaches have been unable to render accessible much of the theological content of Rossetti's devotional prose, except where it shows resemblance to major historical figures. One senses the feeling even in recent criticism, that whereas authors like Arnold or Ruskin can be expected to make valid comments on literary and theological subjects, as a Victorian woman Rossetti has neither the education nor the authority to do so.

On the other hand, it may be felt that a sufficient knowledge of her life and work can be gained from her poetry alone, and familiarity with her devotional material is simply not necessary for the study of her poetry. It is true that a lot of Rossetti's poetry can be enjoyed with little or no reference to her theology, but it has also become increasingly evident that much of her so-called secular poetry is informed by religious models.<sup>4</sup> Moreover the interpretation of her later poetry, in



particular those poems originally included in the prose works themselves, becomes problematical without a valid contextual reference.

If at times in her later poetry she falls into apparent 'unpoetic' lapses -- Stuart Curran cites, for example, the unintentional comic effect of the rhyme 'increase us' with 'Jesus' (p.289) -- the question to ask is whether there has been a shift in her definition of the function of poetry or of the poetic. It would be interesting to discover, for example, why she found acceptable such an awkward phrase as 'Thy Cross cruciferous',<sup>5</sup> in one of her latest devotional poems. How do the botanical implications of 'cruciferous' relate to Christ's Death and Resurrection? How can the Cross become itself cross-bearing? The poem needs to be read in its context within the devotional work, *The Face of The Deep*, and, if the subtle web of illusions is to become clear, it must also be seen in relation to Rossetti's theology as a whole. A detailed study of all her prose works is needed, therefore, especially her devotional works, in order to establish the main features of her theology and to trace her intellectual development from her earliest attempts at prose, right through to her mature theological formulations.

The contextual approach to Rossetti's work has so far yielded the most substantial results in the examination of her theology. R.Chapman's *Faith and Revolt*, and G.B.Tennyson's *Victorian Devotional Poetry* have both made significant contributions to our understanding of Rossetti's relationship to the Tractarians. A major step forward recently in the contextual approach has been A.H.Harrison's *Christina Rossetti in Context* which demonstrated the importance of traditional and contemporary theology in the understanding of her work. Harrison suggests the metaphor of Archaeology in the recuperation of Rossetti's work, and I think his comparison is a good one. But in his reclaiming of the various contexts surrounding Rossetti's work he does not do justice to the delicate relationships between Rossetti's own volumes, and neglects her own coherent world of ideas which tends to be seen in an inferior relationship to other value systems. At times he also disregards the chronological sequence of her production, thus destroying any evidence of intellectual development. The charge of 'solipsistic withdrawal from any active life' (Preface) does not take account of Rossetti's later insistence that 'the approach to paradise is by way of labour not of sloth'.<sup>6</sup> Finally, his conclusion that in her work 'the desire for sensory and erotic satisfaction is elided or transmuted into traditional religious aspirations and language' is ultimately disappointing in that it simply restates the traditional womanhood versus sanctity theme.<sup>7</sup>

Harrison's volume, nevertheless, contains a great many valuable insights into the relationship between Rossetti and the value systems she had available to her.

This study hopes to add to these insights by making more accessible the development of Rossetti's own ideas, as found in her prose fiction and devotional prose volumes, which far from being full of superficial platitudes, reveal themselves the repositories of Rossetti's critical reflections on the aesthetic and theological movements of her day. But I hope also to correct the various misconceptions regarding Rossetti's continued concern with the world around her, and concerning her value as a figure representative of the fascinating intellectual developments of the late nineteenth century.

In one way or another, all studies begin with the subjective element of choice, and are conditioned by the prevailing enthusiasms of the time of writing. The present study is no exception. The central idea evolved from an earlier study of Christina Rossetti's poetry which revealed a significant interaction between inherited Romantic ideas and Victorian religious elements in her work, and suggested her conscious participation in the dialogue of transition.<sup>8</sup> Starting from this observation, it was found that the great variety of genre and form in Rossetti's early fiction was a manifestation of her interest in confronting the old with the new, and of her search for forms of integration. The following devotional prose works confirm her interest in form and language and show her growing awareness of the ethical and hermeneutical issues involved in creative and interpretative activity.

Chapter one of this study thus deals with Rossetti's earliest experiments in prose fiction, *Maude* (Completed by 1850, although not published until 1897), and *Commonplace*, noting particularly her handling of language and genre. Chapter two examines *Speaking Likenesses* in terms of the confrontation between ethical concerns and the free working of the creative imagination. The redirecting of the creative endeavour towards scriptural themes in *Annus Domini*, *Called to Be Saints* and *Seek and Find* is the subject of Chapter three, followed by Chapter four which focuses on Rossetti's critique of received Romantic tradition and her redefinition of symbol in *Letter and Spirit* and *Time Flies*. Lastly, Chapter five sees Rossetti's tentative development of a hermeneutical theory in her commentary on Revelation, which aims to demonstrate the continuing relevance of the scriptures to modern life, in *The Face of The Deep*.

In order to combine as far as possible the following of subjective interests with more objective and scholarly assessments, and in order particularly to preserve the spatial and chronological relationships between and within the volumes themselves, certain limits and disciplines have been imposed. In a study of this kind it is not possible to take up controversial issues in, say, feminist theory or modern theology, except where these have a direct bearing on the development of Rossetti's

thought. Nor is it possible to include an in depth discussion of Romantic theory or of Victorian theology. Having said this, I hope nevertheless that scholars in these areas may find something of interest to follow up.

Strict attention to chronology will be observed throughout, in particular the exclusion of ideas from Rossetti's later studies in the discussion of her early ones except where necessary occasionally for comparison. A strict adherence to chronology also assumes, as far as possible, the use of contemporary terminology, and Rossetti's own vocabulary will be used in theoretical discussion, except where modern terminology is necessary to show the relation of her own undertaking to ours.

Lastly, given the lack of critical data on Rossetti's prose works and the limited access to many of them for most readers, a general account of each volume will be given, in order to furnish a context for the subsequent discussion. Quotations will also be longer than those normal for a critical study, in order to provide material otherwise unavailable. Rossetti's two articles on Dante will not be included in the study nor her studies of other celebrities, as they refer to authors outside the scope of this study.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Rossetti's sketches in *Dawn of Day*, and her 'Harmony on First Corinthians' in *New and Old* have been included as they have a direct bearing on Rossetti's theological development. They may be found in the Appendix together with the unpublished material also used in the study, Rossetti's notes on Genesis. Continuous reference will also be made to Rossetti's poetry, where appropriate.

## Notes

1. *Rossetti--Macmillan Letters*, ed. with an introduction and notes by L.M.Packer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p.120.
  2. There appears to be a certain reluctance to give an outright pronouncement on Rossetti's worth as a poet, although recent criticism shows clearly her intelligence and skill, a far cry from Stuart Curran's picture of her as 'a simple and pious woman' lacking in 'mental prowess'. ('The Lyric Voice of Christina Rossetti' *VP* 9:3 (Autumn 1971), p.298). Even A.H.Harrison's summing up of Rossetti in *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1988), as 'an intelligent middle-class Victorian woman' (p.10) seems a bit flat, given his obvious admiration for her powerful poetry.
  3. P.G.Stanwood, 'Christina Rossetti's Devotional Prose', *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by D.A.Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p.239. I wonder that David Kent, who in 1974 accused Dorothy Stuart of 'patronising condescension' in his 'Sequence and Meaning in Christina Rossetti's Verses' (*VP*, 17:3, p.259) should find a similar condescension permissible in his own volume.
  4. One only has to look at the enormous influence of typology on the early Pre-Raphaelites to understand how inseparable religious and aesthetic ideas were at the time. See for example George Landow's study of Victorian Typology in *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).
  5. *Seek and Find* (London: SPCK, 1879), p.320.
  6. *The Face of the Deep* (London: SPCK, 1892), p.232.
  7. 'She set the claims of her womanhood against those of her sanctity.' C.M.Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), p.255.
  8. Palazzo, L. 'Romantic Imagination/ Victorian Morality: A Study of the Poetry of Christina Rossetti from 1847 - 1859'. Unpublished MA Thesis, Univ of Natal, Durban, RSA. 1986.
  9. 'Dante. The Poet illustrated out of the Poem' *The Century*, Vol.XXVII (NS Vol.V) (Feb 1884) pp.566-573, 'Dante, an English Classic' *Churchman's Shilling Magazine* Vol.ii 1867, pp.200-205.
- A List of all Rossetti's publications may be found in the bibliography section of Bell, M., *Christina Rossetti: A Bibliographical and Critical Study* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1898).

## Chapter 1

As a young woman, Rossetti moved constantly between two poles: the Pre-Raphaelite circle and the concerns of her two older brothers, and the religious and social activities of her mother and her sister, Maria. C.M.Bowra concluded that she had two sides to her character, which reflected these two areas of her life:

One side of her was Pre-Raphaelite (...). She was often enough content to withdraw into fancies and dreams and to find a full satisfaction in the world of her imagination. (...) But she had another side, grave and serious and intimately bound with her inner life. (...) Her faith was the centre of her life, and to it she gave her passionate allegiance, her ruthless self-examination, and her unremitting candour.<sup>1</sup>

Rossetti's firm adherence to the Christian faith throughout her life cannot be questioned; her brother W.M.Rossetti, her first biographer, Mackenzie Bell, and her subsequent biographers wrote of her unwavering faith in Christ. This faith is confirmed in her poetry and devotional prose. She was a churchgoer all her life, from the early days at St.Katherine's Church, Regents Park, until her last attendances at the Church in Woburn Square. Together with her sister and her mother, 'a devout but not bigoted member of the evangelical branch of the Church',<sup>2</sup> she was attracted by the Tractarian fervour of Christ Church, Albany Street and its incumbent, Rev.William Dodsworth. She must certainly have heard Dr.Edward Pusey preach on more than one occasion. She had, in addition, as a lifelong friend, the high church cleric and controversialist, Rev.Dr.R.F.Littledale. Thus provided with a religious education dominated by some of the most progressive and committed theologians of her time, it is no wonder that she applied her religious principles so passionately to her life and thought.

Her relationship towards the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, on the other hand, is not so simple. She certainly learnt from them; her early exposure to Romanticism must have come through her brothers and she was well read in Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. The richness of her early Pre-Raphaelite poetry shows her sharing their admiration for the sensuous description of Keats, for example, the favourite poet of her brother, Dante Gabriel. Her interest in the Romantic poets was not confined, however, as was that of Dante Gabriel, to an imitation of their rich, sensuous detail. Early experiments in poetry show her attempting to imitate and evaluate complex aesthetic theory.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that she became master of the Pre-Raphaelite, Post Romantic style, but her knowledge of Romanticism and of the Romantic imagination was by no means confined to discussions with her brothers. The Oxford

Movement, a most influential force in her religious education, was in fact itself a manifestation of Romantic fervour in the English church, and Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular would have been much discussed.<sup>4</sup> A further complication in her relationship with the artistic and poetic activities of her brothers arises because of the religious and typological element in Pre-Raphaelitism itself. Much early Pre-Raphaelite art is based on models of early Italian religious paintings, and religious themes persisted, particularly in the work of Holman Hunt. So although the young Rossetti's interest was, in a sense, divided between her religious activities and her brothers' circle, it is erroneous to assume, as Bowra has done, that the two sides of her life can be so easily distinguished. Rather than emphasize the divisions in Rossetti's work, it would be more useful therefore to look at Rossetti's work as tending towards some kind of personal unity, in a period of great aesthetic and theological disunity.

In his study of eighteen of Rossetti's early letters, A.H.Harrison describes the young Rossetti as a lively, witty and intelligent young artist, enthusiastic about the activity of her brothers, but by no means overawed, and quite capable of holding her own.<sup>5</sup> Her humorous references to the activity of the PRB and in particular the ill-fated *Germ*, hint at her having kept a certain intellectual distance from her brothers, despite her fondness for them and for the other members of the circle.

One may be led, then, to expect in her early work a sound sense of 'that which is true and right',<sup>6</sup> a knowledge of Tractarianism, an interest in the concerns of struggling young artists and 'modern' aesthetic theories, and finally, a touch of humour. We find all these in her first volume of fiction, *Maude*.

### *Maude*

In the introduction to her new edition of *Maude* (1976), R.W.Crump made the assertion that it 'has been perhaps the most neglected work of Christina Rossetti'.<sup>7</sup> Yet even after the publication of her authoritative edition, the book has not gained in popularity. The cause of such neglect, I believe, stems primarily from the insistence of most Rossetti critics until quite recently that the novella is autobiographical. As Crump herself writes:

The novella deserves study as one of her most autobiographical compositions; it sheds considerable light on the inner suffering and intensity of her outwardly uneventful life.<sup>8</sup>

More recently, Diane D'Amico in her article 'Christina Rossetti's *Maude*: A Reconsideration', acknowledges the limitation of a purely autobiographical



approach and moves forward to a re-evaluation of 'significant thematic and structural elements'.<sup>9</sup> The advantage of her approach is that it enables her to see the relationships between this, Rossetti's earliest prose work, and her later devotional prose, and the recognition of a lively critical intelligence at work in *Maude* leads naturally to a recognition of the important theoretical discussions Rossetti later locates in her devotional volumes. Neglect of Rossetti's prose works leads even a most discerning and able critic like Catherine Cantalupo to ignore vital areas of Rossetti's incarnational poetics.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, what is needed is a re-evaluation of the novella's lively and often humorous debate, and a recognition that the protagonist's views are not necessarily those of Rossetti herself. The young Rossetti, as both *Maude* and Rossetti's early letters show,<sup>11</sup> had a lively intelligence and wit, as well as great enthusiasm for her art. The internal dialogue of the text of *Maude* shows Rossetti's awareness of the possibilities and limitations of her artistic heritage, and is of great interest to the critic who wishes to evaluate her subsequent development.

Some critics have begun to appreciate Rossetti's skill with narrative, although *Speaking Likenesses* is more popular as a subject for critical enquiry than *Maude*.<sup>12</sup> A.H.Harrison's *Christina Rossetti in Context*, amid traces of the old autobiographical bias -- *Maude* as an echo of Rossetti's struggles with the 'pleasures of the flesh', her reading of St. Augustine buttressing 'her renunciatory mentality'<sup>13</sup>-- sees a Rossetti who 'indulges in linguistic, formal and metaphoric play'.<sup>14</sup> Harrison's claim that in *Maude* 'Rossetti took up the three moral issues that also preoccupied Augustine in the last stage of his conversion'<sup>15</sup> is true, I think, but the novella leans more towards the nineteenth century manifestations of these same issues. (In a similar manner, a study of the influence of Augustine on Rossetti's biblical exegesis needs to be tempered by a consideration of nineteenth century hermeneutical developments.) On the whole, however, this more recent approach I see as very promising; the consideration of the text as an evaluation by a young writer of the various possibilities of expression open to her.

As the first complete prose work which Rossetti produced, *Maude* is particularly interesting in its use of genre models to comment on and evaluate the religious and aesthetic standpoints with which each is associated, at the same time experimenting with the forms themselves as possible modes for her own writing: Evangelical piety with the attendant moral tale; Romantic longing with touches of the interior debate, the personal quest of the *Bildungsroman*; the religious and aesthetic appeal of Tractarianism which lends itself now to the first, then to the second debate. All compete, as it were, to become dominant in the story, which ends finally, as Harrison observes, with a closure that 'embodies a literal resignation of the rebelliousness of language, themes, and characterisation(...)a giving over of the potential evoked(...)for destabilising the conventional world (of language, social

expectations, literary conventions)'.<sup>16</sup> In effect, Rossetti finally rejects 'the subjective element of experience'<sup>17</sup> for a clearly defined moral and social position. At the same time she rejects the destabilising effect of this subjectivity on genre, falling back on a form which is familiar and unchallenging. But during the course of the volume there are constant gestures towards a form of expression which defies genre restrictions. The model represented by Maude's 'writing-book (which) was neither Common-Place Book, Album, Scrap-Book nor Diary' but 'a compound of all these' (p.30) -- a model which is 'locked' and eventually suppressed in the story -- slowly re-emerges in the course of Rossetti's own career and finds its final form in her later devotional prose, as a 'poetic of life' which embraces all. Already in *Maude*, as Harrison tells us, the functions of language itself are questioned and we see an attempt at subversion in the destructive thrust of Maude's 'very odd sonnet'. But at its close, the story makes use of clearly defined religious language as it returns to conservatism.

The novella begins with all the appearances of the moral tale, and is seen as such by William Michael Rossetti, who calls his sister's *Maude* a 'Tale for Girls'<sup>18</sup> in his 'Prefatory Note' to the 1897 publication. Writing after the great flowering of the moral tale for boys and girls in the second half of the nineteenth century, he can easily place Rossetti's story in the tradition of Charlotte Yonge and Hesba Stretton. Although the story had been completed before 1850, a fact which he acknowledges, years before Yonge's novels became well known or Stretton's even written (*The Heir of Redclyffe*, which incidentally greatly interested Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, came out in 1853<sup>19</sup>), it is possible that Rossetti had read or heard about Yonge's earlier novels. A form which Rossetti constantly had available, however, was the RTS tale, with its Evangelical emphasis. The Religious Tract Society was founded in 1799 by a group of Evangelicals, to counteract the corrupting effects of non-religious fiction on the young. The golden rule for books published under the auspices of this society was 'that each one must contain "some account of the way of a sinner's salvation," that is, of the central evangelical message of conversion'.<sup>20</sup>

These stories fed on an Evangelical tradition of infant piety, death-bed conversions described in minute detail -- all to shock and frighten the innocent child-listener into obedience. The SPCK was a little slower in introducing these 'Exemplary Tales' but soon caught up together with the commercial publishers, after 1850. In fact the RTS tale soon became common currency, and Rossetti herself was certainly familiar with it.<sup>21</sup>

But whilst these stories attempted to convert, they were never used for debate, for the exploration of a particular religious position, with the exception of Harriett Mozley's *The Fairy Bower* (1841) and *The Lost Brooch* (1842). The debate begun by the Oxford Movement in the 1830s brought a challenge to Evangelical

notions, and Mozley, being the sister of J.H. Newman and wife of the Tractarian Tom Mozley, was obviously in the centre of discussion. Her books were written to expose Evangelical attitudes which in her opinion were nothing short of hypocrisy, but she never promoted Tractarian ones. There is no record of Rossetti having read Mozley's novels, but she and her mother attended the Tractarian Christ Church and she must have at least been aware of the debate. W.M. Rossetti comments on the 'High Church' flavour of *Maude*:

One can trace in this tale that she [Rossetti] was already an adherent of the advanced High Church party in the Anglican communion, including conventual sisterhoods.<sup>22</sup>

But in contrast to Mozley's stories, Rossetti's novella does not engage in any fundamental debate for or against Tractarianism; rather, her conflict is between the forces of 'stability'-- clear moral and social positions -- and the destabilising effect of Romantic subjective perception. The Tractarian revival itself was a most curious blend of both of these, and Tractarian fervour appears here at times in support of either. In the main however the Evangelical and the Tractarian came to co-exist quite happily in the moral tale genre, and this is true of *Maude* also. The emphasis on obedience and on the sacraments blends perfectly with the RTS model of the children's tale. On the other hand, the aesthetic appeal of elaborate church music and the atmosphere of heroic martyrdom reminiscent of Newman and John Mason Neale's historical fiction also become vehicles for subjectivism. What dies in the end, in *Maude*, is the Romantic spirit of innovation, of rebellion; the thrill of creating something new and exciting: the spirit of a free-ranging imaginative fiction, in effect.

The antagonism in *Maude* is located in the four central characters, Maude, Agnes, Mary and Magdalen, who are all trying to articulate their own moral or aesthetic standpoint, in most cases determined by the genre or model with which they are associated. For example, at the opening of the story, Maude, the heroine, is cast as the naughty child of the moral tale, but she attempts to break out of this role and assumes other models for herself, trying to find one which suits both her artistic temperament and her moral perceptions. She fails to find a suitable role for herself and is finally given a pious death-bed, as the most fitting exit for the heroine of a moral tale, the genre which finally reclaims the story. Left to sort out the literary remains of Maude is Agnes, a moderate Tractarian cousin, who is shocked by the destruction of such 'variety,' but is honour bound to destroy the major part of Maude's work. The reader is left with the sense of loss that such destruction provokes.

The initial organisation of *Maude* corresponds more or less exactly to that of the Evangelical tale. A 'naughty' girl is compared to a group of 'good' girls, with mediation between them through a narrator who also acts as moral teacher (We

shall see later how narrative intervention persists and becomes intrusive in Rossetti's attempts at imaginative fiction). Maude's activities are dubious: her writing book is hastily locked as her mother enters, carrying an 'open letter' (p.29). She is surrounded by 'a chaos of stationery' and 'was slipping out of sight some scrawled paper' (p.29). Her attitude to her mother is summed up by the narrator as 'one who without telling lies was determined not to tell the truth,' (p.29) a fault not sufficiently reprehensible to alienate the reader, yet clearly against two fundamental Tractarian principles, which play central roles in Yonge's novels, truthfulness and obedience to parents. (Incidentally, Mozley's *The Fairy Bower* has as its central plot the withholding of truth, which is considered as serious as a lie). On the whole, Maude's behaviour is most 'un-Evangelical' especially in her attitude to good works. Maude is lazy and unproductive in this sphere:

She yawned, leaned back in her chair, and wondered how she should fill up the time till dinner. (p.30)

In contrast, her cousins, Mary and Agnes Clifton, are paragons of Tractarian and Evangelical virtue: obedient to their mother (as in most of Rossetti's work, fathers are absent), busily engaged in trivial tasks. Their reward for conformity is beauty (of the blue-eyed kind), health and happiness, whereas Maude is 'pale,' 'languid and preoccupied to a painful degree' (p.30). The features of these main characters are easily recognisable to the critic of Rossetti's poetry but it is important to recognise their origin here as bearers of a particular religious position. Maude is quite well known in her own circle as a poet, but her reputation is a source more of frustration than of satisfaction to her. Her attitude to her own poetry is ambiguous; she hides away more than just her own poetic compositions. Her 'writing-book' does not acknowledge genre limitations, containing 'original compositions (...), pet extracts, extraordinary little sketches and occasional tracts of journal' (p.30). The printed poems to which the reader of the novella has access, function as an integral part of the structure, mirroring the changes in Maude. The first, a sonnet, establishes Maude's dominant motivation, which is in serious conflict with the tone of the moral tale: she is attracted by the heroic, the passionate, the 'poetic', where that is defined as an emotional extreme.<sup>23</sup> The impulse is clearly a Romantic one, similar to the inner searchings and world-weariness of the *Bildungsroman*, here presented to us in a recognisable Tractarian form: heroic sanctity, and this heroism will throughout the entire first half of the story be pitted against the 'other side' of the Tractarian ethic lived by the Clifton sisters, the two sides scoring 'direct hits' against each other.

In this first sonnet, Maude shows the attraction martyrdom has for her, and her repugnance for the ordinary, every-day business of living:

Yes, I too could face death and never shrink:  
 But it is harder to bear hated life;  
 To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;  
 To drag the heavy chain whose every link  
 Galls to the bone;

(p.30)

Of course Maude is not blind to the aesthetic value of such a position, indeed the centre of the conflict is within Maude herself. When she finds a substitute for heroism in the thrill of Anglican church music, her greatest problem becomes the fear that she is attracted by its aesthetic value, rather than by its moral worth, and one notes the similarity here to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Hand and Soul'. The relationship in Pre-Raphaelitism between moral and aesthetic concerns was ambiguous to say the least.<sup>24</sup>

When the two 'factions' (Maude and the Clifton girls) meet, Mary Clifton scores the first anti-heroic hit:

We are to do what we like in the morning: I mean, nothing particular is arranged; so I shall initiate you into all the mysteries of the place; all the cats, dogs, rabbits, pigeons, etc; above all I must introduce you to a pig, a special protégé of mine: - that is, if you are inclined, for you look wretchedly pale; aren't you well, dear? (p.32)

The humour is typical of Rossetti, with the juxtaposition of heroism and the small insignificant creatures of the place -- rabbits, moles, wombats and similar small creatures feature largely in her poetry. The pig must have come as a particular shock. Maude counter-attacks immediately after Mary's banter, by over praising Mary's beauty and making her blush. But the Cliftons' resounding victory comes at the end of Part One, Chapter One, as the 'new and very fat' Clifton baby loudly proclaims Maude's unsuitability for motherhood, receiving 'Maude's advances with a howl of intense dismay' (p.32).

The bantering continues, as always most amicably, in I:II, this time with Agnes' comment:

Here is your wreath, Maude; you must wear it for my sake, and forgive a surreptitious sprig of bay which I have introduced. (p.33)

Maude ignores the comment for as long as she can, but eventually attempts to make light of the statement with 'I have not earned the bay' (p.33). Nevertheless, she does not attempt to remove it and we are given a hint that Maude's problem stems also from her intellectual disposition. The bay, we are told, matches 'the really intellectual character of her face' (p.33), but neither the bay (Maude's literary ability) nor her creative intellect have any possibility of expression either in terms of

the dominant genre (the moral tale) or in terms of the kind of religious life the Clifton girls represent, except in the secret of her writing book, which is kept locked.

Yet Maude continues to challenge the dominant religious ethic, and the genre in which she is trapped. Her abrupt suggestion that they write 'Bouts rimés' comes as a shock both to the company of young girls assembled for the party which follows, and in a sense also to the 'moral tale' genre. Most early Evangelicals did not trust either fiction or poetry, which were considered 'only nets to catch young minds in the maze of Satan'.<sup>25</sup> However, the Clifton girls belong to the more liberal-minded Tractarians and although Mary admits composition is quite beyond her (she is the most 'at home' in her environment and in the story), Agnes takes up the challenge. So, surprisingly, does Magdalen, a quiet unobtrusive girl, who has found her way into the story together with the party guests.

Predictably, Agnes uses her poetic opportunity to attack, albeit gently, both Maude (for suggesting poetry) and poetry itself. Her sonnet is devoted to all the horrific things she would do rather than write. Maude's reply is friendly, but has a cutting edge to it:

Might I however venture to hint that my sympathy with your sorrows  
would have been greater, had they been expressed in metre? (p.36)

Magdalen's sonnet shows a non-engaged, escapist beauty; in other words, we see poetry doing what might at that time be expected of it, the creation of a Keatsian dream world. Maude's sonnet, on the other hand, is ugly, and she means it to be. It not only overthrows the expectations of its genre, but includes an anti-social attack:

If all the world were water fit to drown  
There are some whom you would not teach to swim.  
(p.37)

The Clifton girls are not quite sure how to react. Mary calls it 'a very odd sonnet', but Magdalen shows an unexpected understanding of what Maude was trying to do, judging it 'by far the best of the three' (p.37).

Agnes saves her cutting comment for later in the story. In the third section of Part One, as the girls are discussing the events of the night before, Maude suggests sending her sonnet to one of the guests who begged for some of her poetry:

'She can have the sonnet I wrote last night.'  
Agnes hesitated: 'I could not well offer her that, because -- ' (p. 41)

Agnes does not even need to finish her sentence. Maude takes the hint, without any resistance. The poem that she then gives Miss Savage indicates a growing alienation and a sense of despair at the failure to find a meaningful mode of expression:

My tears were swallowed by the sea;  
Her songs died on the air.

(p.41)

Maude's attitude has already begun to change by the end of Part One. As her loneliness grows, so does her desire to join in the happy existence of the Clifton girls and enter, as it were, the moral tale. She admires the embroidery work the two sisters are engaged in:

‘But you have both finished breakfast, and make me ashamed by your diligence. What is that beautiful piece of work?’

The sisters looked delighted: ‘I am so glad you like it, dear Maude. Mary and I are embroidering a cover for the lectern in our church; but we feared you might think the ground dull.’

‘Not at all; I prefer those quiet shades.’ (p.40)

Maude still balks, however, at joining in with them, although she admits her own dissatisfaction with herself:

‘How I envy you,’ she continued in a low voice as if speaking rather to herself than to her hearers: ‘you who live in the country, and are exactly what you appear, and never wish for what you do not possess. I am sick of display and poetry and acting.’ (p.41)

As Maude wavers in her antagonism towards that which the Clifton sisters represent, the sisters themselves adopt a far friendlier attitude. This warmth intensifies in Part Two, when the cousins come to stay. Maude has already changed in two significant ways: she is dismissive of her poetry, ‘Yes, I continue to write now and then as the humour seizes me’(p.43), and has developed an enthusiasm for the ceremony of High Church Anglicanism, finding a substitute for ‘heroism’ in the beauty of the Anglican musical tradition. After a disastrous evening with Mrs Strawdy (an extension of the Clifton ethos) in which it becomes clear to Maude that she simply cannot integrate and become like the sisters, Maude returns home in utter turmoil, ‘dissatisfied with her circumstances, her friends and herself’ and the story reaches its climax.

Maude begins to feel guilty about her attraction to the aesthetic appeal of church music and in an excess of scrupulosity ceases to participate in the Eucharist. Her refusal to attend the most important ceremony of all, shocks Agnes to the centre of her Tractarian core:

Why deprive yourself of the appointed means of grace? Dear Maude, think better of it. (p.54)

For all her Tractarian vocabulary, Agnes cannot hide her Evangelical origins, which Maude, of course, shares:

You cannot mean that for the present you will indulge vanity and display; that you will court admiration and applause; that you will take your fill of pleasure until sickness, or it may be death, strips you of temptation and sin together.

(p.53)

Here at the crisis point of the story, Maude goes to bed 'harassed, wretched, remorseful, everything but penitent' (p.54). Then the song of carol singers at the window (it is Christmas Eve), heralds in her reconversion in true Evangelical style, complete (later on in the story) with death-bed scene.

In her use of the RTS model Rossetti was not necessarily making a point of the Evangelical elements which persisted in Tractarian thought; her attention at this stage seems rather to be on the Evangelical tale as available genre. Keble had firmly established the Tractarian poem in *The Christian Year* (1827), a book with which Rossetti was very familiar, but the same had not been done yet for Tractarian fiction.

Maude's 'conversion' takes place in the interval before Part Three, and we learn of it only after the event. Nevertheless, Maude's obedience to her mother when we meet her again, does not surprise us as her conversion had already been predicted at the end of Part Two; nor does the information that she has been working at embroidery.<sup>26</sup> True, she has made the design herself and has sewed it 'in glowing shades of wool and silk' (p.59), but her promise of 'strict conformity to her mother's injunction' (p.59) betrays her integration. We learn later, too, that she has resumed participation in the sacrament;

How I rejoice that my next Communion was not indeed delayed till sickness had stripped me of temptation and sin together. (p.69)

and we note the deliberate repetition of Agnes' words from p.53. If the tale were to end here, according to genre, the 'indulgent reader' (p.80) might sigh with satisfaction, the moral tale told, all ending happily, including the blissful death of Maude the penitent. It very nearly does. Maude dies, as was expected of her; after all Mary has done what was expected of her, in her happy marriage to Mr Herbert (note the name); Magdalen likewise, at her reception into the 'Sisterhood of Mercy,' persevering in her abstinence until she receives 'an abundant recompense



for all she has foregone here,' (p.58) a similar sort of displacement as the escapist dream of her poem. Maude herself is happy with the opportunity to show her heroism in a way sanctioned by her religious principles. She dramatises her pain in her letter to Agnes:

Uh, my side! it gives an awful twinge now and then.

(p.61)

and delights in her almost self-willed decline:

I obstinately refuse to be kept up, but insist on becoming weaker and weaker. (p.61)

By her death Maude has escaped having to reconcile the challenge of her rebelliousness with the realities of her daily life. Her death ultimately is as much an escape as the fate of Mary or Magdalen. She has been happily integrated into the moral tale genre, as its heroine.

The story does not end with Maude's death, however, and Agnes is left to voice regret and to ponder the consequences of Maude's conversion; the same Agnes who was instrumental in bringing it about. She is left to comment on the course of events, and on the final triumph of the strongly moral and didactic Evangelical ending. Before Maude dies, she turns Agnes' own conformity against her by insisting that she herself accept one of these positions:

At last she said: 'Agnes, if you could not be yourself, but must become one of us three: I don't mean as to goodness, of course, but merely as regards circumstances, -- would you change with Sister Magdalen, with Mary, or with me?' (p.69)

But Agnes resists the advances of conformity, in this sense showing herself ultimately the heroine of *Maude*:

Not with Mary, certainly. Neither should I have courage to change with you; I never should bear pain so well: nor yet with Sister Magdalen, for I want her fervour of devotion. So at present I fear you must even put up with me as I am. Will that do? (p.69)

It obviously will not do for the new, conformed Maude as she does not answer, except to remind Agnes that her hint of a vengeful God was the starting point of this conversion. Agnes is quite shocked:

Did I say that? It was very harsh. (p.69)

The poem that follows, written by the converted Maude, can only add to Agnes' discomfort:

But the dead branch spoke from the sod,  
 And the eggs answered me again:  
 Because we failed dost thou complain?  
 Is thy wrath just? And what if God,  
 Who waiteth for thy fruits in vain,  
 Should also take the rod? --

(lines 19-24)

After the death of Maude, as a result of the injuries sustained in the carriage accident, Agnes is left to carry out her dying wishes, which include the destruction of the major part of Maude's poetry. Maude's 'writing book' dies with her:

The locked book she never opened: but had it placed in Maude's coffin, with all its records of folly, sin, vanity: and, she humbly trusted, of true penitence also. (p.72)

Agnes, 'astonished at the variety of Maude's compositions' (p.72), recognises her act as one of destruction, and 'it cost her a pang' (p.72) to carry out Maude's instructions. The poems she keeps for herself soften the blow a little, as they lead away from Maude, offering a future to Agnes herself:

Then if you haply muse upon the past,  
 Say this: Poor child, she hath her wish at last;  
 Barren through life, but in death bearing fruit. --

(Poem 1, lines 28-30)

Birth follows hard on death,  
 Life on withering.  
 Hasten, we shall come the sooner  
 Back to pleasant Spring. - -

(Poem 2, lines 9-12)

' Winter is past, and Spring  
 Is come; arise, My Love, and come away.' --

(Poem 3, lines 13-14)

The echo of The Song of Solomon suggests a fusion of the biblical and the sensual and is interesting in the light of Rossetti's later efforts to claim Romantic subjectivity as a valid exegetical mode. However, at this stage, although Agnes may have a future, she has no voice and no role in the society which Maude has escaped through death. She can only long, albeit in religious terms 'for the hastening of that eternal morning, which shall reunite in God those who in Him, or for His Sake, have parted here' (p.75).

If one may identify Rossetti herself with one of the characters in the story, it must surely be Agnes, who in the end must remain silent, knowing the necessity for a

strict moral life but also its destructive effect on free creativity, yet unable to find a medium in which both happily coexist. As moral influence she has saved Maud from a sinful death, but all the vitality of Maude's creative imagination has had to be suppressed. The inner Maude -- her emotional struggles, her self-examinings, her yearnings, in short Maude the potential heroine of the *Bildungsroman* -- is buried together with her diary.

### *Commonplace and Other Stories*

Rossetti was unsatisfied with *Maude* and, as she wrote to William Michael in 1851, was hopeful of doing better:

I think *Maude* may await my return. She is lying perdu in a drawer, several removes from undergoing a revise. Perhaps I shall some day produce something better in the first instance.<sup>27</sup>

Her next volume, *Commonplace*, a collection of short stories, was published in 1870, and shows her experimenting with a variety of genres. Her first biographer, Bell, commenting on the volume, concludes:

The volume under consideration seems to indicate that at one period of her life Christina Rossetti had a tentative purpose of becoming a novelist.<sup>28</sup>

Rossetti may have had hopes of becoming a novelist, but the volume did not find favour with the reviewers. They objected particularly to her use of different genres all in the same volume, and her departure from the rich Pre-Raphaelite idiom of 'Goblin Market'. The volume suffered considerably from the comparison with her exciting and highly imaginative poetry. *The Spectator's* review of October 29 echoed Dante Gabriel's sardonic comment: 'Not dangerously exciting to the nervous system'<sup>29</sup>:

The exuberance and delicacy of fancy, which are such charming characteristics of her poems, have not much play in short stories like these -- principally of ordinary life. We sigh to find the spell broken, and that the authoress of such exquisite verses can indeed write commonplace.<sup>30</sup>

But the overall defect of the volume, as the *Spectator* critic spelt out clearly, is the lack of consistency both in subject matter and style:

Not that evidence of the same fancy is entirely wanting, but it is chiefly exhibited in the grotesque variety of the wares offered for our

acceptance, and which are adapted to such opposite classes of customers, and belong to such different periods of life, that we are involuntarily reminded of her own merchant-men crying to the passers, 'Come buy, come buy!' and offering fruits of every clime and season, 'All ripe together.'<sup>31</sup>

Particular anger in the reviews was reserved for the religious tales. For 'The Waves of This Troublesome World' is reserved the comment in the *Pall Mall Gazette* that to this story 'the word commonplace in its common acceptation applies better than to anything else set before us'.<sup>32</sup> *The Spectator* is particularly sarcastic in its dealings with 'A Safe Investment', which in form is perhaps the most daring of Rossetti's stories. Although grudgingly conceding that it may be called 'a misty allegory',<sup>33</sup> the reviewer seems mainly concerned about its lack of realism: 'such an accumulation of disasters were never described before as happening in a few consecutive hours, for it was nearly morning before the hubbub began(...) how the investors got scent of their disasters at such an hour, is not explained'.<sup>34</sup> The reviewers quite evidently had no idea how to take the volume. Admittedly, the stories on the whole are not particularly successful -- Rossetti herself would have agreed.<sup>35</sup> However, the volume makes interesting reading for the Rossetti critic and the questions the stories raise are most helpful as a guide to the works that follow. Seen in the context of Rossetti's experiments with genre, it is clear that she is further exploring ways of presenting the duality of inner and outer experience which so often nagged at the Victorian conscience, and which attempts to surface in *Maude*: the new and exciting concept of inner psychology versus the old established moral and social order.

The earliest story in *Commonplace*, 'Nick,' had been written as early as 1853, and therefore quite soon after *Maude*, as it is mentioned (quite unenthusiastically) in a letter from Dante Gabriel Rossetti, of 30th September of that year.<sup>36</sup> In her writing of 'Nick', Rossetti was experimenting with fairy tale, a genre which had been steadily gaining in popularity since the publication of the tales of the brothers Grimm, in English, in 1823 and their reprint in 1826. William describes the story as 'grotesque'<sup>37</sup> and in this respect it resembles the Teutonic folk tale which deals abundantly in corpses, graves and violent deaths. The Rossetti children were introduced early to German folk tales by Dr. Adolf Heimann, a German Jew, and as William records it, were reading *Sagen und Mahrchen* in 1841.<sup>38</sup> L.M. Packer traces the origin of Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' in 'Teutonic fairy lore',<sup>39</sup> and the grotesque element in this story would support her suggestion. The device of metamorphosis, on which 'Nick' is based, is also a common one in German folk tale.<sup>40</sup>

But although Rossetti has taken the form of her story from the German folk tale, the didactic element which she superimposes on it is alien to the folk tale, although familiar to the reader of *Maude*. The 'poor man' of the opening, in the original form, would have been a man burdened with family or genuinely destitute,

but Rossetti qualifies him as one 'who had no family to labour for or friend to assist'(p.167), but who instead had as many possessions and comforts as a man could want. The explanation which follows: 'No, I call him poor because, with all these, he was discontented and envious,'(p.168) although certainly in tune with Rossetti's own moral sentiment and possibly that of the average Evangelical tale, is most out of place in German folk tale. The good 'fairy' also, 'a little rosy woman, no bigger than a butterfly'(p.168) seems to belong more to an English tradition than to the grotesque and sometimes brutal 'Nick'.

Rossetti has made the mistake of imposing too strong a moral on her material, the general fate of the 'modern' fairy tale, according to Ruskin. Ruskin's essay on fairy stories was published in 1869, but is of particular interest here:

The effect of the endeavour to make stories moral upon the literary merit of the work itself, is as harmful as the motive of the effort is false.<sup>41</sup>

The other fairy tale in the volume, 'Hero', is far more successful in this respect. The didactic function does not intrude quite so much, and Rossetti successfully separates the grotesque from the 'fairy' by establishing the topography of the story, in which mortals, 'a bold tribe of semi-barbarous fishermen' (p.184) are separated from fairyland by a stretch of sea. The difference in size is ignored where convenient, a much better arrangement than in 'Nick'.

Hero, the beautiful daughter of a simple fisherman, begins to pine away as a result of some sort of loss of innocence, in manner reminiscent of Laura in 'Goblin Market', and only returns to the fold having experienced metamorphosis to and from a series of 'supreme objects of admiration'(p.190), as ransom for the princess of fairy land whom she had captured. Rossetti's delicate descriptions of fairy land, especially the description of the sleep of Hero's soul, are worthy of a Pre-Raphaelite painting:

So Hero quitted the presence, led by spirits to a pleasance screened off into a perpetual twilight.

Here, on a rippling lake, blossomed lilies. She lay down among their broad leaves and cups, cradled by their interlaced stems, rocked by warm winds on the rocking water; she lay till the splash of fountains and the chirp of nestlings, and the whisper of spiced breezes, and the chanted monotone of an innumerable choir, lulled to sleep her soul, lulled to rest her tumultuous heart, charmed her conscious spirit into a heavy blazing diamond, -- a glory by day, a lamp by night, and a world's wonder at all times.(p.195)

No doubt this kind of description, reminiscent of her early poems like 'Dream Land' with their sensuous appeal and Romantic yearning, charmed Dante Gabriel, who wrote to his sister: 'Your "Hero" is splendid: I don't know if I'd ever read it. You

ought to write more such things'.<sup>42</sup> But Rossetti is not able to sustain this kind of writing. The story is indeed beautiful in places, but there is a problematic relationship between her Pre-Raphaelite descriptions, such as the 'Goblin Market' fruit of Trech's garden, and a mode of domestic realism which encompasses 'forcing-houses, pits, refrigerators' (p.202). The incongruity is reminiscent of the lines which she rejected in 'The Lowest Room':

Shall we revere mere strength? as well  
Revere a steam-engine.

That grim ally of brittle faith:  
We tolerate its lines and posts  
In doubt if it will serve our turn  
Or turn us into ghosts.<sup>43</sup>

The end of 'Hero' shows again the return to a conventional life which we saw in *Maude* (and which marks also the end of 'Goblin Market'), in which the wonderland of fantasy is accessible only through an experienced guide who intervenes with advice and moral guidance:

I will merely tell you how in after years, sitting by her husband's fireside, or watching on the shingle for his return, Hero would speak to her children of her own early days. And when their eyes kindled while she told of the marvellous splendour of Fairyland, she would assure them, with a convincing smile, that only home is happy: and when, with flushed cheeks and quickened breath, they followed the story of her brief pre-eminence, she would add, that although admiration seems sweet at first, only love is sweet first, and last, and always.(p.211)

Not only do we see here Rossetti attempting to put into prose a theme which she has dealt with in her poetry, but this sort of didacticism of the domestic hearth looks forward to *Speaking Likenesses* and her own recognition that imaginative fiction is not the correct vehicle for what she wishes to say.

Another of the earlier stories, 'The Lost Titian', published in *The Crayon* (New York) in 1856,<sup>44</sup> has also been singled out for special attention, this time by Bell who has been attracted by its Pre-Raphaelite characteristics:

In my judgement, for clear and natural colouring 'The Lost Titian' is the finest story in the book. Written somewhat later than Dante Gabriel's 'Hand and Soul', it has, like that story, much atmosphere of its own, and real mediaeval colour combined with absolute fidelity in its delineation of the scenes depicted.<sup>45</sup>

The story does bear a superficial similarity to 'Hand and Soul'; they are both 'stories concerned with Art and artists'.<sup>46</sup> Like Dante Gabriel's story, 'The Lost Titian' claims authenticity, and Rossetti, ever conscious of the possibility of

dishonesty, apologises in her general introduction to the collection, lest her story be seen 'in the light of an imposture' (Prefatory Note). But 'The Lost Titian' does not show the artificial striving after a medieval idiom that characterises 'Hand and Soul'. The style is more robust, Poe-esque in the hint of a sinister intellect lurking beneath joyful medieval gaiety. Poe had long been a favourite of Dante Gabriel and Rossetti herself mentions her intention to read *Arthur Gordon Pym* in her letter of 31 August 1849 to her brother William.<sup>47</sup> The publication in America of the story also suggests its appeal to a public familiar with Poe's tales. The story begins as Titian adds the last touch to a completed masterpiece. Rossetti's description of the painting is a good example of the Pre-Raphaelite qualities that so impressed Bell:

The orange drapery was perfect in its fruit-like intensity of hue; each vine-leaf was curved, each tendril twisted, as if fanned by the soft south wind; the sunshine brooded drowsily upon every dell and swelling upland: but a tenfold drowsiness slept in the cedar shadows. Look a moment, and those cymbals must clash, that panther bound forward; draw nearer, and the songs of those ripe, winy lips must become audible. (p.145)

Rossetti conveys the brooding, claustrophobic atmosphere of the studio, and the evil lurking in the jealous mind of the rival painter, Gianni, who was 'second in most things, but in nothing first' (p.146). Gianni stakes his life against the painting in a game of dice, and wins. Titian does not realise that Gianni is in deadly earnest until he looks into the other's eyes: 'but no shadow of jesting lingered there'. Titian sees in Gianni's eyes 'the gnawing envy of a life satiated: a thousand mortifications, a thousand inferiorities, compensated in a moment' (p.153). Here we have the rivalry of 'The Lowest Room', presented in a male context. No evil intentions underlie 'The Lowest Room', but this story bristles with sinister undertones. Possibly her logical and theologically based criticism of Pre-Raphaelitism (as in 'The Lowest Room'), in the context of her brother's art gives way to a more imaginative or instinctive evaluation. It is interesting to note here this dual approach, the logical and the imaginative, as both play a part in her later attitudes towards interpretation.

A brief word may be mentioned here of 'Folio Q', a story which Rossetti destroyed almost immediately after composition. Dante Gabriel seemed particularly keen on it and in a letter of Jan. 1861 wrote to his sister, telling her that Macmillan 'would also especially like to see "Folio Q"'.<sup>48</sup> William, commenting on the letter, adds:

Folio Q must have been a prose story which our sister wrote somewhere about the time in question. It dealt with some supernatural matter -- I think a man whose doom it was not to get reflected in a looking-glass (a sort of alternative form, so far, of Peter Schlemihl). I preserve a faint but very favourable recollection of it, as perhaps the best tale Christina ever wrote in prose; but unfortunately it turned out to raise -- or to 'seem' as if it were meant to raise -- some

dangerous moral question; and, on having her attention directed to this, my sister, who had been all unconscious of any such matter, destroyed the MS. on the spot. A pity now.<sup>49</sup>

Possibly Rossetti had composed her story along the lines of the German folk tale, or its grotesque development in Poe. The similarity to 'Peter Schlemihl' with its origin in German Jewish folklore, possibly introduced to the Rossetti children by Dr. Heimann, would suggest this. Or perhaps it resembled the Gothic tale, something like Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Rossetti was familiar with the Gothic novel. As a child, she and her brothers were avid readers of Maturin and her early poems abound with echoings and borrowings from this source.<sup>50</sup> Interesting too is the promptness and finality with which Rossetti destroyed the manuscript. We are assured by William that the 'dangerous moral question' was not one of 'immorality',<sup>51</sup> but given the enormous sense of responsibility which Rossetti felt towards her readers, it must have been in some way open to misinterpretation, even if the ambiguity belonged more to the tradition of Peter Schlemihl than to her own story. Any hint of the demonic, or the selling of one's soul to the devil, would have been most repugnant to Rossetti. Certainly, nothing like 'Folio Q' was attempted again, but the picture we have from this incident suggests a Rossetti ever conscious of the possibility of ambiguity in her dealings with the grotesque, preferring to suppress rather than to mislead.

We are told by Barry Qualls in his *Secular Pilgrims of Victorian fiction* that 'This imaging of an "inward world" -- whether celestial or infernal -- is the preoccupying task of the Victorian novelists: they want to force acknowledgement of the vital region of dreams and demons that a rationalist, prospering, utilitarian age would overlook'.<sup>52</sup> However, here Rossetti seems more to be trying 'to force acknowledgement' of this inner world on herself and discovering to her horror its moral ambiguity and subversive potential. She neatly divided the fairy from the grotesque in 'Hero', separating as it were the good 'inner world' from the bad, but balks at the possibility of the demonic.

The next story to be considered here, 'A safe Investment', one of the religious tales which together with 'Pros and Cons' and the 'The Waves of This Troublesome World' was published in the *Churchman's Shilling Magazine*, shows a shift away from the fairy tale towards the much safer allegory. Bell calls 'A Safe Investment', 'an allegory of the relative advantages of, and difference between, heavenly and earthly commerce, if 'commerce' be a permissible word in such a connection'.<sup>53</sup> The story is particularly interesting in its attempt to combine the contemporary and the apocalyptic, and its reflection of the contemporary feeling that a crisis-point had been reached in society. Rossetti was a reader of Carlyle, and must have been familiar with his comments in 'Signs of the Times':



At such a period, it was to be expected that the rage of prophecy should be more than usually excited. Accordingly, the Millenarians have come forth on the right hand, and the Millites on the left. The Fifth-monarchy men prophesy from the Bible, and the Utilitarians from Bentham. The one announces that the last of the seals is to be opened, positively, in the year 1860; and the other assures us that 'the greatest-happiness principle' is to make a heaven of earth, in a still shorter time.<sup>54</sup>

The key phrase from Carlyle, 'the signs of the times' is also quoted by Rossetti in her story (p.241), bringing with it its echoes from St. Luke: 'Ye hypocrites, ye know how to interpret the face of the earth and of the heaven; but how is it that ye know not how to interpret this time?'.<sup>55</sup>

Rossetti's story opens as the anxious inhabitants of a city peer into the blackness of the darkest night in living memory. Scriptural references abound, together with references to modern devices such as gasworks and a very sophisticated banking organisation with both national and regional representatives. Her method may be seen as a rather tentative attempt, by simply juxtaposing modern vocabulary and biblical quotations, to produce allegory:

Those who discerned the signs of the times, those who waited for the morning, looked often towards one house which could not be hid, for it was set upon a hill, nor, overturned, for it was founded upon a rock, and from which a light streamed pure and steady, shaming the flickering gas-lamps of the town. (pp.241-242)

Into the dark city rides the apocalyptic figure of Rev.6.2, whose horse's hoofs ring out the beginning of the end:

They passed through the eastern gate, which was opened wide before them: without let or hindrance they entered in, and the horse's hoofs struck once on the paved road.

In an instant, at the western outskirts of the city a flare of red light shot up. (p.242)

Again we have a problematic relationship between two modes, as in 'Hero'; this time between scriptural and fictional elements. The constant gesturing towards fictional narrative is interrupted by scriptural reference, hampering the creation of a fictional world. On the other hand the possibility of a sort of religious analysis of the disaster is undercut by the constant reminders that the setting is a modern city, and that really, everything can be explained as natural occurrence. The apocalyptic fire is 'the explosion of the great central gasworks' (p.243) and basically the real tragedy is the breaking first of the local bank and then of the main national bank. Although

the point of her story is to show up the materialism of the age, Rossetti's transference of a commercial vocabulary to divine things risks colouring even those with the prevailing mentality of profit and loss, as Bell seems to have realised. Carlyle draws attention to this tendency:

Religion in most countries, more or less in every country, is no longer what it was, and should be,-- a thousand-voiced psalm from the heart of Man to his invisible Father, the fountain of all Goodness, Beauty, Truth, and revealed in every revelation of these; but for the most part, a wise prudential feeling grounded on mere calculation; a matter, as all others now are, of Expediency and Utility; whereby some smaller quantum of earthly enjoyment may be exchanged for a far larger quantum of celestial enjoyment. Thus Religion too is Profit, a working for wages; not Reverence, but vulgar Hope or Fear.<sup>56</sup>

Rossetti's attempts at allegory fall far short of Carlyle, but the connection with his work is interesting because he was one of the earliest nineteenth century writers to attempt to strike a balance between a religious and a Romantic heritage.<sup>57</sup> However, as yet, Rossetti has not begun to define her conflict as one between the fundamental ideas of Romanticism and her religious beliefs. Rather, she attempts to relate what she sees as the truths of scripture to modern society. The stories are awkward because as yet she uses scriptural 'truths' uncritically. The great value of her later devotional prose lies in exactly this, the realisation that any recognition of 'truth' carries with it its own assumptions; but here she has not yet begun to question the forms in which these truths are presented, and their relation to the forms of her own discourse.

The other two religious stories in the volume are more concerned with church matters, and were, as Rossetti tells us in her prefatory note, written with 'a special object' in mind; 'Pros and Cons' deals with the abolition of pew rents, a controversial issue at Christ Church in the time of the Rev. Henry William Burrows, and 'The waves of This Troublesome World' with Dissent. They are particularly interesting in that they give an idea of Rossetti's attitude to the new developments in the Anglican Church, and show again her Evangelical tendencies, bearing out Packer's suspicion that the religion of the women members of the Rossetti family 'was the old wine of Evangelicalism settling itself into new High church bottles'.<sup>58</sup> The rector in 'Pros and Cons', although clearly of Tractarian persuasion, having introduced such innovations as chants, a surpliced choir and daily services, is moved by a marked Evangelistic fervour:

I tremble lest any should be deterred from coming to Him because I am too fine a gentleman to go out into the highways and hedges, and compel to come in those actual poor. (p.264)

The sympathy for Evangelistic enthusiasm is even more marked in 'The Waves of This Troublesome World', in which Rossetti demonstrates how Dissent can be brought back into the unity of the established church to enrich and revitalise it.

William Michael Rossetti tells us in his memoir of his sister that 'though enormously strict with herself in matters of religious faith and dogma, she was not intolerant of difference of opinion in others: she met on terms of close or amicable good-will many persons whom she knew to be decided disbelievers, not to speak of earnest and devout Dissenters'.<sup>59</sup> From this statement it would seem that, at least for William Michael, dissenters were held to be worse than unbelievers, in which case Rossetti's sympathetic approach is most unusual. 'The Waves of this Troublesome World' was published in *Churchman's Shilling* in 1867, so most probably Rossetti had had the benefit of George Eliot's sympathetic portrayal of Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* (1859). Both she and Eliot appreciate the fervour and simplicity of Methodism, but whereas Eliot is moving towards Feuerbach and his 'substitution of Humanity for God as the proper object of worship',<sup>60</sup> Rossetti is determined to draw this vitality into the established church. She shows tolerance and understanding in her treatment of the young Methodist photographer in the story, John Lane, one of the typical itinerant preachers of the time who travelled through the fashionable watering places in search of converts. The admirable character, religious sincerity and excellent intentions of Lane are never in doubt, but Rossetti stands firm in her judgement that Dissent is wrong:

These two men, both honest, both zealous, both uninstructed, provoked each other to good works; but, utterly alien from Church unity, ignored many vital doctrines. (p.291)

Rossetti further demonstrates her point using the parable of the lost sheep, told by the curate's wife to young Jane, but really meant for the instruction of John Lane's widow:

'This sheep by sin wandered, as it supposed, quite away from its kind shepherd's eye and care; but if, instead of going far, it had just crept through the paling and sat down outside the fold, and when its master called it back, had answered, 'Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest: but the grass outside the fold is more nourishing than that which grows inside, and the sheep whom I lived with there do not love and follow thee as entirely as I wish to do,' -- would its master have been pleased with it?'

'Oh no!'

'Yet this, Jane, is just what many people do now. They fancy they can find better food for their souls out of the Church than in it, and so join the Dissenters; refusing to return, though they see written in the Bible that God added to the Church daily such as should be saved. (p.312)

Now although this statement amounts to a rather short-sighted interpretation of the parable, and the contemporary critics were quick to comment to this effect, it does show in Rossetti a combination of tolerance and the capacity to accommodate innovation within established guidelines. The curate's wife tells John Lane's young widow, with great warmth and sympathy:

Your husband taught my husband a living lesson of boldness, self-denial, and trampling false shame under foot. Often when I see him earnest in the pulpit, or zealous in his schools, or energetic amongst his poor, I remember John Lane, and thank God for his example.  
(p.326)

Rossetti also deals with the tendency in Evangelical preaching towards 'the cult of the individual minister';<sup>61</sup> something like Janet Dempster's hero worship of Mr. Tryan in Eliot's short story 'Janet's Repentance'. The reader is never really sure that Janet's second conversion is anything more than love for the new Evangelical curate:

The thought of Mr. Tryan was associated for her with repose from that conflict of emotion, with trust in the unchangeable, with the influx of a power to subdue self.

To have been assured of his sympathy, his teaching, his help, all through her life, would have been to her like a heaven already begun.<sup>62</sup>

Rossetti would have found Eliot's humanism unacceptable and her response is to label such a relationship idolatry; the breaking of the second commandment. (George Eliot, one suspects, is also aware of the implications of Janet's devotion.) John Lane's widow is finally persuaded that her faith must not rest in her dead husband but in God, 'thankful that her idol was removed for a season, if so she might receive him for ever; able to say at last, "whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee"' (p.329).

Rossetti's compassion and attempts at fairness towards the Dissenter set her apart from other conformist novelists, herself writing as it were from the 'inside'. To William Sewell, for instance, Dissenters 'were no better than heretics'<sup>63</sup> and Dickens presents his Dissenting preachers more often than not as grotesque caricatures,<sup>64</sup> although Dickens' objection is directed towards their life-styles rather than their theology. But then Rossetti's Evangelical emphasis, especially in her early writing, and her constant scriptural references and parallels would give her a natural affinity with the Dissenter's point of view. What is surprising is her resolute adherence to the fact that Dissent is wrong, however sympathetic one may feel towards its cause.

Although deeply moving in places, the story suffers from a lack of coherence in narrative style. The amicable narrator who points out one of the main characters, suggesting 'let us peep into his cottage'(p.273) and overhear the conversation, is with difficulty separated at the end of the story from Mrs. Grey, the moralist and teacher. From realist description the reader is suddenly plunged into an unadorned Sunday-School lesson. Nevertheless, as in 'A Safe Investment', we see Rossetti trying to translate the scriptures in terms of everyday life. At the centre of the story lies the parable of the lost sheep, which is enacted in the straying of Sara Lane from the established church and her final return 'Back from meeting-house to church, through church up to the blessed Sacrament of the Altar'(p.328). For younger readers there is also the physical enactment of the parable, in which two children get lost in the fog as the sea roars up to engulf them:

Jane felt ready to sit down and cry; but she remembered the Good Shepherd seeking His lost sheep, and in her heart prayed Him now to seek and save His little lambs. (p.322)

But one feels that the critical challenge of the early Maude is missing in these stories. Jane is obedient and diligent, especially at her bible lessons, and together with her little brother is rewarded by rescue at the last moment, as 'it was not God's will that the water-flood should drown them, and the deep swallow them up'(p.323).

Not so for the protagonists of 'Vanna's Twins'. In this story Rossetti seems bent on proving that the dead infants are still saved, despite the death of the body. They are found frozen in the snow, but 'clasped between them was a small silver cross'(p.236). Although Roman Catholic, they are certain of salvation: 'Nossignore e buono, e certo li avra benedetti' (p.237). (Our Lord is good and certainly will have blessed them.) 'Vanna's Twins' was most probably written after 'The Waves of This Troublesome World'<sup>65</sup> and serves to balance the rather too literal interpretation of the lost sheep in the latter. Physical rescue does not always arrive in time, much to Swinburne's horror as he read the story,<sup>66</sup> but eternal salvation is assured.

Rossetti is also able in this story to use her considerable knowledge of Italian language and custom to charming effect and 'Vanna's Twins' is one of the few stories in the volume where the moral does not intrude.

By 1870, the time of completion of 'Commonplace', the title story, Rossetti appears to have dropped the strong didactic emphasis of the earlier stories and adheres to the fashionable domestic realism of the period. The move away from more imaginative composition takes up the suggestion at the end of *Maude* where imaginative activity, dreams of heroism, and aesthetic pleasure, are abandoned in favour of a position of conformity. The move from there towards realism is a natural one for an author of Evangelical sympathies. Elisabeth Jay in *The Religion of the*

*Heart* describes a similar movement in George Eliot who was greatly influenced, as Rossetti was also, by Ruskin: 'It was in response to the Evangelical claim that fiction, being "a continual tissue of falsehoods", is necessarily evil, that Ruskin started to formulate his distinction between falsehood and the true imagination'.<sup>67</sup> Jay quotes from an article in the *Christian Observer* of 1822 which could easily have come from Rossetti's poem 'The Lowest Room', a poem which retains, although not without challenge, the Evangelical heritage of *Maude*. Here is the extract from the *Christian Observer*:

It is a prime secret for happiness to learn the  
art of lowering our expectations; to be satisfied with a little; to be  
content with the state of life in which we are placed; to improve, and  
thus to enjoy, the present hour, and to look for no perfection either in  
men or in things.<sup>68</sup>

The theme of one of her poems, 'The Lowest Room', is this exactly. One of the sisters, the narrator of the poem, is attracted to the heroism of Ancient Greece and comments on the dullness of the present age:

'Yet had those days a spark of warmth,  
While these are somewhat cold--  
  
'Are somewhat mean and cold and slow,  
Are stunted from heroic growth: '<sup>69</sup>

Evangelical and Tractarian elements fuse as her sister rebukes her, reminding her of her Christian duty:

'But life is in our hands,' she said:  
'In our own hands for gain or loss:  
Shall not the Sevenfold Sacred Fire  
Suffice to purge our dross?  
  
'Too short a century of dreams,  
One day of work sufficient length:  
Why should not you, why should not I  
Attain heroic strength?'

'Heroic strength' manifest in everyday, humdrum events seems to be the aim in 'Commonplace'. Lucy, the heroine (despite Rossetti's assertion that 'No one character in the tale is so prominent as to give her name to it'<sup>70</sup>), struggles heroically against a passion which she feels is wrong. Mr. Hartley, whom she believed loved her, has married another, but she cannot rid her thoughts of him:

By day she could forbid her thoughts to shape themselves, even  
mentally, into words, although no effort could banish the vague, dull

sorrow which was all that might now remain to her of remembrance. But by night, when sleep paralysed self-restraint, then her dreams were haunted by distorted spectres of the past; never alluring or endearing -- for this she was thankful -- but sometimes monstrous, and always impossible to escape from. Night after night she would awake from such dreams, struggling and sobbing, with less and less conscious strength to resume daily warfare. (pp.48-49)

Here is all the psychological tension and duality of such horror poetry as 'The World'(1854), and 'A Coast Nightmare',<sup>71</sup> which has finally found a home in the Gothic formula: 'the unspeakable',<sup>72</sup> the monstrous, the torment of shame and guilt, but safely labelled as dreams in an ordered domestic realism. Rossetti is deliberately rejecting the psychological depth which the Gothic attempts to expose. It would seem that she is much more aware in her prose than in her poetry of the implications of the structures she is using, and far more sensitive to subversion. Symptoms of withdrawal appear in her leading character, Lucy; the same withdrawal and physical decline which accompany such a conflict in so many of her poems, including 'The Lowest Room'. But here the struggle is overcome, to the constant moral reassurance by the narrator that 'no one struggling persistently against weakness fails to overcome'(p.50). Lucy finally regains her peace of mind at meeting Mr.Hartley and his new wife:

Recollections which she had not dared face alone,  
Mr.Hartley, by recalling had stripped of their dangerous charm; had  
stripped of the tenderness she had dreaded, and the sting under which  
she had writhed; for he was the same, yet not the same. Now, for the  
first time, she suspected him not indeed of hollowness, but of  
shallowness. (pp.118-119)

The story is able to return to the ordered reality of an established moral order by reducing the fantasy world of dreams and nightmares to a false alarm. The depths the heroine was afraid of were simply not there. This situation is no advance from a *Northanger Abbey*-type formula and again the interior journey towards the understanding of self has been cut short. Lucy's marriage at the end of the story to Mr.Tresham sees her happy and integrated back into domesticity.

The story is interesting in its use of the device of 'sisters' which is a common one in her poetry, and which we have seen, in a sense (the girls are only cousins), in *Maude*. Nina Auerbach draws attention to the similarity between 'Commonplace' and the poem 'A Triad': 'Commonplaces'(sic) appears to be a slightly simplified fictional revision of Rossetti's poem 'A Triad' (1862), which also juxtaposes the spiritual destinies of three sisters in terms of their contrasting attitudes to love'.<sup>73</sup> 'Commonplace' lacks the tension and jealousy of Rossetti's earlier treatment of the 'sister' theme, but her use of sisters does highlight the varying attitudes towards love and marriage, the central love affairs (or lack of them) being echoed and contrasted

in widening circles of lesser characters. Jane, the youngest of the three, is motivated by worldly considerations and marries for money and status; Lucy gives up all hope of romance and marries a trusty doer of good works. But the third sister, Catherine, bears 'in silence the sting of shame and grief' over Jane. The suppressed inner world of Lucy re-emerges in this sister as she remains brooding over a wild and restless sea, filled with Romantic longing for something postponed, deferred, but inevitable. One notes particularly the ambiguity, present in Agnes at the end of *Maude* but much more noticeable here, between religious and Romantic longing. Lucy may well be looking forward to her heavenly reward, but the sea for the Romantics represented 'a type of sublime wilderness'<sup>74</sup> into which one might escape from the responsibilities of daily life. Lucy gazes at the restless sea:

Full in view of the drawing-room windows spread the sea, beautiful, strong, resistless, murmuring; the sea which had cast a burden on Catherine's life, and from which she now never meant to absent herself; the sea from which Lucy had fled in the paroxysm of her nervous misery.

At last Lucy spoke again very earnestly, 'Oh, Catherine, I cannot bear to be so happy when I think of you! If only you, too, had a future.'

Catherine leaned over her happy sister and gave her one kiss, a rare sign with her of affectionate emotion. Then she turned to face the open sky and sea.--'My dear,' she answered, whilst her eyes gazed beyond clouds and waves, and rested on one narrow streak of sunlight which glowed at the horizon,-- 'My dear, my future seems further off than yours; but I certainly have a future, and I can wait.' (pp.141-142)



## Notes

1. C.M.Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination*, p.249 .
2. L.M.Packer, *Christina Rossetti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 5-7.
3. See Ch.3 of 'Romantic Imagination/ Victorian Morality'
4. For the influence of Romanticism on the Victorian Church, see Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
5. 'Eighteen Early Letters' Kent (ed.).
6. *Idem*, p.205.
7. Crump, *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, ed by R.W.Crump (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p.7.
8. *Ibid*.
9. *University of Dayton Review* (Spring 1981), p.129.
10. Cantalupo's recognition that Rossetti 'inherits the Romantic concern with epistemology'(Kent, p.282), is, I think, a very accurate deduction and has been most helpful as a pointer in the present study. However, she seems to have missed Rossetti's central concern with the Romantic symbol and the mediating role of Christ. Surely the point of a poem like 'An old-world thicket', without, of course, dismissing the importance of obedience, is the appearance of Christ, which turns all into symbol.
11. Harrison, A.H. 'Eighteen Early Letters' in Kent (ed.) pp.192-207.
12. See for example U.C.Knoepfmacher's very interesting article 'Avenging Alice: Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll' in *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 41:3, (Dec.1986).
13. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p.100.
14. *Ibid*, p.18.
15. *Ibid*, p.100.
16. *Ibid*, p.18.
17. Williams, I. *The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p.10. Note particularly the discussion on English 'conservatism'.
18. Crump, p.79.
19. Wolff,R.L., *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (England: Garland Publishers, 1977), p.135.
20. Bratton,J.S., *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.33.
21. See Palazzo,L., 'Christina Rossetti: Two forgotten Sketches', *Notes and Queries*, 37:1, (March 1990).

22. Crump, p.79.
23. See, for example, E.S.Dallas' definition of the poetic: 'And every pleasure too, has a degree of its own at which it becomes poetry, just as ice, glass and iron have each a degree at which they melt... so certain moods of the mind, such as love and feeling generally, contain so much imagination as to be almost always poetic' *Poetics: An Essay on Poetry* (London, 1852 rpt New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1969), p.47.
24. See Palazzo, L. 'Christina Rossetti's "A Birthday": Representations of the Poetic', *JPRS*, 7:2 (May 1987).
25. Bratton, p.34.
26. For a discussion of the significance of embroidery in Rossetti's poetry, see Palazzo, L. Unpublished MA Thesis, p.59.
27. *The family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti with Some Supplementary Letters and Appendices*, ed by W.M.Rossetti (London: Brown Langham, 1908), p.17.
28. Bell, p.272.
29. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.270.
30. *The Spectator* 29th October 1870, p.1292.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Pall Mall Gazette* 7th June 1870, p.12.
33. *The Spectator* 29th October 1870, p.1292.
34. *Idem*, p.1293.
35. 'Evidently in her later years Christina Rossetti looked with disfavour on the book we are now discussing. For, in September 1891 when sending a list of her books to Mr.Patchett Martin, at his request, in prospect of an article upon her in 'Literary opinion,' she remarked: 'Commonplace and other short stories. [Out of print and not worth reprinting.]' Bell, p.278.
36. Bell, p.27
37. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters* (London: Ellis & Elvey, 1895), Vol.II, p.111.
38. *Idem*, Vol.I, p.87.
39. Packer,L.M. 'Symbol and Reality in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"', *PMLA*, 73:4 (Sept 1958), p.377.
40. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.269.
41. *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed.Cook and Wedderburn, vol.xix (London, 1906), p.236.
42. *D G Rossetti: Family Letters*, Vol.2, p.184.
43. Crump, p.302.
44. Bell, p.340.
45. Bell, p.274.

46. *Idem*, p.272.
47. *D G Rossetti: Family Letters*, Vol.I, p.76.
48. *Idem*, Vol.II, p.162.
49. *Ibid*.
50. See D'Amico D. 'Christina Rossetti: The Maturin Poems' *VP* 19(2) (1981).
51. Bell, p.279.
52. Qualls,B., *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.8.
53. Bell, p.278.
54. *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* , 7 vols (1839; London: Chapman & Hall, 1890), vol. II. p.232.
55. St.Luke 12.56.
56. *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. II p.247
57. See Qualls,B. *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction*, ch1, for a most interesting account of such an amalgamation of inherited religion and Romanticism in Carlyle.
58. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.7.
59. *The Poetical Works of Christina Rossetti* with memoir and notes by W.M.Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1904), p.liv.
60. Jones, R.T. *George Eliot: Adam Bede* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p.14.
61. Jay, E., *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p.123.
62. *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.409.
63. Wolff, p.329.
64. Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1975), ch.vii.
65. *Rossetti--Macmillan Letters*, p.83.
66. *Idem*, p.82.
67. Jay, p.211.
68. *Idem*, p.214.
69. Crump, Vol.I, pp.202-203.
70. *Rossetti Macmillan Letters*, p.82.
71. For complete version of the poem, see de Groot, 'Christina Rossetti's "A Nightmare": A Fragment Completed', *Res*, 24: 93, (Feb 1973), pp.48-52.
72. See E.K.Sedgewick's most interesting analysis of 'the unspeakable' in Gothic Literature, in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), ch.1.
73. Auerbach,N. *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.129. For interesting accounts of the 'sister' theme in Rossetti's work, see also Weathers, W.

'Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self' *VP*, 3 (1965) pp.81-89, Coslett, T. *Woman to Woman: Female Friendship in Victorian Fiction* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1988), chapters 1 and 2, and Rosenblum, D., *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), Ch.4.

74. Fletcher, *Gardens and Grim Ravines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p.128. For a discussion of the sea motif as a Romantic symbol in Rossetti's poetry, see Palazzo, L., unpublished MA thesis.

## Chapter 2

### *Speaking Likenesses*

In *Genre*, Heather Dubrow tells us that ‘Nothing illustrates the interpenetration of aesthetic and cultural factors better than genre theory during the Victorian period’ and that ‘On one level that theory represents a self-conscious rejection of the romantic emphasis on the artist’s autonomy and hence participates in the kind of debate between one age and the next that so often informs literary culture’.<sup>1</sup> Dubrow’s observation is particularly true of Rossetti’s work. Her concern with genre, which we saw both in *Maude* and in *Commonplace*, indicates her recognition that generic evolution is a reflection of a much wider clash between new ideas and old, with generic structures becoming centres of interaction in the assimilation of Romantic ideas. The study of generic change in her prose is therefore a very useful pointer to indicate the future direction her work is taking.

In her next prose publication, *Speaking Likenesses*, a collection of three short stories for children, the Evangelical tale, bearer of a very specific moral and social code, is set against a subversive *Alice*-type ‘wonderland’ which has gained access to the genre through its weakest point, the element of retribution. In what David Grylls calls ‘the Puritan attitude to children’,<sup>2</sup> a deliberate attempt is made to frighten the child reader into obedience. Grylls explains how the moral tales of Mrs. Sherwood, for example, exploit childish fears:

The desire to save children from eternal torment was what made contemporary torment so righteous and benign. No doubt infant readers (or listeners) duly shuddered at the episode in which Mr. Fairchild, having caned his children for squabbling, shows them how naughty they have been by taking them out to a dark wood to look at the gibbeted and decomposing corpse of a man who murdered his brother (Cain and Abel is the text for the day). The book’s savage parts can sometimes slice open dark fears. But Mr. Fairchild’s motive is soul-salvation: for the ill-fated brothers, he points out, ‘when they first began to quarrel in their play, as you did this morning, did not think that death and hell would be the end of their quarrels.’<sup>3</sup>

This severity, of course, stems from the very literal interpretation of hell by the Evangelicals, with their warnings of hell-fire and Divine Judgement. The early Tractarians inherited an Evangelical emphasis on eternal punishment, and sin was for them a very real thing. Given her early exposure to Tractarian teaching, Rossetti was most probably influenced by them here. But liberal positions in theology were rapidly gaining ground, and by 1868 even Newman was preaching that hell might be

explained as the unbearable presence of God to those who have rejected Him: 'heaven is not heaven, is not a place of happiness, except to the holy'.<sup>4</sup> The notion of hell-fire was becoming more of an embarrassment than anything else. Rossetti herself later adopts a more liberal position in her attempts to explain hell as an attitude of mind, in *Time Flies*, perhaps echoing F.D.Maurice in his assertion that separation from goodness and truth are a punishment in themselves:

In the bottomless pit I see a symbol of that eternal antagonism and recession by which created free will seems to be able to defy and baffle even the Almighty Will of the Creator. At a standstill anywhere, though on the extreme boundary of time or space, the sinner might be overtaken by the pursuing love of God: but once passing beyond those limits, eternity sets in; the everlasting attitude appears taken up, the everlasting recoil commenced.<sup>5</sup>

But Rossetti makes this comment in 1885. In the first story of this volume, 'Speaking Likenesses', she is nearer the Calvinist severity of her earlier poem 'The World':

Is this a friend indeed; that I should sell  
My soul to her, give her my life and youth  
Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell?

(ll.12-14)<sup>6</sup>

The problem of holding a Calvinist attitude towards children in 1874, the time of publication of *Speaking Likenesses*, and especially in a children's tale, was that in response to liberal theological attitudes theories of infant punishment and reward were being seriously challenged. *Essays and Reviews* carried the message that we should not attempt to deny Heaven to those who were undeveloped spiritually, but should hope for heavenly 'nurseries as it were and seed-grounds, where the undeveloped may grow up under new conditions'.<sup>7</sup> The Romantic challenge in the form of the Wordsworthian portrayal of childhood, had also deeply affected attitudes towards children, leading to a rejection of the Calvinist belief that the child naturally tended towards evil and learnt goodness through punishment and reward. Although a welcome relief to the excesses of child punishment, this defence of the rights of the child developed at times into a challenge to parental authority, and children's books such as *Holiday House*<sup>8</sup> celebrated thoughtlessness and irresponsibility as childish vitality. To defy the authority of a parent would, to the Evangelical, be a defiance of God Himself. Lewis Carroll's own *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872) carry this kind of subversion, where the world of the child develops into an exploration of an alternative world of the imagination, challenging the established world of reason and logic. As a result of such weakening of authority, Rossetti's fantasy world of fear and retribution in 'Speaking Likenesses', the 'hall of misery', stands in a very uneasy

relationship to the rest of the story, tending towards subversion of the moral framework.

The tendency within Rossetti's fiction, towards the subversion of genre, and the identification of the subversive element as a Romantic one (as in the Gothic novel) is, of course, a common manifestation in Victorian Literature. And it is not limited to that period either, but echoes through Literary and Theoretical concerns from Croce to the deconstructionists (attacking genre) on the one side, and formalists and structuralists (upholding the importance of genre) on the other.<sup>9</sup> Most interesting in the case of Rossetti, however, is her recognition not only of the link between genre as a means of authorial control -- a statement of intent by the author which is recognised by the reader, or in the language of semiotics, the fixing of the relationship between signifier and signified -- and the Romantic challenge which emphasised the autonomy of the artist and of the artifact, but also her recognition, that 'To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text', and that 'refusing to assign (...) an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity (...) since to refuse to fix meaning is in the end, to refuse God'.<sup>10</sup> Put simply, if one wishes to teach the love of God, a text which is open to misinterpretation may defeat this aim. But on the other hand, to assume that all meaning is fixed from the beginning assumes total passivity in the reader which in terms of our relationship with God suggests the doctrine of predestination.

Rossetti's fear of ambiguity, of misleading her child readers through texts open to subversion, leads her in her first story of the collection to create a narrative structure which attempts to control reader reaction; in other words, the story contains within itself instructions for its own interpretation. In her second story, however, she dramatises the limitations of this kind of control by a metaphoric representation of the act of composition, and finally in the third story returns to the security of an old, established form, the allegorical *Pilgrim's Progress* of Bunyan, which is less open to subversion because it has already undergone a synthesis of old and new elements very similar to those with which she has been wrestling. Although children's tales, these stories strongly suggest that Rossetti is moving towards the realisation that our relationship to genre, form and language is intimately connected to our perception of God.

Each of the stories in the volume describes the adventure of a little girl, who is faced by some kind of test of obedience. In the first story, Flora, angry and intolerant because she can't have all she wants on her birthday, isolates herself from the other children and subsequently finds herself in a horrifying 'hall of misery'. There she has to submit to the cruelty and intolerance of monstrous children before she is able to return, humble and obedient, to her family. Little Edith, in the second

story, is thwarted in her attempt to light a fire under an empty kettle, and the last little protagonist, Maggie, who kindly offers to deliver some parcels, has to travel through a dark, frightening forest and face horrid temptations before finally returning home in triumph. All three stories are told to a group of children by their aunt, who acts as narrator and guide throughout.

Described innocently enough by Rossetti herself as 'a little prose story, such as might I think do for a child's Xmas volume'<sup>11</sup> and 'a Christmas trifle, would-be in the *Alice* style with an eye to the market',<sup>12</sup> *Speaking Likenesses* had a most peculiar reception. A rather indignant reviewer in *The Academy* of December 5th 1874 wrote:

We wish we could understand it (...) but we have an uncomfortable feeling that a great deal more is meant than appears on the surface, and that every part of it ought to mean something if only we knew what it was. The good old fairy tales of our childhood had no moral, or if they had, it was put in a separate place at the end.<sup>13</sup>

Another contemporary reader of the volume, Ruskin, could not reconcile it with the lyric Rossetti of her poetry. Commenting on some children's volumes sent to him by Ellis, Ruskin wrote:

The worst I consider Christina Rossetti's. I've kept that for the mere wonder of it: how could she or Arthur Hughes sink so low after their pretty nursery rhymes?<sup>14</sup>

A twentieth-century reviewer in an article in the Children's Book section of *The Times Literary Supplement* for May 29th 1959 echoes Ruskin's indignation:

Judged by any standard, this is a peculiarly revolting book, though its nastiness is mitigated by the framework in which it is set.<sup>15</sup>

The stories, it seems, are just plain 'nasty'. Rossetti has, to the consternation of those critics who are looking for an imaginative wonderland of sensual description, laid bare the luscious goblin fruits of her 'Goblin Market', exposing them as stark realities of sin, the nineteenth-century representatives of Bunyan's Apollyon. The mention in the *TLS* review of a pleasant framework which mitigates the unacceptable stories suggests a reversal of the situation in 'Goblin Market', where, despite the insistence of 'must not' and 'should not' and a framework which tries to accommodate the sensual stimulation of the plot by rendering harmless its potentially dangerous effects,<sup>16</sup> the attraction of the luscious fruit remains. At times critics have been disappointed at the final rejection of the goblin idiom at the end of 'Goblin Market' and the sentimentality of 'there is no friend like a sister'.<sup>17</sup> Ifor Evans sees the integration of Laura at the end of the poem as 'an incongruous



anti-climax to a narrative full of glamour and magic'.<sup>18</sup> Stuart Curran echoes a similar disappointment in his 'What begins as a startling complement to Poe and Baudelaire settles stiffly into a Victorian Parlour'.<sup>19</sup> The moral framework of 'Goblin Market' is undeniably weak; indeed moral ambiguity is common to much of Rossetti's poetry of the 50s and 60s. Alice Meynell describes 'The Convent Threshold' as 'a song of penitence for love that yet praises love more fervently than would a chorus hymeneal'.<sup>20</sup> *Speaking Likenesses* ruthlessly attempts to contain this kind of ambiguity, and reverses the attraction of the imaginative world, weakening its challenge to the moral framework by consciously emphasising the cruel and repulsive nature of the creatures found there. Even the dull domestic routine is preferable to the horrors of this kind of 'wonderland'.

The relationship of the 'wonderland' to the representation of the 'real' world is made clear by Rossetti herself in a letter to Macmillan:

My small heroines perpetually encounter 'speaking (literally speaking) likenesses' or embodiments or caricatures of themselves or their faults.<sup>21</sup>

She insists also that her tales are not to be seen as fairy stories, and one notes her angry reaction to Macmillan's use of the word 'fairy' in the volume:

The list of illustrations treats my subjects as I should not have treated them: the word "fairy" I should altogether have excluded as not appropriate to my story.<sup>22</sup>

From his use of 'fairy' and words like 'enchanted' as explanations for the occurrence of a journey into wonderland (see for example the caption to the illustration on p.29.), Macmillan seems to be attempting to alter the relationship between the two worlds, rather like the narrator in 'Commonplace', by emphasising the harmlessness of the inner. But here Rossetti will not have the effect softened. Misery must be misery, painful and real, even to the extent of shocking her child listeners. The description of the game of 'Hunt the Pincushion' (p.33) is savagely ironic;

This game is simple and demands a moderate amount of skill. Select the smallest and weakest player (if possible let her be fat: a hump is best of all), chase her round and round the room, overtaking her at short intervals, and sticking pins into her here or there as it happens: repeat, till you choose to catch and swing her; which concludes the game. Short cuts, yells, and sudden leaps give spirit to the hunt.

and its allegorical status is made quite clear to the listeners:

Oh, Aunt, what a horrid game! surely there cannot be such a game? -- Certainly not, Ella: yet I have seen before now very rough cruel play, if it can be termed play. -- And did they get a poor little girl with a hump? -- No, Laura, not this time: for

The Pincushion was poor little Flora. (p.33)

Such unmitigated violence is bound to shock a reader versed in the charm of Rossetti's poetry, and demands an explanation. U.C.Knoepfmacher suggests that it represents both Rossetti's revenge on Lewis Carroll and a manifestation of her own repressed power lust through her narrator:

By attacking these sadistic magnifications of Wonderland creatures, Rossetti's narrator purports to put down the childish fantasies of power that were given such a free range by Lewis Carroll. In actuality, however, she reveals her own hunger for domination. Although ostensibly placed in the services of a cultural superego, this hunger by far exceeds that of a Flora or an Alice. Paradoxically enough, it is the narrator's very repressiveness, her hostility to all forms of fantasy, that endows Rossetti's three anti-fairy tales and anti-narratives with a powerful energy of their own.<sup>23</sup>

Now while I would agree that the power of the first tale stems from its savage repression of free-ranging fantasy, I should not locate the origin of such repression either in Rossetti's subconscious (Freudian analysis is beyond the scope of this study) or in any particularised attack on *Alice in Wonderland*, except inasmuch as it represents the embodiment of an imaginative and potentially subversive 'wonderland'. Knoepfmacher has recognised the power struggle located in the story, but comes perilously close to seeing Rossetti herself as the narrator, rather than judging the narrator 'spokeswoman' for one of the positions which Rossetti is considering. The story does represent a power struggle, but certainly not Rossetti's own desire to dominate men like Carroll. Rather, it mirrors the challenge Romanticism poses to the established moral and social order to which she belongs. Possibly Rossetti's own reference to *Speaking Likenesses* as 'would be in the *Alice* style' and Hughes' very Alice-like illustrations have led to an over-emphasis on the similarities between the two volumes. Hughes' illustrations for *Speaking Likenesses* come uncomfortably close to those he did for Carroll. Before Knoepfmacher, R.A. Bellas also made the comparison;

Though Christina asserted that *Speaking Likenesses* was in the *Alice* style, her book falls short of its model.<sup>24</sup>

and before this, T.B.Swan:

Imitated wonder is no longer wonderful, and imitated whimsy is no more than oddity. There are three stories in *Speaking Likenesses*, and each is about a little girl too much like Alice, who wanders through a countryside too much like wonderland.<sup>25</sup>

Exaggerated emphasis on these similarities has led to neglect of the volume as complete in itself, and as one which draws on themes and developments from Rossetti's own work. As a poet and as a person, Rossetti had far too much respect for her public and her own responsibility as a writer to offer either an imitation of something else, or an expression of her own wounded ego.

But she did want to teach her readers, as her own mother had taught her as a child. The volume is dedicated to Frances Rossetti 'in grateful remembrance of the STORIES with which she used to entertain her children'. Given the Evangelical bias of Frances Rossetti, Rossetti's very evident admiration for her mother and the clear indications of Rossetti's own familiarity with the Evangelical tale even as early as *Maude*, we must, I think, see *Speaking Likenesses* as a genuine expression of her desire to teach.

Her interest in the Evangelical genre extends even much later in her career, although in her later use she in fact rejects altogether the element of punishment. In October 1882, Rossetti informed her brother William that *Dawn of Day*, an SPCK magazine, had published two of her stories:

October 11 (1882). Christina showed me, in a halfpenny magazine published by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, two little sketches she wrote lately narrating the facts regarding two poor families of her acquaintance, the Meaders and Bakers.<sup>26</sup>

These two stories are Rossetti's last attempts at prose fiction and true to the Evangelical distrust of purely imaginative writing, they have their origin in true experiences. The titles of the stories are 'True in the Main' Part One<sup>27</sup> and 'True in the Main' Part Two,<sup>28</sup> and they deal with the activities of the Rossetti sisters in the early 1860s, a time when they became interested in missionary activity.

The two sketches show Rossetti writing in the Evangelical tradition of pious deeds. In Part One she tells of the philanthropic activities of Miss M., 'a lady full of Christian love and good works',<sup>29</sup> and her kindness towards a young crossing sweeper, Jack, who saves his mother and family from destitution by diligence and hard work, and who then betters himself through education at one of the many Anglican sisterhoods which had sprung up in the wake of Puseyism. True to tradition, the highlight of both stories is the conversion of the protagonists:

Jack remained under the good sisters' eye till, after careful preparation, he was confirmed and admitted to Holy Communion.<sup>30</sup>

In time she (Miss M.) led both husband and wife, after earnest preparation, to be confirmed, and to become devout and habitual communicants. Thenceforward they in their turn became messengers of good within their own circle: and (please God) at the Day of Resurrection some will rise with them who owe to them, under God, eternal gratitude.<sup>31</sup>

Particularly important in the story is the emphasis on good works and dedication to duty. Jack is prepared even to forego a chance at school 'if incompatible with duty'.<sup>32</sup> (Jack is a kind of religious version of Samuel Smiles' *Self Help*. In *Speaking Likenesses*, however, the grotesque deterioration of the wonderland children's game of 'self-help' shows us Rossetti's opinion of any attempt at self betterment without a religious basis.) Miss M., most probably Rossetti's sister Maria, is also dedicated to the upliftment of the poor, and the 'kind hearted old lady' of the second story is engaged in sewing garments for the poor and 'sent a beautiful bundle of baby clothes of her own making to help the mother'.<sup>33</sup>

Although 'Speaking Likenesses' makes no direct religious claims, the framework of the narrative clearly belongs to such an ethic. The little girls in the story are engaged in mending and darning clothes as they listen to the narrator-aunt. One notices also the reference to *Maude* at the beginning of the story where Maude herself, as a very young girl, is rebuked for her initial resistance to needlework:

What Maude! pouting over that nice clean white stocking because it wants a darn? Put away your pout and pull out your needle, my dear; for pouts make a sad beginning to my story. And yet not an inappropriate beginning, as some of you may well notice as I go on. Silence! Attention! All eyes on occupations, not on me lest I should feel shy! Now I start my knitting and my story together. (p.2)

Maude's bad-tempered reluctance links her to the protagonist of the story the aunt tells, Flora, and this link shows the didactic function of the story as far as the work party of little girls is concerned: it is told to prevent these little 'Maudes' from becoming like the bad-tempered and anti-social Maude of Rossetti's earlier story. The practice of story-telling has also become part of domestic routine, together with sewing, and one notes here the fulfilment, as it were, of the claim made for 'storytelling' at the end of 'Goblin Market'. Maude also does not have to die to be heroic, as in the earlier novel, but is being shown how to channel her literary talents into a socially and morally acceptable role. The needlework in *Speaking Likenesses* is to be done for the relief of the poor and the story told for the edification of the little girls. Maude is not allowed to forget that the two activities go together:

"But we got through our work yesterday."  
"Very well, Maude, as you like: only no help, no story. I have too many poor friends ever to get through my work. However, as I see thimbles coming out, I conclude you choose story and labour."(p.50)

Other similarities with Rossetti's poems are to be found. Flora's state of mind as she enters the strange 'wonderland' is a familiar one to the critic of Rossetti's poetry:

But Flora had no heart to listen, or to care about the frog. She lagged and dropped behind not noticed by any one, but creeping along slowly and sadly by herself. (p.16)

Maude, protagonist of the early novel, and the protagonist of 'The Lowest Room' with their thwarted hopes of heroism; Laura in 'Goblin Market' under the power of the sensual fruit; Hero in the grip of pride, are all predecessors of little Flora who now sinks into abject self-pity because her desire for power and status on her birthday have been thwarted: "It's my birthday", cried Flora; "It's my birthday" (p.13). Unfortunately, she has no Lizzie to help her and has to face 'the other side' of her desire for dominance by becoming its victim herself. She wanders off and enters a strange fantasy land through a magic door leading to a room full of children. As she is about to put a spoon full of strawberries and cream into her mouth, she is stopped by an angry voice. One notes the particular interest of the little listener, Laura, in this part of the story:

Who was it? Was it a boy or a girl? -- Listen, and you shall hear, Laura.

The speaker was a girl enthroned in an extra high armchair; with a stool as high as an ottoman under her feet, and a table as high as a chest of drawers in front of her. (...)

Perched upon her hair she wore a coronet made of tinsel; her face was a red face with a scowl: sometimes perhaps she looked nice and pretty, this time she looked ugly. "You shan't, they're mine," she repeated in a cross grumbling voice: "it's my birthday, and everything is mine". (p.52)

The speaker is obviously the embodiment of Flora's desire for special status on her birthday (a comparison with the imagery of the poem 'A Birthday' is significant), represented in such a grotesque way and 'reflected over and over again in five hundred mirrors', so as to repulse little Flora and make her realise how ugly her behaviour has been.

The queen's subjects also portray the ugliness of the behaviour shown at Flora's party, as physical characteristics representing flattery (Sticky), deviousness (Slime) and various aspects of juvenile cruelty portrayed as male, (Quills, Hooks and Angles). This kind of allegorical writing is quite common in Victorian children's literature, although the form of representation varies. In Kingsley's *Water Babies* (1863) outward appearances often reflect inner character, and George Macdonald used allegory extensively in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871). North Wind can only appear to a wicked nurse as a wolf:

I had to make myself look like a bad thing before she could see me. If I had put on another shape than a wolf's she would not have seen me, for that is what is growing to be her own shape inside of her.<sup>34</sup>

Rossetti provides examples of correct behaviour by making the furniture put the grotesque children to shame: chairs and tables glide around to accommodate them, and trays of food move in and out of the room 'with considerable tact and good taste' (p.18).

But the presence of tantalising 'Goblin fruit' in this 'hall of misery' which should, if it is to be effective as punishment, be totally repulsive, hints that the total effect of the visit could subvert rather than deter:

She was hot and thirsty, and the feast looked most  
Tempting. She took up in a spoon one large, very large strawberry  
with plenty of cream.' (p.23)

Despite the cruelty of the games the children play, Flora, although passively submitting, is not harmed because she abstains from eating these magic strawberries which the other children 'had eaten and stuffed quite greedily' (p.26). The dangerous properties of the fruit are hinted at in the narrator's words : 'it may have been quite as well for her that she did not feel at liberty to eat such a mixture: yet it was none the less tantalising to watch so many good things come and go without taking even one taste' (p.39). An echo of this statement in the last story of the volume informs us that by the end of the book the child listeners have learned the value of self-control: 'You and I, who have as it were peeped behind the scenes, may well believe that it kept her (little Maggie) out of no very delightful treat' (p.81).

Rossetti makes her didactic purpose quite clear through the remarks of the narrator to her child listeners, the framework acting as a representation of the desired relationship between herself and the implied reader of her book. (Without going as far as Knoepfelmacher, I do assume a similarity between the aims of the narrator and those of Rossetti herself. But as a writer of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, Rossetti is also familiar with and attracted to the sort of aesthetic that the strawberry represents. She is very conscious of all the implications of her art.) The relationship between the 'wonderland' and everyday life is also made clear to the implied child reader: 'Who knows whether something not altogether unlike it has not ere now taken place in the Land of Somewhere? Look at home children' (P.36). This frequent narrative intervention is intrusive and as Knoepfelmacher correctly points out, is part of a power struggle. Rossetti, not content with the much used eighteenth-century narrative structures which leave space for the reader's imagination,<sup>35</sup> locates a representation of the implied author-implied reader relationship within her framework, in the relationship between aunt and child listeners, thus attempting to control reader response. The story, so to speak, dictates the way in which its inner story, the trip to 'wonderland', is to be interpreted: the 'hall of misery' is hateful and to avoid it one must conform to the moral code of

society. Of course the codes of the internal framework of the Flora story, represented by the behaviour of authority figures around Flora, and that of the aunt/ narrator are the same: Evangelical piety and good works. The narrator intervenes to block off any deviation from that norm: 'Jane and Laura, don't quite forget the pocket-handkerchiefs you sat down to hem' (p.21). As Knoepfelmacher noted, the narrator is power hungry in the service of her cultural code, but has become so because this code is under threat.

When, for example, Lawrence Sterne wrote in *Tristram Shandy* that 'the truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine'<sup>36</sup>, he could assume a certain amount of correspondence between the values of the implied reader and his narrator, in other words, he could be pretty sure of predicting and controlling the imaginative responses to his narrative promptings. The Evangelical moral tale also assumes a similar correspondence. But Rossetti is using the moral tale in a period when, as we have seen, its values were already being challenged and subverted, and her narrator's interference may be seen as a last desperate measure to keep the genre intact.

The second story in the volume is evidence that despite the elaborate narrative structure of Flora's story, Rossetti realises that to force more and more narrative control onto a work of imaginative fiction is, in the end, to destroy it. She cannot write a 'self-interpreting' text.

But if one cannot control the responses of the reader, what if one's text is 'misinterpreted' in a moral sense, and that which is meant as a warning against corruption become the means of corruption? Here I shall digress slightly to show an alternative reading of 'Goblin Market'<sup>37</sup> which indicates how Rossetti tries to show that even simple exposure to corruption, can itself also corrupt. I suggest that it is not Lizzie's redemptive act in itself that saves Laura, although it does indirectly bring about her salvation. Lizzie's speech and indeed her whole comportment changes after her contact with the goblins and their fruit. In her earlier conversations with Laura, Lizzie's speech is plain, without even a hint of sensuality. If she mentions the goblin fruit it is as 'evil gifts'(l.66) or simply 'fruits' (l.386), with none of the sensual detail that Laura includes. She is cautious and 'placid'(l.217). Her words to the goblins are 'matter-of-fact' and speech rhythm predominates:

"Thank you", said Lizzie: "But one waits  
At home alone for me:  
So without further parleying,  
If you will not sell me any  
Of your fruits though much and many,  
Give me back my silver penny  
I tossed you for a fee." —

(ll.383-389)

However, once she has been in contact with the goblin fruit, although she has resisted as they smear it on her mouth, Lizzie runs back to Laura, but 'Knew not was it night or day'(l.44). This inability to distinguish night from day is exactly the condition of Laura after having tasted the fruit: she, too, 'knew not was it night or day/ As she turned home alone' (ll.139-140). If we consider Rossetti's metaphorical use of night and day in such poems as 'The World', we have here a reference to good and evil.

If we then look at the words Lizzie speaks to Laura after this incident, we can see the affect the fruit has had on her speech:

Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices  
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,  
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.  
Eat me, drink me, love me.

(ll.468-470)

The sensuality of the lines, especially the use of 'suck', is similar to the description of Laura devouring the fruit. There is also a hint of the obsessive rhythm of the fruit descriptions. This particular passage has been quoted in many critical accounts of the poem, the most striking being that of the new feminist criticism, where the interpretation is that Rossetti is putting forward a feminine Christ.<sup>38</sup> These critics defeat their own argument of Lizzie as a Christ-like saviour by referring to the passage, for example, as 'Laura's satanically unholy Communion'.<sup>39</sup> There is little of the Holy Eucharist about the passage except an implied contrast which magnifies the perversion of the lines 'Eat me, drink me, love me.' The sensuality of the words serves as a reminder to Laura of what her irresponsible act has done to Lizzie, who, because of her sister's disobedience, disobeyed herself. Lizzie has been exposed to temptation because of Laura's irresponsibility. We are reminded here of Rossetti's feelings of spiritual responsibility towards her readers.

Laura's first reaction to Lizzie's return, rather than being one of joy that she can finally taste the fruit again, is one of sheer horror as she notices the difference in Lizzie, a sure sign of her contact with the fruit:

Laura started from her chair,  
Flung her arms up in the air,  
Clutched her hair:  
"Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted  
For my sake the fruit forbidden?  
Must your light like mine be hidden,  
Your young life like mine be wasted,  
Undone in my undoing  
And ruined in my ruin,  
Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?"

(ll.487-488)



This concern for her sister produces tears which are the first agents of her regeneration.

If we then identify the goblin fruit with the unknown imaginative powers unleashed by Romanticism -- a link made by Rossetti critics as early as Bowra's *The Romantic Imagination* -- we see Rossetti's fear that even simple exposure to such an imaginative world might corrupt, and an irresponsible author endanger the salvation of the reader. The closing lines of 'Goblin Market' suggest that storytelling under guidance is the answer. But in *Speaking Likenesses* the narrator has had to resort to more and more 'guidance' to keep the imaginative world from challenging the moral authority of the framework. Even the unabated horror of the 'hall of misery' has its own interest and attraction for the human mind.

The second and pivotal story of the trio in *Speaking Likenesses* is a demonstration of the powers and limits of this kind of authorial control. Knoepfmacher identifies the subversion of reader expectation;

In what surely must be the most consummate hoax in English children's literature, Rossetti makes sure that the story will never catch a fire of its own. The reader's expectations are programmatically subverted.<sup>40</sup>

and I would agree that the narrator, as in the first story is attempting to exercise power in this way. But even more than an exercise of power over the reader, it is a projection of the struggle between author and story.

A very little girl, Edith, is taking out into the woods a copper teakettle and matches with the intention of lighting a fire to boil it. She drops all but six of the matches on the way, and her remaining matches are then all used up in unsuccessful attempts to light the fire. Talking woodland animals come to her aid and even a fox from Aesop's fables, but all help is fruitless. Knoepfmacher rejects as unworthy of any consideration 'the tedious moral that little girls should not play with matches'<sup>41</sup> but one should, I think, be wary of rejecting the simple in Rossetti's work. We have an echo here of the deceptively simple moral of 'Goblin Market', for example: "You should not peep at goblin men".<sup>42</sup> Any interpretation that ignores the importance of disobedience and punishment, especially in the context of a moral tale, will be a limited one indeed. Given also Rossetti's firm adherence to Christian principles, it would also be most unlikely that she is indulging in a 'hoax'.

But there is certainly manipulation. The narrator not only manipulates her readers, but she manipulates story also. The mention of a frog in the first story and the development of the idea in the second is crucial. Susan told her story, but Flora was not ready to hear it, caught up as she was in her own selfishness. The child listeners insist at the beginning of the second story (by then Flora has learnt 'how to bear a few trifling disappointments' p.49) that the aunt should tell them 'the story of

the frog who couldn't boil the kettle' (p.49) which was interrupted by the telling of Flora's story. Their urging brings the response 'But I was not there to hear Susan tell the story'. The narrator finally retells the story on her own terms and produces instead another, similar story with the moral bias she desires: 'I can imagine reasons why a frog would not and should not boil a kettle'. The 'hijacking' as it were of a potential fairy tale in order to impose a moral meaning is exactly the tendency which we noted in *Commonplace*. The difference here is that Rossetti is consciously analysing her own problem and exploring the powers and limitations of this form of art. When the story attempts to revert to its original form, or even turn into a fable, it is thwarted at every step. The frog itself is not even allowed to take a major part in the story. Even Edith ignores it, which shows that the actual subject of the story is not at issue, just its status as 'story'.

The story becomes in fact a battle ground: the narrator, who is determined that the story should demonstrate a moral lesson, (representing, let's say, the didacticism that spoiled the stories of *Commonplace*), pitted against the charm and irresponsibility of the fairy tale, or the world of fantasy. The trump card of the narrator or storyteller is the negative power of 'non-creation'. She can withhold. If she does not wish Edith to light the fire there is nothing Edith can do. (One needs to imagine this battle going on in a sort of 'pre-story' phase and consequently, as the fire is not lit, the story is never told). So Edith's story is prevented from materialising. On the other hand, the narrator's story, the moral lesson, has in fact been told. In terms of her storytelling, the message is that she can control the story by rejecting it, by never telling it at all. But such control is far from satisfactory. Does fear of ambiguity have to imply the suppression of the story? Is there no place for moral concern in fantasy?

The implications of the story do not end here. It is worth considering the motivation of the narrator in the story. Her allegiance lies with the children and she cares more about her child listeners than about Edith's quest. In that Edith is potentially one of these listening children, the narrator cares about her also and so she is prevented from harming either herself or the kettle. We know that Rossetti cared deeply for the welfare of her readers and in terms of the literary fashions of her day, her clear message is that the notion of art for art's sake is mistaken. A writer's allegiance should never lie with art to the expense of the reader. Better still, art should be used for the benefit of the reader, and if the imagination lead astray it were better not to use it at all.

As a children's story, the lesson to be learnt is humility. Edith, we are told, 'was a little girl who thought herself by no means such a little girl, and at any rate as wise as her elder brother, sister and nurse'(p.51). There is just a hint that she has committed the unpardonable, that is 'to reckon herself as wise as her parents'. Grylls tells us of the 'explicit insistence' of the Evangelicals 'that parents were surrogates

for God'<sup>43</sup> and thus Edith's pride echoes that of Lucifer. To soften the reference, though, the narrator casts doubt on this last sin of Edith's: 'we must hope not, for her own sake.' Edith's misplaced confidence in herself leads her to suppose that she can perform the actions of an adult and light the fire in the wood to boil her kettle. She does not lie to the cook about her intention, an action which would be unpardonable (we note the similarity to Maude ), but she is nevertheless 'not very anxious to make herself heard' when she mentions what she is about to do.

When she and her three pets reach the wood, Edith is tempted by luscious grapes swinging high above her head. The sensual lure does not even detain her, instead she is bent on something which reveals itself to be far more dangerous. The child listeners would have noted the irony of the narrator's use of 'wise girl' because they would have recognised that her quest was both unwise and positively dangerous. Tension is created by the very possibility that she will succeed and it is made very clear that success would mean disaster. A frog, 'The Frog' is briefly let into the story to offer advice; 'Does not the kettle want filling?', and is ignored by Edith. The kettle, of course, is empty, and the success of Edith's quest would have very serious consequences for it and most probably for Edith herself. An interruption by the narrator here makes certain that the child listeners have understood the point being made: ' "Remember, girls, never to put an empty kettle on the fire, or you and it will rue the consequence"'(p.65). The final failure of the quest is as much a relief as a disappointment and the humiliated Edith is abandoned by all her 'fictional' woodland friends, and advised by the nurse -- who has all the necessary equipment to light the fire -- to return home, having learnt, one is left to presume, the lesson in humility. Edith is much luckier than one of Mrs.Sherwood's little protagonists, who disobeys her parent about playing with matches and is burnt to death in the most hideous manner as a result. She is also luckier than Flora, as she sustained no hurt during the course of her lesson, except of course to her pride.

It is opportune here, as a guide to uniting the moral import of the story with Rossetti's struggle to master fictional forms without compromising her theology, to mention part of the letter which accompanied the manuscript of *Speaking Likenesses*:

The fire has died out, it seems; & I know of no bellows potent enough to revive dead coals. I wish I did.<sup>44</sup>

Rossetti was telling Macmillan of her growing inability to write poetry. This second story echoes these feelings of frustration at the dwindling of her own powers of fantasy. She must have understood Edith's bitterness at being thwarted, but the story indicates quite clearly that such thwarting, or 'pruning', was a blessing in disguise. In terms of a Christian relationship with God, a forced acceptance of limitations, is softened by the knowledge that those things which are denied us may be the very

things which have potential to do us harm. The narrator's apparent cruelty in thwarting Edith's plans was in fact true wisdom.

But again we are left with a problem. Edith has been saved from the fire, but she has not learnt anything from the experience. Furthermore, the negative experience has crushed her good qualities of courage and ingenuity; something worthwhile has been overlooked and destroyed.

An interesting parallel may be made here with Wolfgang Iser's identification in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* of a tension between the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which implies the exclusion of any kind of active participation in salvation, and the human need to participate actively in the process of seeking grace:

Thus the characters develop a striking polarity: on the one hand, they remain drawn to the goal that dominates their whole existence -- salvation; on the other, their humanity, their inner world, is bound to be accentuated in order to bring out their subjective mitigation of the theocratic Calvinist doctrine.<sup>45</sup>

In the second story of *Speaking Likenesses* autonomy of action has been denied Edith, and authority transferred to the storyteller who determines whether or not the little girl emerges unscathed. Edith is finally saved, but is not allowed to participate in her own salvation. Even though she has been spared the agonies Flora suffers, she is denied experience; the chance to explore for herself, to question, and to develop her own inner response to God; in short, she has been denied free will.

It is significant that Rossetti's last story in the volume, the tale of little Maggie's quest, is cast in the mould of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. As Carlyle utilises the form of Bunyan's allegorical journey in *Sartor Resartus* to unite 'religious heritage and Romantic education',<sup>46</sup> so Rossetti also recognises in this form her opportunity to integrate the objective fact of salvation with subjective participation in the process, and also the possibility of using again her fantasy world. The aunt's little charges complain about the lack of imaginative experience in Edith's story, or rather her 'non-story', and urge 'Please, aunt, be wonderful'(p.71). So in the last story of the volume the narrator brings back the grotesque children from the imaginative world of the first story, and enlarges the plot to include more such encounters, but within the context of an allegorical journey or quest. In other words, she has combined the essential elements from the first and the second stories: experience of evil, together with certitude of salvation. We know that Maggie, the young protagonist, is a very good girl, participating actively in the ethic of good works represented by her shopkeeper grandmother: 'Did Maggie serve too?' ask the listeners, 'Yes Jane; and it was her delight to run up steps and reach down goods from high shelves'(p.73). But although the child listeners know there will be a positive outcome to Maggie's quest, Maggie herself has to undergo personal

experience of salvation in her dialogues with the strange creatures. This story, then, has moved far away from the emphasis on punishment of the first; from the threat of hell-fire to a new assurance, which nevertheless is only the beginning of a process of personal exploration and discovery.

Little Maggie's quest begins when she offers to deliver some forgotten parcels to a doctor who 'resided with his family in a large house some distance out of the village' and has to cross 'the outskirts of an oak forest' (p.74). Armed with her grandmother's exhortation to 'make great haste' she enters a fictional 'wonderland' after having slipped and bumped her head. Her trials and temptations begin immediately in the form of a group of children engaged in wild, breathtaking games:

How she longed for a game with them! She had never in her life seen anything half so funny, or so sociable or so warming on a cold day.

(...) "Yes", she answered eagerly; "yes, yes; what shall we play at?" (p.78)

It is then made obvious to the listeners that the children in question are those from the first story, and they react in horror:

Oh, Aunt, are these those monstrous children over again? -- Yes, Ella, you really can't expect me not to utilize such a brilliant idea twice. (p.78)

The aunt's remark here, as with most of the interpolations of the narrator, shows up fictional invention as a tool to be used when needed in the service of moral teaching, here used to demonstrate the importance of obedience. Obedience saves Maggie from the pain or humiliation of the first two protagonists, but unlike the passive Flora, who submits to the grotesque children's games, or Edith who is given no choice in the matter, Maggie is allowed to decide her course of action for herself, guided by her conscience:

"Anything you please," panted Maggie, twirling and leaping in emulation, and ready to challenge the whole field to a race; when suddenly her promise to make haste crossed her mind -- her fatal promise as it seemed to her; though you and I, who have as it were peeped behind the scenes, may well believe that it kept her out of no very delightful treat.

She ceased jumping, she steadied her swinging basket on her arm, and spoke resolutely though sadly: "Thank you all, but I mustn't stop to play with you, because I promised Granny to make haste. Good-bye." (p.81)

The child listener learns also, as in 'Commonplace', that no one struggling 'resolutely' against temptation can fail to triumph. The strange children do not attempt to pursue Maggie and neither does the next apparition, the boy with the

monstrous mouth who appears when she is tempted to break off a piece of chocolate from her parcel. As obedience saves her from her own ignorance in the first encounter, so it saves her from this embodiment of greed and lust. She will not steal the chocolate for him, despite his threatening behaviour. Again resolution renders the monster harmless.

The last temptation which Maggie has to face is one which is manifest very often in Rossetti's poetry:

Poor desolate Maggie! drowsiness was creeping over her, and she began to wish above all things that she might just sit down where she stood and go fast asleep: never mind food, or fire, or bed; only let her sleep. (p.87)

Her temptation is rendered almost unbearable by the sight of a group of sleepers basking in the warmth of a glowing fire. Again obedience saves Maggie from the consequence of sleeping out in the cold: almost certain death, as the narrator points out to her listeners. Sleep and rest often represent an attractive but deadly temptation in Rossetti's poetry, from such early poems as 'Dream Land'(1849) and 'Sleep at Sea'(1853), to the later 'If Only'(1865), with its realisation that we are required to resist weariness and escapism in order to 'love Him and live on'.<sup>47</sup>

Action in the face of weariness is the message of the second half of the story. Even when her temptations are over and her quest ended, Maggie is not allowed rest. The parcel is delivered but she is sent back without even a glimpse of the Christmas festivities within, 'chilled to the bone, famished, cross, and almost fit to cry with disappointment'(p.91). Maggie is required to retrace her steps and aid those who have fallen prey to the dangers of the wood, and one notes the echo of the 'Goblin Market' conclusion:

"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."<sup>48</sup>

First Maggie finds and saves, in the place where the sleepers were, a half-frozen wood pigeon, sinking into the sleep of death. Where 'the Mouth' met her, she rescues a small tabby kitten which had been held in the jaws of the monster's familiar, a tabby cat, and then abandoned. The child readers may not grasp the symbolic values of these rescues, although they are quite explicit, but the significance is clear: help those in need. With her last rescue of a puppy abandoned and lost in the same place as the monstrous children's games, Maggie's pilgrimage is over. The narrator is careful to add that the help given these poor creatures lightens the journey and fills her way with joy:

She added the puppy to her basketful, -- and a basketful it was then! -- and ran along singing quite merrily under her burden. (p.94)

The joy within her transforms the landscape around her:

And when, the forest shades left behind her, she went tripping along through the pale clear moonlight, in one moment the sky before her flashed with glittering gold, and flushed from horizon to zenith with a rosy glow; for the northern lights came out, and lit up each cloud as if it held lightning, and each hill as if it smouldered ready to burst into a volcano. Every oak-tree seemed turned to coral, and the road itself to a pavement of dusky carnelian. (p.94)

The beauty of the description, which matches the joy within Maggie, suggests that perfect conformation of the will to obedience allows for perfect happiness and a vision of heavenly beauty. There is, too, a strong suggestion that the final rest is death, the sudden glorious transformation of the landscape corresponding with the final certainty of salvation.<sup>49</sup> Knoepfmacher's hints of an ironic subversion of the moral, I feel, destroy any sense of the unity of this little volume which, far from being ironic, is a little gem of balance and harmony. The tone or message of the volume also corresponds with what we know of Rossetti's life during this period, and the moral import of the stories leads quite naturally to the stance adopted in her later devotional prose. I see no reason to suspect the 'secret agenda' that made the reviewer of *The Academy* uncomfortable.

But of course the stories also reflect the concerns of Rossetti herself as a writer, as we have already seen in *Maude* and in the stories of *Commonplace*. It has become increasingly evident that there is an extremely close bond between Rossetti's fictional stories, her overall literary concerns and her faith. One important observation is worth adding here, and that is the fate of the narrative framework in the last story. McGillis draws our attention to the fact that 'The book ends without a return to its narrative frame' and that it 'begins with a call to story, and (...) ends within the world of story'.<sup>50</sup> It is true that the aunt and the children disappear (as do the attacks on fiction) when the last story enters its final phase, but it in fact returns to its own framework of domestic harmony and good works. After Maggie's triumph and her banishment of the monsters of 'wonderland' (we note that as soon as she reaches the doctor's house the monsters disappear) there is no need for the original framework to reappear. After all, it was there as guidance, to distance the readers from a potentially harmful fictional experience. But the world of 'fiction', through the duality implied by allegory, now points back towards the 'real' world. The children's request for the wonderful has been satisfied with a story that conveys the 'true' wonders of the soul's earthly pilgrimage. McGillis is right in his observation that in these stories Rossetti offers her readers 'participation in

imaginative understanding', but she does this finally from within a very specific form of representation: allegory. I think McGillis is wrong therefore in assuming that she offers this participation through extolling 'the high morality of art'.<sup>51</sup> The moral status of imaginative understanding and the 'morality' of art are questions which will occupy Rossetti's mind and work for the next twenty years.



## Notes

1. (London: Methuen, 1982), p.77.
2. Grylls, *Guardians and Angels* p.86.
3. *Idem* p.87.
4. Rowell, G., *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) p.95.
5. (London: SPCK, 1885), p.105-106.
6. Crump, *The Complete Poems*, p.77.
7. *Essays and Reviews* (London: J.W. Parker & Son, 1860 repr Gregg International, 1970), p.205.
8. 'The book (*Holiday House*) is mainly about a youngish brother and sister, Harry and Laura, who are 'heedless lively romps'...(.) Their function is to illustrate Catherine Sinclair's belief that children can be naughty without being wicked -- but 'naughty' is hardly the word. Harry...plays with prohibited candles, but instead of lighting the fire he must live in for all eternity, he merely burns half the house down.' Grylls, p.94.
9. Dubrow, pp.87-96.
10. Barthes, R., 'The death of the Author' in *Image-Music-Text*, trans by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p.146.
11. *Rossetti -- Macmillan Letters*, Feb.3rd. 1874.
12. *Family Letters*, May 4th. 1874, p.44.
13. p.606.
14. *The Works of Ruskin* ( London: George Allen), 1909, vol.37, p.155.
15. p.xi For a reply by L.M.Packer, see *TLS*, June 5 1959, p.337.
16. For an analysis of the framework of 'Goblin Market', see Palazzo, L. 'Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market": The Sensual Imagination', *Unisa English Studies* Vol.XXVI, No.2 1988, pp.15-20.
17. Crump, p.26.
18. Evans, *English Poets in the Later Nineteenth century* (London: Methuen, 1966), p.92.
19. Curran, 'The Lyric Voice of Christina Rossetti' *VP* 9:3 (Autumn 1971), p.288.
20. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.376.
21. *Rossetti -- Macmillan Letters*, Mon. July 27th 1874. p.101.
22. *Idem*, p.103.
23. Knoepflmacher, 'Avenging Alice: Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll' *Nineteenth Century Literature*, Vol 41 Dec. 1986, p.317.
24. Bellas, R. *Christina Rossetti* (Boston: Twayne, 1977), p.107.
25. Swann, T.B. *Wonder and whimsy: The Fantastic World of Christina Rossetti* (Franeestown: Marshall Jones, 1960), p.60.
26. *Family Letters*, p.212 For a discussion of the stories, see Palazzo, L. 'Christina Rossetti: Two Forgotten Sketches'.

27. *Dawn of Day*, May 1 1882 p.58.
28. *Dawn of Day*, June 1 1882 p.69.
29. Part I p.58.
30. Part I p.58.
31. Part II p.69.
32. Part I p.58.
33. Part II p.69.
34. S.Prickett discusses the use of allegory in Victorian Children's tales in *Victorian Fantasy* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), p.86.
35. Iser, in his discussion of narrative structures in the novel, quotes Stern's *Tristram Shandy*: 'No author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve the matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself and comments, 'If the reader were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to imagine, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us.' *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), p.275.
36. *Tristram Shandy*, ed by I.C.Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), II, 11 p.87.
37. See Palazzo, L., 'The Sensual Imagination'.
38. Gilbert, S. and Gubar, S., *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p.567.
39. *Idem*, p.568.
40. Knoepfmacher, 'Avenging Alice', p.321.
41. *Idem*, p.322.
42. Crump, p.12.
43. Grylls, p.90.
44. *Rossetti -- Macmillan Letters*, p.99. This letter is also quoted by Knoepfmacher, 'Avenging Alice', p.323.
45. Iser, p.6.
46. Qualls, B., *The Secular Pilgrims*, p.18. For a discussion of the importance of Bunyan to the Victorians, see also 'Bunyan Among the Victorians' S.Finley, *Literature and Theology* 3:1 pp.77-94
47. Crump, p.181.
48. *Idem*, p.26.
49. In Rossetti's poem 'An Old-World Thicket', a similar vision occurs as the mind of the speaker turns to contemplate a flock of sheep representing the perfect obedience of Christ. Iser notes in his discussion of *Pilgrim's Progress*

that 'the Calvinists abandoned their radical contempt for the world when it had to serve as the setting for an unmistakable manifestation of grace. Although the pilgrim sets forth in the hope of ensuring salvation through overcoming the contemptible world, this very world miraculously changes into a nascent paradise the moment he feels his expectations might come true' (Iser, p.26).

50. McGillis, p.226.

51. *Idem*, p.208.

### Chapter 3

#### *Annus Domini*

At the same time as she was writing *Speaking Likenesses* Rossetti was also exploring another approach to the representation and expression of 'imaginative truth'. In his biography of Rossetti, Mackenzie Bell notes what he calls the 'restraining of the imagination' in *Annus Domini*, a volume of prayers for daily use, which Rossetti published during the same year as her last work of fiction, 1874:

These prayers are not so imaginative as Christina's later devotional work. Perhaps this restraining of the imagination may have arisen on her part from her deep reverence for prayer as prayer, and her feeling, once or twice expressed to me, that no human creature, however skilful, ought wantonly to embroider with his own ability petitions to the Almighty. It may also have arisen partly from the fact that her symbolism became more developed in later life. But even in this book we find her remarkable power of evoking spiritual sublimity from Biblical passages which at first sight do not appear to contain it in a great degree.<sup>1</sup>

The two characteristics which Bell has noted here, imaginative restraint, and 'spiritual sublimity', together with *Annus Domini*'s exclusively scriptural content, indicate a turning point in Rossetti's career. From attempts to put forward Christian teachings in fictional form she has now turned directly towards the source of the teachings, the scriptures. But although a turning point, the writing of *Annus Domini* by no means indicates a break from her former concerns, in particular her attempt to synthesize her religion and her literary heritage. Rather, she abandons the use of fictional forms for this purpose, turning her attention instead to language. I mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis that until now Rossetti had been using Biblical language uncritically in her fiction. Owen Chadwick notes a similar tendency in Victorian poetry generally:

With the revival of intense religious feeling linked with ecclesiastical discipline, poetry was simply lacking the language that was needed.(...) Where poetry took a religious theme, it generally borrowed the prevailing diction or gave a metrical cast to the language of the Bible in its Authorised Version and of the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>2</sup>

He also adds that, as far as Rossetti is concerned, 'Regrettably the Biblical strain too often dominates what she wants to say' and that she 'did not solve the linguistic problem'.<sup>3</sup> We have seen in Rossetti's *Commonplace* stories this kind of 'domination' of Biblical diction, but the study of her later prose works and their

focus on language and interpretation shows that she went a long way towards solving her linguistic problems. She was very aware of the implications of language, and *Annus Domini* with its concentration on passages direct from the Authorised Version indicate her interest in the imaginative and emotive possibilities of Biblical language. She recognises in the language of the Authorised Version of the Bible something akin to the sensuous and imaginative language of Romanticism, and indeed there is a very close link between Christian linguistic tradition and certain strains of Romanticism. Debora Shuger comments on the role of passion and imagination in the sacred rhetoric of the Renaissance:

The Christian grand style (...) becomes a bridge between the word and the world, connecting problems of style to the role of emotion and imagination in the mind's journey towards God, to the relation between thought and feeling, to the Christian concept of selfhood. It reflects the revival of Augustinianism in the Renaissance and with it a defense of emotion as inseparable from Christian inwardness. For Augustine spiritual existence, with its joy, desire, sorrow, and hope, is affective. In the Renaissance, this Augustinianism develops into the belief that spiritual life is primarily a matter of the heart and will, that love is more important than knowledge. Sin therefore results from defective love rather than ignorance and is healed not by suppressing emotion but by redirecting it.<sup>4</sup>

Shuger also identifies a direct link between the tradition of the 'grand style' and the Romantics, in the figure of John Dennis, who was schooled in sacred rhetoric and who was also admired by Wordsworth and Coleridge.<sup>5</sup> The Augustinian redirection of passion from earthly towards spiritual things also becomes characteristic of the Tractarians, as does the belief that the imagination plays an important role in our response to God. Rossetti thus is able to find in the language of the Authorised Version and in the *Book of Common Prayer* a model for her own use of imaginative perception in the study of humanity's relationship with God.

Rossetti was a regular Bible reader as shown by her thorough familiarity with both the Old and the New Testament. She had been encouraged in Bible reading from an early age; both her Evangelical heritage and the Tractarian emphasis of her churchgoing promoted direct access to the scriptures, although the latter were against 'indiscriminate Bible reading'.<sup>6</sup> A Rossetti family friend, William Sharp, gives Mariolatry as the reason why she never joined the Roman Church,<sup>7</sup> but Bible reading could have had equal weight. A close friend of hers, the Rev.R.F.Littledale, launched a scathing attack against Rome in his *Plain Reasons Against Joining the Church of Rome*, and access to the scriptures is one of the controversial issues he takes up in the volume. He stresses the papal ban on personal access to the Bible in the Vulgate:

Whosoever shall presume to read these Bibles, or have them in possession (...) shall not be capable of receiving absolution for their sins, unless they have first given up the bibles to the ordinary.<sup>8</sup>

Littledale comments that Bible Societies are grouped in the Roman Church 'along with Socialism, Communism, and Secret Societies as pests'.<sup>9</sup>

Now, although in the main Bible reading was encouraged in the Established Church, the average Anglican Bible reader was not much better off, because the big question then became 'How was the Bible to be read?' The Tractarians continued in the tradition of literal interpretation, although they tended towards the Roman view that the ultimate interpretation of the scriptures was in the hands of the church. Pusey's reaction against the authors of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), a publication advocating a more liberal approach to the interpretation of the scriptures, suggests his own very rigid approach to scriptural interpretation,<sup>10</sup> of the kind that earned Francis William Newman's scorn in *Phases of Faith*:

It was impossible with perfect honesty to defend every tittle contained in the Bible. Most of the points which give moral offence in the book of Genesis I had been used to explain away by the doctrine of progress; yet every now and then it became hard to deny that God is represented as giving an actual sanction to that which we now call sinful.(...)

The doctrine of the verbal infallibility of the whole Bible, or indeed of the New Testament, is demonstrably false.<sup>11</sup>

*Essays and Reviews* was an attempt by a group of scholarly Christians to reconcile Christianity and modern scientific and historical knowledge. Its message was basically that 'Modes of interpreting vary as time goes on; they partake of the general state of literature or knowledge',<sup>12</sup> but the book was seen as a deliberate attempt to discredit the scriptures by proving that they were not historically or scientifically true. The challenge of a book like *Essays and Reviews* to the traditional literalist interpretation, had wide-reaching consequences for the Bible reader of the time: 'young preachers were in danger of failing to deliver anything from the pulpit because the words which they had to deliver felt less absolute'.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the relationship of the individual Christian to the text of the Bible had become extremely problematic as more and more information became necessary for exposition. If the clergy had problems with interpretation, for the layman the problem was worse, as one 'could no longer know the Bible by knowing only the Bible'.<sup>14</sup>

Rossetti's attitude to the text of scripture is an extremely interesting one. W.M. Rossetti, for example, never doubted that his sister's attitude towards the Bible was anything other than belief in its literal truth. In his memoir from the *Poetical Works* he tells us:

Faith with her was pure and absolute: an entire acceptance of a thing revealed -- not a quest for any confirmation or demonstrative proof. There were few things she more disliked than an 'Evidences of Christianity': I dare say she never read one, but she must have glanced at one or other sufficiently to know that she disliked it. To learn that something in the Christian faith was credible because it was reasonable, or because it rested upon some historic evidence of fact, went against her.<sup>15</sup>

He continues:

She was wont to construe the biblical precepts in a very literal manner; and (...) she would in some instances have expressed herself with more latitude of thought and word, and to more valuable effect, but for fear of saying something which would somehow or other turn to the detriment of some timorous or dim-minded reader.<sup>16</sup>

Her approach to truth was, he adds later, a consideration 'whether or not it conformed to the Bible, as viewed by Anglo Catholicism.' From William Michael's testimony we gather that she shared the Tractarian approach and rejected the need for historical or natural evidence for the truth of the Bible, but from more direct evidence we see that she allowed herself liberties which would have made the Tractarian shudder.

The most useful evidence we have regarding Rossetti's attitude towards the Bible are her rough notes on Genesis and Exodus.<sup>17</sup> It is hard to date these notes and I would tend to agree with L.M.Packer that 'Probably she was jotting down these "notes" while working on *Seek and Find*, for the same ideas appear in both works'.<sup>18</sup> However, some ideas from the notes echo even in her latest prose work, *The Face of The Deep*. Rossetti's note for Genesis 8.9, for example, tells us about Noah's dove: 'She is not shut out, but pulled in'. The poem in *The Face of The Deep* for Revelation 15:7 echoes Rossetti's emphasis on the word 'pulled':

Lord, give us grace to tremble with that dove  
Which Ark-bound winged its solitary way  
And overpassed the Deluge in a day,  
Whom Noah's hand pulled in and comforted.<sup>19</sup>

Rossetti could possibly have jotted down the notes at a later date than that suggested by Packer, or she might have re-read an earlier note when writing the poem. But whatever the date of composition, these notes are valuable indeed as they give us a clear indication of her approach to the scriptures.

A first glance shows the great variety of points that Rossetti has singled out for comment. Most of the comments originate from marginal notes which are compared with the main text and any references looked up.<sup>20</sup> Rossetti at times

strongly objects to the marginal references, which gives us some indication of a critical intelligence at work rather than an attitude of passive acceptance. For example, the marginal references for Genesis 11.2, 2 Samuel 6.2, and 1 Chronicles 19.6, earn her scornful comment: 'I do not see that these two references have any bearing on the text'. Some marginal references lead to a more extended consideration of significance. Her comment on a reference for Genesis 2.22 is particularly interesting:

Margin "builded" He a woman: opens the whole subject of the church born & built from our Lord's side. Also consider His parallel with Adam casting in His lot with his lost bride."Yet without sin" Also the female (cast out) of sin? is it so?

(The words in parenthesis are unclear in the notes.)

Diane D'Amico draws our attention to the use Rossetti makes of Typology in this passage: 'Rossetti makes a Typological association between Eve, built from Adam's side, and the Church, built from the side of Christ'.<sup>21</sup> This Typological association is a standard one; the type, Adam, and his relationship with his 'lost bride' Eve has its antitype in Christ and His bride, the Church. The use of Typological associations was widespread in the nineteenth century, *coexisting with* the literal interpretation of the scriptures still adhered to by the Evangelicals, and was essential, as Fairbairn tells us, to render scriptural ideas vivid in the mind of the reader. According to Fairbairn *an important service 'which a truly scriptural* Typology is fitted to render to the cause of divine knowledge and practice, is the aid it furnishes to help out spiritual ideas in our minds, and enable us to realize them with sufficient clearness and certainty'.<sup>22</sup> There is evidence in this extract that Rossetti is quite daring in her exploration of the type, as she here suggests that the love which Adam had for Eve was his reason for casting in his lot with her, and thus we also see Christ's 'casting in His lot' with the Church.<sup>23</sup> Another type of Christ which Rossetti notes is the ram caught in a thicket by his horns, in Genesis 22.13, which is presented as a sacrifice by Abraham in place of Isaac. As before, Rossetti continues the parallel:

XXII.13 The ram is caught by his horns, the very  
glory of his strength: so Xt by His own  
Excellence is constrained to save us.

She also looks for types of antichrist, a practice which is quite permissible according to Fairbairn, even though, as he tells us, the wicked 'are NOT to be made Types of Christ':

It is perfectly warrantable and scriptural to regard the form of evil which from time to time confronted the type, as itself the type of



something similar, which should afterwards arise as a counter-form of evil to the antitype. Antichrist, therefore, may be said to have had his types as well as Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Rossetti's use of this kind of evil type seems a little strained as she searches in the text for possibilities. Her preference for the marginal reading in Genesis 11.3 appears to be its making available a typological reference:

11.3 "they said one to another,"margin"a man said to his neighbour" may not this be a man (as Nimrod, prefiguring Antichrist), & not a mere idiom?

Other similar associations made in the notes suggests that hers is a habit of mind which constantly seeks out parallels, in what Landow calls a 'process of selective interpretation' which 'deforms the type into an allegory, symbol, or mere static emblem -- a process which (...) seems to be more characteristic of High Church exegetes than those with Evangelical leanings'.<sup>25</sup> In her note on Genesis 19:11, Rossetti seems to be consciously stretching the text in her search for parallels with Christ. The result again seems strained, although admittedly she does not claim any kind of typological status for the interpretation:

XIX.11 Was this blindness transient: or were these sinners already cut off from the rising of morning(15) and the sunrise on the earth (23) as well as from the door. If so, note the 3 symbols of Xt.

There is a tendency in Rossetti's notes to seek combinations of biblical events and evolutionary theory, a synthesis which we also find in her later prose, especially in *Seek and Find*. Avoiding the conventional interpretation of the rainbow as a type of Christ,<sup>26</sup> for Genesis 9:13, Rossetti centres on the word 'bow':

" 13 "My Bow" \_ would this suggest bow and arrows as an antedeluvian mode of hunting, & thus familiar and intelligible?

L.M.Packer also notes a similar attempt to assimilate evolutionary theory in Rossetti's comment on Exodus, where 'she applies the "vast periods theory" to the Biblical account of Creation'.<sup>27</sup>

This kind of typological method, like that of Pusey and Edward Irving, is dependent on a hermeneutic of literalism. Rossetti's typology, as we have seen, while it is based on this kind of literal interpretation begins to break down into allegory, symbol or mere correspondence, the tendency, Landow tells us,

characteristic of the Tractarian High Church. But Rossetti's response shows a higher degree of subjectivity than the Tractarians would have permitted, the actual words of scripture themselves becoming the subject of imaginative speculation. For example in Genesis XVIII 1:2<sup>28</sup> she singles out the word 'ran' as having a special emotional significance: 'Though it was "the heat of the day" Abraham "ran" '. The very interesting note for Genesis 8.9, which I partially quoted earlier, centres on the similar sound of the words 'sole' and 'soul'. Having made this association, for Rossetti the dove becomes quite easily the type of the earthly pilgrim:

8.9. No rest for the sole of dove's foot; stranger  
& pilgrim. Her very sole print.

In this way, Noah automatically becomes a type of Christ, as in the poem previously quoted from *The Face of The Deep*, which makes explicit the shadowing forth of Christ's mercy in Noah's deed:

For we who much more hang upon Thy Love  
Behold its shadow in the deed he did.

(ll.13-14)

But if such an interpretation possibly still remains within the bounds of the orthodox, other comments of hers are entirely speculative:

XXIV.11. The Camels knelt: is it possible they  
thus unconsciously seconded Eliezer's  
prayer?

and

XXVI.3 Perhaps the blind old father was  
remembering how his handsome son used to  
look setting off to the chase:  
"take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy  
quiver and thy bow -- "

Similar treatments of scriptural passages in the Exodus notes have been brought to our attention by Packer, for example Rossetti's comment on Exodus 1:22, "And Pharoah charged all his people saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive". In her notes, Rossetti suggests a general application of the statement, where "the penalty of death has been laid on man and of life on woman".<sup>29</sup> This note of Rossetti's is a curious blend of scripture, evolutionary theory and a personal interest in the lot of woman. Her comment in parenthesis immediately afterwards suggests that she recognised her own daring: '(All this I write down craving pity and pardon of God for Xt's sake if I err)'.

The typological habit of mind, a poetic sensitivity and subjectivity in relation to the words or characters of scripture and a tendency towards personal meditation on correspondences and parallels are, as we have seen, the characteristic of Rossetti's Bible reading and we will bear them in mind throughout the study of her devotional works, and most especially in the analysis of her most exegetical work of all, *The Face of The Deep*.

But Rossetti's typology also provides a useful entry here to *Annus Domini*, because this volume's introductory poem, which acts as a preface and is its only poem, depends on a knowledge of typology for its effect. The poem opens in an attitude of despair and then seeks to understand why, in order to obtain God's mercy and love, there is need for such a struggle, 'So agonised an effort and a strain' and 'such wringing out of breathless prayer'. The tone of passion and despair is set in the poem and pervades the entire volume; the struggle is unequal, mingling joy and despair:

Alas my Lord,  
How should I wrestle all the livelong  
night  
With Thee my God, my Strength and my  
Delight?

(p.ix)

The poem sets out a series of scriptural parallels of the struggle which have ended in success, each one of which is presented so as to suggest an attitude to prayer available to all; Abraham (supplication); Jacob (strength, steadfastness -- 'the clenched hand of prayer'); Elias (repetition); All Nineveh (penitence); the Church (persistence). The list then reveals itself to be a list of types which reach their perfection in Christ who 'prayed all night, and in the garden prayed'. There follows a moment of horror for the speaker, in stanza 10, with the realisation that she does not have the strength to follow this pattern;

Alas for him  
Who faints, despite Thy pattern, King  
of Saints:  
Alas, alas, for me, the one that faints.

(p.xi)

and a renewed petition follows, but this time it is only for 'strength/ To hold Thee fast'. The final reference point of the poem is the gift which Christ has obtained for us, that of Grace. Mankind no longer has to rely on innate strength for salvation. We have the comfort of knowing that even in our ultimate weakness, death, it will be Christ's strength that will redeem us:

But when our strength  
 Shall be made weakness, and our bodies  
 clay,  
 Hold Thou us fast, and give us sleep till  
 day.

(p.xii)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti greatly appreciated this opening poem of *Annus Domini*, possibly attracted by an intensity particularly suited to introduce a volume of prayers which seem to be the issue of a deep personal struggle. The Rev.H.W.Burrows in his introduction stresses the fact that each prayer is the result of a meditation on a passage of scripture:

They seem to me valuable in themselves from their fervour, reverence, and overflowing charity, and also because they are suggestive of the use which should be made of Holy Scripture in our devotions. Each little Prayer may be considered as the result of a meditation, and as an example of the way in which that exercise should issue in worship.

Rossetti's own stated intention is practical in its emphasis, that of supplying 'a Text and Collect for each day of the year'. Possibly this arrangement stems from her own habit of bringing the household together for daily devotion, a practice which was still a common one in most Victorian households:

In the morning, and once more towards nine o'clock in the evening, Christina Rossetti gathered the servants around her, reading for a few minutes a passage from Scripture, and then a suitable prayer from the Anglican Prayer-Book and frequently the Collect for the day.<sup>30</sup>

There would have been a small but secure market for a volume such as *Annus Domini*, accepted for publication by James Parker & Co., a London firm which had become the publisher for the General Literature Committee of the SPCK in 1832.

The organisation of the prayers in *Annus Domini* does not follow the Church year, but rather moves through scripture from the Old to the New Testament, with nothing regulating the choice of text besides the special interest of Rossetti herself. She does, however, indicate those prayers which are suitable for the various Church seasons 'if such a classification is wished for'. The most striking aspect of the prayers is that their wording follows almost exactly that of the scriptural text. This severe limitation of verbal freedom does not allow for the intrusion of any thought extraneous to textual meditation, and what might at first seem a senseless check on any kind of spontaneity in fact produces a striking intensity as the full force of mind and imagination are brought to bear on a set of words. The new turn in redirecting the imagination exclusively towards the scriptures angered Rossetti's brother

William Michael, who could not hide his regret as he wrote of her 'over-scrupulosity':

Over-scrupulosity made Christina Rossetti shut up her mind to almost all things save the Bible, and the admonitions and ministrations of priests.(...) Impulse and elan were checked, both in act and in writing.<sup>31</sup>

Rossetti's curbing of imaginative freedom, although initially a product of the Evangelical bias of her youth, in *Annus Domini* at least has more in common with Tractarian reserve. Her use of Types suggests a familiarity with Isaac Williams' Tract 80 and the severe restriction on imaginative freedom is reminiscent of Keble's writing on poetry and his own quiet and reserved lifestyle. Poetry, Keble claims, may be supposed 'in general to mean the expression of an overflowing mind, relieving itself, more or less indirectly and reservedly of the thoughts and passions which most oppress it'.<sup>32</sup> The prayers in *Annus Domini* are the 'poetic' overflow of the emotions produced as a result of scriptural meditation.

Her 'restraint', however, is very much in the nature of self-discipline, the checking of natural impulse which her brother mentioned and which the various biographers have noted as part of her character. In her poetry this severe suppression of impulse produces an intense 'negative romanticism',<sup>33</sup> but in her volume of prayers the effect is very different and best described by Bell's 'spiritual sublimity'. Because the stimulus of the emotion is Holy Scripture and the emotional appeal is towards Christ, there is none of the ambiguity which characterises her imaginative poetry, from 'Goblin Market' to poems such as 'Autumn' and 'The Convent Threshold'. Even attempts to 'outlaw' imagination, such as in the first and second stories of *Speaking Likenesses*, carry their own fundamental contradiction: a negative portrayal of the imagination serves only to intensify its subversive potential. But in these prayers, the imagination is allowed total freedom within the bounds of her material (the text from scripture) and her relationship with Christ, and such freedom issues in rightly directed emotional intensity. The result is very close to Keble's notion of the 'poetic'. G.B.Tennyson tells us that for Keble, the poetic lies in the 'expressive character' of art which is similar to Aristotelian imitation

"provided we understand that term with the two following quotations:-  
1. That the thing to be imitated or expressed is some object of desire or regret, or some other imaginative feeling the direct indulgence of which is impeded:-  
2. That the mode of imitation or expression is indirect, the instruments of it being for the most part, associations more or less accidental."<sup>34</sup>

The 'thing to be (...) expressed' in the case of *Annus Domini* is spiritual emotion directed towards Christ and the 'instruments' used for its expression are her

meditations on a scriptural text, conveyed as far as possible by the actual words of the text or scriptural parallels, either through orthodox associations or imaginatively inspired.

For example, in her first prayer, in response to Genesis iii.15, she uses an orthodox typological association: the 'seed' that will bruise the serpent's head is Christ, to whom she addresses this prayer and all the others in the collection. Her prayer no.6 reintroduces a parallel from the opening poem: as Jacob prevailed, so must we hold fast by prayer:

Gen.xxxii.28

As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

O Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom Jacob prevailed, help us with that holy patriarch by prayer to hold Thee fast, and by love to cleave steadfastly unto Thee, our ever-present Aid. I entreat Thee, when Thy Providences are dark to our eyes strengthen our faith; and whatever portion Thou allottest to us, give us grace to say, It is enough. Amen.

A purely imaginative association introduces the last thought in the prayer, possibly arising out of Jacob's dissatisfaction with his lot. This kind of association is used very often in the prayers and the imagination utilised at times to visualise in the most literal way the suggestions of the text.<sup>35</sup> Such imaginative appropriation of the actual words of scripture heightens their intensity:

43

Ps.xvi.11

Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy Presence is fulness of joy; at Thy Right Hand there are pleasures for evermore.

O Lord Jesus Christ, at Whose Right Hand are pleasures for evermore, open, I pray Thee, our eye of faith to behold those heavenly pleasures: that lifting up our heart to them we may be weaned from the unsatisfying and surfeiting pleasures of this life. Teach us to covet earnestly Thy best gifts, and to long for Thee the Giver above all. Amen.

The imagination, stimulated by the notion of 'pleasures', moves the enthusiasm of the seeker to gaze on them in the mind's eye, bringing to bear sublimations of personal experience of pleasure. The prayer moves from the contemplation of heavenly pleasures, to the renunciation of unsatisfying earthly ones, a favourite theme of Rossetti's. It then moves neatly back to focus on the addressee, Christ the giver.

Bell notes the influence of the *Book of Common Prayer* on the volume, with Rossetti's appropriation of some of its 'well-ordered grandeur'.<sup>36</sup> Rossetti has

adopted, in a most literal way at times, the formulations of Cranmerian rhetoric, which itself centres on that of the early Bible translations into the vernacular. Her skill with form allows her to echo the order and balance of her source: the vivid images and powerful metaphors of the grand style kindling imaginative and emotive response, but kept in check by a strictly regulated form in a tightly-held tension between emotional intensity and formal economy. Prayer No. 212 is a particularly good example of Rossetti's skill.

212  
St. John x.9.

I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Door, I cry unto Thee, let us in; into Thy peace, into Thy Kingdom, into Paradise with Thee. Now while Thou wilt bestow, give us all grace to ask; while Thou mayest be found, to seek; while Thou wilt open unto us, to knock. I ask, I seek, I knock: O Lord, send none away empty. Amen.

The urgent petition for entry, balanced by the repetition of three parallel phrases which grow in intensity, is steadied by a formulaic sentence of gracious prose. This formula is then appropriated in an intensely personal threefold petition: 'I ask, I seek, I knock' and the prayer ends with the psalm-like response, 'O Lord, send none away empty'. It is a pity that a volume which demonstrates such skill on the part of Rossetti in the creation and ordering of such beautiful prose in the Anglican tradition should not be available to the general reader of her poetry. *Annus Domini* survives mainly in specialised collections and has never been reprinted.

The volume does, however, pose a problem for the critic interested in Rossetti's literary development. While its beauty and intensity are most striking, it does not offer any practical way out of the Post-Romantic dilemma: the search for a valid means of expression in a rapidly changing society. Intense meditation upon surface particularities satisfied the Romantic need for diversity within a universal whole, but for the Victorians such assurance of universal correspondences was no longer possible: 'the egotistical sublime no longer revealed the universal mind underlying all individual imaginations but came to pose the threat of solipsism'.<sup>37</sup> In a sense, Rossetti's literal appropriation of the language of Anglican worship in *Annus Domini* relies on the central feeling of Christian community which inspired the sacred rhetoric of the Reformation.<sup>38</sup> Reluctance to step outside this highly specific language suggests a difficulty in relating its meaning to the world outside the community. Where a sense of community, or a sense of the wholeness of experience, is lacking, emotional intensity directed towards a particular image or linguistic

figure could so easily become the morbidity of Tennyson or of the Pre-Raphaelites. While Rossetti remains within the language of liturgical unity, she may safely contemplate the changing world without having to relate her images and metaphors to the actual world around her:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Whose Name is called Wonderful, give us grace,  
I beseech Thee, with all prostration of heart and intellect to adore  
Thee, Who art with the Father and the Holy Ghost One only Lord  
God. Suffer us not to be seduced from the faith by miscalled reason,  
or apparent facts of science, or wit and learning of misbelievers, or  
subtilities of Satan.

(Prayer no.234)

But Rossetti, like the Pre-Raphaelites with whom she is so closely associated, cannot ignore the call of individual sense perception; the wealth of sensual detail of her 'Pre-Raphaelite' poems, her love of small woodland creatures and all the particularities of the natural world. It was not long before she turned directly to the world of nature, in her search to interpret her own world in the light of the scriptures.

### *Called to Be Saints*

Although published in 1881,<sup>39</sup> the volume was written before 1876 and thus it may be examined before *Seek and Find* which has the earlier date of publication, 1879. The two volumes share many similarities, moving from the examination of the minute particularities of nature to the role of living things in Creation.

*Called to Be Saints* opens with an introductory section entitled 'The Key to My Book' and here Rossetti explains the complex arrangement that follows. Central are the saints themselves, 'the nineteen Saints commemorated by name in our Book of Common Prayer, with the Holy Innocents neither named or numbered, with St. Michael and his cloud of All Angels, with All Saints as the stars of the firmament and as the sand by the sea-shore innumerable'. Thus the great circle of saints and martyrs are to be examined in their service to God, 'forcible witnesses of ancient truth, provocations to the exercise of all piety' (Rossetti is quoting here from Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*). The saints she surrounds by the praise-givers of the psalms, planting also, as she tells us in the introduction, 'a garden round their hallowed graves': a garden of wild flowers and precious stones.

As all things are connected laterally through their relationship to God, Rossetti is free to choose her own correspondences. The stones she assigns according to the correspondence between the twelve apostolic foundation stones in Revelation, and the Church Calendar. Her choice of plants for each saint is



arbitrary but she answers those who may object to her choice as 'mere freaks of fancy'(xiv) by the observation that 'so long as with David our musings are on God's works' they cannot fail to do good.

It is interesting to note Rossetti's defence of imaginative associations in the context of scripture and the Christian life; the same sort of imaginative freedom within a specific context which we saw in *Annus Domini*. In her accounts of the saints, although she has a certain respect for historical accuracy, the aim is rather to bring the saint to life in the imagination of the reader. She stresses those incidents and saintly qualities which may easily be recognised and imitated by the reader, even if these come by way of popular tradition:

Much of my material can only be drawn from uncertain traditions: but after one protest that to such I attach no binding faith, nor even necessarily any credence, I shall not deem it incumbent upon me to guard each sentence as it occurs by a supplementary protest; nor have I hesitated partly to construct my so-called "Memorials" on a legendary foundation. Such memorials may, I am not without hope, prove helpful towards realizing each Saint in his special Office on his appointed day. (p.xvi)

The link which Rossetti is aiming to establish between the Biblical and 'This near-at-hand land' of nature is further emphasised by her use of local wild flowers and herbs rather than those of Palestine:

I even think that a flower familiar to the eye and dear to the heart may often succeed in conveying a more pointed lesson than could be understood from another more remote if more eloquent. (p.xviii)

The urge to teach lessons from nature, to 'gather simples and try to spell out their lessons'(p.xvi) has, as the introductory poem tells us, the aim of encouraging the reader to attain 'That far-away land' which 'overflows with treasure/ of heaped up good pleasure' (xviii).

Each chapter is dedicated to a discussion of a saint or Holy day, and follows roughly the same plan throughout. For example St.Andrew, the first saint in the Church calendar (30 Nov. Advent) is formulated as follows:

St.Andrew, Apostle:  
The Sacred Text  
Biographical Additions  
A Prayer for Large-Heartedness  
The Memorial  
The First Foundation: Jasper  
The Daisy

The first section, 'The Sacred Text' gives direct scriptural quotations concerning the saint in question, organised so as to form a framework for the saint's life and

work. The impulse here may very well stem from the revival by the Tractarians, notably Isaac Williams, of 'a medievalizing system of correspondences'.<sup>40</sup> Indeed Rossetti mentions her debt to Williams' *A Harmony of the Four Evangelists* in the preface to *Seek and Find*. The 'Biographical Additions' section in each case embroiders the scriptural accounts with tradition or legend, or further Biblical references, ending with a prayer which highlights a particular quality of the saint, chosen by Rossetti herself; for example, St. Stephen, 'Victory', St. Thomas, 'Confidence of Love', or for the Annunciation, 'Self-Devotion'. The prayers, although lacking the intensity of those in *Annus Domini*, again show evidence of Rossetti's mastery of the 'sonority and stately rhythms of the rhetorical prose of the great Anglican divines'.<sup>41</sup>

If the language of the volume shows the influence of the rhetorical style of the *Book of Common Prayer*, its form shows also the influence of the traditional Anglican Church service. Rossetti describes how her idea for the 'Memorials' grew out of her Church attendance: 'They took their rise from my own observation of appropriate verses when I joined in our Church Service: one such association succeeded another, until it appeared to me that the Psalms of each Feast might be arranged in more or less apt connection with its special history'(xvi). Rossetti's choice of words here, 'association', 'imagined', 'suggestive'(xvi) already indicates that she is straining the notion of correspondences as the Tractarians would have understood it, and as the volume unfolds it becomes increasingly evident that *Called to Be Saints* is not simply another Emblem Book.

The relationship between the 'Sacred Text' section and the 'Biographical Additions' is worthy of note here. The latter has as aim the 'fleshing out' of the purely Biblical descriptions of the former. Rossetti adds curious and vivid details handed down through popular legend, to engage the imagination of the reader, 'the sure utterance of inspiration being supplemented by the uncertain voice of tradition'(p.25). For example, for St. Thomas she adds a twin sister Lysia whom the saint forsook 'for the love of Christ'(p.27). Where possible she adds details of the horrendous deaths of the martyrs; the cauldron of boiling oil in which St. John is said to have been immersed (p.72), or the laceration of St. Mark's body as he was dragged back and forth over sharp rocks, 'his blood staining the stones, fragments of his flesh bestrewing the ground'(p.198). She also adds vivid detail to some of the well-known incidents from scripture: 'St. Peter is said never again unmoved to have heard the cock crow: and we are told that his cheeks became furrowed by tears'(p.319).

Rossetti is working from a literal acceptance of the facts of the Bible as accurate, as 'communicated by inspiration'(p.224), towards the contemporary popularisation of the lives of the saints, itself of medieval inspiration. We saw Rossetti's earlier attempts to accommodate the exploration of the self within a

secure social and religious framework, and here a similar system operates. Despite Rossetti's defence of the legendary and fanciful, she insists that her volume conforms to Anglican tradition: 'No graver slur could attach to my book than would be a reputation for prevalent originality'(xvii). In the 'Pilgrim's Progress' formula of the last tale of *Speaking Likenesses* we saw that the outline of the story was known, salvation assured; but the movement towards self-awareness in the dialogue became the means by which the reader had access to imaginative appropriation of the moral lesson. In *Called to Be Saints* the scriptural outline is supplemented by the vivid biographical details of the second section. Take for example the human sympathy which the following little story evokes :

A touching incident is related in connection with our Saint's martyrdom. The very accuser who apprehended him, moved by his lofty demeanor and plenitude of faith, craved his forgiveness and confessed Christ. St.James paused a brief space; then turned, embraced him, said "Peace be with Thee," and kissed him: after which the veteran Champion and the new-born disciple together submitted to the sword, and together slept in Jesus. (p.343)

The close personal relationship which is established between Rossetti as Christian teacher in her later devotional prose, and her reading public, has already begun to develop in this volume, for example in the personal anecdote which is such an important part of a later volume such as *Time Flies*:

(St.Matthew vi.6) "Shut thy door:" and on this I laid no stress till a friend called my attention to it. Since that time I have been struck with (as it seems to me) the width and undiminished application of one certain precept of prayer, which at first sight might appear restricted to those few disciples in whose hearing it was uttered.' (p.381)

We see in this comment the way Rossetti is beginning to widen her application of the scriptures, at the same time maintaining her emphasis on the actual words of the text. A similar mechanism operates in a passage like the following, where a very literal understanding of Isaiah's vision is used as a refreshing stimulus to the weary or frustrated imagination:

When it seems (as some times through revulsion of feeling or urgency of Satan it may seem) that our yoke is uneasy and our burden unbearable, because our life is pared down and subdued and repressed to an intolerable level: and so in one moment every instinct of our whole self revolts against our lot, and we loathe this day of quietness and of sitting still, and writhe under a sudden sense of all we have irrecoverably forgone, of the right hand, or foot, or eye cast from us, of the haltingness and maimedness of our entrance (if enter we do at last) into life, -- then the Seraphim of Isaiah's vision making music in our memory revive hope in our heart.

For at the sound of their mighty cry of full-flooding adoration, the very posts of the door moved and the house was filled with smoke. No lack there, nothing subdued there; no bridle, no curb, no self-sacrifice: outbursts of sympathy, fulness of joy, pleasures for evermore, likeness that satisfieth. (p.435)

Rossetti has appropriated the Romantics' use of the role of memory in imaginative apprehension and renewal. But the language she uses suggests rather the closed-in existence and obsessive absorption of Tennyson's Mariana, the anguished frustration of Dante Gabriel, or perhaps her own difficulties as a female poet in a man's world. We have here, I think a most interesting example of the transformations which Romantic theory undergoes as it moves into the context of the Victorian. Rossetti is redirecting the Romantic sublime from Nature towards the scriptures. She does not deny the possibility that we may discern in nature 'The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible/ Of that eternal language, which thy God/ Utters, who from eternity doth teach',<sup>42</sup> but sees in the inspired language of the Bible a guarantee of truth.

Nevertheless, Rossetti certainly does not neglect the wonders of nature and we see in the minute nature studies of *Called to Be Saints* her joy in the natural world around her. The book is written in the English Emblem Book tradition, in its use of Emblem, Biblical text and poem. Gisela Hönnighausen in a most informative article 'Emblematic Tendencies in the Works of Christina Rossetti' traces the influence of medieval and seventeenth-century emblematic interpretations of nature on the Victorians and sees Rossetti's use of emblems as 'following the general trend of the times'.<sup>43</sup> Rossetti stands together with the Tractarians here as she scans the Kebleian Book of Nature, where 'Any object in nature must have concealed affinity with every other object in nature, lateral correspondence, because all objects form part of the vertical correspondences between nature and God'.<sup>44</sup> Not even the humblest 'can lack the germ if no more of each grace' and, 'as all virtues have one and the same root, even so does that root shoot up into every virtue'(xiv). The virtues of mankind and of nature are linked by their common root, Christ.

But the minute attention to natural detail, and the subjectivity of her correspondences show her very close links with Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites. Hönnighausen comments on the similarities: 'The affinity to Ruskin does not end with her love of exact detail; there is a further and more important point to confirm it. In Ruskin's scientific works as in Christina Rossetti's devotional writings one cannot help but notice the same striving to discover a deeper meaning in every detail'.<sup>45</sup> A.H.Harrison also notes the similarity, where 'the systematic and detailed descriptions of plants appropriate to given occasions in *Called to Be Saints* mimic Ruskin's own descriptive botany throughout the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*'.<sup>46</sup> Harrison draws our attention particularly towards Rossetti's

'investigation of the relations among Nature, God, and human perception' which he claims 'serve almost as a summary of the central tenet of Ruskin's moral and sacramental theory of art in *Modern Painters*'.<sup>47</sup> He comments finally on the similarity of the 'penetrating, prophetic imagination' in both Ruskin and Rossetti which 'works for the salvation of his or her audience'.<sup>48</sup> Now, while Rossetti's attention to minute particulars does seem to have been the result of Ruskin's general connection with the Pre-Raphaelites, both she and Ruskin are direct inheritors of the strange combination of Romantic nature worship and religious aesthetics that emanated from developments in Oxford in the 1830s; Ruskin because he was there at the time (although apparently he was not impressed)<sup>49</sup> and Rossetti through her youthful attendance at Christ Church, Albany Street. (She also, it seems, 'thought nothing of Keble as a poet'.<sup>50</sup>) Most important also in both writers is the need to teach, which springs from a strict Evangelical upbringing (maternal in both cases) and a thorough knowledge of the Bible. Ruskin's stated intention, for example, in *Proserpina* (1875-1886) is to 'interpret, for young English readers, the necessary European Latin or Greek names of flowers and to make them vivid and vital to their understandings'.<sup>51</sup> Rossetti, in her volume, proposes, as we have seen, to 'gather simples and try to spell out their lessons'. The very wording of these two authors proclaims their common aim: both wish, above all, to teach, to 'interpret', to 'spell out' the lessons from nature.

The illustrations of wild flowers and herbs in *Called to Be Saints* are also strikingly similar to those of *Proserpina*. There is no mention in Rossetti's volume as to who provided the illustrations of wild flowers; and it is doubtful that they were done by Rossetti herself as her drawing skills were limited.<sup>52</sup> But the accurately-drawn sketches with their chiaroscuro<sup>53</sup> effect do not have the scientific accuracy of Ruskin's.

Ultimately, despite the similarities, the two writers are moving in different directions. By the time of writing *Proserpina*, Ruskin has lost sight of the God behind creation. In the words of J.H. Miller in *The Disappearance of God*, 'the Word is nowhere to be found. The lines of connection between us and God have broken down, or God himself has slipped away from the places he used to be. He no longer inheres in the world as the force binding together all men and all things'.<sup>54</sup> The painstaking accuracy of his detail become obsession, at times no more than a vehicle for ill-tempered peevishness. Ruskin has substituted man for God;

All these virtues imply radically the conception, -- they lead ultimately to the revelation, -- of personal and governing Deity: but they begin, practically, and themselves consist to the end, in truthful knowledge of human power and human worth.<sup>55</sup>

and in so doing has cut himself off from anything except his own reflection in Nature. He has realised, as has Rossetti, that words also are forms which yield up

stimuli for the imagination, but rather than learn from them, he must substitute his own desires and ideals in place of their lessons. His proposed alternative nomenclature in the study of flowers will have as 'practical result (...) that the children who learn botany on the system adopted on this book will know the useful and beautiful names of the plants (...) and the ugly ones they will not know'.<sup>56</sup> He attempts to substitute Biblical or Classical terminology for 'ugly' Latin nomenclature, but the act of transposition becomes unbearable because ultimately it is not the words themselves which offend him but the associations they arouse in his unconscious mind:

Its leaves, (of a certain type of violet) I am informed in the text, are either 'pubescent-reticulate-venose-subreniform,' or 'lato-cordate-repando-crenate': and its stipules are 'ovate-acuminate-fimbriodenticulate'. I do not wish to pursue the inquiry further.<sup>57</sup>

For a moment we stand with Ruskin and glimpse the ugliness of conventional botanical classification. But our attention is no longer on the individuality of the plant, or even on the words themselves, but on the nightmares which they produce in Ruskin himself.

Rossetti, on the other hand, has already travelled through the nightmare of isolation, decay and despair; the anger of 'The World', the resentment and confusion of 'The Lowest Room', the bleakness and sterility of the 'lonesome, very lonesome' shore of 'Autumn' are testimony of her passage. Many writers of the period lost their faith, others turned towards Roman Catholicism in search of unity and continuity, finding comfort in doctrines such as that of the Real Presence.<sup>58</sup> The message of *Called to Be Saints* is not to give in to despair, but rather to look again more closely at what is given us to see, with the eye of faith. The words of the Bible, the intricate forms and shapes of nature are still there, close, abundant, accessible; we only have changed, believing that they have nothing to say to the new self-conscious generation. Rossetti's love of minute detail does not alienate her from God. Rather, the intricacies of natural form and the discoveries of science give her more wonderful facts on which to ponder with reverence. Unlike Ruskin in his later period, she can assimilate processes of decay and regeneration, and her system can contemplate with joy even those things which cannot be discovered by the eye alone.

Take for example her study of the violet, whose 'lowly stature' and humility she sees as symbolic of the Virgin, of whom we know so little: 'Let her be known to us as violets not pried after but sweetly and surely proclaimed by the fragrance of their odour' (p.137). The 'miniature world' of the 'seed-vessel' of the violet illuminates our meditations on Christ's mother, the 'rose, who bore the Rose' (p.193). The 'discriminative sensitiveness' of the violet can only be detected when the plant itself has been destroyed:

For a syrup concocted from it detects by contact either acid or alkali; the one transmuting the violet's blue component into red, the other into green. (p.192)

Rossetti's account of the seed-vessel of the violet not only recognises the autonomous 'world' of the violet, but suggests also that that world and our own are safely held within the will of God:

The petals having dropped away, the seed-vessel matures, and exhibits the figure of a somewhat irregularly modelled globe; this, surrounded by the fingers of a five-pointed calyx, seems a miniature world held in the hollow of a hand.  
(p.191)

Thus Rossetti uses her study of flowers, together with her observations on precious stones, to provide a familiar context for her study of the saints, one which reflects and illuminates. As the whole universe springs from God, no part may be seen in isolation, 'For as all virtues have one and the same root, even so does that one root shoot up into every virtue' (xv). All creation becomes our study even as God's Grace encompasses all.

### *Seek and Find*

Rossetti's next volume, *Seek and Find* (1879), has in the main been treated well by those critics who have examined it as a volume in its own right. Harrison in particular is convincing in his assessment of her 'general Romantic project of coming to spiritual terms with the external world'.<sup>59</sup> His comparison with Ruskin is, as we have seen, particularly fruitful, and Rossetti's impulse in the volume to establish for every part of nature an identity which transcends mere scientific naming or cataloguing of physical characteristic is very much in line with Ruskin's controversial definitions in *Proserpina*. They share in the general post-Romantic distrust of a science which ignores feeling. Ruskin also feels the need to establish a synthesis with nature, alternative to a 'scientific' one:

It is of no use (...) to determine, by microscope or retort, that cinnamon is made of cells with so many walls, or grape juice of molecules with so many sides; -- we are just as far as ever from understanding why these particular interstices should be aromatic, and those special parallelpipeds exhilarating as we were in the savagely unscientific days when we could only see with our eyes, and smell with our noses.<sup>60</sup>

Ruskin's attempt in *Proserpina* to establish a classification according to myth (Biblical 'myth' is used on a par with Classical) is in a sense comparable to

Rossetti's desire to establish scriptural definitions of the characteristics and functions of natural things and of our subjective perception of them, thus linking both ourselves and them to a permanent and God-given order of creation. The Benedicite, both the source of categories and the unifying structure underlying the volume, brings together the whole of visible and invisible creation, including mankind, in the one act common to all, praise of the Creator. All creatures render praise to God by fulfilling the functions for which they were made:

The divine bounty and mercy are good: the divine justice and chastisements are good also. The decree being good, that creature which fully and simply executes the decree is also good. Wherefore every obedient creature, whatever its particular act of obedience whether in judgement or in mercy, may by and for that act render praise to God. (p.15)

Mankind from the allotted place in creation is able to observe the elements of nature perform the roles appointed them, and, most important to Rossetti, has available the 'Treasure Trove'<sup>61</sup> of scripture in which definitions of roles have divine sanction. The difference between the availability of 'inspired' definitions and reliance on purely imaginative ones only may be seen in the contrast between Rossetti's assurance and optimism and Ruskin's haunting fear as they both explore nature:

The price Ruskin pays for his imaginative vision of Nature is the possibility of its negative counterpart. (...) Unable to assimilate the world of process, his innocence can conceive natural change only as a child's nightmare.<sup>62</sup>

From her position of faith, Rossetti's link with the divine scheme of creation allows her not only to see corruption and decay as positive pointers towards a time of perfection, but she is also able to contemplate violence and destruction, secure in the knowledge that 'divine justice and chastisements are good also'.

A further step in Rossetti's thought can also be seen in her emphasis on doing. What natural things are is closely bound up with what they do. Their essence and their appointed role are to a certain extent the same thing. Mankind, no more and no less a creature of God, is bound also to find the essence of existence in the activity of praise to the creator.<sup>63</sup>

Rossetti's treatment of the functions of living things also owes much to notions of beauty taken directly from Ruskin's volume two of *Modern Painters*; beauty taken 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 fulfilment of their duties and functions.<sup>64</sup>



Her definition of beauty in nature, however, is at once far simpler, yet more complete and wider-reaching than Ruskin's, as she synthesises strands of thought inherited both from his works and Platonic developments in Tractarian thought:

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. Beauty essential is the archetype of imparted beauty; life essential, of imparted life; Goodness essential, of imparted goodness: (p.14)

The use of 'archetype' here suggests both the relationship of creation towards its Maker, from Whom stems all goodness, life and beauty (and here the context for the phrase 'A work is less noble than its maker'(p.13) which puzzled G.Battiscombe<sup>65</sup>) and the other typological relationship between type and antitype which we saw in her notes and in *Annus Domini*. All creation stands in a typological relationship to the 'new heaven' and 'new earth' of Revelation:

But such objects, good, living, beautiful, as we now behold, are not that very Goodness, Life, Beauty, which (please God) we shall one day contemplate in beatific vision. (p.14)

*Seek and Find*, even more than *Called to Be Saints*, must be seen in relation to the influence of Tractarian thought.<sup>66</sup> Rossetti acknowledges a debt to Isaac Williams, in her stated use of his *Harmony of the Four Evangelists*<sup>67</sup> in the prefatory note, and the 'harmony' she presents at the beginning of her volume owes much to Williams' use of a similar layout:

#### The Benedicite

##### The Praise-Givers are

O all ye works  
of the Lord, bless  
ye the Lord:  
praise Him, and  
magnify Him for  
ever.

##### God's Creatures

God saw everything  
that He had made,  
and, behold, it  
was very good'.  
(Gen.i.31).

##### Christ's Servants

The Word was  
God. All  
things were  
made by Him;  
and without  
Him was not  
anything  
made that  
was made.  
(St.John i.  
1,3).

Each praise-giver mentioned in the Benedicite -- 26 sections in all -- is dealt with in the first series, Creation, in relation mainly to the Old Testament and in the second series, Redemption, in relation to Christ's work on earth. The volume as a whole makes cumbersome reading at times for the twentieth-century reader, but

there is a unity to the work which is particularly satisfying, and Rossetti does not waver from her original statement of intent or from her underlying theological convictions.

Rossetti had, in February of the same year, 1879, published a short harmony on First Corinthians 13, in the journal *New and Old*. The compilation, she tells us, had originally formed part of a Lenten exercise the year before, and was by no means all her own idea:

1 Cor.xiii. with illustrative texts was suggested to me as an exercise last Lent. The *Chapter* I thought of myself; the particular treatment was suggested in part or wholly to me.  
(Appendix D)

Rossetti's three headings in the article are 'Charity', 'Our Lord' and 'His School'; the first containing a verse from First Corinthians 13, the second an illustration from the life of Christ, and the third, for the most part, the witness of the early church. Surprisingly, some of the verses of First Corinthians which must surely have fascinated Rossetti, those dealing with the nature of revelation, have been omitted and she keeps rigorously to the heading 'Charity' throughout.

But where her article avoids complex issues and declines comment on the nature of revelation and human perception, *Seek and Find* itself centres on them. The Tractarian doctrine of Reserve, for example, is very much a part of her understanding of the dealings of God with humanity:

If even St.Paul might have been exalted above measure through abundance of Revelation (2 Cor.xii.7) let us thank God that we in our present frailty know not any more than His Wisdom reveals to us: not that man's safety resides in ignorance any more than in knowledge, but in conformity of the human with the divine will. (p.15)

Rossetti's attitude towards the scriptures here seems closest again to that of Isaac Williams, and she must certainly have read his study of Genesis (possibly an inspiration for her own notes on Genesis), which tells us in the Preface:

If nothing is revealed concerning them, (the scriptures) it is because such knowledge would not further, but might impede, our salvation. (...) Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above thy strength. But what is commanded thee, think thereupon with reverence.<sup>68</sup>

The tone of *Seek and Find* is very much one of reverent inquiry and as with all her devotional prose, rests on the assurance that if approached through faith, no study of the scriptures will be unprofitable. Scripture, claims Williams, following the

tradition of St. Augustine and the early Church fathers, 'is not understood, except by faith'.<sup>69</sup> Rossetti echoes, 'Amen, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He helping us, let us bring love and faith to our study of the Benedicite' (p.13).

Rossetti has also inherited Williams' conciliatory attitude towards modern science, and the calm assurance with which he approaches such controversial issues as historical accuracy and miracle. With the 1860 controversy over the volume *Essays and Reviews* in mind, Williams comments on the new theories in his introduction to the Genesis studies, showing an attitude very different indeed from the dogmatism of Pusey:

The question is not what Moses intended or thought of, but what God hath said by Moses. Even as on Mount Sinai, when he had been conversing with God, his countenance shone with the light of God, although he himself knew it not.(...)

By Moses He may give us an account of things as they occurred, while yet the fuller purport and manifold bearings of them, none but the wise in Christ in after ages can understand.<sup>70</sup>

The scriptures, he continues, 'are not to instruct us in physical philosophy, but, like the miracles of scripture, to impress us with the power of God'.<sup>71</sup> He adds, 'there can be then in the long run no interference, no opposition or contradiction between science and revelation.(...) No firm believer, therefore, in the Holy Scriptures can have any apprehension or misgiving respecting the ultimate results of scientific discovery as bearing on Divine truth'.<sup>72</sup>

In *Seek and Find* Rossetti suggests that 'the deepest students' of science learn a sincere humility akin to that of the saints, in the knowledge that 'much more exists which they know not' (p.36). The danger lies in the shallows:

Let us not exercise ourselves in matters beyond our present powers of estimate, lest amid the shallows (not the depths) of science we make shipwreck of our faith. (p.29)

Science is a useful tool of inquiry and makes available facts to elicit wonder and to provide marvels for the imagination. Reverent contemplation of the facts provided by scientific study can only add to our admiration of God's handiwork. I shall quote at length here, to show how Rossetti has subjected scientific knowledge to imaginative experience. Humanity may break out of the 'imprisonment within the bounds of (...) selfhood'<sup>73</sup> by using the subjectivity of imaginative and sensuous impressions to promote desire:

We who occupy comparative shallows of intelligence are not wholly debarred from the admiration and delights of noble contemplations. We can marvel over the many tints of the heavenly bodies, ruddy, empurpled, golden, or by contrast pale; we can understand the

conclusion though we cannot follow the process by which analysis of a ray certifies various component elements as existing in the orb which emits it; we can realise mentally how galaxies, which by reason of remoteness present to our eyes a mere modification of sky colour, are truly a host of distinct luminaries; we can long to know more about belts and atmospheres; we can ponder reverently over interstellar spaces so vast as to exhaust the attractive force of suns and more than suns. (pp.36-37)

Although Rossetti is using the Romantic idea of imagination, such utilisation of natural and scientific fact is made possible by the consideration of nature as a sacramental system.<sup>74</sup> The idea that God uses reserve in His dealings with mankind, a doctrine central to the Tractarians from the very beginning, leads to a consideration of nature as veiled revelation, in the words of J.H.Newman, 'material phenomena are both the types and instruments of real things unseen'.<sup>75</sup> Rossetti makes it quite clear at the beginning that her dealings with nature rest upon analogy and reserve. In a delicate 'double analogy' she seeks to demonstrate how the process works:

The sky and its azure become so at one with our associations, that all fair blue objects within our reach, stone or flower, sapphire or harebell, act as terrene mirrors, conveying to us an image of that which is above themselves, as "earthly pictures with heavenly meanings." (...)

Thus while all the good creatures of God teach us some lesson concerning the unapproached perfections of their creator, that which they display is a glimpse, that which they cannot display is infinite. (pp.24-25)

An imaginative response to nature within the context of faith is, however, only the first step in the process of learning from nature. Nature must be apprehended spiritually as well, the authority coming from Christ Himself, Who 'deigned many times to take for His text or illustration some common every-day object, making thereof the key to unlock a mystery.' (p.197) Indeed, to ignore these spiritual lessons 'Divinely commended to our notice' (p.199) becomes a sin:

The shower which they foretell rebukes them for those signs of the times which they discern not (St.Luke xii. 54-56). (p.197)

Rossetti has taken as her model for the treatment of her 'lessons from nature' Keble's Tract 89. Not only, as Harrison has pointed out, do they both take as their foundation St.Paul's words 'The Invisible things of Him are understood by the things which are made',<sup>76</sup> but Rossetti also makes use of the Fathers' threefold way of interpreting nature. Keble recommends the consideration of nature 'either as fraught with imaginative associations, or as parabolic lessons of conduct, or as a symbolic language in which God speaks to us of a world out of sight: which three

might perhaps be not quite inaptly entitled, the Poetical, the Moral, and the Mystical, phases or aspects of this visible world'.<sup>77</sup>

The numerous scriptural references which Rossetti gives for each praise-giver of the *Benedicite*, which make the volume so unwieldy, are a necessary part of the threefold approach. Here we have the difference between something like Ruskin's project of exploring the relationships between man and nature, or Harrison's assessment of *Seek and Find* as simply Rossetti's redirecting of 'the general Romantic project of coming to spiritual terms with (...) sensory responses to the external world'.<sup>78</sup> Rossetti's link with scripture indicates from the outset that the central concern is humanity's relationship to God, not to nature in itself. The volume has the most ambitious project of scanning the whole of visible and invisible creation for the lessons afforded by God, both through His own relationship with it, as found in the scriptures, and through our own. The observations which we make from our own place amongst the praise-givers must have as their aim the establishment of a true and just relationship with God. In other words, if all creation praises God by the fulfilment of their God-given 'duties and functions', we may seek to praise God by identifying and fulfilling those functions and duties ordained us. Where better to learn the nature of these but by observing the other praise-givers?

Mankind amongst all the creatures of creation has the privilege and dire responsibility of establishing a personal relationship with God; self-consciousness and imaginative sensitivity may be seen as tools given for this end. Although all of creation was involved in humanity's guilt (p.184), partaking of the fall, irresponsible nature has been redeemed through no merit of its own:

Creatures devoid of free-will abide safe and blessed within the will of God; but they cannot withhold, and therefore cannot genuinely give.  
(p.186)

Mankind, although also redeemed through no personal merit, has been granted free will, with which to chose either salvation or destruction:

Free-will, that one power which God Himself refuses to coerce, free-will it is that renders possible our self-destruction; and on the other hand furnishes us with the one solitary thing which as a king we can give unto our all-giving beloved King (see Sam. xxiv. 23, 24). (p.186)

With scripture as our guide and inspiration, spiritual growth in our relationship towards God through His creation depends on our own response; our awareness of self and the subjectivity of personal response are therefore part of God's plan:

Our Divine Teacher has Himself deigned in His parable of the Two Foundations (St.Matt.vii. 24-27) to draw for us a spiritual lesson from

certain natural facts, showing us that our outward circumstances become good or evil not of their own essence, but in strict accordance with whatever good or evil responds to them from within ourselves.' (p.201)

*Seek and Find* sets out to extract the necessary 'spiritual lessons' from a study of creation, following Keble's threefold approach, the imaginative (which may draw on simple physical or aesthetic relationships, often elaborated through scriptural example, speculative ones drawn from known or unknown facts of natural phenomena, or purely personal associations), the moral (through 'symbol or analogy' in the study of all creatures 'higher and lower than man' (p.127), but for our 'own flesh and blood, our own capabilities and duties (...) we must study plain examples and plain warnings. And yet not altogether so: for still many times we may discern the lower person or event prefiguring a something transcending itself.' p.127); Keble's third mode for interpreting nature, 'the Mystical', as he suggests, comes through an attempt to identify the 'divine associations and meanings' which may be found in the 'authentic records' of God's will which 'are, of course, Holy Scripture and the consent of ecclesiastical writers'.<sup>79</sup> Many of the New Testament references in *Seek and Find* are clearly searching for scriptural recommendations, as opposed to the more simple analysis of function or physical characteristic of her Old Testament references.

Of course Rossetti does not adhere strictly to the three modes all the way through the volume, but her treatment of Angels, the first of God's creatures mentioned, shows evidence of a systematic working through the various modes.<sup>80</sup> We are introduced to their function as praise givers first of all; they are 'ministering spirits' (Heb.i.14), 'in the scale of natural creation higher than man', although 'through the grave and gate of death' mankind 'shall attain to equality' with them. Once Rossetti has established their identity, she passes on to the moral lessons which we may learn from them:

Let us collect what we already know of these our unseen fellows that by considering what are their characteristics, we ourselves may be provoked into love and to good works (Heb.x.24). (p.17)

There follows a list of their characteristics, together with the lesson which we may learn from each. First of all 'They rejoice', as in Job xxxviii 4-7, with joy 'of a generous sort; contrary to envy, grudging, covetousness' and this characteristic 'teaches us moderation, reverence'. Then Rossetti continues through their association with light (2 Cor.xi.14) which exhorts us to 'become children of light' (St.John xii.36); their strength, which is used to proclaim its own inferiority compared to that of God (Rev.v.2-7) -- 'What then must we be?'; their justification

of God's judgements, which should encourage us to faith as children of the faithful Abraham, and so on. She ends this very methodical chapter with a short study of the recommendations of the New Testament as regards the ordained relationship between man and the angels. They do not share the privileged relationship with Himself, which God has afforded man, through Christ:

Unto the angels God hath not put into subjection the world to come (Heb.ii.5): angels desire to look into things which Evangelists were privileged to preach (1 St.Peter i.12): it is by the Church that the manifold wisdom of God becomes known to principalities and powers in heavenly places. (Eph.iii.10)

Rossetti's Redemption series study of Angels also exhibits the systematic approach of her Creation series, suggesting that she composed both series at the same time, creature by creature. This first section of the Redemption series opens with a most beautiful simile in which Rossetti imagines the host of Angels saluting Christ's birth:

As all lovely tints engarland the sun at his rising, come to light while he runs his course, turn the rain in his path to a glory, and rally around him when he sets, so the blessed host of heaven waiting on their Lord appeared and vanished, stooped to earth and returned to Heaven.

She then lists their acts of love in the service of their Lord, 'Who deigned to become their fellow creature': the Archangel Gabriel (St.Luke i. 11-20), an angel to reassure Joseph (St.Matt.i.20, 21), the announcement to the shepherds of St.Luke ii. 8-14 and so on, ending with an reflection on their terrible power to punish, in Revelation. Her last consideration reflects the lesson at the end of the Creation series. Despite the superiority of the Angels, Christ chose to take human nature upon Himself:

Angels neither sin, nor mourn, nor die. We who sin and mourn and must die, how much shall we love that dear Lord Who wedded to Himself not their nature but ours ? (Heb.ii.16; Eph.v.22-32)

The neatness shown in these two sections breaks down in the following ones as Rossetti warms to her theme, but the underlying structure remains in all of them. Her desire to teach her readers is here given ample scope by the formula, and she may call upon their imaginative response without fear of misinterpretation. But her tone is never one of superiority; she is never patronising. She confessed to her brother Dante Gabriel that *Seek and Find* 'is of course, but a simple work adapted to people who know less(!) than I do'.<sup>81</sup> The SPCK, who eventually published *Seek and Find* in 1879, had already defined this section of their readership in a report of 1874, as 'self-educated persons of average ability (...) semi-educated persons, (...)'

imperfectly educated persons'<sup>82</sup> amongst other even less impressive categories. With characteristic modesty, Rossetti, in effect, places herself in this category also, as her exhortations always begin with 'we' rather than 'you'. The SPCK also instructed its authors to keep to the Authorised Version of the Bible, which Rossetti does for the most part, and to 'harmony of the Old Testament with the New',<sup>83</sup> which as we have seen is also characteristic of the volume. It is important to keep in mind the readership which Rossetti is addressing, because no matter how intricate or learned Rossetti's own patterns of thought may be, in the text all must issue in simple instruction and suggestion. Only through accessible advice can Rossetti inspire to action and good works.

Rossetti's emphasis on service through good works,<sup>84</sup> evident so often in her earlier prose, provides the final phase of her exploration of nature; mankind's own rendering of praise through action. Any tendency towards 'self postponement'<sup>85</sup> does not bring with it exemption from present exertion. The need for withdrawal from daily life manifest in Rossetti's earlier poetry, going back as far as *Maude*, has been replaced by a firm belief in the necessity for active participation in even the small, insignificant areas of life. Heaven, she tells us, is popularly thought of in negative terms, as a place where we can be compensated for present suffering and deprivation:

Made wise by experience we start with negatives: earth has, heaven will not have, tears, pain, sorrow, reverses, death, sin (Rev.iii.12; xxi.4,27); assuredly not sin which entails the bitterest of all misery, breeding fear and self-loathing. War is banished; doubt also and antipathy; weariness, with both sleep and sleeplessness. "No more sea" (xxi.1) puzzles: but we bridge over our non-sequence by exclaiming "No more separation". We who have lacked friends, on reunion: we shall regain and never more lose those beloved ones who for the present are buried out of sight. (p.176)

Here is the heaven of Dante Gabriel's 'The Blessed Damosel' or Rossetti's own earlier poetry such as 'The Lowest Room', a heaven in which all the miseries of this life will be repaid, where the last shall be first and the first last. No action is necessary besides watching and waiting. But the much wiser Rossetti of 1879 realises the falsity of such a notion of heaven:

Yet all this analysed, what does it all amount to? It is heaven without God.(p.176)

If we wish to reinstate God, this must be done through following 'Christ the Way' (p.177). As Christ Himself used His own earthly environment to point out the way, He cannot be followed through a denial of involvement with the world. Earthly pleasure, for example, has its own function in that the beauty of creation should serve as motivation for action:



It is good for us to enjoy all good things which fall to our temporal lot, so long as such enjoyment kindles and feeds the desire of better things reserved for our eternal inheritance. The younger fairer than the elder (Judges xv.2), the best wine last (St.John ii.10), these are symbols calculated to set us while on earth hankering, longing, straining, after heaven.' (p.181)

So far, Rossetti does not greatly differ from the Tractarians in their attitude towards nature. But her insistence on active involvement (itself of Tractarian origin) leads to a very different emphasis: a recognition of the responsibility laid upon mankind by the granting of free will. Mankind has the whole of creation to contemplate and to learn from and has been shown how to proceed, through the example of the scriptures:

He Who spake as never man spake (St.John vii.46) deigned many times to take for His text or illustration some common every-day object, making thereof the key to unlock a mystery or the goad to urge His hearers to a duty. (p.197)

The outcome of humanity's study should be action. Not even ignorance or inability may serve as an excuse for inaction, as God will judge according to the talents which he has bestowed (p.15). In one of the most beautiful passages in the volume, Rossetti tells of the role of creation in the salvation of mankind:

Christ holds up before our mental eyes Himself in all the loveliness of His perfect beneficence: and when He has charmed our heart through our eyes He rests not satisfied with our idle admiration or inoperative love; but says to each one of us, "Go and do thou likewise" (St.Luke x.37). (p.217)

The final message of the volume, inspired by Rossetti's favourite text, The Book of Revelation, is that our final judgement will depend not on what we are but on what we have done: 'they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them (xiv.13)' (p.320):

Drawing our own humble lesson from what the sacred text here cited directly reveals or at least seems to imply, we learn that the approach to paradise is by way of labour not of sloth: that if we would meet our work there, we must first have wrought it here. (p.320)

Rossetti's final chapter contains a stern warning which may be seen also as a suggestion both as to the function of the poet and the attitude of the reader. If we do not use the study of creation to 'discern Jesus', 'we shall be like Hagar familiar with the wilderness, but unaware of the well of water (...) or, yet more hopeless, we shall be like the delighted listeners to Ezekiel (xxxiii.30-32) who flocked after the poet and ignored the prophet' (p.326).

## Notes

1. Bell, pp.285-286.
2. Chadwick, O., *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1970), Vol II, p.191.
3. *Idem*, p.192.
4. Shuger, D., *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p.8.
5. *Idem*, p.254.
6. Chapman, R., *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970), p.223.
7. Quoted in D'Amico, 'Eve, Mary and Mary Magdalene' (Kent, p.183).
8. Littledale quotes from 'the fourth Rule of the Congregation of the Index of Prohibited Books, approved by Pius IV, and still in force' *Plain Reasons Against Joining the Church of Rome* (London: SPCK, 1897), p.90.
9. *Plain Reasons*, p.92.
10. *Faith and Revolt*, p.84
11. *Phases of Faith*, (London, 1881, rpt ed and introduced by U.C.Knoepfelmacher New York: Humanities Press, 1970), p.65.
12. 'On the Interpretation of Scripture' Jowett, *Essays and Reviews*, p.331.
13. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p. 107.
14. *Idem*, p.109.
15. *Poetical Works*, p.liv.
16. *Idem*, p.lxvii and lxviii.
17. I am indebted to Mrs Joan Rossetti for the Notes on Genesis, and to Prof.D. D'Amico for her help in tracing their whereabouts. The original notes on Exodus have, it seems, been lost, but I have been assured by Mrs.Rossetti that they were more or less all quoted by L.M.Packer in her biography of Rossetti. The full text of Rossetti's unpublished Genesis notes will be found in the Appendix.
18. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.330.  
Packer comments that 'the faithful SPCK refused to publish her (Rossetti's) undated "Notes" on Genesis and Exodus (extant but still unpublished), probably because they were too fragmentary and unorganised'(p.329). Given Rossetti's manifest concern for form and unity, I doubt whether she ever presented the notes to the SPCK.  
D'Amico also discusses the notes in 'Eve, Mary and Mary Magdalene', Kent, ed, (p.176).
19. *The Face of The Deep*, p.377.
20. Unfortunately it appears that the 'small black' bible from which Rossetti worked has been lost (letter from Mrs Joan Rossetti).

21. D'Amico, 'Eve, Mary and Mary Magdalene', p.176.
22. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, (Bk.1 Ch.III) (Michigan: Zondervan, n.d.), p.180. Also quoted in Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, p.39.
23. For D'Amico's comment on these lines, see 'Eve, Mary and Mary Magdalene', p.178.
24. Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, p.37.
25. *Idem*, p.59.
26. *Idem*, p.112.
27. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.331.
28. The change in Rossetti's notes to Roman numerals suggests a possible time lapse between page 1 and pages 2 and 3.
29. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.330.
30. Bell, p.164.
31. *Poetic Works*, p.lxviii.
32. Tennyson, G.B., *Victorian Devotional Poetry* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.55.
33. See Palazzo, unpublished MA Thesis, UND, 1986 Ch.3.
34. Tennyson is quoting from Keble's essay reviewing Lockhart's *Life of Scott. Victorian Devotional Poetry*, p.51.
35. A Quality which McGann has also noted in her 'bold and literalistic approach to Revelation'. Kent, ed, p.17.
36. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.286.
37. Christ, C.T., *The Finer Optic: The Aesthetic of Particularity in Victorian Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p.12.
38. 'The central action of the community was to be that of feeding upon a sacrifice once made, not that of offering sacrifice anew, the central speech of the community was to be that of the Bible in the vernacular, not that of legends and stories of saints.' Jasper, D. and Jasper, R.C.D. eds, *Language and the Worship of the Church* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.20.
39. 'Macmillan was not interested in publishing it, and the book had to wait another four years to find a publisher' Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.328.
40. Hönnighausen, G., 'Emblematic Tendencies in the Works of Christina Rossetti', *VP* 10: 1 (Spring 1972), p.2.
41. Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.328.
42. Coleridge, S.T., *The Poetical Works* ed by E.H.Coleridge (rpt Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.242.
43. Hönnighausen, p.3.
44. Fletcher, I. 'Some Types and Emblems in Victorian Poetry' *The Listener*, May 25 1967, p.680.

45. Hönnighausen, p.6.
46. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p.35.
47. *Idem*, p.31.
48. *Idem*, p.32.
49. Leon, D. *Ruskin the Great Victorian* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p.44.
50. Bell, p.335.
51. *Proserpina*, Vol.XXV *Works* (Cook & Wedderburn), p.201.
52. Rossetti's pencil sketches in her copy of *The Christian Year* show a lack of artistic skill. Some of her drawings have been published in D'Amico 'Christina Rossetti's *Christian Year*: Comfort for "the weary heart" ', *VN* (Fall 1987). The same lack of skill characterises Rossetti's illustrations to the poems of *Sing Song* (Ashley M S 1371)
53. *Modern Painters*, 5 vols (London: George Allen, 1900), vol.I, p.184.
54. Miller, J.H., *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1963), p.2.
55. Preface to the re-arranged edition of *Modern Painters*, vol.II (1883), p.xi.
56. *Proserpina*, p.202.
57. *Idem*, p.400.
58. Miller, p.6.
59. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p.36.
60. Quoted also in Kirchoff, F. 'A Science against Sciences', Knoepfelmacher and Tennyson, eds, *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), Ch.XIV, p.251.
61. 'Treasure Trove' was the title originally given the manuscript of *Seek and Find*. It was first presented to the SPCK under this title on March 14, 1879, and declined. (See minutes of the General Literature Committee of the SPCK, p.148) This title, 'Treasure Trove', comes from the quotation which heads Rossetti's chapter on winds: 'He bringeth the wind out of His treasures' Ps. cxxxv.7. Rossetti comments 'What God brings out of His treasury cannot but be a treasure: our treasure if He blesses it to us'(p.43).
62. Kirchoff, 'A Science Against Sciences', p.257.
63. Compare Rossetti's attitude with that of G.M.Hopkins, as described in Miller, p.270.
64. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p.30.
65. G. Battiscombe comments : 'a curious point to be adopted by someone who had lived all her life among artists and who knew very well how a fine work of art can often be produced by a person of extremely faulty character' *Christina Rossetti* (London: Constable, 1981), p.168.
66. Some major studies dealing with the Tractarian influence on Rossetti are Williams, *Faith and Revolt*, Tennyson G.B., *Victorian Devotional Poetry*,

- Cantalupo unpubl.thesis, Rutgers, 1983, Apostolos-Cappadona, 'Oxford and the Pre-Raphaelites from the Perspective of Nature and Symbol'*JPRS* 2:1 (1981) and Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*.
67. *A Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1850).
  68. *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis, with Notes and Reflections* (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1861), pp.5-6.
  69. *Idem*, p.5.
  70. Williams, *Genesis*, p.22.
  71. *Idem*, p.30.
  72. *Idem*, p.33-34.
  73. Miller, p.271.
  74. See Cantalupo, pp.273-275, Tennyson, G.B., Ch.2, Harrison, pp.30-31 and Schofield 'Being and Understanding', Kent, ed, pp.301-321.
  75. Tennyson, G.B., p.52.
  76. Romans i.20, *Seek and Find*, p.326.
  77. from Tennyson, G.B., p.54.
  78. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p.36.
  79. Tennyson, G.B., p.55.
  80. *Seek and Find*, pp. 16-20 and 171-174.
  81. *Family Letters*, to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, July 1879.
  82. *A History of the SPCK*, Clark, W., and Lowther, K., (London: SPCK, 1985), p.173.
  83. *Idem*, p.177.
  84. No doubt Rossetti was greatly influenced in her youth by 'the exceptional zeal' of some members of the Christ Church congregation. Both she and Maria were actively involved in the Young Women's Friendly Society, and Maria especially 'did good work in this little society.' Burrows, H.W., 'The Half Century of Christ Church, Albany Street' (London: Skeffington, 1887), p.34.
  85. A reading of Rossetti's devotional prose works would, I think, serve to correct a popular Feminist assumption that Rossetti 'belongs to a company of woman poets who (...) have cultivated an "aesthetic of renunciation"'. Rosenblum, D., 'Christina Rossetti's Religious Poetry: Watching, Looking, keeping Vigil.' *VP* 20:1 (1982), p.35.

## Chapter 4

### *Letter and Spirit*

*Letter and Spirit*, Rossetti's third SPCK volume, continues the inquiry of *Seek and Find* into man's relationship with God, this time in a study of both the Old and the New Testament Commandments. Following on from the earlier volume, the emphasis, as was so often the case for the Victorians -- Carlyle's *Past and Present*, for example -- is on practical advice for daily living, the early pages echoing the closing exhortation of *Seek and Find* that 'the approach to paradise is by way of labour, not of sloth' (*SF* p.320). At the opening of *Letter and Spirit* Rossetti comments on the harsh judgement meted out to the slothful servant in the parable of St. Matthew xxv.24-30, and urges the reader to action:

'Inasmuch as ye have done it.( ...) Inasmuch as ye did it not' explains and justifies the sentence. (p.39) Matt.xxv.40,45.

Bell makes much of Rossetti's practical character in his biography, and of *Letter and Spirit* writes:

Nothing is more unreasonable than the opinion so often expressed and apparently truly felt that the poetic mind is deficient in practical attributes. The exact reverse is not seldom the case with the higher types of poetic genius, and certainly nothing could be more practical than the exhortations of Christina Rossetti in this book.<sup>1</sup>

In the volume Rossetti not only takes England to task for its lack of humility and its party-political antagonism, gives advice on relationships between employer and employee, parents and children, the running of the home and the organisation of daily life in general, but she also engages with some of the major controversies of her time, advocating a common-sense approach simple enough for the non-learned yet adhering strictly to what she considered theological truth. The book is at times quite startling in its severity and this strict application of the Scriptures no doubt lies at the root of Rossetti's own personal self-discipline.

There is no room for half-heartedness in obeying the Commandments, even if society should frown. There is 'no room for two opinions as to whether the Lord meant what He had plainly said' (p.20). Rossetti is criticising here those who would soften or modify the message of the scriptures if this should clash with contemporary decorum, and we note here a similarity to Newman's criticism of the idea of the 'gentleman':

To do anything whatsoever, even to serve God, 'with all the strength,' brings us into continual collision with that modern civilized standard of good breeding and good taste which bids us avoid extremes. (p.19)

The organisation of *Letter and Spirit* grows out of the all-encompassing vision of *Seek and Find*, its celebration of the variety of all creatures united in one song of praise to God. The Keblian system of 'two worlds' adopted there governs the system of correspondences with which Rossetti arranges her material, and she has made particularly fruitful the doctrine of analogy as presented by Williams:

There are wonderful correspondences in the ways of God; one thing answers to something else: and as the Wise man says 'All things are double one against another.' So that the chief manner in which God instructs man both in *Nature* and grace is by *Analogy*.<sup>2</sup>

But here Rossetti is no longer concerned with the whole of creation; in *Letter and Spirit* she concentrates entirely on humanity's relationship to God, and on the duality of our responsibility: to God and to our neighbour.

The volume opens with a harmony of the New and Old Testament Commandments and then proceeds directly to Theological discussion. The absence of a preface or foreword suggests continuity with *Seek and Find*, its instruction from the parable of the Good Samaritan, 'Go and do thou likewise' (*SF* p.217), here being assisted by guidelines for Christian conduct.

The arrangement of the Commandments in the harmony are as follows, the left hand column dealing with the individual's relationship to God, and the right hand that with the rest of humanity:

#### New Testament

(from St.Mark xii.28-30: St.Matthew xxii 39,40.)

##### 1st Commandment

Hear, O Israel; The  
Lord our God is one  
Lord (...).

##### 2nd Commandment

And the second is like  
unto it, Thou shalt love  
thy neighbour as  
thyself.

#### Old Testament

(from Exodus xx.3-17)

1st Comm. Thou shalt have none  
other gods but Me.

5th Comm. Honour thy father  
and thy mother (...).

2nd Comm. Thou shalt not make  
to Thyself any graven  
image (...).

6th Comm. Thou shalt do no  
murder.

7th Comm. Thou shalt not  
commit adultery.

8th Comm. Thou shalt not steal.

3rd Comm. Thou shalt not take  
the name of the Lord  
thy God in vain (...).

9th Comm. Thou shalt not bear  
false witness against  
thy neighbour.

4th Comm. Remember that Thou  
keep Holy the Sabbath  
day (...).

10th Comm. Thou shalt not  
covet (...).

Rossetti's division shows clearly the extent to which Keble's sacramental system governs her thought: the relationship between the two columns and also between the Old and New Testament Commandments, is that of analogy, and on such a relationship all her consequent discussions are based. The Commandments of the New Testament become the two sections of mankind's responsibility: towards God and towards neighbour; the First concerns the relationship with the Divine world, the Second the earthly reflection of that relationship. The Ten Commandments are then divided according to the section of mankind's responsibility with which they are concerned. The first four govern our relationship with the Divine and the rest that with our neighbour. The correspondences, the Fifth with the First, the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth with the Second and so on, are seen as earthly reflections of our relationship with God.

Rossetti sums up the essence of the 'two worlds' of the Commandments in a metaphor familiar to any critic of her work: the virgin who has renounced the world and earthly love in favour of a direct relationship with God, and the married woman who serves God through the carrying out of her homely duties; in essence, the traditional antithesis of Mary and Martha, from Luke 10.38-40:

The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband (1 Cor.vii.34,38). These two contrasted figures, the married woman and the virgin, may, I think, be studied as illustrative of the First and Second Commandments.

She whose heart is virginal abides aloft and aloof in spirit. In spirit she oftentimes kneels rather than sits, or prostrates herself more readily than she kneels.... She contemplates Him, and forgets herself in Him. If she rejoices, it is on spiritual heights, with Blessed Mary magnifying the Lord; if she laments, it is still on spiritual mountain tops, making with Jephthah's daughter a pure oblation of unflinching self-sacrifice. (pp.91-92)

The married woman on the other hand serves God in fulfilling her duties towards her husband and family, and her situation illustrates the reflection of the Divine in human relationships:

The wife's case, not in unison with that other, yet makes a gracious harmony with it. She sees not face to face, but as it were in a glass darkly. Everything, and more than all every person, and most of all the one best beloved person, becomes her mirror wherein she beholds Christ and her shrine wherein she serves Him. (p.92)

If Rossetti's poetic representations of sisters or rivals are, as Winston Weathers suggests, various conflicting aspects of the self,<sup>3</sup> here we have a



recognition on the part of the poet, that the two 'sisters' are but complementary aspects of the human condition: the first the spiritual desire for direct union with God and the second, a dedication to the service of mankind, which is a reflection of the first. Both are essential for the fulfillment of God's law:

Even could the Second be abolished, the First would remain: yet to fulfill that Second is man's only mode of making sure that he observes the First, nor can these two which God has joined together be put practically asunder. (p.14-15)

The discussion of the Trinity with which she opens her volume, begins with a consideration of the essential unity of creation (the subject of *Seek and Find*) which must necessarily at the same time be multiplicity, simply because 'our conceiving it as separate from ourself attests at once our likeness and unlikeness to it' (p.10). If creation reflects, albeit darkly, the divine attributes of God, the variety of creatures all united in His service would give a glimpse of what is meant by Trinity in Unity:

Perhaps, we may not unlawfully ponder whether, could the Divine Unity have existed as (so to say) an unmodified Oneness, whether such a God would (I say not could) have created this multitudinous ever multiplying creation. For if (as I have seen pointed out) God is not to be called like His creature, whose grace is simply typical, but that creature is like Him because expressive of His archetypal Attribute, it suggests itself that for every aspect of creation there must exist the corresponding Divine Archetype. (p.13)

Rossetti's formulation in *Seek and Find*, which presents 'Beauty essential' as 'the archetype of imparted beauty' (*SF* p.14), has here been extended to embrace the very foundations of her faith. She has reconciled the alienating Romantic awareness of self with the Benedicite's vision of unity; the 'Multeity in Unity'<sup>4</sup> of Coleridge's definition of beauty, where 'each thing has a life of its own, & yet they are all one life',<sup>5</sup> but anchored securely in Trinitarian doctrine. The fact that Rossetti approaches philosophical and literary speculation from a secure religious standpoint and is thus able to make the kind of synthesis we find in this description of the Trinity, distinguishes her from someone like Carlyle, for instance, although they both share the Calvinistic belief that the world, left to itself, is essentially corrupt. Carlyle ultimately could not reconcile Romantic theory with his religion:

Carlyle, having no philosophy of mind linked to a doctrine of the Trinity, balanced his pantheistic tendencies by a quite different insistence on God's transcendence, one which (...) made his concept of the relation between God and the world essentially unlike Coleridge's. (...)

The differences have their roots in Carlyle's early religious background against which he fought, but which he was never quite able to reject: Calvinism.<sup>6</sup>

Despite her own Calvinistic tendencies, Rossetti's Christ-centred approach to theoretical concerns brings her, as we shall see, much closer to Coleridge than was Carlyle.

P.G. Stanwood's deprecating comment 'We can learn little from Rossetti's discussions of the Trinity'<sup>7</sup> seems to me to be most misleading and stems from a critical attitude which would approach such volumes as *Letter and Spirit* only out of charity ('If we approach the book "in charity"'<sup>8</sup>). It may be true, as he tells us, that 'Poetry was to Rossetti always the primary and most natural concern of her life' but her affection for poetry does not automatically make her prose volumes 'of minor significance'.<sup>9</sup> Her later prose works become the centre of her attempts to synthesise the various contradictions and tensions of her earlier poetry, and of her attempts at imaginative fiction. Poetry itself, in her latest writings, becomes subservient to the need for unity of vision, which is the driving force behind her devotional prose. Far from a collection of 'easily formulated and superficially considered theological statements'<sup>10</sup> the arguments of *Letter and Spirit* are central to Rossetti's relationship with her age, her art and her calling.

Particularly interesting in this respect is her discourse on the Second Commandment of the Decalogue, which establishes a firm grounding for the discussion in the actualities of her life and art. After first outlining the difference between the First and Second of the Old Testament Commandments, the First dealing with 'principle' and the Second with 'practice' (p.69), Rossetti explains the need for this Second, more practical Commandment:

The Second Commandment is adapted especially to man as compounded of soul and body, both of which God claims for His own exclusive homage. (p.70)

It is significant that Rossetti locates the body also under the First New Testament Commandment in her discussion; in other words, the 'two worlds' of the First and Second New Testament Commandments do not correspond to any division between soul and body. Both soul and body are bound by the Commandment to love God 'with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength'. The First and Second Commandments of the Decalogue are therefore both situated in the first column. The First Old Testament Commandment speaks to the soul ('Spiritual of substance and unlimited of extent' p.68), but as we are made of flesh also, we need physical forms on which to centre our worship. Therefore the Second Old Testament Commandment addresses the senses:

As any direct breach of the Second Commandment consists in part of a bodily act, so we observe that this same commandment confines itself to such temptations as address us through our senses. (p.70)

The discussion which follows her assertion brings her to a most interesting and revealing definition of the symbol. The Second Commandment not only forbids Idol worship, which consists of 'substituting in our affections and homage some thing, any thing for God', but condemns mankind's worship of symbol 'in substituting it for Him under that very aspect according to which its created nature has nothing in common with His all-perfect Divine Nature' (p.71). A statement of this kind assumes a distinctly Coleridgean conception of the symbol, where the symbol is characterised 'above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the temporal', and 'always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative'.<sup>11</sup> Here is the basis for Rossetti's definition of the Trinity and the theory which informs her thinking on the symbol. Her criticism in *Letter and Spirit* is that mankind tends to worship not God through the symbol, but those temporal and superficial aspects of the symbol which appeal to the senses.

The earliest traces of religion, she tells us, stem from mankind's recognition of personal imperfection, which leads to 'half-blind gropings after light and goodness' (p.72). The desire to 'see' God, can be satisfied only by symbol:

Man burdened by the unbearable burden of self grows wearied in the greatness of his way, his strength and his weakness alike rise in rebellion, he stoops to sensible encouragements and has recourse to vivid symbols. (p.72)

Here Rossetti makes use of the verses from Romans i, often quoted as being at the basis of her sacramental vision of nature.<sup>12</sup> She states the passage, however, not to *support* a sacramental vision, but as St. Paul did, to strike out against those who would misuse it:

'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things' (Rom.i.18-23). (p.73)

The elements of nature, 'from being accounted symbols came to be rated as gods' (p.75), and finally, as in ancient Greece and Rome, 'man reversed the process of creation, and making gods after his own likeness adored himself in them' (p.77).

Not only does Rossetti see the basis for a sacramental Universe in St. Paul's epistle, but also a stern warning against the failure to recognise God in His creation. Without such a vision 'we deny the possibility of a religious faith which is sacramental, because we deny transcendence to "the incidents and situations of common life"'.<sup>13</sup> The Christian faith must exercise the high privilege '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 (...), as double against each other' (p.131). As a result, even the 'very small things' (p.169) of daily life, 'wind, water, fire, the sun, a star, a vine, a door, a lamb, will shadow forth mysteries' (pp.131-132). Rossetti resembles the great Tractarians in her vision of two worlds, and the sanctification of everyday life, but what most concerns her here is the tendency towards the declassification of the symbol, something like Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility'<sup>14</sup> but reflecting rather her own experience as observer of the rise and decline of Pre-Raphaelitism;<sup>15</sup> the degeneration, for instance, of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's art into a projection of personal desire, mankind 'worshipping himself' (p.77).

It is possible here in Rossetti's reasoning to see a parallel with Coleridge's *Understanding*, which has as its starting point the world of the senses. The refusal to turn the Understanding in sequence towards the Reason, to be guided exclusively by the Understanding 'without, or in contravention to the reason' is defined, in *Aids to Reflection*, as sin also: where the Understanding is 'ever in league with, and always first applying to, the desire, prevailing on the will (...) against the command of the universal reason and against the light of reason in the will itself'.<sup>16</sup>

Rossetti's formulations bear the stamp of her keen observation of her own social circle. She would have noted the debasement of early Pre-Raphaelite typology and symbol, indeed overtones of idolatry in the Pre-Raphaelite context of poems such as 'A Birthday' show how early she was aware of the ambiguity manifest in Dante Gabriel's work.<sup>17</sup> The dilemma which Dante Gabriel Rossetti presents in his early story 'Hand and Soul' shows that he, too, was alert to the ambiguity of Pre-Raphaelite representation. Of the protagonist of the story, Chiaro, he writes:

He became aware that much of that reverence which he had mistaken for faith had been no more than the worship of beauty.<sup>18</sup>

The name Chiaro, or 'light', suggests that the light which inspires the painter's work does indeed come only from within himself, and despite his early misgivings, Chiaro finally dedicates his art to the projection of his own soul, in the form of a beautiful woman:

'I am an image, Chiaro, of thine own soul within thee.'

'Chiaro, servant of God, take now thine Art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know me.(...) Do this; so shall thy soul stand before thee always, and perplex thee no more.' <sup>19</sup>

What may have been religious dedication in Dante Gabriel's work, finally degenerates into personal indulgence. A comparison of the paintings done by Dante Gabriel of Jane Morris with the actual photographs from which he painted them is most revealing. He has projected an image of his own desires on to the canvas, and 'A real, oppressed and inaccessible woman has become an alluring male fantasy figure'.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the maiden in 'The Blessed Damozel', instead of fulfilling the role of Dante's Beatrice in drawing her lover up to Heaven, is unable to free herself of earth and its desires. As in 'Hand and Soul', again Dante Gabriel is aware of the ambiguity of his figure. The maiden is denied true Heaven:

The light thrilled towards her, fill'd  
With angels in strong level flight.  
Her eyes prayed, and she smil'd.

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path  
Was vague in distant spheres:  
And then she cast her arms along  
The golden barriers,  
And laid her face between her hands,  
And wept. (I heard her tears.) <sup>21</sup>

The blessed damozel is simply a projection of her earthly lover's desire. Denied the status of symbol, she belongs to earth, partakes of the realities of earth, and so cannot lift the reader's perception heavenward.

Rossetti also differs from Coleridge in that she participates in the general Victorian collapse of confidence in the imagination. We have seen her striking use of the power of the imagination in *Annus Domini*, but there her material was exclusively scriptural. The very power of the imagination to appropriate and 're-create' images of sense, Rossetti tells us, enables it to override moral law, and it becomes dangerous when it serves the appetite exclusively. She discusses the misuse of imaginative art under the column of the Second New Testament Commandment, in her treatment of the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Commandments which she sees as parallel to the Second of the Old Testament Laws. These Commandments, she tells us, 'may be classed as answering on a lower level to the Second'(p.77) as 'the murderer, the sensualist, the thief, substitutes for his neighbour some personal indulgence or acquisition of his own: each postpones God or man to self'(p.79). (Dante Gabriel, the sensualist, has substituted in his paintings a 'personal indulgence' in the place of the real woman he is using as a model.)

Rossetti then deals with 'sensual sins'(p.100) under the Seventh Commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', and directly and immediately involves the imagination:

"Blessed are the pure in heart:" but how shall a heart preserve its purity once the reign be given to imagination; if vivid pictures be conjured up, and stormy or melting emotions indulged? This, surely, were to commit sin already in the heart, and to act in direct defiance of God Who in this matter hath plainly charged us, and Who, being greater than our heart knoweth all things. (p.101)

Implied here is that the imagination must not be given 'reign' (the pun is deliberate), but must be controlled, for example as in *Annus Domini* where the subject for meditation is scriptural. Rossetti's advice to those who wish to avoid this kind of breach of God's law is in harmony with the suggestion of the central story in *Speaking Likenesses*: where the imagination is suspect, even in imaginative fiction, suppress it. Her point of silence and avoidance in *Letter and Spirit* is unequivocal and final:

I venture to infer that one legitimate mode of treating our present subject, and it may be not the least profitable mode, is to turn our hearts and thoughts away from it...  
Purity is like silence, destroyed by discussion.  
(p.101)

As regards whatever leads to sensual temptation a rule of avoidance, rather than of self-conquest or even of self-restraint, is a sound and scriptural rule. (p.102)

Nevertheless, Rossetti does not condemn the weaknesses of our physical state. Rather, she insists that they be used for our spiritual benefit, by becoming symbolic of spiritual needs.

Our bodily needs and infirmities will be sanctified if they become to us a parable of spiritual significance; for they are not even in their own nature blameworthy while curbed and directed aright. (p.111)<sup>22</sup>

She subjects her own work as writer and poet to the same scrutiny in dealing with the Ninth Commandment (an earthly reflection of the third). Words are powerful agents for good or evil;

Words find man so vulnerable as in great measure to lie at their mercy: they may distil as dew, or, on the other hand, bite like adders or pierce like swords. (p.143)

and responsibility for the outcome of her literary influence lies heavily on her conscience:

Our possibilities, our responsibilities, seem to enlarge and multiply while we study this momentous subject of personal influence (...).  
"Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness." (p.151)

However, Rossetti's criticism of the misuse of symbols and of imagination does not confine itself to the literary. The debasing of the sacramental system of nature is just a part of the Victorian tendency towards religious disbelief and the post-Feuerbachian declassification of the scriptures into myth. Cantalupo, in a note dealing with *Letter and Spirit*, links Rossetti's comment on her use of 'old fashioned' treatment of the scriptures, with the use of typology. Rossetti recognised the tendency towards secularisation:

The more traditional and stricter literary mode of typology was being resisted or secularized. Rossetti was aware of it: 'Old fashioned it certainly is to search the Scriptures...for our examples and warnings; but surely the dread of appearing old fashioned is one form of that Disinclination in which already we have thought to discern a breach of the First Commandment! (p.43-44)<sup>23</sup>

Rossetti is also attacking the Feuerbachian devaluation of the actual text of the Bible, and the reduction of its message to no more than a series of moral truths. The Biblical reference which Rossetti gives to support her 'searching' of the scriptures, that of Acts xvii 10-12, confirms her insistence that the word of scripture be used as a guide to daily behaviour:

Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed.

The 'new fashioned' scriptural interpretations come in for a fair amount of criticism. In a similar manner to those who would abuse the symbol, those whose attention is held exclusively by the form or presentation of the message instead of the message itself break the Second Commandment:

It is, I suppose, a genuine though not a glaring breach of the Second Commandment, when instead of learning the lesson plainly set down for us in Holy Writ we protrude mental feelers in all directions above, beneath, around it, grasping, clinging to every imaginable particular except the main point. (p.85)

Rossetti has in mind, of course, the controversies sparked off by the publication of *Essays and Reviews*, and possibly the Colenso affair as well. The mind is waylaid by the physical truth or falsity of the scriptures: 'What was the precise architecture of Noah's Ark?', Rossetti quotes, 'Clear up the astronomy of Joshua's miracle. Fix the botany of Jonah's gourd. Must a pedestal be included within the measurement of Nebuchadnezzar's "golden image"?' (pp. 86-87) Joshua's miracle must particularly have interested her, as she had, two years before, attempted to publish a similar, though more detailed comment on it in *Seek and Find*. The page on which this discussion appears had been rejected by the publishers, the SPCK, possibly because

of its controversial topic. It still remains with the original manuscript, however, (plus the rewritten page) in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. (See appendix) Here Rossetti writes:

We read in the Book of Joshua (10.12-14) how that hero spake to the Lord & "said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; & thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, & the moon stayed." A mist bred rather from oversight than from insight has, I believe, obscured to some apprehensions the sun of this miracle.

Although, as we have seen in *Seek and Find*, Rossetti believes that science may aid mankind in the contemplation of God, where there is a conflict between science and the scriptures the cause can only be our own incomplete knowledge. In the words of Isaac Williams, 'for a time there may be a seeming discrepancy, on account of the infirmities and short-sightedness of men.'<sup>24</sup>

Rossetti continues the discussion on the rejected page with an account of the difficulties in reconciling the scriptural account of Joshua's miracle with scientific discoveries:

The earth, it has been alleged, needed to stand still in her real course round the sun; not the sun in its apparent career round the earth. Yet (writing merely for readers as unscientific as myself) it surely seems inevitable that if one single member of a planet-group had been arrested while its associates whirled on, then the drawings & counter-drawings which apparently constitute the mainspring of their motion would have lost balance, & no local victory but a general chaos must have ensued.

Here one may with profit compare Rossetti's resolution with that of Bishop Colenso, who commented on the same allegation:

If the earth's motion were suddenly stopped, a man's feet would be arrested, while his body was moving at a rate (on the equator) of 1,000 miles and hour (...) so that every human being and animal would be dashed to pieces in a moment, and a mighty deluge overwhelm the earth, unless all this were prevented by a profusion of miraculous interferences.<sup>25</sup>

Colenso also quotes Archdeacon Pratt's explanation of the miracle: 'Were so great a wonder again to appear, would even an astronomer, as he looked into the heavens, exclaim, 'The earth stands still!''? Would he not be laughed at as a pedant?'<sup>26</sup> Rossetti comments on this kind of explanation also:

I have heard it suggested that Joshua himself understood the relations of the sun to earth, but judged the moment inopportune for conveying such information to his hearers: but I own that except for a pious & reverent aim this solution appears to me as valueless as the original difficulty.



But whilst Rossetti warns against the distraction caused by controversy over scientific detail, a study of the forms in which God's laws are expressed in the scriptures may, she tells us, become most profitable, 'doubtless being the perfect form wherein to embody the particular precept'(p.89), provided such a study is acknowledged as secondary:

It is well and best to be ruled by the highest motive, yet it is not necessarily evil to be influenced by lower considerations. St.Paul speaks of one who "doeth well", even when naming another who "doeth better". (p.90)

As a poet, and particularly as one with Pre-Raphaelite affinities, forms are most important to Rossetti and she uses her sensitivity to style to inspire others to meditate on the scriptures. The particular harmony and balance of *Seek and Find* is present in this volume also in 'the two worlds, visible and invisible (...) double against each other' (p.131), as is the unity of the circle, symbol of all-embracing Holiness. The two divisions into which she has placed the Old Testament Commandments (those which correspond to the First of the New Testament, and those which reflect the Second) are not seen simply as a list, but as circles embracing the totality of mankind's duty:

Well, I think, may we speak of the 'circle' of both Will and duty; the Fourth and Tenth Commandments lead us back to the starting point of a holiness spiritual and, so to say, immaterial; our strength will in great measure be to sit still. (p.163)

The two circles which result, together embrace the whole of necessary human obedience, and such obedience corresponds exactly with the eternal Will which embraces it:

The circle, emblem of eternity, in old established art often figures as a serpent biting its tail. Happy shall we be if we bring to bear the wisdom of serpents (St.Matt.x.16) on our study of eternity; and of that circle of the Divine Will into which the circle of human obedience fits with such absolute accuracy as to leave no discrepancy between the twain, if only the lesser be perfectly rounded. These are to each other as the First Great and Second Like Commandments are also to each other, distinguishable while indivisible; as the outer and inner edge of a wheel-tyre revolving in indissoluble union, yet of which one moving along its vaster orbit with a dominant sweep encompasses and entails the other. (p.163-164)

By ignoring God's command to labour only six days, mankind creates discord in the Divine Harmony:

(Mankind's) work must be worked, his rest rested, not according to impulse but according to rule; otherwise into the Divine scheme of universal harmony he will intrude a discord, as of those children of whom we read, 'We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.' Through going out of time he will practically wander out of tune. (p.166)

Here, I think, in this medieval vision of unity, lies the beauty of Rossetti's devotional works, as she restores a harmony which embraces even the fractures and anxieties of her own age. Her keen sensitivity towards poetic form finds balance, correspondence and analogy in all she sees. Without despising the 'small things' of daily life, yet neither overawed by those things which test her ability to the limit, Rossetti wrestles with the totality of experience, sifting, ordering, interpreting and finally turning all into poetic vision.

### *Time Flies*

Rossetti's next volume, *Time Flies*, expands further her holistic approach to the poetic, clarifying in particular the role of Christ in the creation of symbol.

In the opening pages she claims that the totality of Christian experience must be 'poetic'; in the terms of her earlier volume, there must be the recognition of the superiority of 'spirit' over 'letter':

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. (p.2)

Characteristic of *Time Flies* is this synthesis between poetry, faith and life, organised in the form of day to day advice on the rules of Christian conduct. The central theme is the birth and growth of the Spirit, God's gift to humanity through the birth and death of Christ, and Rossetti traces Christ's role in leading mankind from 'surface history' (p.13) towards the 'mystery' of eternity.

Starting from January 1, Rossetti provides a section of her own prose or poetry for each day of the year, in the manner of Hone's *Every-Day Book*, a publication she had been familiar with as a child. The variety of form in her volume is reminiscent of the ideal represented in her early novella *Maude*: the locked diary of the protagonist, a 'writing-book' of 'original compositions (...), pet extracts, extraordinary little sketches and occasional tracts of journal', hidden and ultimately destroyed at the end of the story. But characteristic of *Time Flies* is a new-found confidence in form: prose flows into poetry, anecdote into prayer, the tone at all

times open and friendly. Rossetti has finally found a congenial medium of expression, and a public attentive and responsive to her message. Her devotional prose volumes were in fact more popular than those of her poetry by the end of the century and reprints of some of them were still being published many years after her death-- but, of course, their popularity was linked to family prayers and Sunday devotional reading, and did not outlive the decline of such practices.

The appeal of Rossetti's devotional prose to her Victorian readers lies, I think, in her particular gift of being able to render even the most difficult theological concepts in forms directly accessible to even the non-learned reader. The subtler movements of her thought are at all times manifest in concrete suggestions for meditation, worship, or good deed, and the reader perceives the unity of the whole even though truly understanding perhaps only the most obvious instructions. At the conclusion of the volume Rossetti states:

All the great things done for us, and revealed to us, ought to have led us up to a simple, earnest, unflagging fulfilment of everyday duties.  
(p.278)

As she stressed at the conclusion of *Seek and Find* also, our faith is worth nothing unless the end result is action.

Such a comfortable arrangement of theory and practical advice for her Victorian readers, has unfortunately counted against Rossetti's prose in their reception by the modern critic. Much of the advice Rossetti gives in *Time Flies* seems outdated and of little value to the critic uninterested in the domestic or religious affairs of the average Victorian household. But a little patience reveals a keen mind and a lively interest in the theological and literary debates of the time, much the same as in *Letter and Spirit* only here made more interesting and varied by the inclusion of personal experience and every-day incident. The theoretical debate, however, as seems to be the rule in her devotional works, is more clearly outlined in the earlier passages which lay the foundations for the following entries and discussions.

Rossetti's skill in detecting correspondences has marked her opening text, January 1, The Feast of The Circumcision, which is hailed as the beginning of Christ's spiritual life. The terms of her discussion are still those of *Letter and Spirit* inasmuch as Christ's coming has satisfied humanity's need for concrete symbol: the 'sensible encouragement' which she spelt out in the earlier volume.

Her poem for January 6, The Feast of The Epiphany, attempts a synthesis between the philosophy of *Letter and Spirit* and the Nativity:

'Lord Babe, if Thou art He  
We sought for patiently,

Where is Thy court?  
 Hither may prophecy and star resort;  
 Men heed not their report.'  
     'Bow down and worship, righteous man:  
     This Infant of a span  
     Is He man sought for since the world began.' \_\_  
 'Then, Lord, accept my gold, too base a thing  
 For Thee, of all kings King.'

'Lord Babe, despite Thy youth  
 I hold Thee of a truth  
 Both Good and Great:  
 But wherefore dost Thou keep so mean a state,  
 Low lying desolate?'  
     'Bow down and worship, righteous seer:  
     The Lord our God is here  
     Approachable, Who bids us all draw near.' \_\_  
 'Wherefore to Thee I offer frankincense,  
 Thou Sole Omnipotence.'

(p.5 stanzas 1-2)

The excessively formal language of the first three stanzas of the poem present a striking contrast to the warmth and tenderness of her Christmas carols, notably her lovely poem 'In the Bleak Mid-Winter', with its emphasis on the humanity of the Christ-Child. In 'Lord Babe' she presents rather the philosophical questioning of the wise men; their need to fit the incongruous sight of a helpless child into the stern reasoning of prophecy. Confronted with the poverty of a stable, the first two wise men ask its meaning. The abrupt reply 'Bow down and worship' gives no answer, but in the ritual language of prophecy draws their attention towards the child.

These blunt answers betray a mounting irritation and impatience in the speaker, as the sages--representatives of humanity's need to probe and to question--ultimately miss the answer which lies revealed in the physical presence of Christ. One is reminded of the impatience of Christ Himself, addressing the multitude in Luke 12.56: 'Ye hypocrites, ye know how to interpret the face of the earth and the heaven; but how is it that ye know not how to interpret this time?' The answer to mankind's need of tangible form lies revealed in the Christ-Child, the fulfilment of prophecy, the gift of gold pointing to His acceptance of an earthly identity. The second stanza points out the necessity for Christ's physical form: 'The Lord our God is here/ Approachable', and the second gift, frankincense, draws the attention to the divinity present in the human form. Myrrh, the last gift, becomes the symbol of the relationship between the two, prefiguring the paradox of the Crucifixion: 'He that lives, this same is He that dies.'(p.6)

But the tense dialogue of the first three stanzas gives way, in the fourth, to a language free from the constraints of ceremony, as shepherds enter bringing with

them a lamb, the symbol of Christ as sacrificial lamb and subsequently as object of worship (Isaiah 53.7, Revelation 5.12):

And lo! from wintry fold  
Good will doth bring  
A Lamb, the innocent likeness of this King  
Whom stars and seraphs sing:

(stanza 4 p.6)

The old language of prophecy has now been replaced by the new language of revelation which Christ has made possible, in which all creation may tell of God's love: the language of symbol. The acceptance of Christ's role in the creation of symbol and thus the participation of Christ incarnate in the symbolic mode, allows Rossetti herself a new freedom to transpose the message of the scriptures into the language of the natural world which she loves. The forms of everyday experience are transformed; in Keble's words, 'clothed with so splendid a radiance that they appear to be no longer symbols, but to partake (I might almost say) of the nature of sacraments.'<sup>27</sup> But, of course, for Rossetti, the status of symbol implies a sacramental universe already, as in becoming symbol nature becomes sacrament also. As Christ has deigned to take on Himself our human nature, so He has become part of all nature, which is thus able to assume Christ-likeness. And as all nature is united in Christ, all creation may unite in praise of Him:

And lo! the bird of love, a Dove  
Flutters and cooes above:  
And Dove and Lamb and Babe agree in love:-  
Come, all mankind, come, all creation, hither,  
Come, worship Christ together.

(stanza 4, ll.6-10, p.6)

In the next entry, for January 7, Rossetti further utilises the story of the Epiphany to explain the necessary condition of mind for the perception of symbol:

Faith and good will made all the difference between seer and seer.

As then, so now.

The starry heavens are so far like their (and our) Maker, that they answer and instruct each man according to his honest intention, his tolerated stumbling-block, his bosom-idol, as the case may be.

To some they say nothing.

Some they address through the intellect exclusively.

While to the Magi (that is, to Wise Men) they declare the Glory of God, and show His handiwork.

(p.7)

Rossetti's discussion follows closely her definitions of *Letter and Spirit*, as she explores the implications of her epistemological system. Having outlined the importance of Christ in the sacramental role of nature, Rossetti identifies sin in

terms of the corruption of human perception. Her argument has a Coleridgean ring to it, as she sees sin as humanity's blindly following 'surface history' only. It is mankind allowing the will to be guided only by the Coleridgean Understanding of *Aids to Reflection*, 'Without, or in contravention to the reason-(that is, the *spiritual* mind of St.Paul, and the light that lighteth every man of St.John)'.<sup>28</sup> Her entry for January 15 spells out Adam's fall in terms of an 'initial work of production' which 're-made' the evils of sin, death and hell. Following on from her transferal of the 'poetic' from literature to life itself, in a startling reversal of Coleridge's theory of the imagination, Rossetti sees Adam as able only to re-create the works of evil. Mankind is blind to eternal realities, unable to understand except in terms of surface manifestations. We see the surface but are unable to discern the 'mystery' above and below, the mystery of I Corinthians 2.9, 'Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not' (p.42 and 83). Our only safety lies in Christ:

Love understands the mystery, whereof  
 We can but spell a surface history:  
 Love knows, remembers: let us trust in Love:  
 Love understands the mystery.  
 (poem for January 16, ll.1-4, p.13)

Returning for a moment to the format of scriptural search and definition of *Seek and Find*, Rossetti lists the various symbolic forms in which Christ has been made 'approachable'. The twelve days of the shortest possible Epiphanytide are given loose correspondence with twelve 'Manifestations of Christ', all of which are revealed as qualities necessary for mankind to rise from mere 'surface history' to a perception of the eternal. The names and titles are familiar ones in the Protestant tradition ( as in Isaac Watt's hymn, for example, beginning 'Join all the glorious names'): 'Emmanuel, God with us', 'Jesus, Saviour', 'The Word', 'The Way', 'The Truth', 'The Life', 'The Master', 'The Lord', 'The Intercessor', 'The Light of the World', 'The Good Shepherd', and finally 'The Rock of Ages'. The scriptural quotations Rossetti includes with each title stress the role each plays in the lifting up of mankind, from Christ's birth to the Advent of the spirit; this last, a Victorian typological favourite, the smiting of the rock by Moses (Numbers 20.11) as a type of Christ (I Corinthians 10.4,5): 'They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ' (p.15).

The rest of her volume is dedicated to the task of defining and re-interpreting the human experience in the light afforded by the gift of the spirit, her restatement of the passage from st.Paul, 'We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen'(p.17) linking her discourse with that of her preceding volumes. The basis of her discussion is still the sacramental universe, but here the light of the eternal to which, through Christ, the mental eye has been led, illuminates and redefines the temporal. Her beloved saints and martyrs are given

their place as the finest examples of those who have recognised the worthlessness of earthly values, compared to Divine:

About the year 50, in the reign of the First Emperor Claudius, St. Prisca, then aged about thirteen, refusing to sacrifice to idols, by steps of ignominy and torture went up to her glorious death by decapitation. (January 18 Feast of St. Prisca, Virgin Martyr, p.15)

In the poem which follows the account of St. Prisca's martyrdom, Rossetti explains the changed system of values which allowed the saint to recognise the worthlessness of idols and to accept earthly pain and suffering:

Joy is but sorrow,  
While we know  
It ends to-morrow:-  
Even so!  
Joy with lifted veil  
Shows a face as pale  
As the fair changing moon so fair and frail.

Pain is but pleasure,  
If we know  
It heaps up treasure:-  
Even so!  
Turn, transfigured pain,  
Sweetheart, turn again,  
For fair art thou as moon-rise after rain.

(p.16)

Rossetti has used the poignancy of transience, so beloved of Keats, and so pervasive in her own early poems, but the strong duality set up here is very different from the Keatsian indulgence of poems like 'Dream Land' or 'Remember me.' The tone of the opening lines seems more to be the outcome of a logical argument; the surprise of the inferred listener eliciting the reinforcement 'Even so!'. The parameters for judging human experience change when the 'veil' of our limited perception is lifted, hence the redefinitions: 'pain' becomes 'pleasure' if it leads us to place our 'treasure' with God.

It is not that earthly pleasures are evil in themselves, but they may distract the unwary who fail to recognise them for what they are. The entry for April 28 concerns Rossetti's failure to discern a spider's funnel during a country walk: 'If we turn all this into a parable, and magnify the spider to superhuman scale, what must become of the wayfarer who strolls along not on the alert in any sphere' (p.81). But earthly beauty is no longer a danger to the Christian who has recognised its limitations: 'the dew evaporates, the tints and sparkle vanish' (p.82). The recognition that it 'ends tomorrow' turns all its beauty into 'sorrow'. Yet by recognising the

limitations of the natural world, as we have seen, by using natural beauty as a means of discerning the eternal, we finally inherit both, and the natural world is given back, transformed.

The entry for January 21, the Feast of St. Agnes, Virgin Martyr, allows Rossetti to elaborate on this point: St. Agnes gave up her earthly chance of love and suffered death for the love of Christ, but in sacrificing all for the greater love 'may also (...) have inherited the lesser love "in spirit and in truth"' (p.18). In other words, by renouncing the material world and looking to the spiritual, all will be gained as the material world will be restored, transformed. Rossetti's inclusion of Solomon's gift, 'Even as Solomon, who discreetly choosing "a wise and an understanding heart" received with it the "riches and honour" which he asked not' (p.18), prevents her discourse from falling into the trap of 'hope deferred'. Solomon, choosing a spiritual gift, was also granted temporal fulfilment. We must rather, Rossetti tells us, seek to understand the world in terms of the 'Divine standard' advocated by St. Paul. The feast of St. Valentine gives her the opportunity to explain how necessary it is to strive for correspondence between human and divine standards. A pagan ceremony has been 'wisely exchanged for a Christian observance':

And thus our social habit, even if degenerate, assumes a certain dignity: we connect it not merely with mirth and love, but with sanctity and suffering. The love exhibits a double aspect and accords, or should accord, with heaven as well as earth. (p.33)

Many of the entries in *Time Flies* deal with this process of re-interpretation, the overthrowing of the obvious in order to substitute the exact opposite. The contrast and tension between two opposing states works particularly well in much of the poetry of the volume, but perhaps dearest to the hearts of Rossetti's Victorian readers were the personal anecdotes which point out in the simplest way how our most obvious conclusions may well be mistaken ones. Personal hardship or disadvantage must not be reason for despair, for example. Often such a state 'promotes the welfare of others, or our weak-point nerves them to endure their own' as Rossetti explains, using the curious example of a friend's remark 'What a good thing my feet are large, for so anyone can wear my boots' (p.35).

Our anger or irritation may at times be completely out of place. The passage for August 20, on interruptions, is typical of Rossetti's method of argument:

Interruptions are vexations.

Granted. But what is an interruption?

An interruption is something, is anything, which breaks in upon our occupation of the moment. For instance: a frivolous remark when we are absorbed, a selfish call when we are busy, an idle noise out of time, an intrusive sight out of place.

Now our occupations spring?...from within: for they are the outcome of our own will.



And interruptions arrive?...from without. Obviously from without, or otherwise we could and would ward them off.

Our occupation, then is that which we select. Our interruption is that which is sent us.

But hence it would appear that the occupation may be wilful, while the interruption must be providential.

A startling view of occupations and interruptions! (pp.160-161)

I think we often quite misconceive the genuine appointed occupation of a given moment, perhaps even of our whole lives. We take for granted that we ought to enjoy a pleasure, or complete a task, or execute a work, or serve some one we love: while what we are really then and there called to is to forego a pleasure, or break off a task, or leave a cherished work incomplete, or serve someone we find it difficult to love. (August 21 P.161)

Even the ultimate horror, death, is no occasion for grief or despair, as in the often quoted passage for March 4, where Rossetti recounts her childhood feelings of horror on seeing the corruption of a dead mouse:

Now looking back at the incident I see that neither impulse was unreasonable, although the sympathy and horror were alike childish.

Only now contemplating death from a wider and wiser viewpoint; I would fain reverse the order of those feelings: dwelling less and less on the mere physical disgust, while more and more on the rest and safety; on the perfect peace of death, please God. (p.45)

In occasions of death and sorrow nature teaches and reassures. The rainbow produced by the sun on her eyelashes at her sister Maria's funeral leads her to reflect: 'May all who love enjoy cheerful little rainbows at the funerals of their loved ones' (p.213). But, of course, it is only through Christ the interpreter that these symbols have any meaning for us:

All creation would teach us spiritual lessons and gladden us by heavenly meanings, if we cherished that same interpreter.

'Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.' (p.65)

Rossetti devotes much time in the volume to the illustration of the limitations of human imagination and perception. For February 28th she continues the discourse concerning mankind's inability to see any deeper than surface reality. We cannot, she claims, even describe heaven except in terms of tangible earthly things. The difference is that between the pure colour of a prism, 'a mode, a condition' (p.41), and dyes and pigments, which 'exhibit colour, while their substance is by no means colour but is merely that field upon which light renders visible one or other of its component tints.(...) so any literal revelation of heaven would appear to be over spiritual for us; we need something grosser, something

more familiar and more within the range of our experience' (p.42). But the paradox is that what we perceive as solid, tangible and 'real' is in fact of no substance at all. A visit to a waxworks exhibition affords Rossetti a chance to explain what she means here. She was so struck by the 'distinguished waxen crowd' that she 'literally felt shy', forgetting the real people around her. She had, as most of us in our relationship to the world, totally mistaken the matter:

Things seen are as that waxwork, things unseen as those real people.  
Yet over and over again we are influenced and constrained by the  
hollow momentary world we behold in presence, while utterly obtuse  
as regards the substantial eternal world no less present around us  
though disregarded. (p.36)

Not only are eternal things more real than earthly, but those who stand in 'awe of waxwork' are misjudging the situation to their own cost because the final authority lies with God: 'fear not them that can kill the body, but Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell' (p.48 Rossetti quotes St.Luke 12.4-5).

In our pride we resemble the contemptuous frog in Rossetti's poem for July 7,<sup>29</sup> who confidently sets out to gain experience along the 'imperial highway' and for his pains is squashed by the wheels of a passing waggon. Rossetti's fascinating poem does not, however, simply hold the frog up as a symbol of pride. She wishes to go further and demonstrate how mankind misreads natural symbol. The frog itself finally recognises its own mortality:

From dying choke one feeble croak  
The frog's perpetual silence broke:  
"Ye buoyant Frogs, ye great and small,  
Even I am mortal after all.

(p.130)

The waggoner, on the other hand, instead of looking closely at the natural world (had he actually *seen* the dying frog, he would also have had access to the lesson the frog learned), sets up an alternative, 'hypothetic' natural world in his imagination:

Unconscious of the carnage done,  
Whistling that waggoner strode on,  
Whistling (it may have happened so)  
"A Froggy would a-wooing go:"  
A hypothetic frog trolled he  
Obtuse to a reality.

He amuses himself with the imaginative frog instead of turning to the tangible world of nature and discerning its message:

O rich and poor, O great and small,

Such oversights beset us all:  
 The mangled frog abides incog,  
 The uninteresting actual frog;  
 The hypothetic frog alone  
 Is the one frog we dwell upon.

(p.130)

The real danger of the imagination (the realm of the hypothetical frog), is that it closes our minds in on themselves, cutting us off from the lessons we could learn from the natural world around us. The tone of the poem, of course is light-hearted, and the use of a child's song about a 'froggy' and the word 'incog' to provide a rhyme (perhaps Rossetti had read Burns' poem) add touches of Rossetti's characteristic humour. The fact that the imagination represents a danger of this nature does not lead Rossetti to abandon it altogether, but the touchstone, as we have seen, for any activity, including the exercise of the imagination, is the love of Christ (p.27). Without the renewed vision granted by the spirit, imaginative creation is empty and hollow. Rossetti would certainly have agreed with Carlyle that, in the search for ultimate truth, the Imagination is one of only two things: "Priest and Prophet to lead us heavenward; or Magician and Wizard to lead us hellward" ,<sup>30</sup> but the difference between the two possibilities would depend on the intervention or otherwise of the Holy Spirit. Even when the mind dwells on an untrustworthy 'phantom' of the popular imagination, no harm will ensue if such thought leads 'to think of things pure and lovely, of virtue and praise,'(p.139) and here we are reminded of her use of popular legend in *Called to Be Saints*. But imagination alone is worthless.

Perhaps the most telling testimony of all in *Time Flies* of Rossetti's rejection of imagination as the prime mover in poetic creation, is her inclusion in the volume of an altered version of part of her poem 'A Coast Nightmare', originally written at a time when she was experimenting with her Romantic, particularly Keatsian heritage.

The poem has had an unusual history. For many years it was known only as a fragment entitled 'A Nightmare'. W.M.Rossetti, looking for unpublished poems of Rossetti's for a new edition (*New Poems*, 1896), came across a poem of which the middle section had been torn out.<sup>31</sup> The poem was then published as a fragment: 'Mere scrap as it is, I should be sorry to lose it quite.'<sup>32</sup> The torn out page in Rossetti's note book has given rise to much speculation about the missing stanzas and the reason why Rossetti herself should have destroyed them.<sup>33</sup>

In 1970, a complete manuscript of the poem was sold at Sotheby's and the complete version printed in an article by H.B.de Groot, who felt able to say:

In later years Rossetti herself tore out the middle page from her notebook not because it revealed any secrets about her life but because she had become embarrassed by the disturbing emotional violence of the poem.<sup>34</sup>

De Groot, however, does not seem to be aware that an altered version of the second stanza was used by Rossetti in *Time Flies*, as the entry for April 1 (the date carries its own significance):

A Castle-Builder's World.  
'The line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness.' -- (ISAIAH  
xxxiv.11)

Unripe harvest there has none to reap it  
From the misty, gusty place;  
Unripe vineyard there hath none to keep it  
In unprofitable space.  
Living men and women are not found there,  
Only masks in flocks and shoals;  
Flesh-and-bloodless hazy masks surround there  
Ever wavering orbs and poles;  
Flesh-and-bloodless vapid masks abound there,  
Shades of bodies without souls.

(p.63)

In the context of Rossetti's development of the poetic in *Time Flies* it is clear that here she is reiterating her warning that outward features of our world are as 'masks', 'hazy', 'ever wavering' and 'vapid'. The bodies of the men and women, in earthly terms, of flesh and blood, are, according to the eternal standard, 'Flesh-and-bloodless'. What they lack is the Flesh and Blood of Christ, a lack which leaves them 'shades of bodies without souls'; in the words of St. John 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.' (St. John, 6.53) Without the life of Christ there can be no harvest. An interesting comment in itself, the poem becomes especially significant as an adaptation of a much earlier poem. The earlier version of stanza two of the complete poem 'A Coast-Nightmare' reads as follows:

Unripe harvest there hath none to reap it  
From the watery misty place;  
Unripe vineyard there hath none to keep it  
In unprofitable space.  
Living flocks and herds are nowhere found there;  
Only ghosts in flocks and shoals:  
Indistinguished hazy ghosts surround there  
Meteors whirling on their poles;  
Indistinguished hazy ghosts abound there;  
Troops, yea swarms, of dead men's souls.-- 35

This first version of the poem echoes Keats, particularly 'La Belle Dame' in its reference to the lover who 'of death's tideless waters stoops to drink' (stanza 4) and whose 'ghostland' of 'unended twilight' 'swarms' with 'dead men's souls'. The early poem, then, is an attempt to echo the sinister twilight world of Keatsian

imagination, 'The Castle-BUILDER's World' of the later poem. Rossetti's final judgement of this world is contained in the text from Isaiah, 'The line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness', which may be seen in its scriptural context as a typological reference to the wrath of God, 'the day of the Lord's vengeance'(v.8), without the saving intervention of Christ to prepare a 'high way (...) called The way of holiness' (35.8). The castle-builder's world of emptiness is a world without Christ, which condition Rossetti stresses in her substitution of 'Flesh-and-bloodless' for 'Indistinguished'. Those who live in this world only, like the waxwork dummies on p.36, are now 'masks', no longer the souls of the dead, but 'bodies without souls'. They do not have the life of the Spirit.

In answer to de Groot's suggestion that Rossetti 'tore out the middle page from the notebook (...) because she had become embarrassed by the disturbing emotional violence of the poem', I would say that more probably she just wanted to remove the page for convenient re-use.

A special section at the end of *Time Flies* deals with important events in the church calendar. The most interesting of these is the entry for 'Whitsuntide: Ember Wednesday' which allows Rossetti to conclude her discussion on the importance of the Spirit. She introduces the subject with a reference to the passage from I Kings 19 in which 'wind, earthquake, fire, tremendous but empty, ushered in the "still small Voice" which spake to Elijah'(p.276). She follows the traditional link with the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, telling us that the encounter with God, the possibility of vision, is not in the elements themselves, until they become symbol through the advent of the Spirit. The sound and tongues of fire at Pentecost, as with the wind, earthquake and fire of Elijah, are simply 'outward and visible or audible signs of inward and spiritual grace'(p.276), present to satisfy mankind's need of the tangible. In themselves they are worth nothing; the Holy Spirit alone sanctifies them:

Those outward signs forwarded their work: but without the inward reality both work and workers would have been nothing. (p.276)

One of the last poems of the volume deals again with the Nativity, as the year draws to a close. The poem for December 29, a familiar Christmas carol to many, echoes the message from the opening Nativity poem, 'Lord Babe': the Christ-Child, the incarnation of love, is the perfect satisfaction of our need:

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love Divine,  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and Angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,  
Love incarnate, love Divine,  
Worship we our Jesus, —  
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,  
Love be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and all men,  
Love the universal sign.

(p.251)

## Notes

1. Bell, p.302.
2. Clissold, Rev., 'Inspiration and Interpretation: being a Review of Seven Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford' (Oxford: Hammans, 1861), p.45. Here Clissold is quoting Williams.
3. Weathers, W. 'Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self' *VP* 3(1965) pp.81-89.
4. 'On the Principles of Sound Criticism concerning the Fine Arts' Essay 3, *Miscellanies*, ed. Ashe (London: Bell, 1911), p.18.
5. Letter of 10 Sept, 1802 *Collected Letters* ed by E.L.Griggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956-59), p.459.
6. Swiatecka, M.J. *The Idea of the Symbol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.80.
7. Kent, p.240.
8. *Ibid*, p.239.
9. *Ibid*, p.231.
10. *Ibid*, p.239.
11. 'The Statesman's Manual' *Lay Sermons*, ed by R.J.White (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p.30.
12. Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p.33.
13. Coulson, J. *Religion and Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p.15.
14. Eliot, T.S., *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), p.28.
15. By 1880 Dante Gabriel Rossetti was dead, his health broken by continued misuse of laudanum.
16. *Aids to Reflection*, ed by H.N.Coleridge, 2 vols, 5th edition (London: Pickering, 1843), Vol.I, p.197n.
17. Palazzo, L., 'Christina Rossetti's "A Birthday": Representations of the Poetic'.
18. Rossetti, D.G. *Poems and Translations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p.316.
19. *Idem*, pp.166 and 168.
20. *La Fotografia e i Pre-Raphaeliti*, a cura di M.Bartram ed L.P.Finizio (Citta del Vasto, 1982), pp.49-58, (Fig.54).
21. *Poems and Translations*, p.4-5.
22. One notes the echo of the marriage service. Coleridge had a similar thought on the marriage ceremony, in *Aids to Reflection*, p.27n.
23. Cantalupo, 'Continuities of Faith and Style' p.145n.
24. Williams, I., *Genesis*, p.33.
25. Colenso, Rev. J.W. *Preface to the Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (New York: Appleton 1864), p.9.

26. *Ibid.*
27. Keble, J. *Lectures on Poetry*, tr by E.K.Francis, 2 vols (Oxford, 1912), vol 2, p.480.
28. *Aids to Reflection*, p.197n.
29. Christopher Ricks has included this poem in his recent anthology: *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.301-302.
30. Holloway, J., *The Victorian Sage* (New York: Norton, 1964), p.22.
31. Ashley ms 1364 (2) p.24 and p.27. Pages 25 and 26, on the reverse, have been torn out.
32. *New Poems*, ed by W.M.Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1896), p.383.
33. See for example Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, p.112
34. de Groot, 'Christina Rossetti's "A Nightmare": A Fragment Completed.'
35. de Groot, p.51.



## Chapter 5

‘From you we have a right to expect a sober and meditative accomodation to your own times and country of those important truths declared in the inspired writings’.<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen, underlying the explorations of Rossetti’s devotional prose lies the Romantic awareness of self and other: self and others, self and nature, and ultimately self in relation to God. The new notions of human perception, the increased participation of the subjective ‘I’, deny any simple view of these relationships. Rossetti’s attempts at redefinition become so much clearer once we realise that she is attempting to adapt received notions of Christianity to contemporary thought and in particular to the ideas of her Romantic predecessors. A.H. Harrison sees her central ideology as a mediation ‘between the characteristic Pre-Raphaelite emphasis on aestheticist idealities (especially as presented in dreams or waking visions) and a High Anglican ideology that absorbs not only a high degree of evangelicalism, but also the influence of John Keble, Isaac Williams, and even John Henry Newman. Rossetti’s aesthetic values’, he continues, ‘were, like Ruskin’s, Romantic, transcendental, and even Platonic, but they were also sacramental and, unlike Ruskin’s, sacramental in radically conservative, often Tractarian ways’.<sup>2</sup> Harrison’s summing up of the situation is accurate as far as it goes, in that some of her works, and her poetry in particular, do show a blend of Pre-Raphaelitism and Tractarianism. But both Tractarianism and Pre-Raphaelitism were themselves mediations between Romantic theory and Orthodox Christianity. Rossetti herself sees to the heart of the problem and, like Newman, moves back towards a re-valuation of Romanticism and the Romantic symbol, using both Pre-Raphaelite and Tractarian methods where they appeared congenial to her. She also borrows quite freely from Plato, adding an account of the Transfiguration: ‘Let us sit down amid Divinely cast shadows with great delight: it is good for us to be here’ (*The Face of The Deep*, p.438). Her adaptations of the Romantic symbol are quite explicit in her devotional prose, and consequently any discussion of her poetics which neglects these prose works is necessarily incomplete.

Rossetti was not alone in her turning back towards Romanticism and in her attempts to accommodate the new into the old. The certainties of Romanticism were a most attractive alternative to the pervading scepticism and doubt; scientific developments were eroding confidence in the scriptures, in mankind’s relationship with the world. The poetry of the period reflects the horror of falling between the

Arnoldian 'two worlds'. Then also, the value of the individual sensitivity had been weakened and there was an ever present threat of isolation. Arnold's Empedocles, for example, is caught between a solitude which has become oppressive, and the miserable banality of Victorian life, 'The absence of great natures, the unavoidable contact with millions of small ones'.<sup>3</sup> But any attempt to turn back to an untroubled communion with God and nature is dogged with doubt and uncertainty and haunted by the spectre of solipsism. In her devotional prose we see Rossetti turning to Tractarian analogy and symbol as a way out of the prison of self, her use of the symbol modelled, as we have seen, on that of Coleridge, which is characterised 'above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the temporal', which 'always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative'.<sup>4</sup> Rossetti's anger against those who would de-mystify the symbol could be compared with Coleridge's scorn for a view of society based on the dealings of mankind only, product of an 'unenlivened generalised understanding'.<sup>5</sup> Like Coleridge, Rossetti seeks within the symbol the way out of mankind's isolation, finding, as he did, the perfection of the symbol in the scriptures.

### *The Face of The Deep*

Rossetti's final volume of devotional prose, *The Face of The Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892), shows her exposition of a hermeneutic based on the poetic of the symbol she formulated in her earlier prose. The aim of the volume is twofold: on the one hand to offer a valid means of approaching the scriptures, available to even the humblest Christian, and on the other to demonstrate this method in action, by offering her own meditations on the significance of scriptural truths for her own age. She had long acknowledged that the whole life of the Christian must bear testimony to the laws of God, and that literary activity, as part of the whole, must also be subject to these laws. But God has also deigned to use words as the special means of His revelation in the scriptures, and has designated Himself as *alpha* and *omega*, privileging words and their use. Therefore with the poet or writer lies a special responsibility to help lead the way in discovering God's message:

This title derived from human language seems to call especially upon  
'men confabulant' for grateful homage.' p.23

One cannot help but feel that Rossetti had, either through her own reading or through her constant contact with well-read theologians, understood and

appropriated for herself the desperate need of the later Coleridge to make the Bible *alive* to contemporary minds; the 'living *educts* of the Imagination'<sup>6</sup>:

O what a mine of undiscovered treasures, what a new world of Power and Truth would the Bible promise to our future meditation, if in some gracious moment one solitary text of all its inspired contents should but dawn upon us in the pure untroubled brightness of an IDEA, that most glorious birth of the God-like within us, which even as the Light, its material symbol, reflects itself from a thousand surfaces.<sup>7</sup>

In the course of *The Face of The Deep*, Rossetti provides a commentary for every verse of Revelation, giving equal weight to passages which at first glance may not appear to have any special significance. The text in its entirety contains the Truth, as she stated in *Letter and Spirit*, 'being the perfect form in which to embody God's law' (p.89), and so any part of it may provide access to that Truth. The same pattern is continued throughout the volume: a quotation of a verse or so from Revelation (Rossetti does not tell us which version she is using, although she mentions both the Authorised and Revised Version in the text ) followed by a meditation on a particular aspect of the quotation which has caught her interest. The chosen word or section may or may not be one of the standard phrases chosen by the popular nineteenth-century study of Revelation and very often her meditation leads her, through analogy or correspondence, far from the text itself, into areas of her own life and experience. Of particular interest also is her refusal to allow controversy to intrude between herself and the words in front of her. The message of the text, as she tells us in *Letter and Spirit*, is clearly seen, and to put up 'mental feelers' above, around or below it is a breach, albeit a minor one, of the Second Commandment. Rossetti might well have approved of the aims of the translators of the *Good News Bible* (1976), 'to state clearly and accurately the meaning of the original texts'.<sup>8</sup>

But as Stephen Prickett has pointed out, there are severe limitations to this kind of 'simplification' of the text.<sup>9</sup> To translate language which is complex and at times highly ambiguous into language that is clear and simple is surely to lose much of its value -- ambiguity itself is a form of knowing. Rossetti avoids this highly complex problem by using a method which is more transposition than exposition or translation. In *Annus Domini*, as we have seen, she appropriates the chosen words of scripture, allowing them to stimulate her own emotional and imaginative energy, and then renders them as prayers. In *The Face of The Deep* she takes a line or so from Revelation, allows the text to work on her imagination, and then restores, not the words themselves, but, as it were, fellow symbols which they have produced in her own mind. Let us take the first line of Revelation as an example of her method:

## Chapter 1

1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John: (...)

"Things which must shortly come to pass." -- At the end of 1800 years we are still repeating this "shortly," because it is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ: thus starting starting in fellowship of patience with that blessed John who owns all Christians as his brethren. (p.9)

The word on which she has focused, "shortly", has initially a pivotal function and allows her to include herself in an expanded text. It was "shortly" for John, 'the channel, not the fountain-head' of Revelation, and it is still "shortly" for the present generation. But what is actually meant by "shortly"? Rather than attempt to define the word and in that way give it 'meaning' (she was not versed in Greek anyway), she admits that we have no way of knowing what actual time value is meant by the word: 'Even now, eighteen centuries later, we know not when that cry shall be made, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh."' (p.13). However, by 'thoughtful reception; as blessed Mary, herself a marvel, kept mysterious intimations vouchsafed to her, and pondered them in her heart', the word itself becomes productive in the imagination. It brings to mind, through association and analogy, other scriptural passages which build a circle of reference and relevance around it. Then, finally, as a broadened concept, it is appropriated personally in prayer:

With time, Thy gift, give us also wisdom to redeem the time, lest our day of grace be lost. For our Lord Jesus' sake. Amen. (p.13)

We still have no definition of the word; we do not know what it actually 'means', but through the lateral interplay of symbolic representations, Rossetti and her readers recognise the urgency of salvation and are moved to action.

The justification for her particular method is contained in her opening chapter; above all in her development of the doctrine of inspiration -- the logical outcome of her emphasis on the activity of the Holy Spirit in *Time Flies*, and also very much in keeping with the theological developments of her time. Where Newman, for example, sees the living community of the Roman Catholic Church as providing authority on the interpretation of symbol, Rossetti's emphasis on the activity of the Holy Spirit leads her to stress the safety afforded by Divine Inspiration. She did not, of course, ignore the authority of the Anglican Church and acknowledges constantly the inferiority of her own contribution, but there is often a tension between her imaginative response and the need for the limiting power of Church authority. Scope for individual expression and exploration has long been

characteristic of the Anglican Church, however, and Rossetti was fortunate with her publishers, the Tract Committee of the SPCK; although, as we shall see later, she never actually violates any of the fundamental tenets of orthodoxy.

Rossetti's use of Inspiration owes much to the new formulations of the second half of the nineteenth century, which were helped forward by Benjamin Jowett's controversial article in *Essays and Reviews* (1860), 'On the Interpretation of Scripture'. Jowett wished to counteract the distortion of Luther's claim that the words of scripture 'can have no more than one most simple meaning, which we call the scriptural or literal sense'<sup>10</sup> which had led to an exaggerated fundamentalism, claiming the absolute infallibility of every word of the scriptures; the sort of thing that moved Coleridge to exclaim 'Oh the deadening incubus of that notion of *dictation* by a ghost'.<sup>11</sup> The trouble with this claim was that it became a convenient doctrine to hide behind in order to ignore the challenge of science. At the same time, those who were unable to resist the exposure of the Bible's verbal inaccuracies lost faith altogether, faced with an 'all-or-nothing' situation.

Jowett writes his 'Interpretation' very much as a post-Coleridgean, with intentional echoes from Coleridge's *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, suggesting 'common-sense' rules for interpretation and at the same time emphasising the imaginative appeal of the scriptures to the individual reader:

The office of the interpreter is not to add another (meaning), but to recover the original one; the meaning, that is, of the words as they first struck on the ears or flashed before the eyes of those who heard and read them. He has to transfer himself to another age; to imagine that he is a disciple of Christ or Paul. (...) The greater part of his learning is a knowledge of the text itself; he has no delight in the voluminous literature which has overgrown it. He has no theory of interpretation; a few rules guarding against common errors are enough for him. His object is to read scripture like any other book, with a real interest and not merely a conventional one. He wants to be able to open his eyes and see or imagine things as they truly are.<sup>12</sup>

Rossetti's interest in the *Essays and Reviews* controversy, which we have seen in her comments on miracles, would lead us to believe that she had at some stage had contact with the main ideas of the volume. Jowett's essay may well have been for her a linking factor between her adaptation of the Coleridgean symbol and her attempts at scriptural interpretation; both the 'doubling' action of the symbol and the need for imaginative response become the basis of her method in *The Face of The Deep*. Here are Jowett's comments on the use of symbol and imagination:

The double meaning which is given to our Saviour's discourse respecting the last things is not that 'form of eternity' of which Lord Bacon speaks; it resembles rather the doubling of an object when seen through glasses placed at different angles.<sup>13</sup>

To get inside that world is an effort of thought and imagination, requiring the sense of a poet as well as a critic -- demanding much more than learning a degree of original power and intensity of mind.<sup>14</sup>

The empathy demanded by Jowett would have been eagerly picked up by Rossetti, whose well documented ability to identify herself with scriptural characters stands her in good stead here. W.D. Shaw's description of her Christian empathy in the poem 'Good Friday' shows a Rossetti skillfully bringing her reader face to face with the bare and awful reality of Christ's crucifixion, in which she herself seems to participate:

Numbed and dazed, as if entranced, she counts 'drop by drop' the blood that oozes from the cross. (...) The atomistic detail of the slowly dripping blood verges on obsession: the neurasthenic speaker stands helpless, frozen in dread.<sup>15</sup>

Here we see the poet well equipped to dramatise her Christian faith, in the sense in which E.S. Dallas used 'dramatic' as opposed to 'historical faith'.<sup>16</sup>

Rossetti also had Thomas à Kempis' *Of The Imitation of Christ* and its injunction that scripture 'must be read with the same spirit by which it was written'<sup>17</sup> and the very similar approach of the interpretative and contemplative works of Isaac Williams, whose *Harmony of the Four Evangelists* she acknowledges in the introduction to *Seek and Find*. Williams' *Notes and Reflections on Genesis* were quite influential in the battle against literal interpretation, which had by now come in for a fair amount of ridicule. The Rev. Augustus Clissold, in his pamphlet 'Inspiration and Interpretation: being a Review of Seven Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford', quotes ironically from one of the sermons:

This day's sermon has had for its object to remind you, that THE BIBLE is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the Throne! Every Book of it, -- every Chapter of it, -- every Verse of it, -- every word of it, -- every syllable of it, -- (where are we to stop?) -- every letter of it -- is the direct utterance of the Most High!<sup>18</sup>

The Rev. Augustus Clissold, reacting angrily against the worst excesses of fundamentalism, notes with particular approval the way Isaac Williams applies 'the principle of Analogy to the first chapter of Genesis'.<sup>19</sup> Almost certainly from Williams, that most Tractarian of all the great Tractarians, Rossetti derived, as closest model, her own method of scriptural interpretation: the mood of reverent inquiry, the search for correspondence and analogy as a means of making the scriptures live in the mind of the reader. There are very many parallels between Williams' accounts of Genesis and Revelation<sup>20</sup> and Rossetti's volume. In Chapter

4 of this thesis we have already seen their almost identical treatment of science and the miracle. Williams' insistence on Truth as 'independent of any mere cultivation of the intellect'<sup>21</sup> is echoed again and again in *The Face of The Deep*: 'Faith alone', Rossetti tells us, commenting on the faith of the prophets, 'not knowledge, seems essential to the miracle.' (p.19) The obscurity of works such as Revelation, says Williams, are a test of faith and an invitation to wisdom rather than knowledge:

Good for us is this sense of our ignorance, which comes upon us on the first opening of the Bible. It teaches us to feel how little man is, how great is God. 'All great knowledge', says St. Augustine, 'is this for man to know that he himself by himself is nothing; and that whatever he is, he is from God and on account of God.'<sup>22</sup>

This meets us at the very threshold of Revelation. It is written, and being written, it is read. But it is not understood, except by faith.<sup>23</sup>

Williams' link with St. Augustine is here confirmed; the insistence that the mind in reading the scriptures 'must first be purged, and instructed by faith, to set it the surer'.<sup>24</sup> Rossetti, too, insists that grace is the first requisite of Bible study: 'neither knowledge nor ignorance is of first importance to Bible students: grace is our paramount need; Divine grace, rather than any human gift.' (p.114)

The application of analogy is also central to St. Augustine's approach to the scriptures, and Rossetti almost certainly derived directly from him the mediating role of Christ in a system of symbols. St. Augustine quotes the familiar passage of St. Paul, 'For the invisible things of Him, that is His eternal power and godhead, are seen by the creation of the world, being considered in His works' (Romans 1.20)<sup>25</sup> and outlines the symbolic relationship between the visible and invisible worlds:

As for those that think visible sacrifices pertain to others, and invisible to Him (...), verily these men conceive not that the others are symbols of these, as the sounds of words are significations of things.<sup>26</sup>

There are many other indications that Rossetti is writing in the tradition of St. Augustine, as adopted by Williams. For example, the obscurity of Revelation is no obstacle for Williams, nor for Rossetti. 'It is the habit of scripture', Williams tells his readers, 'to leave many things obscure to invite us to the inquiry'.<sup>27</sup> As the Reformers believed also, these darker passages of scripture should not be neglected. They should be read in the light of the clearer passages, with humility and faith. Williams' warning not to indulge in speculation, 'Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above thy strength',<sup>28</sup> is echoed by Rossetti, who, like Newman, sees in the symbolic language of the Bible a means through which God is able to adapt the word to the hearer; the 'self-interpreting' text of the Protestant Reformers, not only in the sense that those who do not fully understand the dogma may glean wisdom and instruction from the surface of the

words themselves, as the Ethiopian Eunuch who already had the beginning of illumination 'his in a measure to enjoy, respond to, improve, even before his father in God preached Christ unto him' (p.12), but also in the sense that the words are in themselves symbols, revealing unknowable divine things in forms available to the human understanding:

'I am Alpha and Omega.' -- Thus well-nigh at the opening of these mysterious Revelations, we find in this title an instance of symbolic language accommodated to human apprehension; for any literal acceptance of the phrase seems obviously and utterly inadmissible. God condescends to teach us somewhat we can learn, and in a way by which we are capable of learning. So, doubtless, either literally or figuratively, throughout the entire Book.

Such a consideration encourages us, I think, to pursue our study of the Apocalypse, ignorant as we may be. Bring we patience and prayer to our quest, and assuredly we shall not be sent empty away. (p.23)

Rossetti has, as we have seen, taken much of her interpretative method from those models which were available to her, but her commentary is particularly valuable in its conscious blending of the Romantic symbol and its emotional and imaginative appeal with these received models. She calls her reader to become emotionally involved, but insists on an attitude of Christian trust:

So now St. John, on the threshold of his revelation, cries to us: 'Behold' -- being about to make us hear with his eyes and hear with his ears, if only we will understand with hearts akin to his own. (...)

Our likeness to St. John (if by God's grace we assume any such vestige of God's glory) must include faith and love, but need not involve more than an elementary degree of knowledge. (p.19)

Her particular method of commenting on the scriptures offers a way out of the literal/ mythological dilemma, a debate which was beginning to hamper the belief of the ordinary Christian. On the one hand there was the closed mind of the fundamentalist whose dogmatic approach resulted in the loss of faith of those who felt they 'must either believe every word of the bible or not be a Christian'.<sup>29</sup> On the other, a tendency towards mythological interpretation saw the death and resurrection of Christ as myths embodying profound natural truths; the sort of thing which led to Arnold's rejection of the poetic element of the scriptures as unable to reproduce fact, and to the belief that the poetry of the Bible was only an outer covering, to be stripped away, leaving the kernel of 'immortal truth'.<sup>30</sup> The writings of Spinoza were attractive to Coleridge, for example, precisely because they provided the assurance that mankind already possessed the potential to recognise 'universal and right religion from their own nature and from general ideas'.<sup>31</sup> But



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ultimately such an attitude leads to the rejection of the actual text of the Bible. Rossetti emphatically denies a mythological treatment of the scriptures:

The antitype determines the type, not this that. If such a distinction might seem purposeless, I come to perceive its purpose when (for instance) Divine Truths having first been confounded with heathen myths are interpreted as on a par with them; as if all alike symbolized various processes, phases, of nature. It is pious to contemplate autumn, winter, spring, summer, as emblematical of our dear Lord's death, burial, resurrection, ascended glory; but to treat these as if they were a parable of those, is to deny the faith. (p.380)

The words of scripture, for Rossetti, are symbols, in the Romantic definition, and are therefore in themselves valuable, in that the symbol always partakes of that to which it points, its divine referent accessible to the imagination of a devout believer through the redemption of Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit. The incarnational poetics formulated in *Letter and Spirit* and *Time Flies* are here applied directly to God's word.

Already at the end of *Letter and Spirit* Rossetti had claimed the value of external form, of the letter itself, acknowledging, however, the superiority of spirit. At the opening of *The Face of The Deep*, she re-iterates the value of the external form of words as an opening for inquiry, its particular advantage being its accessibility to the unlearned like herself:

If thou canst dive, bring up pearls. If thou canst not dive, collect amber. Though I fail to identify Paradisiacal 'bdellium,' I still may hope to search out the beauties of the 'onyx stone.' Prefatory note.

The title of the volume, *The Face of The Deep*, a reference to Genesis 1.2, stresses also the action of the spirit of God which 'moved on the face of the waters'; in this context it is comparable to the opening up of meaning in the text of scripture by the action of the Holy Spirit. Rossetti does not mean, however, a mere surface appreciation of the scriptures; indeed that would, as she stated unequivocally in *Letter and Spirit*, be to disobey the second commandment. Rev.1.16 leads her to ponder the depth of effect the word of God has on the reader. The designation 'sharp two-edged sword' reveals the nature of this effect:

Four points I note: life, keenness in the weapon; depth, subtilty, in the wound. (...) No mere surface work can possibly be this saving work of which the text speaks: a religion without depth is not Christ's religion. (p.37)

As we see in Rossetti's own treatment of this phrase, the activity of human creative thought opens up possibilities from within the words themselves, an activity which very often leads to emotional involvement and healing. It is vital not to discard the

actual forms which St. John conveys to the reader, she tells us, because they are part of the divine ideas of which they are representative and Rossetti warns against dismissing improbable images as of no relevance. The strange horse-like creatures of St. John's vision 'were recognised by St. John as horses despite their unparalleled features.' (p.269) The words of the text describe 'the true and substantial world of revelation', not 'A world of mere opinions and fancies, of day-dreams and castles in the air.' (p.46) On the other hand, Rossetti warns against the fascination with symbols as symbols. 'Symbolism affords a fascinating study', she tells us, 'wholesome so long as it amounts to aspiration and research; unwholesome when it degenerates into a pastime.' (p.438)

Once she has established the symbolic mode of her operation, Rossetti makes use of a variety of techniques to 'open up possibilities' within the text, all of them imaginative in the sense that they imply some kind of creative response from the reader of scripture: allegory, typology, analogy, emblem, correspondence, or association ; all are relevant if they bring involvement with the text and with God, the ultimate author of the text (I note here the interesting similarity with Coleridge's feeling that something in the text 'finds'<sup>32</sup> him.) She employs the same sort of imaginative appropriation as in *Annus Domini* which, as we saw, was inherited from Keble.

It is her own, extremely personal interpretation, as she constantly reminds us, more in the nature of a meditation, and her reader is invited to agree or disagree. As the sort of lateral correspondence that we saw in *Seek and Find* is characteristic of nature as symbol, she can add here and there her own analogies or little 'parables of nature', such as the tale of the newts and frogs on p.162. For each symbol of Revelation she weaves a network of corresponding symbols, very often beginning from the Old Testament, moving through the New Testament and finally seeking analogies in her own time. For example, the phrase in Revelation 19.7 'for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready,' she begins with an analogy using the first man and the first woman, 'As God brought Eve to Adam, so now is He bringing each pure and lovely soul to Christ.' (p.433) As the original phrase initiates the analogy of male and female with Christ and the Church, she feels free to elaborate further:

As everything human that is masculine is or should be typical of Christ, so all that is feminine of the Church. Why then break off our parallel with the galaxy of holy maids and matrons memorialized in the Old Testament, and not carry it further by help of their sister saints in the Gospel? (p.434)

She adds imaginative and emotional detail, filling in an imaginative past where the bride 'Many times heretofore has (...) come forth fasting, praying, weeping between the porch and the altar,' (p.436) and finally brings the whole

construction into the present: 'so she comes forth from the thousand battle-fields of the fierce fight of her afflictions. Beds of weariness, haunts of starvation, hospital wards, rescue homes, orphanages, leper colonies, fires of martyrdom.' (p.436) For the sympathetic and involved reader a single line of Revelation has been endowed with a depth of imaginative and emotional associations; it has been made to 'live' in the mind.

Rossetti also brings her experience in imaginative fiction to her emotional 'dramatisation' of Revelation. She establishes again the role of guide and teacher, which was so intrusive in a work of fiction such as *Speaking Likenesses*. It blends perfectly here with the didactic tone of her volume of devotional prose. In fact, the text of Revelation lends itself perfectly to the whole 'wonderland structure' which she uses in *Speaking Likenesses*: St. John, the guide, draws the commentator, Rossetti herself, within the vision, and she, in turn, beckons to the reader to participate also:

We who have no door set open before us into visible Heaven, may yet look in with St. John's eyes. And if with his heart as well as his eyes, then shall we too be rapt into celestial regions and among harmonies superhuman. (p.192)

Revelation is unfolded as a series of symbolic panoramas, similar to different perspectives of the same object:

As when years ago I abode some where within sight of a massive sea rock, I used to see it put on different appearances: it seemed to float baseless in air, its summit vanished in cloud, it displayed upon its surface varied markings, it passed from view altogether in a mist; it fronted me distinct and solid far into the luminous northern summer night, still appearing many and various while all the time I knew it to be one and the same, -- so now this Apocalypse I know to be one congruous, harmonious whole. (p.174)

Rossetti's vivid response to the series of visions adds to the words of Revelation an emotional depth which possibly a more traditional commentary would be unable to convey. The Romantic source of her emphasis is very clear: 'As children may feel the awe of a storm, the beauty of sunrise or sunset, so at least I too may deepen awe, and stir up desire by a contemplation of things inevitable, momentous, transcendent.' (p.146) The imaginative apprehension of the symbolic blends with the scriptural endorsement of analogy:

The Son of Sirach observes: 'All things are double one against another.' This suggests that everything cognizable by the senses may be utilized as symbol or parable.

To such an exercise certain minds seem strongly drawn. Their horizon thereby recedes, depth is deepened, height heightened, width widened. Underlying any measurable depth, overtopping such height,

encompassing such width, they apprehend That which nothing underlies, nothing overtops, nothing encompasses. To them matter suggests the immaterial; time eternity. 'One day telleth another: and one night certifieth another.' (p.215)

The potential for emotional involvement is part of God's plan for the scriptures:

In the Bible God condescends to employ multiform overtures of endearing graciousness, wooing, beseeching, alluring, encouraging. We love beauty; He lavishes beauty on the sacred text. We desire knowledge; He tells us much, and promises that one day He will tell us all. We are conscious of feelings inexpressible and as yet insatiable; He stirs up such feelings, at once directing them and guaranteeing their ultimate satisfaction. He works upon us by what we can and by what we cannot utter; He appeals in us to what we can and to what we cannot define. (p.432)

Therefore any commentary, in whatever form, that simply moves the heart towards God is a valid one:

Whence it seems to ensue that not only words and thoughts compose such a commentary on Revelation as may lawfully be brought by man for his offering of firstfruits; but that painting, sculpture, music, all are sources capable of swelling that store. (p.432)

God is the fulfilment of Romantic longing: 'Without cavilling or doubt then let us worship God in wordless aspiration aroused by any form of beauty.' (p.432) Fear, awe, delight, joy freely move those who contemplate this awful vision, but the terror of uncertainty which so often touches the Romantic poem and fills much of the poetry of Rossetti's middle period, has been banished. Rossetti sums up the two phases, from fear and uncertainty to faith, in her question 'But if after all we cannot decipher the unsealed revelation?' and her answer 'We still shall have gazed on Him Who is the Author of the revelation: and Greater is He Who reveals than aught else which is revealed.' (p.170)

All that leads to greater involvement with the text is permissible for Rossetti, and hence the great variety found in the volume; variety of form as in *Time Flies*, and the freedom to pass from momentous subjects to the small and apparently insignificant events of daily life. She utilises correspondences, for instance, or more often, lack of correspondence between the Authorised and Revised versions of the text to stimulate her to further thought. An apparent contradiction leads the mind to ponder its implications; even the incomprehensible has its value as a lesson in humility and human limitation. The composition of poems, for Rossetti, become occasions to consolidate a lesson learned, to apprehend its meaning in a personal and intimate way. Rossetti wrote to Watts-Dunton 'I work at prose and help myself

forward with little bits of verse'.<sup>33</sup> These 'little bits of verse' are occasion for moments of pause, of consolidation, of emotional apprehension and reassurance.

Seen in the context of the devotional prose volume, these poems reveal their underlying organisation to be a continuation of the same incarnational poetic. For example, the Poem 'Thy Cross cruciferous doth flower in all' on p.232, stems directly from her observation that only through Christ the saints triumph: 'Christ it is Who triumphs in His triumphant redeemed: from Him they derive their victories, from Him their rewards. His Cross branched out into their crosses: His Cross, the one palm tree of victory, branches out into their palms.'

Thy Cross cruciferous doth flower in all  
And every cross, dear Lord, assigned to us:  
Ours lowly-statured crosses; Thine, how tall,  
Thy Cross cruciferous.

Thy Cross alone life-giving, glorious:  
For love of Thine, souls love their own when small  
Easy and light, or great and ponderous.

Since deep calls deep, Lord, hearken when we call;  
When cross calls Cross racking and emulous:-  
Remember us, with him who shared Thy gall,  
Thy Cross cruciferous.

The poem is, of course, intelligible out of context as well. Rossetti herself extracted many of her poems from the prose volumes for publication in *Verses* (1893), but a consideration of the poem as representative of her Christ-centred poetic shows up clearly the delicate web of analogies on which the poem is based, and its ultimate appeal to Christ the mediator.

The rather ugly sounding, but in Rossetti's scheme highly poetic word 'cruciferous' begins the analogy by turning the Cross into a cross-shaped flower, which grows and branches out into smaller blossoms, endlessly reproducing itself as under the laws of nature. As all flowers relate back to the one life-giving stem, so all human crosses and suffering relate back to the Cross and agony of Christ, 'glorious' after the resurrection and 'life-giving' in that it has become our path to eternal life.

The phrase which opens the last section of the poem, 'deep calls deep', from psalm 42, is an important one for Rossetti and her use of it is similar to that of her quotation from psalm 19, on p.215, 'One day telleth another: and one night certieth another': as an extension of the Pauline 'All things are double one against another' and as a link with the title of her volume. Thus in this poem, earthly suffering, our minor crosses, are double with the Cross of Christ and thus give access to our risen Lord, with possibility of appeal as direct as that of the thieves who were crucified next to Him.

Other poems allow for questioning, especially the dialogue poems, which further promote involvement and move towards a renewal of faith and trust. The prayers and litanies have a similar function, and many of them echo the observations made in the study and ask for guidance to put them into practice. Request for illumination in her interpretation and humility in her assertions also abound, even at the end of the volume: 'From fancied wisdom, presumptuous guesses, vain speculations, unauthorised conclusions, Good Lord, deliver all, deliver me.' (p.467)

Rossetti's treatment of the women figures in Revelation is particularly interesting as her use of free association leads her to relate the word of God to her position as woman in a male dominated world. This kind of free association provides interesting and stimulating alternatives to traditional interpretations. The 'woman clothed with the sun' of Rev.12.1 is approached from a personal viewpoint, without, as it were, prior knowledge of what ecclesiastical authority has to say in the matter. She becomes for Rossetti the triumph of woman, not despite her weakness, but through her weakness; the passive stance is really the strongest, provided that it is voluntary:

Our weakness, if it is to win a victory, must include a voluntary element; at the least so far as to will in concert with the Divine Will, and never to have recourse to illicit weapons.

And I think that in these days of women's self assertion and avowed 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. (p.409-410)

Feminist critics have made much of Rossetti's implied superiority of the passive stance of woman and although I do not wish to detract from the valuable insights which they have contributed, Rossetti's concerns, in fact, had very little in common with the feminist movements of her day or of the modern feminist. That is not to say that in her own way she does not direct her study towards the particular problems which concern her as a woman. Although I would probably not agree with J.J. McGann as to the exact nature of the position from which she operates, his summing-up at the end of his article 'Christina Rossetti's Poems: A New Edition and a Revaluation' is a useful one: 'In accepting the traditional view of "a woman's place," she uncovered a (secret) position from which to cast a clear eye upon the ways of the world'.<sup>34</sup> Rossetti does adhere to the biblical endorsement of female submission; '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' (p.310) but the principle by which woman moves up higher 'from the lowest place' (p.310) is that by which all triumph if, through conformation with the Divine Will, they make of their weakness their strength. Christ Himself is our example, she tells us: 'Our Redeemer's weakness was rather the triumph of His strength, because

to become weak and work mightily through weakness He laid aside his strength and kept it in abeyance.' (p.409)

Rossetti's treatment of the whore of Babylon (Rev.18) is another interesting example of this kind of departure from the standard interpretations of the time. 'Babylon the great' was one of the popular passages for dispute by the Victorians. The interpretation given by Bishop Wordsworth is typical of the period and appealed to the popular imagination: 'And now the prophecy became clear, clear as noon-day; and we tremble with awe at the sight, while we read the inscription emblazoned in large letters, "Mystery, BABYLON THE GREAT," written by the hand of St. John, guided by the Spirit of God, on the forehead of the CHURCH OF ROME.'<sup>35</sup> Even at the end of the century the controversy continued, and Professor Milligan, the Scottish theologian, in his *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (1892), although pointing out clearly that 'Babylon is not the Church of Rome in particular', comments that 'Not a few of the darkest traits of Babylon" apply to her with a closeness of application which may not unnaturally lead us to think that the picture of these chapters has been drawn from nothing so much as her'.<sup>36</sup> Rossetti, in her treatment of the passage, does not even mention the Church of Rome. Her response, instead, is to bring a mental picture of the whore of Babylon into the realm of her own experience as a woman:

Because this type of transcendent wickedness is presented under the feminine aspect, doubtless we women may elicit thence our appropriate lesson. When we behold gauds and frivolities go up towards heaven in smoke of hell, they become a beacon fire to warn us from making shipwreck be it on a mudbank of vileness or on a curious reef of luxury. Scant comfort would it be to perish, though on a very miracle of beauty. (p.416)

Rossetti does not specifically imply that Babylon the Great is the representation of an evil woman; rather, each reader has access to the lesson appropriate to him or herself. It is a form of self-deception, she claims, to ignore those lessons which 'find' us; Eve was quite safe from the serpent until 'she became wise in her own conceit, disregarding the plain obvious meaning of words.' (p.310)

Rossetti's explanation for such a personal interpretation as she has given for these women is that our relationship with the scriptures must be personal, as 'each figure appeals to our experience' (p.309), and in that appeal speaks of the Divine Mystery, even though we do not fully understand it. Her own analogy best reveals her meaning here:

A rose might preach beauty and a lily purity to a receptive mind, although the ear had not yet heard tell of the Rose of Sharon and Lily of the Valleys. (p.309)



Despite the interest of such interpretations for the Rossetti critic, a very strong accusation could be made by the student of biblical studies that Rossetti is using her imaginative response to the scriptures as a vehicle to endorse her own opinions. Such a subjective approach could very easily lead to distortion and exploitation of the text; the Bible could be made to 'mean' anything. In any case the commentary may amount to 'no more than the impression which the Bible makes on the individual reader'.<sup>37</sup> But the whole point of Rossetti's volume is that the subjective approach has its own value. It is a restatement in the Post-Romantic context, of the fundamental argument behind the Protestant hermeneutic tradition. Although Rossetti herself makes no greater claim for her volume than that of pious meditation, she follows in the footsteps of the great Patristic writers, St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom and their works' which combine much that is discursive and contemplative with the interpretations of scripture'.<sup>38</sup> Her work is not based on historical fact, nor on any great degree of interpretative skill; her object is simply to stir up the reader to greater involvement:

I take this opportunity of calling attention to my ignorance of, sometimes, a very critical point in the text on which I venture to meditate; and if in consequence I misrepresent the person of the speaker or the word spoken, I ask pardon for my involuntary error. Only should I have readers, let me remind them that what I write professes to be a *surface* study of an infathomable depth: if it incites any to dive deeper than I attain to, it will so far have accomplished a worthy work. My suggestions do not necessarily amount to beliefs; they may be no more than tentative thoughts compatible with acknowledged ignorance. (p.365)

But Rossetti is also herself sensitive to the possible misuse of speculation, and her imaginative excursions, although, as she believes, guided by the illumination afforded the faithful by the Holy Spirit, admit the control of ecclesiastical authority; not, of course, in the absolute sense Newman has in mind in the infallibly-guided Roman Catholic Church,<sup>39</sup> the sort of thing which sparked off Kingsley's scathing comment that 'Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy'.<sup>40</sup> Rossetti immediately curtails her imaginative exploration if she feels that it will lead her into contradiction with the received notions of her faith:

Yet not to picture saints as mourning when the days of mourning are ended, I set aside my own thought, and dwell upon it only so far as to realise vividly the unworthiness of even the most worthy, and (if such grace be granted me) to nurse tenderness and contrition in my own hard heart. (p.22)

Indeed Rossetti's adherence to the sort of interpretation she feels compatible with orthodoxy keeps the volume well within the canons of acceptability of the orthodox SPCK.

As we have seen, then, *The Face of The Deep* is a most interesting example of late nineteenth-century synthesis between post-Romantic poetic theory and orthodox Christianity. It must be admitted, however, that the multiplicity of method which Rossetti employs makes the volume cumbersome. The danger of this sort of allegorical or analogical interpretation is that the introduction of such an abundance of extraneous material 'draws attention away from the main action which is being performed, and gives "meaning" to so many details that (...) we lose all sense of proportion'.<sup>41</sup> There is a danger that in *The Face of The Deep*, to a certain kind of reader, the text of Revelation may become no more than a guideline, a connecting thread running through a series of meditations. So much so that in 1900 W.M. Jay felt able to extract the 'comforting thoughts' which filled the book, removing them completely from their context as commentary on Revelation: 'I dare to hope' he writes in the introduction to *Reflected Lights from 'The Face of The Deep'*, 'I have done a favour to others by bringing out into clearer view and easier reach many of the beautiful, inspiring, and comforting thoughts that are often hidden away among much matter for which an un leisured reader would have no time, and which a desultory one might find unattractive'.<sup>42</sup>

The appeal of Rossetti's 'comforting thoughts' to her contemporary reader has, ironically, counted against a favourable reception of her devotional prose works by later critics. If I may for a moment draw a parallel between this kind of reader and Rossetti in her attitude towards the Bible, we see that she explicitly rejects the extraction of 'comforting thoughts'. I mean this in the sense that such an extraction neglects the language and form in which these ideas are presented; Arnold's rejecting of the 'husk' for the 'kernel'. As Rossetti was well aware, moral climates come and go and an interpretation addressed to one age may be unintelligible to another -- and here I do not mean that Christianity itself has come and will ultimately go.<sup>43</sup> She addressed herself to readers who desperately needed to regain confidence in the scriptures as a source of comfort and guidance, 'who were so disturbed by the argument of the early nineties that they ceased to find pleasure or comfort reading their Bibles'.<sup>44</sup>

Now, one hundred years later, the most likely reader of Rossetti's volume is the literary historian, in search of neither. Therefore the volume must be seen to make a statement over and above its practical utilisation. If, as McGann has pointed out, 'poetry (or any kind of Literature for that matter) only maintains its life in later ages and later cultures when it preserves its integrity,'<sup>45</sup> much of the value of a text lies in its response to the particular challenges which it addresses. The value of *The Face of The Deep*, therefore for the modern critic, is this turning of context into text. Rossetti utilised the forms and formulations of her Romantic and Tractarian heritage to come to terms with her own age, and to project her own unified vision of life. The neglected prose works are clear examples of the way she does this and cannot but contribute to our knowledge of her own work and of nineteenth-century hermeneutics in general.

## Notes

1. 'The Statesman's Manual', p.7.
2. Harrison, A.H., *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p.65.
3. From Matthew Arnold's letter of Sept. 1849, in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Kenneth Allott (London: Longmans, 1965), p.177. For a discussion of the clash between a Romantic aesthetic and Victorian morality in Rossetti's poetry up to 1860, see 'Romantic Imagination/ Victorian Morality', Palazzo L., unpublished MA thesis.
4. 'The Statesmans' Manual', p.30.
5. *Idem*, p.28.
6. *Idem*, p.29.
7. *Idem*, p.50.
8. *Good News Bible*, Foreword.
9. Prickett, S., *Words and The Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.6.
10. Wilkinson, J., *Interpretation and Community* (London: Macmillan, 1963), p.177.
11. Prickett, S., *Romanticism and Religion*, p.47 (BM Ms.47,536. No.41, p.30).
12. *Essays and Reviews*, p.338.
13. *Idem*, p.381.
14. *Idem*, p.384.
15. Shaw, W.D., 'Projection and Empathy in Victorian Poetry', *VP* 19:4 (1981), p.325.
16. *Idem*, p.323.
17. T. à Kempis, *Of The Imitation of Christ*, trans by John Payne (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1887), p.7.
18. Rev. Augustus Clissold, 'Inspiration and Interpretation', p.12. Colenso also ridiculed the passage, in his *Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, Part 1, p.6.
19. *Idem*, p.44.
20. Williams, I., *Apocalypse with Notes and Reflections* (London: Rivington, 1852).
21. Tract 80, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, p.65.
22. Williams, *Genesis*, p.1-2.
23. *Idem*, p.5.
24. *City of God*, trans by John Healey, 2 vols (London: Dent, 1962), Vol.1, p.313. Stephen Prickett sees St. Augustine as a formative influence also on Wordsworth. St. Augustine's 'exploration of *feeling* as a mode of religious experience, (...) is rediscovered with the advent of Romanticism'

*Romanticism and Religion*, p.90. A.H. Harrison makes much of the influence of St. Augustine on Rossetti, especially 'Augustine's implicit epistemology and his belief in the importance of language in redeeming his fellow man.' *Christina Rossetti in Context*, p.99.

25. *Idem*, p.236.
26. *Idem*, p.293.
27. *Genesis*, p.6.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Chadwick, O., *The Victorian Church*, p.113.
30. Prickett, S., *Words and The Word*, p.64.
31. Frei, H.W., *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p.43.
32. Coleridge, S.T., *Confessions of An Inquiring Spirit*, ed. H.N. Coleridge, p.13.
33. British Museum, Ashley 1386 f23/24.
34. *VS*, 23:2 (1980), p.254.
35. Chr. Wordsworth, Canon of Westminster, 'Is the Church of Rome the Babylon of the Book of Revelation: An Essay Derived in part from the Author's Lectures on the Apocalypse and partly from other sources'(London: Rivington, 1850), p.72.
36. Milligan, W., *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, The Baird Lecture, 1885 (London: Macmillan, 1892), p.183.
37. Wilkinson, *Interpretation and Community*, p.23.
38. Williams, *Genesis*, preface.
39. Newman, J.H., *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, 1870), p.285.
40. *Macmillan's Magazine*, Jan. 1864, p.217.
41. Wilkinson, *Interpretation and Community*, p.xxi.
42. *Reflected Lights from 'The Face of The Deep'* (London: SPCK, 1900), preface.
43. One wonders what McGann means when he says: 'Her (Rossetti's) poetry contains a forcible and persistent reminder that the themes of Christian poetry (...) those of guilt and redemption, of resurrection, of incarnation -- are time and place specific, that they have had a beginning, and a middle, and that they will have an end as well.' McGann, J.J. 'The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti', *CI* 10:1 (Sept. 1983), p.141.
44. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p.109.
45. 'The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti', p.142.

## Conclusion

Through her association with Tractarian thought, Rossetti has assimilated the Tractarian blend of traditional Typology and Romantic psychologizing.<sup>1</sup> She has, however, made two specific advances on the Tractarians: the first the addition of Evangelistic fervour to an 'outreach'<sup>2</sup> which they had already begun, moving the process of religious renewal from the confines of the quiet studies of Oxford, or the seclusion of Hursley or Littlemore, to a confrontation with the conflicts of day-to-day experience in middle-class Victorian England: the temptations and responsibilities of the practising artist, the woman in a man's world, the church-goer in a time of religious upheaval, the average citizen caught up in a world of increasing pressures and uncertainties. Her work provided 'comforting thoughts'<sup>3</sup> for those in need of reassurance, but challenged also the basis of a growing materialism:

Alas England full of luxuries and thronged by stinted poor, whose merchants are princes and whose dealings crooked, whose packed storehouses stand amid bare homes, whose gorgeous array has rags for neighbours! (*The Face of The Deep* p.422)

Her active concern for the poor and exploited, possibly a product of her own experience of poverty and of the exposure afforded by the novels of Dickens and Gaskell, had about it some of the High Church radicalism. Relentlessly opposed to compromise, her keen mind sifted through individual and collective experience, subjecting all to moral law. She observed the activities of her brothers and their circle, too, with a sympathetic but critical eye, never fully embracing a Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic. Her own art came under scrutiny, even as early as *Maude*. In *Maude* and *Commonplace* she tests genres and forms against her early religious ideas, and in *Speaking Likenesses* comes finally to reject popular forms of fiction. She turned to a study of the scriptures and to a reappraisal of Romantic theory, in a search for a means of expression which satisfied her sense of moral purpose, adapting the latter to the theology she found in the former.

The second of these advances over the position of the Tractarians comes about through just such a synthesis, in her development of the Coleridgean symbol, again continuing a process which in part they had already begun. For Rossetti, true symbol comes into being only through the intervention of Christ; initially through the once-for-all event of the Incarnation, and subsequently through the action of the Holy Spirit in the believer. She comes to see the imagination, the unifying force in

the creation of symbol, as the power through which the Spirit works. Her adoption of the Coleridgean relationship between the outward manifestation of the symbol and its referent, and her insistence on its location within a Trinitarian theology, allows her to move forward with confidence to an examination of the scriptures. The language of the Bible, in the manner of the surface manifestation of a symbol, stands in a true and unbroken relationship to God.

This insistence on an incarnational poetic makes Rossetti's work differ markedly from that of Matthew Arnold, for example: the truth of the New Testament is not 'the secret of Jesus',<sup>4</sup> because the secret is Jesus. The language of the scriptures is 'husk', as Arnold would have it, but it remains so until faith in Christ transforms it into symbol; the face of the deep (cf. Rossetti's volume of that name) is transformed by the Spirit moving on the waters (Genesis 1.2). The 'way in' is through the 'husk', but is made possible only by the intervention of Christ. Rossetti does not make the outright claim that the language of the Bible is 'symbolic', but states rather its mode of operation in adapting itself to the hearer either literally or figuratively. Her own special use of the symbolic -- that which links the two worlds, earthly and divine, and leads the faithful to God -- spans both literal and figurative language and applies to the entire text.

The central issue of the Modernist controversy in the Roman Catholic Church in the early years of this century was exactly this, 'the question of the symbolical nature of biblical or theological statements'.<sup>5</sup> On the continent, especially in Germany, emphasis on the nature of the language of scripture grew to embrace the problem of transposing meaning from the original context to the present, and there followed a reappraisal of traditional protestant hermeneutics. Rossetti's work is useful in that it shows similar developments taking place in England before the turn of the century, in the wake of the Tractarian revival.

There are also similarities in Rossetti's scriptural interpretation to the work of major nineteenth-century English theologians. Charles Gore, for example, in his *Lux Mundi* aims 'to present positively the central ideas and principles of religion, in the light of contemporary thought and current problems' and quotes *De Imitatione*: 'Every scripture must be read in the same spirit in which it was written'.<sup>6</sup> The Scottish theologian, Professor Milligan, in his Baird Lectures of 1885, is even more forward looking in his treatment of the nature of Biblical language: 'It is unnecessary to ask whether the visions passed before the Seer in the forms in which he relates them, or whether, having had only certain truths divinely impressed upon his mind, his poetic fancy led him to clothe these in the shapes before us. (...) The Spirit of God adapts Himself to every method of expression suggested by the peculiarities either of a writer or his age'.<sup>7</sup>

Rossetti's frame of reference belongs firmly to the late nineteenth century and looks back towards the Romantics as often as forwards, but it is interesting to

note how similar the main thrust of her volume *The Face of The Deep* is to many of the aspirations of the early exponents of twentieth-century hermeneutics. Karl Barth's *Romans* (1917) sets out to proclaim anew the subject matter of St. Paul's epistle by 'looking *through* the historical to the spirit of the Bible, which is the eternal Spirit. What once was serious is still serious today, and what today is serious (...) stands in direct relation to what was once serious'.<sup>8</sup> Barth's recognition 'of the hermeneutical relevance of the subject' has the same basis as Rossetti's, in Romantic epistemology. Rossetti, also, attempts 'urgent discussion between the wisdom of yesterday and the wisdom of tomorrow' by the recognition that the referent which governs both is always the same: 'The time was then at hand, for so the Bible certifies us, and still must it be at hand (...) whether or not we possess faith to realize how a thousand years and one day are comparable in the Divine sight' (*The Face of The Deep*, p.13).

Rossetti does not attempt, as many of her contemporaries do, to define the 'kernel' of the scriptural message, simply because all the objects of human comprehension, including language, are, according to her definition, by their very nature external manifestations. There is, of course, a central Biblical message; one which is 'plainly seen' by the eye of faith. Our way to this message is through the inspired language of scripture, which 'works on us by what we can and by what we cannot utter' and 'appeals in us to what we can and to what we cannot define' (*The Face of The Deep*, p.432). In other words, the Spirit working through the words of scripture appeals to and involves our imaginative powers; in the words of Coleridge, something in the text 'finds' us. But the way it returns to our conscious selves, the way it becomes operative in our own lives, is through the language of our own experience. Thus Rossetti, although admitting the guiding and limiting authority of the church, feels free to offer the language of her own experience as a commentary on Revelation. Her recognition of the possibility of diachronic discourse through scripture, despite the relativity of individual perceptions of reality, is thus forward looking to some of the modern trends in hermeneutics, but at the same time shows very clearly its derivation from Romantic and Coleridgean epistemology.

There is, however, one further issue which Rossetti's later work raises, an important one in view of modern hermeneutic concerns, and that is the role of ethics in the production and reception of art. In the first instance, we see Rossetti's insistence on a morally responsible art in her own attitude towards her work; her constant self-interrogation, for example, as to the effect her work will have on the reader, even to the extent of imagining having to confront, on the day of judgement, a reader whom she has led astray. But, she also introduces in *The Face of The Deep* the concept of art as an 'offering of firstfruits' (p.432) in which 'everything cognizable by the senses may be utilized as symbol or parable' (p.215). Recognising

the unifying power of the Coleridgean symbol and the possibility of a 'transformed vision of this world',<sup>9</sup> Rossetti nevertheless insists on conformity with traditional Christian doctrine and strict subjection to moral law.

Hans-Georg Gadamer in his study of the development of the Human Sciences, pinpoints Kant's *Critique of Judgement* as the source of a separation of ethics and 'all aesthetics and feeling', which consequently 'limited the concept of knowledge to the theoretical and practical use of reason',<sup>10</sup> and reserved the concept of truth for rational thought only. But once the aesthetic is freed from ethical considerations, the free play of imaginative art, as Gadamer points out, leads to a fundamental shift in the basis of aesthetics:

Like the concept of taste the concept of natural beauty is also devalued, or differently understood. The moral interest in natural beauty that Kant had so enthusiastically described now retreats behind the self-encounter of man in works of art.<sup>11</sup>

What follows is the creation of a substitute ethic, a religion of feeling, 'appropriating for the individual consciousness powers and prerogatives formerly assigned to God in Christian theism'.<sup>12</sup> The fact that deep feelings and sensibilities are evoked by religion leads to the conviction that feeling is religion.

Rossetti's own brother, Dante Gabriel allows his art to degenerate into the worship of sensual pleasure. Even a fine intellect like that of Matthew Arnold finds in the resources of poetry a substitute for an apparently ailing religion: 'More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us (...) and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry'.<sup>13</sup>

Rossetti, however, by allying imaginative activity with traditional protestant forms of faith and intuition, is able on the one hand to resist the devaluation of imaginative perception in the face of materialistic and scientific trends. On the other hand, by insisting at all times that all activity, including the imaginative, be subject to religious law, she preserves the traditional unity of ethics and aesthetics and avoids the post-Kantian exaltation of 'imaginative truth'. She embraces the symbolic modes of Romanticism, but does not reject the more rational modes of allegory and analogy.

It is important to realise that Rossetti firmly rejected what Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* termed 'the primary literary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake'.<sup>14</sup> Roderick McGillis, for example, in his account of her children's writing, sees her work in terms of a post-Kantian religion of art, 'an experience of the high morality of art',<sup>15</sup> but as we have seen, Rossetti steadily refuses to embrace such an aesthetic. I am not suggesting that the Rossetti critic slavishly adhere to the religious implications of everything she wrote, but I do



suggest that due recognition be given to Rossetti's all-pervading theology. *Speaking Likenesses* for example, was written in the same year as the religious work *Annus Domini*. The uneasy realisation in the prose fiction that imaginative play on form and structure has its own attraction, independent of moral concerns, needs to be seen alongside her effortless use of that same intense imaginative play in the devotional work. Rossetti does not deny the power of form and structure, but her striving is clearly towards the use of these in a Christian art.

Lastly, what suggestions then does Rossetti put forward towards a morally responsible production and reception in art and Literature? Having recognised that a writer has no control over a text once it has been written (see Ch.2 of this thesis) she envisions a Christian art, first and foremost as a tribute of 'firstfruits' offered to the glory of God. The reader then (although here she does not in fact specifically deal with the reading of a text other than the Bible) would have the artifact available as 'symbol', to be enjoyed as surface manifestation (but essentially dead) or as a living text, pointing to its divine referent. For a meaningful reading the interpreter must proceed from a position of faith, comparable to that of the author, to 'see with his eyes and hear with his ears,' and 'understand with hearts akin to his own.' (*The Face of The Deep*, p.19). The special value of the Bible in this sense would be its ability to generate this faith even simply from the desire to have faith (p.12).

Of course, Rossetti's insistence on faith is patristic in origin, and part of the nineteenth-century revival, (see Ch.5 of this thesis), but the actual use of the formula seems to stand midway between that of theologians like Isaac Williams and J.H. Newman, and its use in more recent hermeneutical procedures, starting for example from Karl Barth's preference for 'the old doctrine of inspiration'<sup>16</sup> over new historical methods of criticism.

Rossetti's treatment of the scriptures is also forward looking in its rejection of the prevailing historicism. In his discussion of Heidegger's description of the circular structure of understanding, Gadamer stresses in historical understanding the 'polarity of familiarity and strangeness',<sup>17</sup> the 'interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter.' In a manner quite similar to this 'fusion of horizons', Rossetti not only recognises the tension between the alienness of St.John's vision and her own consciousness, but acknowledges at the same time the location of each in a common tradition of faith. Almost certainly it was the typological cast of Rossetti's thought which provided a way out of the limited historicism which was so damaging to faith in the nineteenth-century. In varying degrees of imperfection, both she and St John, and indeed all Christians, are types of Christ.

It is doubtful whether Rossetti's commentary on Revelation made any impact on the intellectual scene when it was published, except in a minor way,<sup>18</sup> but placed

as it is on the threshold of the twentieth century, *The Face of The Deep*, and indeed all of Rossetti's devotional prose, are useful in that they may be seen to anticipate some aspects of modern hermeneutics, demonstrating at the same time their origin in Romantic thought. Although I would hesitate to say that Rossetti's notion of the symbol began 'where Coleridge's left off'<sup>19</sup> -- she herself would, I think, have been highly nervous at the suggestion<sup>20</sup> -- the very Coleridgean cast of her thinking on the symbol, and the popular appeal of her work, did much to carry Romantic symbolism over into the twentieth century.

But a study of her prose works is also vital for the critic of any area of Rossetti's work. The devotional prose especially show the unity of her entire theology which develops in its early stages from the stimulus of her mother's Evangelicalism, working through Tractarian thought and through her own exceptional knowledge of the Bible. She had opportunity to converse with some of the liveliest theological minds of her time and her later works reflect their fervour. We have, then, in Rossetti's prose, a little-explored but most interesting area of her work which will not only add a new dimension to Rossetti criticism, but will also provide things of interest for our own dialogue between past and present.

## Notes

1. 'He (Keble) has, in effect, psychologised typology, thus providing a direct link between Augustine and Freud.' Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion*, p.47.
2. M.H. Bright's claim for the Oxford Movement in general, I would see as especially true of Rossetti's work:  
This evangelicalism, or 'outreach' as it is often called nowadays, more than anything else dispells the mistaken impression that Victorian church-men cloistered themselves within the secure and comfortable confines of university chambers, monastic communities, or gothic churches, contemplating the divine and forgetting 'this strange disease of modern life.' 'English Literary Romanticism and the Oxford Movement' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40 (1979), p.395.
3. Jay, *Reflected Lights*, Preface.
4. Arnold, M., *God and the Bible*, ed by R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), p.156.
5. Swiatecka, p.17.  
Swiatecka also traces the influence of the Coleridgean theory of symbol in three nineteenth-century theologians: Dean Inge, George Tyrrell and George Macdonald.
6. (p.viii) and (p.xx).
7. *Lectures on The Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1892), p.16.
8. Karl Barth, Preface to the first edition of *Romans*, from *New Frontiers in Theology*, vol II, *The New Hermeneutic*, ed. Robinson & Cobb (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 22 and 23.
9. James Cutsinger, *The Form of Transformed Vision: Coleridge and the Knowledge of God* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), p.31.
10. *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p.38.
11. *Idem*, p.53.
12. Lundin, Thiselton, Walhout, *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1985), p.7.
13. 'The Study of Poetry' *The Complete Works of Matthew Arnold*, vol.9, p.162.
14. Frye, N., *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.74.
15. 'Simple Surfaces' Kent (ed) p.208.
16. Barth, *Romans, The New Hermeneutic*, p.22.  
Lundin points out the similarity of Ricoeur's statement to the 'maxim of the medieval theologian St. Anselm: *Credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand).' *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics*, p.26. Hans Frei, in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* also points out a similar link between the reformers and modern theological trends: 'Calvin's doctrine of the Spirit's internal testimony points towards a frequently held modern theological

conviction that a fruitful paradoxical tension must be maintained between a close reading of the biblical text and a logically independent spiritual or existential appropriation of the Divine Word within the text.' p.21.

Cantalupo also recognises the mediating role Rossetti claims for the Holy Spirit in the production and reception of 'religious art', and Rossetti's 'curiously modern view of the autonomy of the reader.' 'Continuities of Faith and Style', p.299.

17. *Truth and Method*, p.262 and 261.
18. My own copy of *The face of the Deep*, (published 1892) bought by W.E. Torr of Eastham in 1900, is heavily marked in places, and apparently quoted in a sermon for 3rd Feb. 1901 'after the Queen's funeral.'
19. 'I cannot, in the end, agree that, as far as the exposition of the concept of 'symbol' is concerned, MacDonald begins where Coleridge leaves off. That task still remains to be accomplished.' Swiatecka, p.168. Here she is commenting on Stephen Prickett's claim that 'George Macdonald's conception of a symbol begins where Coleridge's left off.' *Romanticism and Religion*, p.230.
20. She was nervous even at the prospect of meeting another great poet. Packer, p.214.

## Appendix A

Christina Rossetti's unpublished notes on Genesis.

(Actual size)

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Genesis.

1. 20. margin elucidates creation of Fowls: & sea also, p. 2. Margin "builded" the woman, of the whole subject of the Church long since from an heretic side. Also consider
2. 19. of the Church long since from an heretic side. Also consider
6. 14. "forms shall them make, margin nests": to Noah, in command to build Ark.
7. 14. margin wing, for "of every sort".
- .. 17. The waters lift up the Ark above the earth.
8. 6. Window to the Ark, the single eye: but see 6. 16.
- .. 9. No rest for the sole of doves' foot; stranger & pilgrim. Her very sole print. She is not shut out, but pulled in; yet it is when she returns (or presents herself). Margin
- .. 11. The second time "the dove came in" - 4. 3. 8.
- .. 21. Was this in any measure a recinding of "Cursed is the ground for thy sake"?
9. 4. The law against eating blood includes beasts as well as man; beast, moreover, must make reparation for human life.
- .. 8-17. The Covenant of the Rainbow includes animals.
- .. 13. "My Bow" - words this suggest bow & arrows as an antithesis made of hunting, & thus familiar & intelligible?
11. 2. Margin 2 Samuel 6. 2., 1 Chronicles 13. 6. I do not see that these two references have any bearing on the text. The Ark of the Covenant actually being at Kirjath-jearim, David call Israel may equally be described as solemnly going thither or going thence to bring up the Ark. See marginal reading of text.
- .. 3. "they wisdom to another", margin "a man said to his neighbor may not this be a man (as Nimrod, prefiguring Antichrist)?" - not a mere idiom? - Consider also "burn them to a burning in margin".
14. 2. 8. Of the 4 Kings, him of Zow alone unnamed: e.g. The inevitableness of what is, & of what is not, told us

- Genesis.
- XV. 1. This is said to him who (ch. 14.) fights in rescue of his kinsman, & rejects the spoils.
- VIII. 1, 2. Though it was "the heat of the day" Abraham "ran".
- II. 11. Was this blindness transient: or were these sinners ab cut off from the rising of morning (15) & the sunrise on the earth (29)? as well as from the door. If so, note the 3 symbols of the
- IX. 7. "Because I thought..." Was this real judgment in a saint? In 4, 5 (ante) Abimelech appeals to his own integrity, & things favored his people's lightness of foot: at least part of his plea is allowed.
- XXII. 19. The son is caught by his horns, the outglory of his strength: so Christ by his own Excellence is constrained to save us.
- XXIV. 7. Fresh mention, I think, of "angel" ~~one of the cherubim of the flaming sword~~
11. The Candle kinelt: is it possible they thus unconsciously recorded Hiezer's (?) prayer? (Jorah 4. 2. "And also much cattle") & see also margin 22. 33. Y.
15. ~~Abimelech was a foreigner in a common sense to Isaac~~ Abimelech appears to have been half sister to Nahor, in the same sense that Sarah was half sister to Abraham, if a commentator is right who considers "Israh" XI. 29. to be another name for Sarah: but why think so? Such an opinion belongs to entail explaining II. 12. as using daughters for literally in modern language grand daughters: are there adequate grounds for so explaining it? & rendering unliteral Abimelech grandson ~~of Abraham~~ of Isaac?
15. 24, 47. These mentions of Hiezer show Brebekah to have belonged to Abraham's kindred (this both father & mother & ~~by the wife not the concubine~~): see XXII. 24.
- XXV. 18. And he (Abimelech) died in the presence... Margin gives Heb. "fell" - qu. did he "fall" in a bluish, as seems not unlikely for an Arab? The marg. ref. is to Ps. 78. 64, "Their priests fell by the sword --".
- XXVIII. 9. Perhaps the blind old father was remembering how his handsome son used to look getting off to the chariot: "Take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver & thy bow --".
- XXIX. 19, 20. Notice margin "the heart of Hiezer": does our text convey the same meaning by us as ours? Notice also "stole" in both occasions.
- XXIV. See margin "from east to west" & see also margin 22. 33. Y.

lay sleep on by (not itself in) "the way." Note that the rider falls backward.

"18. Here only Jacob cries out for salvation.

"31. "And there I buried Leah"; - not Rachel. A Tear for earthly love as vanity of vanities.

## Appendix B

The page from the manuscript of 'Treasure Trove' (Seek and Find) rejected by the SPCK.

(Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, FMK 25320 32x)

By permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum.

(32)

suspended planetary law: one having been wrought during the Jewish conquest of the land of promise; the other long afterwards, when Israel had ceased to be a kingdom & Judah was dwindling towards a penitential captivity. We read in the Book of Joshua (10. 12-14) how that hereafter to the Lord & his in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; & thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, & the moon stayed." A most true rather from oversight than from insight has, I believe occurred to some apprehensions the sun of this miracle. The latter, it has been alleged, needed to stand still in her real course round the sun, not the sun in his apparent course round the earth. Yet (noting merely for readers as unscientific as myself) it surely seems incredible that if one single member of a planet-group had been arrested while its associates whirled on, then the drawings & counter-drawings which apparently constitute the main-jointing of their motion would have lost balance, & no local victory but a general chaos must have ensued. And if it was no less imperative for sun & moon to stand still over Gibeon & Ajalon, then for Gibeon & Ajalon to pause; then no verbal inaccuracy remains, whatever may have been Joshua's knowledge or ignorance of astronomy. I have heard it suggested that Joshua himself understood the relations of sun & earth, but judged the moment inopportune for conveying such information to his hearers: but I am that except for a pious & reverent aim this solution appears to me as



## Appendix C

True in the Main.

TWO SKETCHES.

By Christina G. Rossetti.

I.

JOHN Meads, in a drunken fury, turned his wife out of their one room, and locked the door.

Poor woman, she was not far from her seventh confinement, and felt none the brighter or the brisker for that circumstance. She had nothing on but her night-dress, and being torn out of her bed and almost thrown on to the outside landing, there she sat huddled up, shivering and crying. Three of her five living children were locked in with their drunken father, and could not get at her to comfort her or help her in any way. So she could only shiver and cry till at last from sheer exhaustion she dropped off to sleep.

Next morning her husband, no longer furious, but sullen, slouched and stumbled down stairs to his day's work, without vouchsafing her a word or a look. Then she crept back into bed again; and Jack, her third son, aged eight, made and brought her a cup of very poor tea. The tea was poor, but the love with which he brought it sweetened it to her taste, and after they had cried together, they both felt better.

John Meads was a bricklayer, and now he had undertaken a long job of work some miles out of London, and did not mean to return home for several weeks to come. But of this his wife was not informed. Had she known it, it might have distressed her one way, and consoled her another. It was not easy to get on without his wages, but it was a perfect luxury to get on without himself: not even a good wife, and this poor woman was an excellent wife, can take pleasure in the company of a husband who growls and swears and sometimes kicks her, who brings home pence when he ought to bring shillings, who knocks the children about or smashes crockery in drunken rage, and who in drunken jealousy tosses clothes just washed into the coalscuttle. So poor Mrs. Meads, having merely a choice of discomforts, did not much care which lot befell her; and saw him or did not see him return, with a contented mind.

At length, however, the last day's washing was finished off, and the last washing money paid her, at any rate for some time to come: for in her one room and scanty bed she lay in of a wailing skinny little boy.

Jack, aged eight, was now the acting head of the house: for his elder brothers were out in the world, and the two below himself (not reckoning the new baby) were over young to be helpful. Jack could and did light the fire, make gruel, and look up a good natured woman to lend a hand occasionally to his mother. But who, at least till charing or laundry work could be resumed -- who was to earn money and make both ends meet? There appeared no one except himself, so clearly himself it must be. His mind was soon made up, and his plan matured. The good natured woman lent him a stump of a broom at a charge of a penny a-day, to be paid out of his earnings;"no earnings, no pay," was the wary agreement; and engaged even the first day to keep his secret even from his mother. So the very next morning after the baby's birth, Jack marched out to seek his fortune as crossing sweeper in a square.

He worked with a will, eking out a defective broom by energetic brushing. He did not beg of passers by; but his diligence and efficiency pleaded for him, and brought him pence and halfpence in a slender stream. Perhaps his appearance also pleaded for him, for he looked even younger than his years, being short and rosy and childish of aspect, as befitted a twin whose fellow-twin was dead. Such was Jack. And at night when he went home with sevenpence net after paying for the broom, and handed his earnings and told his secret to his mother, and when she blessed him and hugged him, and said she should not know which way to turn but for him, I do not suppose there were many happier boys in London than tired, hungry, muddy, honest Jack.

Day after day Jack returned to his crossing, and evening after evening he carried home halfpence, sometimes more, sometimes fewer, to his mother. An exceptional evening occurred on Saturdays, when Jack made a great bustle and slop, and washed up everything that came handy, including his juniors, in a leaky tub, and the floor, without much soap.

Now in that square where Jack swept lived a lady full of Christian love and good works. Several weeks before our hero's start in life she had noticed certain idle boys who played with brooms and begged in the neighbourhood, and she had done her utmost to induce them to attend school, promising to pay their school fees: but no, their idleness baffled her energetic good-will, and to school they would not go with any approach to regularity. But Jack had heard of that good chance wasted, and longed to secure for himself the lost opening and the discouraged friend. So touching his cap, and looking shy and pleasant, he one day accosted kind Miss M., who had already given him many a penny at his post, and asked her whether she could tell him of a night school into which he might gain admittance? "After his day's work," said he stoutly, ready to forego even coveted book-learning if incompatible with duty.

Miss M. stood still to listen. Yes, she knew of a night school not very far off, kept by certain Sisters who devoted their lives to praying, teaching, and other holy pursuits. She would speak for him to the head Sister, would pay his weekly fee, and provide for him such books as became necessary. What would be required on his part was regularity, painstaking, and strict obedience to rules. All this Jack promised. And thus occurred the turning-point of his life.

At the Sisters' school he learnt to read, write and cipher. Without being unusually clever, he read attentively, and took pains to recollect what he read. Thus he learnt many good and useful things. Best of all, he learnt the truths and duties of religion; and putting in practice what he was taught, he became even a better and still more affectionate son than heretofore to his much tried mother: who was deserted sometimes by her husband, or else at other times was driven by his brutality to keep out of his way if any how she could escape him. Jack remained under the good Sisters' eye till, after careful preparation, he was confirmed and admitted to Holy Communion.

But I will not attempt to follow step by step his prosperous career. As time went on the younger children began to earn something: and then their mother by washing and charring managed, all out together, to get on tolerably. Miss M. continued to help Jack in various ways and on many occasions; and not least when, the head Sister having found a place for him as a photographer's errand boy, money was wanted for his decent outfit. After serving the photographer faithfully, Jack met with an opening to transfer his service at advanced wages to a Medical Practitioner: so he did, and again thrived and acquired friends.

Meanwhile even John Meads, the selfish drunken father, came (we may trust) to repentance. Mortal disease, as so happens to drunkards, laid hold upon him before he was an old man; and then he grew desirous of home and home comforts, and a wife's kind nursing. His wife, poor woman, forgave and forgot; took him home, nursed him, and had the happiness of seeing him leave her for the great last time in a better mind.

When Jack was about twenty, his staunch friend Miss M. died; and knowing how truly she had loved and cared for him, I let him know of her death. Ere long he called upon me, by the act rather than by words expressing his respect and sympathy. He was now under butler, well dressed and prosperous looking, no longer rosy, but still short, doing well, and likely I trust to continue doing well until the final day of account, when "every man shall have praise of God," and when benefactors and benefactresses shall shine forth surrounded by those they have succoured as by a crown of rejoicing.

Surely we cannot doubt that Jack Meads is inheriting the blessing which rests on all who keep the fifth Commandment, that "first commandment with promise."

## II

MRS BATES was a far happier woman than poor Mrs.Meads, though I daresay the latter would not have exchanged her excellent Jack for the other's comforts.

Not that everything went smoothly with Mrs.Bates either. Her husband while still in the prime of life fell into almost desperate ill health, tottered on the brink of the grave, and all but tottered in. But they loved each other as married couples should do: and Mrs.Bates would no more have suffered him to end his days in the workhouse, that she would have crept into that unattractive refuge herself. Wherefore this valiant woman, who could neither read nor write, but who could and would work, strained every nerve to keep a roof over her dear William's head; bent upon letting him live, and (if so it must be) letting him die, in his own bed, and in the midst of his beloved children. She washed, she chared, she took in needlework, though no great hand at her needle; she made a shilling go as far as ever shilling went in London, and habitually owed not one penny to any single person.

Before William Bates quite lost his health, his wife lay in of twin girls: and these twins brought about an acquaintance which in the long run proved of essential service to the Bateses. A kind hearted old lady, who loved souls in general and babies in particular, heard of the duplicate baby Bates; and sent a beautiful bundle of baby clothes of her own making to help the mother. One thing grew out of another. Miss M. (the old lady's niece) conceived a warm friendship with the Bateses; and used her affectionate influence over them with such good effect, that in time she led both husband and wife, after earnest preparation, to be confirmed, and to become devout and habitual communicants. Thenceforward they in their turn became messengers of good within their own circle: and (please God) at the Day of Resurrection some will rise with them who owe to them, under God, eternal gratitude.

Now by this time at which I am writing, the worst of their troubles I hope are over. William Bates, beyond all probability, has so far recovered health and strength as to be able to undertake and carry on (though not without assistance) the duties of organ blower in his district church. Mrs. Bates fulfils a regular engagement as cleaner in another church, where the pew-opener is her helpful friend; and besides this she washes, and more especially irons, for a small connection of paying customers. Her elder daughter, aged nineteen, was married last Easter to a steady young man in constant work: while Bessie, the younger daughter (one of the twins, and rapidly growing up) is willing and competent in some measure to take her sister's place by becoming their good mother's right hand and assistant. These few persons, four in all, or, reckoning the son-in-law, five, now make up the entire Bates family: and Bessie having been confirmed this year, all five enjoyed the privilege of receiving Holy Communion together on a recent Sunday.

Yet when I began to write about this exemplary family, I was thinking more especially of two children who died a dozen years or so ago, -- Bill, and little twin Rose. Bill was an admirable and endearing boy: his uncommonly pretty face seemed aptly to express his beautiful soul. He lived to be about ten years old; and then died of scarlet fever, wringing his mother's heart, and nevermore to be forgotten by her. Besides my general knowledge of his being good and dear, I recollect in particular how in the house where at that time the Bates lodged, he has been known voluntarily and out of his own proper turn, to undertake the weekly cleaning of the common entrance or staircase, in order to spare a fellow-lodger who was an old woman, and who must otherwise have toiled through her work in question.

Very soon after Bill's death, which took place in an Infirmary, little Rose, still scarcely more than a baby, sickened of that same dreadful fever: and she grew so afraid of being sent away from all she loved, that she lay quiet and uncomplaining in hopes of not calling attention to her suffering plight; and only when she thought herself unobserved would she stretch out her poor little fever hand to reach for a mouthful of drink. And thus she did at least contrive to die in her own home.

Keen as is the grief of bereaved parents, I trust both father and mother are ready from the depths of their heart to bless God for these dear children.

"Is it well with the child?....It is well."

*(Dawn of Day, May 1, 1882, pp.57-59 and June 1882, pp.69-70)*

## Appendix D

## A HARMONY ON FIRST CORINTHIANS XIII.

I do not know whether an empty season ever befalls "New and Old," but in such a case perhaps you might think my enclosure worth looking at. 1 *Cor.*xiii. with illustrative texts was suggested to me as an exercise last Lent. The *Chapter* I thought of myself; the particular treatment was suggested in part or wholly to me.

Christina G. Rossetti.

## CHARITY

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long,

and is kind;

Charity envieth not;

## OUR LORD

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."--*S.John* xvi.12.

Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but humbled Himself, and became obedient unto the death of the Cross for our sakes.-- *Phil.*ii.6-8.

Christ poured out His Soul unto death, bearing the sin of many: He shall see of the travail of His Soul, and shall be satisfied. Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor.-- *Isa.* liii. 11, 12; *Cor.* viii.9.

"Suffer ye thus far."--*S.Luke* xxii.51.

Our Lord Healed the ear of Malchus.--*S.Luke* xxii.51; *S.John* xviii. 10.

"He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do."--*S.John* xvi.12.

## HIS SCHOOL

S.Paul would rather speak to edification, than in an unknown tongue. -- *1 Cor.* xiv.19.

Faith, by itself, casts not out fear; Devils believe, and tremble:"but perfect love casteth out fear." -- *S.James* ii.19; *1 S.John* iv.18.

God desires mercy and not sacrifice. -- *S.Matt.*ix.13; *Hosea* vi.6.

S.Paul pleaded his former persecuting zeal in excuse of his countrymen. -- *Acts* xxvi.29.

S.Paul wished unmixed good to King Agrippa and his company. -- *Acts* xxvi. 29

Martha called Mary, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.-- *S.John* xi.28.

Charity vaunteth not  
itself,

"Man, who made Me a  
judge or a divider over  
you?"--*S.Luke* xii.14.

S.John bears  
witness that the  
Lord said not, "He  
shall not die; but,  
If I will that he  
tarry till I come,  
what is that to  
thee?"--*S.John* xxi.23.

is not puffed up.

"I am meek and lowly  
in heart."--*S.Matt.* xi.  
29.

The Centurion sent  
friends to our Lord,  
saying, "I am not  
worthy that Thou  
shouldest enter  
under my roof:  
wherefore neither  
thought I myself  
worthy to come unto  
Thee."--*S.Luke* vii.6,7.

Doth not behave  
itself unseemly,

The Child Jesus sat  
among the Doctors, both  
hearing them and asking  
them questions.--*S.Luke*  
ii.46.

We must render to  
all their due, be it  
tribute, custom,  
fear, or honour.--  
*Rom.* xiii.7.

seeketh not her own,

"Not My Will; but  
Thine, be done."--  
*S.Luke* xxii.42.

S.Paul forewent  
the comfort of  
Onesimus's atten-  
dance.--*Phil.* 12-14.

is not easily provoked,

"If I have spoken  
evil, bear witness of  
the evil: but if well,  
why smitest thou Me?"--  
*S.John* xviii.23.

Blessed are the  
meek.--*S.Matt.* v.5.

thinketh no evil:

"Neither hath this man  
sinned, nor his parents:  
but that the works of  
God should be made  
manifest in him."--  
*S.John* ix,3.

The Writer to the  
Hebrews says: "But,  
beloved, we are  
persuaded better  
things of you, and  
things that  
accompany salvation,  
though we thus  
speak."--*Heb.* vi.9.

rejoiceth not in  
iniquity,

Our Lord, being  
grieved for the hard-  
ness of their hearts,  
looked with anger on  
the men who surrounded  
Him.--*S.Mark* iii.5.

S.Paul wept when  
he spake of the  
enemies of the Cross  
of Christ.--  
*Phil.* iii.18.

but rejoiceth in the  
truth;

Jesus rejoiced in  
spirit, and said, I  
thank Thee, O Father,  
Lord of Heaven and  
earth, that Thou hast  
hid these things from  
the wise and prudent, and  
hast revealed them unto  
babes: even so, Father,  
for so it seemed good in  
Thy sight.-- *S.Luke x.21.*

S.John writes:"I  
have no greater joy  
than to hear that my  
children walk in  
truth."--2 *S.John 4.*

beareth all things,

Christ bare our sins  
in His own Body on the  
tree.--1 *S. Pet.ii.24.*

The care of all  
the Churches came  
daily upon S.Paul.--  
2 *Cor. xi.28.*

believeth all things,

"Friend, wherefore  
art thou come?"--  
*S.Matt. xxvi.50.*

S.Paul believed  
that his Philippian  
converts had lacked  
not care for him but  
opportunity.--*Phil.*  
iv.10.

hopeth all things,

"Lord, let it alone  
this year also, till I  
shall dig about it and  
dung it: and if it bear  
fruit, well." *S.Luke*  
xiii.8,9.

The Penitent Thief  
prayed:"Lord, remem-  
ber me when Thou  
comest into Thy  
kingdom."--*S.Luke*  
xxiii.42.

endureth all things.

Jesus for the joy  
that was set before  
Him endured the Cross,  
despising the shame.--  
*Heb. xii.2.*

"He that shall  
endure unto the end,  
the same shall be  
saved."--*S.Matt.*  
xxiv.13.

Charity never faileth.  
.....

Our Lord having loved  
His own which were in  
the world, loved them  
unto the end.--*S.John*  
xiii.1.

S.Peter, fore-  
warned of his own  
approaching death,  
ceased not to stir  
up his flock.--  
2 *S.Pet.i.13,14.*

And now abideth faith,

"O Righteous Father,  
the world hath not  
known Thee: but I have  
known Thee, and these  
have known that Thou  
hast sent me."--  
*S.John xvii.25.*

"Behold, what  
manner of love the  
Father hath bestowed  
upon us, that we  
should be called the  
Sons of God: There-  
fore the world  
knoweth us not,  
because it knew Him  
not."-- 1 *S.John*  
iii.1.



hope,

"Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me."--*S. John* xvii.24.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."-- 1 *S. John* iii.2,3.

charity, these three;

"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth."--*S. John* xvii. 19.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."--1 *S. John* iv. 7.

but the greatest of these is charity.

"I have declared unto them Thy Name, and will declare It: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."--*S. John* xvii.26.

"God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."--1 *S. John* iv. 16.

(*New and Old*, VII, (Feb 1879), pp. 34-39)

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#### Abbreviations

- JPRS* *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*
- PMLA* *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America*
- VN* *Victorian Newsletter*
- VP* *Victorian Poetry*
- VS* *Victorian Studies*
- MLR* *Modern Language Review*

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