THE THREAD OF PETRARCHAN LOVE IN THE RELIGIOUS SONNETS OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
July, 1993

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE

One of Rossetti's most widely acclaimed works is the sonnet sequence Monna Innominata. Using this sequence as the backdrop for a study of the Petrarchan influences in Rossetti's religious sonnets, I maintain that she takes Petrarch's beloved donna outside the Italian tradition and uses this character's voice as an intertextual link between the sonnets. Rossetti's sonnets contain the traditional Petrarchan conventions of the inspiring and beautiful face of the beloved, the barrier between the lover and the beloved, and the lover's desire for union with his beloved to alter the tradition. She presents the donna and her new lover, Christ, as both the beloved and the lover. Christ promises her a reciprocal love which inspires her patience and religious devotion. The promise also creates anticipation for the donna's union with Christ to come later when she is in heaven. Rossetti uses the Petrarchan influences to argue for the supremacy of Christ as the ultimate lover, thus presenting the Petrarchan tradition as less attractive than the more ancient biblical one.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many individuals who helped me with this thesis and the coursework. In particular, I want to thank my major advisor, Dr. Linda Austin, for her guidance, encouragement, understanding, and

time. Her expertise in the Victorian period, particularly in the Pre-Raphaelites and women writers of that period, was an invaluable aid to this study. I also wish to thank Dr. Austin and the other committee members, Dr. Randi Eldevik and Dr. Elizabeth Grubgeld, for taking time out of their busy schedules to read and discuss the text and its revisions.

I cannot name the many family members and friends who have encouraged me throughout my graduate work. To Channa Anderson and Nancy Bell-LaBrue, thank you for being such great roommates and letting me hide the dining table with all my books and papers. To Fari Rider, Loretta Wideman, Rosie Yandell, Mark Chaplin, Bev Redhead, and Pastor and Sharon Ash, thank you for all your prayers. To my brother and sister, Steve, Sandy and Kim, thanks for believing I could do this. To Mom and Bob, thank you for all the phone calls, cards, and letters encouraging me to keep writing. Your strong shoulders carried me once again. Finally, to my former students now scattered here in Oklahoma and around the world, thank you for inspiring me to finish my coursework.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are frequently used throughout the text in referring to certain sonnet sequences or texts.

FL	The Family Letters of Christina Rossetti (W. M. Rossetti)
LL	Later Life
MI	Monna Innominata
OD	Out of the Deep Have I Called Unto Thee, O Lord
TL	The Thread of Life

All quotations from Christina Rossetti's poetry are taken from R. W. Crump's three-volume edition, The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti. The quotations from Petrarch are taken from the 1946 Pantheon edition of Songs and Sonnets.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The daughter of a Dante scholar and the sister of poet-painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti and writer William Michael Rossetti, Christina Rossetti seemed destined to literary recognition. Her grandfather privately printed her first volume of poetry in 1847 when she was seventeen years old. The next year, she gained public recognition of her skills when two poems were published in the October issue of the Athenaeum. Several other poems were printed in the 1849 issues of the Germ (Stevenson 90). She held an honorary member status in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and Swinburne dedicated a volume of poetry to her, but it was not her Pre-Raphaelite connections which brought her recognition. Instead, it was the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1861 and the next year's publication of Goblin Market, and Other Poems which established Christina Rossetti as "England's foremost woman poet" (Stevenson 107).

Rossetti wrote over 1100 poems in her lifetime, nearly half of them religious in nature. Yet, when Virginia Woolf praised the beauty and skill of "poems that sing like music in one's ears" (264), Woolf joined the ranks of many critics who acknowledge the skill and artistry of Rossetti's poems

but who refuse to give more than a cursory discussion to her overtly religious poetry. One episode is related in which Virginia Woolf revealed her assumption that religion could not have been an important influence upon Rossetti's poetry when she asked Violet Dickinson to write Rossetti's own thoughts about Christianity and the influence it had upon her poetry in the space of a single postcard (Cantalupo 274). A more recent critic, though, declares that she "has a place not far from the highest among religious poets" (Bowra 246).[1] Yet, most twentieth-century critics usually consider her religious poems too conventional with "scarcely an original thought in any of them" (Green 332) or too narrow in their scope (G. Rossetti 116). Woolf's question to Dickinson illustrates a familiar concern in Rossetti scholarship with details about Rossetti's life and the influence her life had upon her work.[2] Although she was a deeply religious woman, few critics have given serious consideration to her religious poems.

The numerous biographical and psychological approaches to her poetry have shared in this general dismissal of her religious work, but the recent publication of R. W. Crump's three-volume variorum edition of Rossetti's poetry and the increased emphasis in text-centered criticism have reinforced the nineteenth-century evaluations of Rossetti as a skillful artist who wrote both secular and religious poems.[3] Contemporary critics now agree that her religious poetry is more important than it was earlier considered to be. They are

endeavoring to situate her religious work within an appropriate context, noting that an understanding of the elements in her religious poems will help clarify her secular poems. This intertextual approach has opened the way for studies in both religious and literary areas. Critics and scholars are now discussing the specific theological, cultural, and literary elements of Rossetti's poems.[4]

One literary area, the sonnet tradition, has begun to capture the attention of Rossetti scholars in more recent years, due to the popularity of her well-known sonnets, "The World" and "If Only" and the sonnet sequences, Monna Innominata and Later Life[5]. The two sequences and several sonnets have been studied individually, but few studies have focused upon the sonnets as a group, even though Rossetti's skill as a sonnet writer did not pass unnoticed. One nineteenth-century reviewer in the Athenaeum comments upon the inclusion of "some charming sonnets" in A Pageant, and Other Poems. He continues his review, writing that "as a sonnet-writer Miss Rossetti takes a place entirely her own" (328). Although William T. Going notes that her religious sonnet sequence, Out of the Deep Have I Called Unto Thee, "reflects in her almost flawless sonnet technique the deep convictions of her Christian faith" (29), no study has appeared dealing exclusively with the religious sonnets.

However, there can be little wonder about a woman who emerges as one of the nineteenth-century's great sonnet writers when she proved herself the master of the Rossetti

children's favorite game - writing bout-rime sonnets. Her prowess continued into adulthood, filling her manuscript pages with over 125 individual sonnets and 7 sonnet sequences containing another 72 sonnets. Most of these sonnets are devotional in content, but they draw heavily from the Italian sonnet tradition.

Recent studies have delineated the Dantean and Petrarchan influences in her sonnets, especially in Monna Innominata.[6] Among the many elements and allusions Rossetti gleans from Dante, the two most important elements include the presentation of the beloved leading the lover to salvation and the fulfillment of an idealized love and the role that art plays in the redemption of the lover. With her father, sister, and both brothers writing articles and books about Dante, Rossetti had little recourse except to be "sucked into the Dantean vortex" herself (FL 188), and both Antony H. Harrison and William Whitla have shown how Dante was more of an influence than Petrarch upon Rossetti's poetry. Yet, as fundamental as the allusions to Dante and his influence are to her presentation of love, she was also well-versed in the traditions of the troubadours and Petrarch.[7] She skillfully takes elements from various traditions and molds them into a powerful argument in behalf of the aspiration of Christ's love over that of an earthly Petrarchan lover.

Rather than reciting Whitla and Harrison's valuable studies of the Dantean influences upon Rossetti's poetry, I would like to give a more detailed description of the

Petrarchan conventions she uses in her religious sonnets and how these conventions help her to contrast earthly love with heavenly love. Using Monna Innominata as the backdrop for an intertextual development of the Petrarchan conventions, I will discuss her use of the love object, the barrier between the lovers, and the relationship of fleshly love with spiritual love. Numerous examples of the Petrarchan conventions exist in the body of her poetry, but I will concentrate upon the sonnet sequences, Monna Innominata, Later Life and Out of the Deep Have I Called Unto Thee, O Lord, and several poems, notably "After Communion," "Lord, dost Thou look on me," and "Who have a form of godliness." From time to time, examples are derived from the lyric poems to show the breadth of Rossetti's development of the Petrarchan conventions.

Most of the sonnets used in this study were first published in the 1881 edition of A Pageant, and Other Poems, the 1892 edition of Poems, New and Enlarged Edition, and the 1893 edition of Verses. Reprinted from "Called to be Saints," "Time Flies," "The Face of the Deep". "After Communion" was written in 1866 and added to the 1875 edition of Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems. Due to the difficulty in dating Rossetti's works, an appendix containing the bibliographic information R. W. Crump supplies in her volumes has been included for each poem used in this study.

CHAPTER II

SPEAKING ELOQUENCE:
THE SILENT OBJECT SPEAKS OUT IN MONNA INNOMINATA

Christina Rossetti's father was not the only family member to influence her poetry. The marks of her mother's and sister's Christian faith and of her brothers' Pre-Raphaelite perspectives have been carefully blended with her father's Italian influences to create an enigmatic body of poetry sometimes difficult to label. Recent scholars have situated her poems within various contexts: the seventeenth-century Metaphysicals, the Romantics, the Pre-Raphaelites, the Tractarians, the Victorians, the women poets, and the Italian and Elizabethan sonnet traditions.[8] Yet, she does not reside well in any one camp. Instead, she seems an amalgam of all these contexts. Her poems do reveal the marks of George Herbert, Dante, John Keble, John Keats, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, but she uses their influences to create her own distinctive voice.

Nowhere in her poetry is that voice more pronounced than in Monna Innominata. First published in the 1881 edition of A Pageant, and Other Poems, it has since joined the ranks of other great Victorian sonnet sequences: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Songs from the Portuguese, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's

House of Life, and George Meredith's Modern Love. Following the sonnet tradition, she explores the many facets of love through the experiences of a lover and a love object. Using the traditional conventions of a poet-lover trying to woo the beloved through poetry, yet being separated by an uncrossable barrier, and realizing after the beloved's death that love must be transformed from fleshly to spiritual love, she makes key alterations to the conventions in order to give a more Christian presentation of the Petrarchan tradition.

The first alteration Rossetti makes to the traditional Petrarchan format of the sonnet sequence occurs in the first few lines of Monna Innominata when the beloved cries to her lover, "Come back to me." In one single line, Rossetti arouses from silence the Petrarchan love object. Seeming to follow the practice of painters like her brother Dante Gabriel, she chooses a woman normally portrayed in the background and places her in the foreground to tell her story. In the introduction to the sequence, she acknowledges the greatness of Dante and Petrarch but criticizes their beloved Beatrice and Laura as "scant of attractiveness." Silent love objects cannot be attractive because, as Harrison notes, their silence renders them "powerless to respond to their lovers" (Context 156). A voice, though, allows the love object to gain power and equality.[9] No longer does the donna remain silent before her Petrarchan lover. She makes known her own desires, helping Rossetti to create a sequence of sonnets "drawn not from fancy but from feeling." In direct contrast

to the Victorian "angel of the house," Rossetti creates a female character with a mind and will of her own.

After Laura died, Petrarch realized he should have given up his love for Laura in exchange for God's love. He laments his "past history . . . spent in the love of mortal things" (CCCLXV.1-2) and reprimands himself for not spending his life "applied to better use" (CCCLXIV.10). When the donna innominata speaks to her lover, though, she advises him to seek spiritual love. He does not need to wait until her death before he seeks that higher love. She offers him an opportunity to escape his remorse "for that error. . .that nearly slew / The seed of virtue" (CCCLXIV.6-7). If he follows her advice he will have ample time to apply his life to seeking God's love and leaving "more worthy proofs" of himself (CCCLXV.4).

Monna Innominata contains many of the same conventions found in traditional sonnet sequences - the images of the world, first meetings, the seasons, dreams, and singing contests - but Rossetti continues the alterations to the Petrarchan tradition she began with the "speaking" donna.[10] When the lady-speaker declares in the first sonnet, "For one man in my world of all the men / This wide world holds; O love, my world is you" (MI 1.7-8), she seems to trade places with Petrarch who finds his world within Laura's glance and to become the lover herself. But as this new lover ponders their first meeting, she does not share Petrarch's memories. Although he blesses "the day, the month, the year, / And the

season, the time, the hour, the point, / And the country" when they first met (LXI.1-3), she grieves over her inability to remember their first meeting. She answers Petrarch's exaltation of her eyes and their powerful gaze: "So blind was I to see and to foresee /. . ./ It seemed to mean so little, meant so much" (MI 2.6,12). She searches her memory for the moment they met, longing to remember the "first touch of hand in hand" (MI 2.14), but she cannot recall it. All her search reveals is their mutual love. Although she loved the lover first, she acknowledges that his love was greater than hers, for he sang "a loftier song [which] drowned the friendly cooings of my dove" (MI 4.2-3). The existence and development of love appears inextricably linked to the presentation of that love in art. Considering the bulk of their works, both Petrarch and Rossetti seem to believe that love has little or no existence unless it has been articulated in some way. In sonnet 4, the song remains as a proof for their love. The beloved <u>donna</u> can now respond more adequately to the lover's wooing with her own poetic voice.

> "Love me, for I love you"--and answer me,
> "Love me, for I love you"--so shall we stand
> As happy equals in the flowering land
> Of love, that knows not a dividing sea. (MI 7.1-4)

Rossetti achieves an equality between the lover and the beloved when the lady breaks her silence. In that one cry, "Come back to me," the <u>donna</u> reveals the "poetic aptitude" Rossetti "imagined" her to share with her lover.

Through the mutual love of her lady-speaker and the lover, Rossetti begins to undermine the unrequited love so fundamental to the Petrarchan tradition. However, rather than rewriting the entire tradition, she first introduces the barrier which both separates the two lovers and maintains Petrarch's convention of unrequited love. She contends that the lovers could not be joined in their love on earth because the lady aspired for the spiritual love of agape more than eros. Throughout the sonnets of Monna Innominata, Rossetti's poet-speaker declares that she cannot offer her Petrarchan lover the love he desires because she lacks an adequate measure of love to fill him. Therefore, she commends him back to God, "whose love your love's capacity can fill" (MI 13.14). She cannot requite her lover's love, but she does carry it with her, declaring "I cannot love you if I love not Him, / I cannot love Him if I love not you" (MI 6.13-14). Although she has renounced her Petrarchan lover for God's love, she recognizes that his love enriches her own love for God. Rather than showing the spiritual love obliterating the physical, Rossetti's donna chooses a love in which agape has absorbed eros, allowing the presentation of a new lover who is both physical and spiritual. In his own sonnets, Petrarch finally realizes that an earthly beloved cannot begin to compare with God, so Rossetti contends that the beloved and her lover must renounce one another as they seek agape. Their mutual renunciation then becomes, as Rossetti

states in the introduction to Monna Innominata, a barrier "held sacred by both."

After erecting this "sacred" barrier, Rossetti returns her lady-speaker to the position of the silent object. In the last sonnet of Monna Innominata, the donna laments the return of her silent position.

> Youth gone and beauty gone, what doth remain?
> A silent heart whose silence loves and longs;
> The silence of a heart which sang its songs
> While youth and beauty made a summer morn,
> Silence of love that cannot sing again. (MI 14.9-14)

Having renounced her lover for Christ and having directed him to seek Christ's love, the donna finds herself alone on earth. No Petrarchan lover remains to woo her; therefore, she need not reply at the end of Monna Innominata. She returns to her silent position. After altering the Petrarchan tradition to allow the beloved to speak, Rossetti now closes Monna Innominata within the conventions of that sonnet tradition she had so radically challenged in the opening beckon to the Petrarchan lover, "Come back to me."

The eloquence Rossetti infuses into Monna Innominata through her "speaking" love object who becomes a lover cannot remove the centuries-old sonnet tradition, but she can use it to introduce a significant intertextual twist within her own sonnets. The lady-speaker who becomes a lover in Monna Innominata can be seen throughout Rossetti's religious sonnets wooing the Heavenly Beloved, Jesus Christ who himself becomes

her lover. The conventions Petrarch used, Rossetti uses: the appeal to the eyes and the attributes of a physical lover, the seemingly insurmountable barrier which separates the lovers, and the change from eros to a form of agape. Ultimately, Rossetti is able to create a sonnet tradition which uses the traditional conventions to illustrate the equality, unity, and reciprocity of her sonnet lovers and their love.[11]

Rossetti's "speaking" love object succeeds in presenting this altered tradition because she can explain why the great sonneteers never found their love requited: the lover and his lady hold a sacred barrier between themselves. Although the lover's love remains unrequited throughout the sonnet sequence, Rossetti sets forth a new beloved, God, who requites her love. The lady lover then rejects pure erotic passion for an interfusion of erotic and spiritual passion, thus accomplishing what Dante, and Petrarch to a lesser degree, desire in their sonnets, the elevation of earthly love to a more spiritual love.

At the conclusion of his deconstructionist essay on Monna Innominata, William Whitla contends that Rossetti's poet-speaker withdraws from her eloquent position to remain the silent donna innominata (131). His argument maintains its validity only when the sonnet sequence is considered distinct from the body of Rossetti's other poems. The relationships between the sonnets in Monna Innominata are obvious, but those sonnets also relate to other poems and sequences. In recent years, both Dolores Rosenblum and David A. Kent

have argued that Rossetti consciously sequences her poems in their published editions.[12] This conscious placement of Rossetti's poems alongside one another to create a more unified and deliberate development of themes and motifs also enables the donna to leave her silent position at the end of Monna Innominta to be heard again in an eloquent position in other poems.

In the case of her sonnets, an intertextual approach such as Antony H. Harrison suggests in his book, Christina Rossetti in Context, helps the reader to recognize a larger scheme of ideological development than the fourteen sonnets of Monna Innominata. The conventions she explores in this sequence extend throughout the body of her poetry. Drawing from the Italian sonnet tradition, she chooses a well-known but little understood persona, Petrarch's silent object, to serve as the voice behind many of her religious sonnets. The mystery surrounding what the beloved would say if she did speak creates a platform from which the one who has heard all the love arguments postulated throughout the centuries can now give an answer for her own actions and a description of true love. The beloved lends an authoritative voice to the poet's own ideas about love, as Rossetti returns again and again to one of her greatest poetic characters, the donna innominata.

CHAPTER III

THE VISION BEATIFICAL:
ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL AND PHYSICAL LOVER

Like the Petrarchan and Elizabethan sonneteers before her, Rossetti follows the convention of appealing to the physical characteristics of her beloved. The medieval idea that the eyes revealed a person's soul explains Petrarch's appeal to Laura's eyes. Lu Emily Pearson gathers some of Petrarch's descriptions into a catalog, showing how meticulously the poet describes each aspect of her eyes as more beautiful and divine than those of any other beloved.

> Her eyes are sweet and kind, beaming with unconquered glances like stars. They reflect the brightness of Heaven, brilliant, ardent, enchanting, twin stars tranquil through their celestial radiance. Her face is resplendent with the sweetness showered on it, and is the brightest the sun ever shone on, and the sunny golden tresses, radiant as those of some sylvan queen or fountain nymph, make the flashing noonday sun darken with envy as the wind blows them into a thousand ringlets and shows their burnished gold. (35)

Rossetti counters this catalog of Laura's beauty throughout her sonnets, as she appeals to the eyes, face, hands, feet,

and heart of her beloved, Jesus Christ. In her sonnet sequence, Later Life (II: 138-150), she asserts that "we feel and see with different hearts and eyes (LL 8.1)," but that Christ has given eyes to see him. She requests that Christ "grant [her] eyes to see" him and his love clearly (OD, "Lord, grant us eyes to see and ears to hear;" II: 184).

For Rossetti, though, to see Christ is to see him with the eyes of desire. The poet-speaker longs not only for his gaze but also for the sight necessary to see that gaze. In "Lord, dost Thou look on me, and will not I" (II, 207), she compares her heavenly beloved ith her Petrarchan lover, using the same appeal to Christ's physical characteristics as she would use in discussing her earthly lover. The presentation of these physical attributes, though, reveals that the two partners are both beloved and lover. Rossetti portrays each partner seeking the gaze of the other.

Lord, dost Thou look on me, and will not I
  Launch out my heart to Heaven to look on Thee?
  Here if one loved me I should turn to see,
And often think on him and often sigh,
And by a tender friendship make reply
  To love gratuitous poured forth on me,
  And nurse a hope of happy days to be,
And mean "until we meet" in each good-bye.
Lord, Thou dost look and love is in Thine Eyes,
  Thy Heart is set upon me day and night,
    Thou stoopest low to set me far above:

O Lord, that I may love Thee make me wise;
That I may see and love Thee grant me sight;
And give me love that I may give Thee love.

While comparing her responses to Christ with the responses she would normally make to an earthly lover, the donna enhances the physical presence of her lover and the power that presence exerts upon her. She can see the love in Christ's eyes and acknowledges his gaze, but that acknowledgement creates a desire within her to see his gaze again and to return his gaze with her own. The profound power sight has upon love compels her to pray for a greater vision of Christ in line 13: "That I may see and love Thee grant me sight." In "Light of Light" (OD, II: 188), she links the eyes, desire, and love more explicitly when she writes, "Who looks on Thee looks full on his desire, Who looks on Thee looks full on Very Love" (lines 9-10).

Rossetti furthers the link between sight, desire, and love in two of her lyric poems: "The Descent from the Cross" (II: 153) and "Thou art Fairer than the Children of Men" (II: 201). Both of these poems exalt the face of Christ and place it within the realm of epic glory. In the poem, "The Descent from the Cross," the speaker asks, "Is this the Face that thrills with awe /. . ./ Is this the Face without a flaw, / The Face that is the Face of Love? /. . ./ This Face the Face of Jesus Christ" (lines 1,3,4,6). Opening with uncertainty and disbelief, the poem closes with the assurance that she has indeed seen the right face. Christ satisfied

God's love when he died for the beloved, but what response will the assurance of having seen his face elicit from her? Will the face of Christ inspire her to great deeds? What effect will his sight and desire have upon her own love? Rossetti's donna answers the challenge in "The Descent from the Cross" with her worship of that face in "Thou Art Fairer than the Children of Men." In this poem, her awe gives way to love when she worships his beauty and character.

A rose, a lily, and the Face of Christ
  Have all our hearts sufficed:
For He is Rose of Sharon nobly born,
  Our Rose without a thorn;
And He is Lily of the Valley, He
  Most sweet in purity.
But when we come to name Him as He is,
  Godhead, Perfection, Bliss,
All tongues fall silent, while pure hearts alone
  Complete their orison.

The voice declaring her love for Christ in these two lyrical poems sounds like the voice of Rossetti's donna. She has again come face to face with Christ and now, "face answering face" ("Behold a Shaking," line 5; II: 156), she records the beauty she sees in that face. She exchanges her position as the love object for that of the Petrarchan lover when she addresses Christ as a "rose" and a "lily." Christ becomes the beloved, "most sweet in purity." The looked for response in "The Descent from the Cross" here presents itself in the

assertion of the poet-speaker as the lover rather than the object. Now, while the face of Christ inspires her, she can present her "orison" in the "poetic aptitude" of the Petrarchan tradition.

Therefore, receiving the Divine Look becomes the focus of Rossetti's appeal to the physical aspects of her lover. The donna repeats the urgency of Petrarch's pleas for Laura to look favorably upon him when she pleads for Christ to look upon her in the sonnet, "Cried out with Tears" (OD, II: 185).

Lord, must I perish, I who look to Thee?
Look Thou upon me, bid me live, not die;
Say "Come," say not "Depart," tho' Thou art just:
Yea, Lord, be mindful how out of the dust
I look to Thee while Thou dost look on me,
Thou Face to face with me and Eye to eye. (lines 9-14)

The plea for Christ's look becomes a plea for life. The donna, like the Petrarchan lover who precedes her, attributes the power of life and death to a gaze from the one she loves. Petrarch describes the power of Laura's love as being "caught between two cruel arms / That unjustly slay me" (CLXXI.1-2). That power is far more debilitating than he imagines. He says, "This lady with her eyes could kindle, stir, / Rhine when it freezes, [or] break a rugged rock" (lines 5-6). With such power in mind, Rossetti allows her donna innominata to speak words of awe, fear, and praise for the "thrilling" face of Christ. His is the only face which can satisfy her

heart. Although Rossetti's speaker shares with Petrarch a sense of her own unworthiness to receive the beloved's love, she continues to raise a clarion call for her beloved Christ to gaze upon her in love.

The appeal to the eyes, face, and gaze of Christ help to create a physical, heavenly lover. Rossetti does more than simply make a spiritual lover more physical. In her presentation of Christ as the lover, she portrays him with a physical body capable of eliciting physical responses from the donna. In the sonnet, "Surely He hath borne our griefs" (II: 203), Rossetti's speaker unites with Christ's body and compares her own body with his. She identifies the soreness of her heart with Christ's heart. Her weary feet cannot measure up to Christ's bleeding ones. Her grief becomes "pleasure with a subtle taste" when she considers the grief she sees in Christ's face. The response to his body is not limited to the donna. She includes the saints, Christ's many lovers, to respond to his physical characteristics as they gather around his "blessed Feet" and "face the Vision Beatifical" (OD, "Lord, make us all love all," lines 5,14; II: 183). Like earthly lovers, the saints may stand with him "hand in hand" and "heart in heart" (OD, "Lord, grant us eyes to see," line 5; II: 185), but physical closeness is not enough for the donna. She desires to share the love she has found with other believers, so she asks Christ to bring more saints to himself, "such as once Thy Hand / Gathered, Thy Shoulders bore, Thy Heart caressed" ("Lord, hast Thou so

loved us," lines 13-14; II: 201). Finally, Rossetti's poet-speaker joins all the saints in assuring Christ that his "wounded Hands" have signaled a mutual reponse in prayer to "clasp and cling / To hold [him] fast and not to let [him] go" ("New creatures, the Creator still the same," lines 10-11; II: 195). In Rossetti's poetry, love remains as long as the lover and beloved continue to look upon one another and to respond to each other physically. This blending of erotic and spiritual responses may be the "attractiveness" Rossetti suggests Laura and Beatrice lack in her introduction to Monna Innominata. Rossetti cannot show Christ's actual physical attraction because she has not seen him. She has only felt him in a spiritual sense, but Christ's responsiveness enables him to fill her "love's capacity" (MI 13.14). She can now return his love both verbally and physically, providing Rossetti with a woman far more attractive than Laura and Beatrice.

Rossetti continues altering Petrarch's love conventions and the attainment of love when she presents Christ as a reciprocal lover. The poet-speaker struggles through the time of separation in this life and denies herself the knowledge of erotic love, but she does not deny herself a requited love with Christ. This great alteration of the Petrarchan convention of unrequited love allows Rossetti to strengthen her argument for seeking Christ's love rather than an earthly lover's love. Throughout her sonnets, Christ's love is deeper than earthly love because he can offer her mutuality in love.

He is presented as wooing her and is never really satisfied until he can have her and the other saints with him in heaven. In "Ah Lord, Lord, if my heart were right with Thine" (II: 186), one of the sonnets of Out of the Deep Have I Called Unto Thee, O Lord, the donna speaks of heaven as a place of loss to Christ if the saints are not there. For the saints, there is no other heaven because it is the place which Christ will share with them "thro' all eternity, / With [them] long sought, long loved, and much forgiven" (lines 13-14; II: 186).

Although the donna rejects the Petrarchan lover's affections for many years, she cannot deny Christ her love when he has already given himself so completely to her. In The Thread of Life sequence (II: 122-123), she declares that her self "is that one only thing / I hold to use or waste, to keep or give; / My sole possession" (TL 3.1-3), yet she willingly offers it to her King, the one "who gave Himself" for her (TL 3.10). When the arduous journey of renunciation becomes too difficult to bear, she hears Christ encouraging her to "follow me hither, follow, rise, and come" (They Desire a Better Country 3.42). Once when she asks the Virgin what she can do to gain Christ's look, Mary quotes from the Song of Solomon, "Thou, also, lift thy heart to Him above; / He seeks not thine, but thee, such as thou art, / For lo! His banner over thee is Love" ("All Saints," lines 13-14; III: 199).

Reciprocity occurs between the lovers. Christ seeks her love and the donna seeks his love. She clasps and clings to him. She continually longs for his favor until she can "taste [his] hidden Sweetness" and "see [his] hidden Beauty" (OD, "O Lord, I am ashamed to seek Thy Face," lines 7-8; II: 183). In "Lord, dost Thou look on me, and will not I" (II: 207), though, Rossetti seems to condense her depiction of love as she contrasts earthly and spiritual love and presents the reciprocity between Christ and the poet-speaker.

> Lord, Thou dost look and love is in Thine Eyes,
>
> Thy Heart is set upon me day and night,
>
> Thou stoopest low to set me far above . . . (lines 9-11)

Earlier in the sonnet when she lists the various responses she could give to a Petrarchan lover, she seems to reassign those Petrarchan conventions from her earthly lover to Christ, adding the promise of requited love and its resulting reciprocity to the only lover she believes can satisfy her love, Christ. His love will outlast the love of her Petrarchan lover. He promises his hands to close her eyes, his heart to be her rest, his strength to sustain her, and his breast to lie upon. Rossetti's donna seems satisfied and desires nothing more than his eternal presence.

In appealing to and delineating the physical characteristics of her beloved, Jesus Christ, Rossetti's poet-speaker continues the Petrarchan tradition of creating a love-object who permeates her own sonnets as much as Laura does the

sonnets of Petrarch. In Monna Innominata, Rossetti's Petrarchan lover loses his beloved to a divine and supernatural lover. That loss may have caused some consternation on the part of her lover, but how could he possibly compete against a supernatural lover who could elicit such an exclusive love from his beloved through the promise of reciprocity? First of all, the creation of a physical lover through the appeal to Christ's eyes, face, hands, and feet may appease any sense of loss or shame the lover feels in losing his beloved to a heavenly lover and answer the misunderstanding as to why she rejected her Petrarchan lover for Christ.[13] Secondly, the appeal offers the physical characteristics necessary for a response with eros. The Petrarchan lover only offers a physical love, while Christ promises both a physical and a spiritual love. This ability to love with a combination of eros and agape adds virtue to physical love and a greater passion to spiritual love.

Using the donna innominata as the speaker in her religious sonnets, Rossetti continues both the Petrarchan tradition and the specific alterations she made in Monna Innominata. The physical characteristics of Christ elicit an eloquent response from the one who withstood the wooing of Petrarch and so many other would-be lovers throughout the centuries. Through the traditional appeal to the eyes and other physical characteristics of the beloved, Rossetti presents a donna who is both the beloved and the lover. As the beloved, she continues her explanation of why she

renounced the Petrarchan lover for Christ, but when she presents Christ as the beloved, she assumes the role of the Petrarchan lover who pursues Christ's love. Christ is also presented in these dual roles of beloved and lover which allows Rossetti the opportunity to present her <u>donna</u> with the greatest of possible lovers: one who is both physical and divine.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN BAR: A BARRIER BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

Fundamental to the Petrarchan tradition is the existence of a seemingly uncrossable barrier separating the lover and the beloved. For both Petrarch and Dante, this barrier is the marriage of their beloved Laura and Beatrice to other men. Using Petrarch's sonnets as models, many Petrarchan and courtly love poets established marriage as the barrier between the lover and his beloved in their own sonnets. This led some critics to interpret the lover in Monna Innominata as one of the poet's two fiances, James Collinson or Charles Bagot Cayley. Lona Mosk Packer, though, assumes that the lover the donna renounces is more than a fiance and concludes that Christina Rossetti must have been secretly in love with a married man, William Bell Scott.[14] Yet, Rossetti's donna insists upon a spiritual, rather than a marital barrier: "I love, as you would have me, God the most; / Would lose not Him, but you, must one be lost" (MI 6.2-3). Later in sonnet 13, the donna admonishes her Petrarchan lover to look to God for love, revealing the move from an earthly, erotic love to an agape love that Petrarch portrays in his sonnets after Laura dies. When Rossetti's speaker commends her lover

"back to Him / Whose love your love's capacity can fill" (MI 13.13-14), she maintains the Petrarchan tradition of the transformation of fleshly love into spiritual love, at the same time that she uses Petrarch's own theory of love to separate the lover from his beloved.

Rossetti's donna erects a formidable barrier between these two personas. Not only does the donna's lover lose his beloved to God, but he faces the task of crossing the gulf between heaven and earth should he continue pursuing her love. Any cruel separation Petrarch may have endured from his Laura lessens when compared to this heavenly separation. To pursue his beloved, the lover must renounce his love for the donna and look to God. He must join his beloved in waiting for the eventual fulfillment of love with Christ. He will find that the days of his "mortal life [are] the vigil, and death is the festival" (Blake 14).

The barrier takes several forms in Rossetti's poems. In the "Martyrs' Song" (I: 182-4), she presents an idea reminiscent of her brother Dante Gabriel when she portrays the saints in heaven as blessed damozels leaning "over the golden bar . . . with open arms and hearts of love" (lines 8,10). For Rossetti, the "golden bar" is not a cruel separation between lovers; it is a path to eternal bliss. The martyrs in her poem travel through "flood, or blood, or furnace-fire, / To the rest that fulfils desire" in heaven (lines 15-16), but she reiterates the magnitude of both the barrier and its reward in the sonnet, "Darkness and light

are both alike to Thee" (II: 204). She uses words like gulf, fountain, torrent, sea, and ocean to denote how great Christ's love is for his beloved, but these words also imply bodies of water which must be crossed. The difficulty in crossing these barriers causes the poet-speaker to wish for wings, so she may cross the barrier between earth and heaven to join her heavenly lover. To further expand the breadth of this barrier, Rossetti doubles the number of sonnets in Later Life from the fourteen in Monna Innominata to twenty-eight. In this second sequence, Rossetti does not present the beloved and the Petrarchan lover. Rather, she describes the life the donna has chosen to live, waiting to cross the barrier in death and join her heavenly lover. The many years between her renunciation in Monna Innominata and her life of "numbness" have plodded along. She has rejoiced in the joy to come in heaven or despaired in the waiting upon earth, but her descriptions continue to expand the barrier into "ice-bound seas," "lifeless tracts of sand," and a "dead and living world" (LL 23.5,7,9). Death preoccupies the thoughts of the donna in Later Life.

Death becomes an important component to this barrier between the donna and her heavenly lover. Its role in separating the lovers is temporary, so Rossetti transforms its grimness into blessedness, allowing her poet-speaker to depict death as the entryway to life.

This Life we live is dead for all its breath;
Death's self it is, set off on pilgrimage,

Traveling with tottering steps the first short stage:
The second stage is one mere desert dust
Where Death sits veiled amid creation's rust:
Unveil thy face, O Death who art not Death.
(LL 26.9-14)

The poet-speaker begs death to reveal its true nature as the blessed gate which unites the lovers. Throughout the religious poems, the knowledge of death sobers Rossetti's donna who "hankers after Heaven, but clings to earth" (LL 24.11) and encourages her to press on toward her heavenly mark. In the sonnet, "Lord, it is Good for us to be Here" (II: 259-60), love finds its perfection in death because the donna develops her patience, faith, and hope while waiting for her heavenly lover. At times, the wait may seem long and unfulfilled, but she has learned that God's will makes the wait worthwhile. Barbara Fass notes that the "doubtful expectation" the poet-speaker sometimes depicts in the poems "gives way to faith and trust" (44). The donna knows that she will eventually be united with her lover in "eternal bliss; "therefore, she continues her "hankering after heaven" (Fass 44).

Rossetti portrays heaven as the home of love, eternal bliss, and reward for those saints who have persevered through doubting and waiting. The poet-speaker tries to console her mother not to weep in the sonnet, "Life Out of Death" (III: 102-3), assuring her, "I shall fall asleep in pain and in grief, / But wake to perfect gladness" with "Love and Joy in Heaven" (lines 7,8,14). In his book on the Victorian

sonnet, William T. Going notes this same theme in Monna Innominata where Rossetti moves her sequence through the "opening moods of joy and pain . . . to renunciation, followed by the Christian consolation that in the second life all is love" (22).[15] In one of her previously unpublished sonnets, "Who have a form of godliness" (III: 224-5), Rossetti further explains her position.

When I am sick and tired it is God's will;
  Also, God's will alone is sure and best:--
  So in my weariness I find my rest,
And so in poverty I take my fill:
Therefore I see my good in midst of ill,
  Therefore in loneliness I build my nest:
  And thro' hot noon pant toward the shady west,
And hope in sickening disappointment still.
So when the times of restitution come,
  The sweet times of refreshing come at last,
My God shall fill my longing to the brim:
Therefore I wait and look and long for Him;
  Nor fainting tho' the time be almost past.

This sonnet continues the thematic thrust of Rossetti's religious sonnets in depicting a spiritual barrier between the donna and her lover. She admits that she is frustrated and weary of waiting for Christ, but her trust in God's will remains intact. Despair has not alleviated her faith. She has learned to look beyond the weariness, loneliness, and disappointment to the promise of heaven where she will be

united with God, the one lover who can "fill [her] longing to the brim" (line 12). Whether a "golden bar" or a veil (LL 24.2), the barrier remains intact. The lovers will remain separated until the donna passes through the gate of death.

The assurance of a heavenly lover waiting in heaven for the donna runs throughout the religious poems. Her weariness after years of separation from her lover resembles Petrarch's own despair over his unrequited love for Laura. Her despair becomes ennui in the sonnets of Later Life, and she complains of her miserable life living on the earthly side of the great expanse.

> I am sick of where I am and where I am not,
> I am sick of foresight and of memory,
> I am sick of all I have and all I see,
> I am sick of self, and there is nothing new;
> Oh weary impatient patience of my lot!--
> (LL 17.1013)

In her weariness, though, she realizes that while she is on earth her physical body can never adequately respond to Christ's love, for her heart is simply "too narrow for the girth / of love, which is infinity" ("Sonnet," lines 34; III: 171). Her hunger is for something "earth can never feed" (LL 25.4). She can only long for Christ and the time when she can cross the spiritual barrier between them.

Rossetti's poet-speaker may be assured of her eventual union with Christ, but she often asks why she must continue

suffering. Why must she remain separated from Christ? Is there no reason for her suffering and longing for the heavenly lover? This donna does not escape the anguish her Petrarchan lover may feel for her when she renounces his love for Christ's love in Monna Innominata. She too must allow suffering to purify and transform her love from eros to agape, but she cannot shield her poet-speaker from these questions. In her quest to reveal "an inimitable 'donna innominata' drawn not from fancy but from feeling" (II: 86), Rossetti opens the donna's heart to the reader. She brings to the forefront those thoughts which reveal her "doubtful expection."

> Lord, if I love Thee and Thou lovest me,
> Why need I any more these toilsome days;
> Why should I not run singing up Thy ways
> Straight into heaven, to rest myself with Thee?
> What need remains of death-pang yet to be,
> If all my soul is quickened in Thy praise;
> If all my heart loves Thee, what need the amaze,
> Struggle and dimness of an agony?--
> Bride whom I love, if thou too lovest Me,
> Thou needs must choose My Likeness for thy dower:
> So wilt thou toil in patience, and abide
> Hungering and thirsting for that blessed hour
> When I My Likeness shall behold in thee,
> And thou therein shalt waken satisfied. ("Why?" II: 163-4)

Rossetti blends the Petrarchan tradition into the Christian

ideology that God's highest gift of love to the saints is Christ and his image. For Petrarch, the highest gift the beloved could give him would be herself, but here Rossetti draws the biblical conclusion that the highest gift is to exchange her flawed identity for the perfect image of Christ. In this form of gift-giving, she portrays the quintessential marital relationship where the two lovers become one. She then follows the gift-giving with the donna's new title, bride. This elevation of her to the status of a bride illustrates and authenticates the strength of her resolve to wait as long as necessary for an eventual union with her lover and a "longer day of love to come" ("Lord, give me love that I may love Thee much," line 12; II: 248). As she strains to cross the barrier, she finds her love purified through the patience and steadfastness of waiting. She also learns to choose Christ's likeness for her own, thus making her more attractive to her new lover. That lover, Christ, then promises to reward her grueling wait with satisfaction.

Rossetti expends a significant amount of creative energy in portraying Christ as the donna's lover and bridegroom. Her donna has not renounced the human lover for an abstract spiritual idea. She has renounced him for a being with spiritual and physical characteristics. A "personal relation with Christ as God" (Lowther 687-688) and "a thirst for God" (M. Kent 763) fuel her religious writings. Antony H. Harrison notes that when the donna is presented as the bride, she becomes the "reflex of Christ" (Context 85). Unfortunately

for Petrarch, he could never find this "reflex" because his donna, Laura, would not become his bride. The barrier between them never opened, but Rossetti's poet-speaker has the promise of union with her lover. She uses the persona of the bride to further the Petrarchan convention of separation between the earthly lovers, knowing that the separation between her and Christ is only temporary. Eventually, she and Christ will be married. Until then, Rossetti uses her poetry as love songs to help her maintain her "trust in the faithfulness of the Lover" (Sawtell 85). Her resolve is sure: "My God shall fill my longings to the brim: / Therefore I wait and look and long for Him" ("Who have a form of godliness," lines 11-12; III: 225). Her longing creates desire and perseverance. Like Petrarch, she remains faithful to the beloved.

The poet-speaker spends much of her time waiting and watching for her lover. If she relaxes her watch she fears she will miss her lover's arrival. Reminiscent of the beloved in the Song of Solomon and the five wise virgins in the parable of the ten virgins, Rossetti's poet-speaker expends most of her energy waiting for her lover and maintaining a constant state of readiness. Rossetti uses various motifs to illustrate the waiting required of her speaker, and Kathleen Blake lists some of the motifs as the bride waiting for the bridegroom, the cyclical movement of the days and seasons, the apocalyptic harvest of souls, the journey or pilgrimage, and the movement of the sea (14-5). In Later

Life, Rossetti presents several of these motifs in the cycle of the world from creation to eternity as souls slowly "flock home" to God "thro' life, thro' death, while clod returns to clod" (LL 1.8), in the sun "hurrying west" before the "shadows lengthen" (LL 2.7,11), in the orbits of stars "pitched in harmony" (LL 9.12), in the passing of autumn into winter and back into spring LL 18 and 19), and in the lands and seas which "stretch" unseen and unknown "betwixt the lands where living flowers are blown" (LL 23.5). Linguistically, she carries the cyclical and temporal images of these motifs through the encircling lines of sonnet 6 (II: 140-41).

We lack, yet cannot fix upon the lack:
  Not this, nor that; yet somewhat, certainly.
  We see the things we do not yearn to see
Around us: and what see we glancing back?
Lost hopes that leave our hearts upon the rack,
  Hopes that were never ours yet seemed to be,
  For which we steered on life's salt stormy sea
Braving the sunstroke and the frozen pack.
If thus to look behind is all in vain,
  And all in vain to look to left or right,
Why face we not our future once again,
Launching with hardier hearts across the main,
  Straining dim eyes to catch the invisible sight,
And strong to bear ourselves in patient pain?

In the first few lines, the poet-speaker reels around looking for an escape from the "lost hopes." She clearly presents

the dilemma of the donna in Monna Innominata when she realizes that she cannot look behind her or to either side. She must keep looking forward to her heavenly lover. With renewed strength, she fortifies her heart, strains her eyes, and bears the pain of watching and waiting for Christ and that day when the enemy of her soul and his "realm of change and death and pain" shall be swept away LL 14.14). Thus, she can confidently state that "grief is not grievous to a soul that knows / Christ comes,-- and listens for that hour to strike" ("Surely He hath borne our griefs," lines 13-14; II: 203).

Rossetti's erection of a spiritual barrier between the two lovers resembles the uncrossable barrier Petrarch and Dante suffered with their beloved women. She maintains the spiritual quality of Monna Innominata throughout her religious sonnets, leaving her readers a significant reason for her renunciation of an earthly lover for Christ. She transforms death, the seemingly insurmountable and eternal barrier between the lovers, into a gate through which she can find an eventual union with her lover. Linda Marshall, in her discussion of the dead and death in Rossetti's writings, notes that "Christina Rossetti seems slowly to turn from the idea of death as withdrawal from human relationships to death as entry to Paradise, where continuing consciousness affirms enduring human love and strengthens the individual's personal relationship to a loving God" (58). If the donna wants to be united with her lover, she must learn to seek his home

in heaven and to "learn another hope, another love, / and sigh indeed for home in banishment" ("A Discovery," lines 13-14; III: 206-7). Rossetti maintains the Petrarchan idea that the lovers will be reunited in heaven, but she transfers the reunion with the Petrarchan lover to her eventual union with Jesus Christ. Unlike Petrarch who never experiences Laura's love, Rossetti's donna as poet-speaker anticipates her union with the heavenly lover, realizing that one day she will cross the great expanse between heaven and earth to be with him forever.

CHAPTER V

PASSION AND FULFILLMENT: AN ETERNAL LIFE OF LOVE

Throughout literary history, lovers have wooed their beloveds with songs and poems. Each line carried the lover's hope that one day he (or she) would find love requited and enjoyed. Love incited battles, inspired the fine arts, and gave meaning to life. No other emotion seems to have captured the interest and attention of humans like love. It has been exalted, cursed, studied, and experienced; yet, few people seem to understand its existence and its characteristics. The Greeks categorized and identified its perspectives as _philia_ (friendship and brotherly kindness), _storge_ (affection and family love), _eros_ (love of a beloved), and _agape_ (spiritual love). In his book _The Four Loves_, C. S. Lewis delineates the aspects of each love with its various characteristics. He argues that each of these loves can be a blessing or a curse, depending upon their focus, and ultimately, how they relate to God as "the only Beloved who will never pass away" (167). Lewis' discussion follows the Platonic theory of love and its later Christianization in the Middle Ages. Lewis suggests that _eros_ is not evil nor must it be obliterated before _agape_ can appear. He argues that the loyalty which _eros_ spawns between the lover and the beloved is the

commitment needed to enhance a marriage and an agape with God. His book, a summary of both Platonism and the Christian tradition, contends that all four loves must be present in the human experience, but they should be safeguarded from their inherent potential for excess. Affection, friendship, and eros help to strengthen agape, so the lover or beloved can find his or her ultimate relationship in Christ.[17]

Rossetti anticipates Lewis' Christian approach to Plato when she takes the ennobling qualities of Petrarch's beloved and the differentiation between Plato's eros and agape to present the relationship between the donna and Christ.[18] The donna encourages the Petrarchan lover to look to Christ and his love, while she aspires for Christ's love herself. When she asserts in Monna Innominata that she has renounced him for God (MI 6.3), she seems to be renouncing eros for agape. A closer examination of the religious sonnets, though, reveals that Rossetti's donna expects to find eros in her love for God. The physical and spiritual lover, Jesus Christ, becomes the culmination of both the beloved and the lover. As the beloved, he has both physical and spiritual qualities which ennoble the donna as lover to aspire for agape. Yet, he also seeks her as his own beloved and can promise her an eventual and eternal union. Petrarch's sonnets reveal his hope for union with Laura, but his passions remain unfulfilled and endless (Bermann 34). Plato, on the other hand, contends that the lover must completely renounce his physical lover before he can attain the divine love. Rossetti combines these

two ideas and reverts back to the older biblical tradition in which the physical and spiritual loves seem to intermingle. Christ becomes the Bridegroom and the Christian believer, a part of the Church, becomes the Bride. In a spiritual sense, the donna is confident that she will find absolute consummation of her love in heaven.

When Rossetti presents love in her sonnets, she combines the virtuous elements of eros into agape. Petrarch's presentation of love throughout most of his sonnets is only a depiction of eros. Lewis maintains that eros is not solely sexual desire, and Petrarch does desire Laura both sexually and emotionally and tries to woo her through his appeals to her physical body. He begs Laura to "untie the strings" of her hands (XL.12-13) because he is "overcome by the long wait / And by the endless battle of [his] sighs" (XCVI.1-2). Laura's unending refusal to requite his love augments his grief. Even after her death, Petrarch continues to depict his love for Laura within the boundaries of eros. Only late in his poems, after he deifies Laura and begins to respond to her spiritual appeals, does he exchange his erotic love of Laura for a spiritual love of God and the Virgin Mary.

The progression or transformation of love from eros to agape seen in Petrarch and Plato appears in Rossetti's sonnets as a complex blend where it becomes difficult to note where eros ends and agape begins. She clearly renounces any human lovers for Jesus Christ, but she transfers both eros and agape to him.[19] As the Son of God, he is already deified, so she

does not need to deify this lover as Petrarch had deified Laura. She merely chooses deity as lover. Within her presentation of agape, she struggles with her desire for eros. Christ is presented as a glorified human. He seems capable of reciprocating her love spiritually, and to some degree, physically. She longs for his gaze and his touch. Her physical senses respond to him in the same way they would to a human lover. She continually echoes the metaphors and descriptions normally associated with physical love to illustrate her relationship with Christ.

Love, for Rossetti's donna, is a driving force, a law to itself, and a motivation for everything. She asserts that love "learns and teaches; love shall man acquaint / With all he lacks, which all his lack is love" ("Quinquagesima," lines 7-8; II: 221). The lack of love makes man pitiable and unable to offer the proper gifts of love to Christ whose love motivated him to die for the beloved. She believes she has nothing worthy to offer him, but Christ sees the most valuable gifts in "Not yours but you" (III: 262) and asks her to offer him her youth, life, and love as proper love gifts. The rewards of love, though, validate any sacrifices required of the donna, for Rossetti explains in a lyric poem, "Praise of Love" (III: 134) that the duty and glory of the love shown in her sonnets will guide the donna along the path to glory. The speaker also finds that the rewards of love help her to be willing to suffer its pain and sorrow. For Rossetti's donna, love shall never cease but shall soar to "[transcend]

the law / Of time and change and mortal life and death" ("Sonnets are full of love," line 14; II: 59), filling her sonnets with numerous illustrations of the love which motivated the _donna innominata_ to renounce her human lover for the heavenly lover.

When Rossetti presents her _donna_ as the bride waiting for Christ, a new passion and the intermingling of _eros_ and _agape_ emerge. The _donna_ may have renounced the Petrarchan or human lover and his erotic love to choose the divine lover, Christ, and his _agape_, but she refuses to replace _eros_ with _agape_. Rather, she infuses the spiritual love with erotic love, presenting instead a love which is both passionate and spiritual. Nowhere in Rossetti's poetry is the expectancy of the lover's arrival more pronounced than in "A Pause" (III: 216).

> They made the chamber sweet with flowers and leaves,
> And the bed sweet with flowers on which I lay;
> While my soul, love-bound, loitered on its way.
> I did not hear the birds about the eaves,
> Nor hear the reapers talk among the sheaves:
> Only my soul kept watch from day to day,
> My thirsty soul kept watch for one away:--
> Perhaps he loves, I thought, remembers, grieves.
> At length there came the step upon the stair,
> Upon the lock the old familiar hand:
> Then first my spirit seemed to scent the air
> Of Paradise: then first the tardy sand

Of time ran golden: and I felt my hair

Put on a glory, and my soul expand.

In this poem, she notes that even in death a bride may grieve at her lover's tardiness and the agony of waiting for eros to be requited, but as she remains faithful, waiting and watching for his arrival, she will find that her spiritual love has been strengthened and glorified in the process. Using the same motifs of the barrier of time, the waiting bride, and the spiritual sensations of union with the bridegroom as appear in her sonnets about Christ, Rossetti shows the woman's vigilance and separation from her previous life. She has become oblivious to the sights and sounds of nature and people. She waits only for her lover, despairing that he may have forgotten her. Yet, when he arrives, her reactions change dramatically. She is now aware of the slightest sounds and scents, as her lover's presence enraptures her.

Sensing the rapture of Christ's presence creates a greater desire within the donna for her lover and bridegroom. She begins to pursue her lover, begging him to come to her again and again. In one of her lyric poems, "God is our Hope and Strength" (II: 206), she implores Jesus to "stoop low from Thy glory above . . . Till we gaze on Thee face unto Face, and / respond to Thee love unto Love" (lines 8, 10). In a sonnet shortly following this poem, she shows Christ's response to her request as he looks on her and stoops to set her "far above" ("Lord, does Thou look on me,and will not I" lines 9-11; II: 207). Her beloved Christ has shown he

is desirous and wants to please her, also. He is her bridegroom and can help her find fulfillment in love.

The donna begins to recognize that love can perpetuate and reproduce itself. She declares in the first sonnet of the sequence, Out of the Deep Have I Called unto Thee, O Lord (II: 181-88), that "by love we dwell with patience and desire . . . Love offering love on love's self-feeding fire" ("Alone Lord God," lines 10, 14). She then asks Christ, in her sonnet sequence Later Life (II: 138-150), to help her insufficiency to kindle this "self-feeding fire." Because he is Love, he only can "furnish [her] / With that same love [her] heart is craving now" (LL 5.3-4). She seeks agape, though, as she asks Christ to "kindle my fire from Thine unkindled fire, / And charm the willing heart from out my breast" (LL 5.13-14). Rossetti continues the "kindling fire" motif in her lyric poem, "The Ransomed of the Lord" (II: 189). She agrees with Petrarch that eros leads to agape and states that love kindles "faith and pure desire" where it can then follow "on to bliss" (lines 13-14). Linking herself with other Christian saints, she prays that God will trust them with "passionate craving of desire, / That [they] may mount aspiring . . . to the unutterable kiss / Of peace for every victor at the goal" (OD, "As the sparks fly upwards," lines 2-4, 13-14; II: 182).

Not only does Rossetti's poet-speaker long for Christ's presence, but she longs for the rapture she will experience with him. Her sonnets are filled with the saints's "gathering

volume of untold desire," as they "press upward" ("Faint Yet Pursuing," 2.3; III: 55), "mounting to Him in love's perpetual fire" (LL 11.14). She and the other saints rise to seek his love, knowing that "anguish is anguish, yet potential bliss, / pangs of desire are birth-throes of delight" ("Subject to like Passions as we are," lines 9-10; II: 250). For the donna, no other passion can possibly compare with the love of Christ. So encompassing is Christ's love that the poetspeaker declares that everything about him is love to her--his heart, his will, and his word ("Trinity Sunday," II: 235). She resolves to live with Christ as his bride, "all simple-souled, dove-hearted and dove-eyed, / Soft-voiced, and satisfied in humble nest" ("Whitsun Tuesday," lines 7-8; II: 234).[20]

The fulfillment Rossetti's donna finds in Christ's love is both erotic and spiritual in the sense that she finds a lover with whom she may enjoy the physical closeness and the spiritual rapture she desires. Echoing the thoughts of countless brides before her, the donna contemplates her eventual union with Christ and wonders what it will be like in her time of love in the sonnet, "After Communion" (I: 229).

> Why should I call Thee Lord, Who art my God?
> Why should I call Thee Friend, Who art my Love?
> Or King, Who art my very Spouse above?
> Or call Thy Sceptre on my heart Thy rod?
> Lo, now Thy banner over me is love,
> All heaven flies open to me at Thy nod:

For Thou hast lit Thy flame in me a clod,
  Made me a nest for dwelling of Thy Dove.
  What wilt Thou call me in our home above,
Who now hast called me friend? how will it be
  When Thou for good wine settest forth the best?
Now Thou dost bid me come and sup with Thee,
  Now Thou dost make me lean upon Thy breast:
How will it be with me in time of love?

In this sonnet, the donna tenderly addresses her heavenly lover and asks him to describe their union and love. Her whole being is charged with the expectancy of being with Christ in heaven. She has found a sense of equality and union with Christ, but she still anticipates the reciprocity to come. When she is with Christ, she receives the special privileges of a bride: heaven's welcome, a home, the best wine, and Christ's breast to lean upon.[21] In a spiritual sense, she does find absolute consummation of her love in heaven.

The renunciation of earthly love allows Rossetti's poet-speaker to spend her time seeking the virtue in spiritual love that Petrarch finally realized after he was denied Laura's love. Bermann notes that Petrarch felt his greatest sin was "not subsuming his love of an earthly creature to his love for the Creator" (39-40). Thomas Roche further explains that Petrarch's concern over his love for Laura stems from Augustine's teaching that "all love is one, single, and from God; its value is determined by the object toward which it is directed" (6). Rossetti infuses this idea into her poetry,

but she hastens Petrarch's method for attaining virtuous love when the donna chooses renunciation in Monna Innominata long before Petrarch realizes he must renounce her. Love for Rossetti's donna then becomes "a spiritual discipline for the individual in his [or her] progress toward perfection" (Going 23). She declares her thirst for the ideal love in a longer poem, "Death is Swallowed up in Victory" (III: 154).

"I thirst for love, love is mine only need,
Love such as none hath borne me, nor can bear,
True love that prompteth thought and word and deed."

Rossetti's speaker thirsts for agape, the love which acknowledges Christ and his will before her own will. She wants to find her blessing as she "loves God the most" (MI 6.2). In this higher love, she can find pardon, patience, salvation, and service. Her ultimate love gift becomes possible when she seeks Christ's love: "So lit by love that Christ shines manifest / Transfiguring [her] aspects to His own" ("Vigil of St. Bartholomew," lines 13-14; II: 243). Petrarch could not seek Christ's love nor offer the love gift of Christlikeness until Laura died. Her death urged him to re-evaluate his reason for pursuing her. All his attention to her physical aspects diminishes when he realizes that her virtues bring him closer to God through spiritual love (Roche 5). Rossetti's poet-speaker anticipates this outcome and begins her quest for virtuous love before her lover dies.

Although Rossetti's donna finds a love she can embrace, she continually finds Christ's love incomprehensible. She

exalts his love for its willingness to love her, even though she is unworthy of such a love. Her self-abasement becomes an important part of the love she portrays throughout the religious sonnets because it helps to fuel her renunciation of the earthly lover and her perceived attractiveness to the heavenly lover. She recognizes the price Jesus paid for her love, but it still does not help to explain why his love is so great for her. She finds she must simply accept the price of his "priceless blood" (OD, "I will come and heal him," II: 186). Unlike Petrarch who regretted wasting his life pursuing the love of his beloved, the donna intends to spend her life seeking that "greater," more spiritual love through her continued renunciation of the Petrarchan lover for Christ. The love she depicts for Christ bears resemblance to the love Petrarch had for Laura. The physical aspects of her lover affect her much like Laura's beauty affected Petrarch. From time to time, she succumbs to despair when the separation from her lover seems unbearable. Ultimately, though, her earthly sense of love gives way to the spiritual, manifesting itself in her concern for others to experience Christ's love. She realizes that nothing can compare to or even outlast love. The pre-eminence of love and its ideals shape Rossetti's sonnets as she defines love and portrays the ultimate lover, Jesus Christ. In sonnet 7 of Later Life, she reiterates that love is the goal, but that goal may be more difficult to reach than normally expected because love is also a "parallel unending line / Whose only perfect Parallel is Christ" (LL

7.10-11). Whether that love be *eros*, *agape*, or a combination of the two, Rossetti consistently directs the reader's gaze to Christ and his love. He is the only lover who can truly satisfy hearts. His love is consuming, and Rossetti suggests that Christ's love is the culmination of both *eros* and *agape*.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Christina Rossetti's poetry has often been overshadowed by other poets: her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti; her contemporary, Elizabeth Barrett Browning; and her fellow Christian poet, George Herbert. Some critics feel her poetry lacks substance, while others praise her skill. Tastes always vary, but sometimes those tastes dictate what is or is not read of a certain writer. Most readers of Victorian poetry have read Goblin Market, but few may have read Out of the Deep Have I Called Unto Thee, O Lord. Unfortunately, the critical taste of the twentieth-century which inclines more to the secular than the religious probably has influenced the oversight. The greater interest in secular literature has caused a dichotomy in the body of Rossetti's literature. However, in Rossetti scholarship, the two must not be separated from one another, as each illumines the other. Complexities abound in her writings, but the clues to understanding the difficult passages and poems may hide within her religious poems.

One of these more difficult passages presents her complex views on love. At the end of sonnet 6 in Monna Innominata, the donna declares, "I cannot love you if I love not Him, / I cannot love Him if I love not you" (lines 13-14).

The passage may seem confusing as she elevates each lover and gives him influence over the other. Yet, in this declaration, Rossetti suggests there exists more than a simple link of influence between the Petrarchan and divine lover. She reminds the reader to approach her work intertextually and to see that the spirit and the flesh are united in her poems. They work together to create a body of poetry based upon both philosophical and Christian traditions, not a unique proposition, but a renewed attempt.

In Monna Innominata where the donna first appears, William Whitla contends that the sequence should "be read as in a given form (Petrarchan sonnet sequence) and also as against that form" (96). The donna both maintains and subverts the Petrarchan expectations inherent in the sonnets. She becomes a beloved as lover, renounces her earthly lover for Christ, extols her new beloved's physical characteristics, endures a physical separation from Christ, and longs for her eventual union with him. Yet, the similarities Rossetti shares with Petrarch emphasize how much his philosophy of love fails to provide the donna with a satisfactory relationship. He does not offer her the equality she seeks; therefore, she refuses to reciprocate his love. The heavenly beloved/lover, though, offers her both equality and reciprocity. Thus, in following the tradition of Petrarch, Rossetti creates a sonnet sequence much larger than Monna Innominata or Later Life. She uses the Petrarchan conventions, creates

a Petrarchan character, and develops a sequence which includes many of the sonnets she wrote throughout her lifetime.

The love Rossetti portrays in her sonnets between the donna innominata and Christ is a mixture of eros and agape. At first, in the early sonnets of Monna Innominata, the speaker renounces eros entirely when she leaves her human lover for Christ. Her decision to seek Christ's love reveals a desire for agape, but Rossetti does not depict a weak, sexless saint in her religious sonnets. Rather, she presents a woman who desires and responds to Christ with the same passions a bride would have for her bridegroom. In the process, she presents a love far more feminine than the usual Victorian portrayals of erotic, fallen women and domestic "angels in the house." Her donna refuses to remain silent on the subject of love and to accept her traditional Petrarchan role. She is no longer the beloved who simply inspires erotic love and then selflessly points her lover to the pursuit of spiritual love. Instead, she has her own desires and seeks the love of her beloved, Jesus Christ. At times, she does revert back to her role as the beloved so that Christ can pursue her as his beloved, but these role reversals allow the donna to control her own poetic destiny. Rossetti uses her alterations to the Petrarchan tradition to offer women a different choice than the normal Victorian possibilities for finding love.[22] In his article, "Christina Rossetti and the Sage Discourse of Feminist High Anglicanism," Antony H. Harrison maintains that when Rossetti presents her donna as

the bride of Christ, she offers the "only vital alternative to the stereotypical roles of prostitute, wife, and lovelorn spinster" (97). He affirms the choice she makes to renounce the world of her love "with all its misguided social institutions and material temptations" as the "unique route to self-fulfillment (97). Living a life of worldly renunciation and in pursuit of Christ's love leaves both Rossetti and the donna free to develop their "poetic aptitude" (MI preface).

Finally, Kathleen Blake notes that Christina Rosetti, "like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, [alters] the masculine tradition to suit her own circumstances" (118). Choosing the donna innominata as the spokeswoman for her ideals of love, she chooses the one sonnet persona who "[burns] with heavenly desires" (Mommsen xxxv). Only the donna could set forth the Christian ideals Rossetti considers most important and for which she never apologized.[23] Fusing her faith and her art together in her religious sonnets, Rossetti creates a poetic character who fulfills Petrarch's model of love. Where Petrarch had failed to win Laura's love, to have his erotic love satisfied, and to spend his life in pursuit of spiritual love, Rossetti's donna finds all three fulfilled in Christ. The initial renunciation of an earthly lover portrays the poet-speaker's refusal to live in the traditional roles of her society. Rather, through a few key alterations to the Petrarchan sonnet tradition, the donna finds her own fulfillment in Christ.

ENDNOTES

[1]Ralph Bellas states in his study of Rossetti that by "general agreement, Christina Rossetti must be ranked among great religious poets in England such as John Donne, George Herbert, and Henry Vaughan of the seventeenth century and John Keble, John Henry Newman, Coventry Patmore, and Gerard Manley Hopkins of the nineteenth" (76). Again, she is compared to the great Metaphysical Poets when Lionel Stevenson asserts, "In the religious poems the fervor of her worship and the agony of her supplications for divine mercy have seldom been revealed by an English poet, and certainly never by a woman. They merit comparison with those of Donne, Crashaw, and Herbert" (119). Walker had made the same observation decades sooner (507). Paul Mariani contends that she was an early influence on Hopkins's poetry (2).

[2]In 1898, Mackenzie Bell published the first biographical and critical study of Christina Rossetti. His work remains the standard biography in the field, and most of the subse- quent works on the life of Rossetti have drawn considerably from Bell's book. Other more helpful and sometimes notable biographical studies are Margaret Sawtell's Christina Rossetti: Her Life and Religion (1955), Lona Mosk Packer's Christina Rossetti (1963), Georgina Battiscombe's Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life (1981), and Kathleen Jones's

Learning Not to be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti (1991).

[3]An anonymous reviewer of The Prince's Progress; and Other Poems praised the "plaintive sentences of those stanzas, of their music, of the beauty by which the pervading idea is illustrated" (Prince's Progress 825). When New Poems was published in 1896, another Athenaeum reviewer links the poet's Christianity with her poetry, but spends much of the essay discussing the feminine qualities inherent in the poems. Early in the twentieth-century, two of Rossetti's family members continue the nineteenth-century evaluations. William Michael Rossetti presents his sister as a gifted but "spontaneous" writer in his 1904 edition of her poems, while Ford Madox Hueffer, Rossetti's nephew, asserts in the Fortnightly Review that she is a "lasting" poet, and then in his 1911 Memories that she is a Modernist poet.

[4]David A. Kent, Jerome J. McGann, Diane D'Amico, Dolores Rosenblum, and Antony H. Harrison have greatly boosted Rossetti scholarship with their numerous studies attempting to contextualize her work. Kent's The Achievement of Christina Rossetti (1987) contains articles on the historical, sociocultural, literary, and religious contexts surrounding her work. McGann reestablished the validity of Rossetti's religious poetry in his articles, "Christina Rossetti's Poems: A New Edition and a Revaluation" (1980) and "The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti" (1983). Diane D'Amico has studied the influences of both Charles Maturin (1981) and

George Herbert (1985) upon Rossetti's poems. Dolores Rosenblum and Antony H. Harrison have attempted to give a more feminist presentation of her work. Rosenblum's biography, Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance (1986) gives a detailed discussion of renunciation in Rossetti's poetry, mainly as it relates to her womanhood, while Harrison extends the sociocultural influences to her Anglican background ("Christina Rossetti and the Sage Discourse of Feminist High Anglicanism" [1990]), her poetic vocation (1985), and her literary tradition in aesthetics, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Italian literature (Christina Rossetti in Context [1988]).

[5]Harrison's discussion in Christina Rossetti in Context and William Whitla's article in The Achievement of Christina Rossetti (1987) have given clearer and more text-centered discussion of Rossetti's sonnets. Most of the early biographers (Bell, Sawtell, Sandars, and Packer) discuss the sonnets, but their biographical approaches drew attention away from the specific literary elements. Helen H. Wenger's article concerning the biblical influences in Monna Innominata (1973) helped to redirect attention back to the sonnets themselves.

[6]The two most helpful articles on the influences of Dante and Petrarch upon Christina Rossetti's sonnets, notably Monna Innominata, are William Whitla's "Questioning the Convention" (1987) and Antony H. Harrison's chapter entitled "Intertextuality" in his book, Christina Rossetti in Context (1988). Lona Mosk Packer (1963) and Georgina Battiscombe (1981) should also be consulted.

[7]Rossetti has placed at the head of each sonnet in Monna Innominata an epigraph from Dante and one from Petrarch. Her family members's studies of Dante and her fiance's translations of Petrarch aided her own knowledge in these two great sonnet traditions. When Cayley was working on his translations, she read his proofs (FL 76-77). Also, one of her mother's and Dante Gabriel's treasures was "a choice copy of Petrarca." Her mother notes in her diary (written in Christina's hand) that "the one grievous mishap of the sale [of Dante Gabriel's belongings] was the disappearance . . . . of the choice copy of Petrarca, given by my father to me, by me long afterwards as a keepsake to Gabriel, and containing the autograph of John Philip Kemble, by whom it was originally given to my father" (FL 227). Also, she displayed her acquaintance with the troubadours when she commented in a letter to William Michael Rossetti that they gave a golden violet for their poetry prize (FL 145).

[8]See Sir Edmund Gosse (1898), Diane D'Amico ("Reading and Rereading George Herbert" [1985]), Jerome Bump ("Hopkins, Metalepsis, and the Metaphysicals" [1985]), and David A. Kent ("By Thought, Word, and Deed" [1988]) for discussion on the influences of the Metaphysical Poets. C. M. Bowra (1961), Stuart Curran (1971), Gisela Honnighausen (1972), Barbara Fass (1976), and Catherine Musello Cantalupo (1987) have discussed some of the Romantic influences. Pre-Raphaelite studies are numerous, but Lionel Stevenson (1972) and Jerome Bump ("Christina Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood"

[1987]) make helpful additions to the field. G. B. Tennyson (1981) has given the definitive study of Christina Rossetti as a Tractarian poet, but Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (1981) and Linda Schofield (1987) also should be consulted. In Tuell's book, she named Rossetti "a Victorian at bay" (1932), but critics have compared Rossetti to other Victorians like Hopkins (Mariani [1970], Bump [1985], Smulders [1991]) and Swinburne (Packer, "Swinburne and Christina Rossetti" [1963]).

[9]Harrison suggests that Rossetti takes the Augustinian role of mediator and prophet in the "Christian eloquence" of her poetry (Context 106). In giving the donna a voice, Rossetti extends the role of prophet to this persona, enabling her to speak eloquently for the Christian ideals concerning love and its attainment.

[10]Dolores Rosenblum comments that Rossetti's "themes and forms may be as codified as any Petrarchan sonneteer's" (5). In her book Elizabethan Love Conventions, Lu Emily Pearson lists some of Petrarch's own themes: Laura's beauty, beauty in grief, love, death, love's wiles, Laura's cruelty, sleeplessness, suffering caused by love, vanities of earth, and the celebration of natural incidents in the lives of the lady and the lover (37-8). Many of these Petrarchan themes can be seen in Antony Harrison's summary of Monna Innominata, here listed in a table format.

Sonnets 1-4: "establish aesthetic context," list theme as "desire for fulfillment of erotic passion"

1 - need for physical presence of the beloved

2 - lovers's memories of their first meeting

3 - lovers's perfect union in dreams

4 - union of lovers

Sonnets 5-8: focuses on "the role of God in the speaker's secular love relationship"

5 - renunciation of lover's service

6 - unity of lovers

7 - afterlife relieves tension between earthly and spiritual love

8 - prayer for God's sanction of the union

Sonnets 9-11: earthly love renounced; hope of its fulfillment in heaven

Sonnets 12-13: speaker believes in her feelings for her beloved

Sonnet 14: emphasis on themes of renunciation and resignation; realization of mutability. (Context 153-4)

[11]Antony Harrison alludes to the equality, unity, and reciprocity of Rossetti's sonnet lovers and their love in his discussion of Monna Innominata in Christina Rossetti in Context. He discusses the song contest of sonnet 4 as a reinvention of the Petrarchan tradition.

> . . . Rossetti reinvents the Petrarchan tradition by innovatively reconstituting the love relationship in the expressly competitive convention of the pastoral singing contest. The speaker's antitraditional emphasis is not only on the equality of the lovers, but also, as a result of that equality, on their harmonious unity

> demonstrated in an exchange and interplay of songs. Neither partner is silent. Their love can be perfected and fulfilled only through their art. Indeed, given the orientation of the preceding sonnets, it appears that dream and desire have been realized wholly in song." (177)

Harrison's observations concerning the realization of dream and desire in the song of sonnet 4 can be extended into Rossetti's other poems. She uses art, here the Petrarchan tradition, to create a place for her lovers.

[12]David A. Kent argued in his 1979 article, "Sequence and Meaning in Christina Rossetti's Verses (1893)" that Rossetti's sequencing of the poems allows a clearer understanding of the relationship between poems which, in turn, clarifies her common images and themes. Dolores Rosenblum's article on Rossetti's poetic sequence (1987) helps to point out how the poet works her ideas intertextually between the religious and secular poems.

[13]In sonnet 11 of Monna Innominata, the poet-speaker knows there are those who have misunderstood why she renounced her lover. She attempts to give an explanation of her answer, assuring the lover that she did not play with his affections. Rather her love for him "was life and not a breath" (MI 11.14).

[14]The publication of Lona Mosk Packer's biography shocked and excited the critical community with her thesis that a third love had joined the acknowledged presence of Collinson and Cayley in inspiring some of Rossetti's poetry. In the

Preface to her biography, Packer reveals that her thesis presented itself through "the discrepancy between [Rossetti's] inner world . . . and the existing biographical assumptions about her" (vii-viii), but she is quick to disclaim that her biography does not "presume to say the last word about Christina" (vii.)

In the nearly three decades following the publication of her biography, most critics have rejected the theory that Rossetti was actually in love with William Bell Scott, stating that Packer did not substantiate her thesis. One of the most outspoken critics, Jerome J. McGann, states that her "speculative psycho-biography carries [the] 'lost love' line of criticism to its self-destructive limits, and although informed scholars recognize the worthlessness of Packer's critical imagination, the book diverted scholarly attention from its main tasks" ("A New Edition" 238). McGann considers the present scholarship surrounding Rossetti's work much more relevant and necessary to the field than Packer's William Bell Scott theory.

[15]Going further identifies the sonnet, "Remember" (I: 37) and the sequence, Later Life, as illustrations of Rossetti's "distinctive voice of quiet renunciation" (51). He explains this renunciation within the Victorian culture, stating that "Victorian women writers portray artists of their sex as wary of love. In renouncing it they suffer, and they may do some damage to their art as well, but they can become artists only by renunciation. Renunciation makes

creation possible in a way" (ix). Kathleen Blake echoes his view that renunciation creates art in her book, Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature. She contends that the morbidity some critics find in the themes of renunciation or postponement can create "material for eloquence" (23). She further explains that in self-postponement Rossetti can make the artist "emblematic of this art in the figure of a woman whose love vigil extends itself in perpetuity, a woman a man finds hard to understand" (23). Rossetti attempts to answer any difficulty in understanding her poet-speaker through the constant presentation of a woman waiting for her heavenly lover and the life of love to come.

[16]Throughout the New Testament, especially in the Pauline epistles, Christians are encouraged "to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom. 8.29) and to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God. . . ." (Eph. 5.2). Paul then gives a lengthy discourse in I Corinthians 13 on the characteristics of Christian love. Finally, the apostle, John, encourages believers that "when [Christ] shall appear, [they] shall be like him; for [they] shall see him as he is" (I John 3.2). He admonishes them that anyone who "hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as [Christ] is pure" (v. 3). Rossetti's poems reveal the influence of Pauline and Johannine theology in her renunciation of an earthly love for Christ's love. (All quotations are from the King James Version bible.)

The similarity of Rossetti's theme of renunciation to the lifestyle of imitating Christ that Thomas a Kempis proposes should be readily apparent. The three most important books for Rossetti were the Bible, The Confessions of Augustine, and the Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis (Bellas 18).

[17]Lewis' argument reflects the Christianization of Plato's theory of love. When Plato presented his ideas through the dialogues in the Symposium, he asserted that love must progress from a contemplation of physical beauty to that of moral beauty until the lover had finally progressed on to absolute beauty. This progression from a physical to a spiritual love appealed to medieval Christian culture and was adopted into the tradition surrounding courtly love.

[18]Christina Rossetti enjoyed studying Plato and his writings. Harrison recounts an occasion when she took all six volumes of Plato on vaction with her (Context 96).

[19]Some critics (Packer, Blake, Battiscombe) have tried to determine why Rossetti renounced her two lovers. Even her brother, William Michael, felt constrained at times to answer for his sister, stating that the "bar to their marriage [Christina's and Cayley's] was lack of money" (Blake 25, note 16). Yet, Rossetti insists in her poetry and personal views that the reasons were religious (FL 10, 12, 29, 166). Kathleen Jones has described Rossetti's faith as "passionate and organic" (140). She states that the "idea of physical and spiritual union--the mystical one flesh--with someone [Cayley]

who differed on such a fundamental question was anathema to Christina, as it is to many committed Christians today" (140). For Rossetti, her Christian experience was the cornerstone of her life and art. She felt she could not compromise this important area in a marriage.

[20]The picture of domestic purity presented in this poem reflects the continued influence of the Song of Solomon upon Rossetti's love poetry.

[21]Rossetti draws heavily from the Bible in this poem as she alludes to the home Jesus is preparing in heaven for the saints (John 14.3--"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."), to the miracle of wine at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2.1-11), and to the closeness of John who leaned upon his breast (John 13.25). The last image reflects the friendship she anticipates sharing with Christ in heaven. She does not seem to be looking for sexual fulfillment in her love relationship with Christ, but she does desire his physical closeness. The biblical images help to portray Christ in physical settings and to emphasize that she will be united with him in heaven as his bride.

[22]Harrison notes that Rossetti seems to infer in another poem, "A Triad" (I: 29), that "an ideal of fulfillment is attainable but would require a love match in which the woman is able to satisfy her passions without debasing herself as a voluptuary or a dependent" (106).

[23]Dante Gabriel once commented to her about writing for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and she replied, "I don't think harm will accrue from my S.P.C.K. books, even to my standing: if it did, I should still be glad to throw my grain of dust into the religious scale" (FL 92). Edmund Gosse recounts that he found Christina Rossetti's personality could be "daunting," but when he "talked to her about religion and poetry he was rewarded with a glimpse of the other side of her personality and she became warm and animated" (Jones 146). Other than her family ties, nothing dominated her life more than her faith and her art.

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APPENDIX

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI PUBLICATIONS

The poems cited in this study were first published in the following editions. A list of Christina Rossetti's published editions appears in R. W. Crump's edition of The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti (I: 317-319; II: 7-11; III: 7-9). For a bibliographic listing, consult Crump's Christina Rossetti: A Reference Guide (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976).

1847 Verses: Dedicated to Her Mother. London: privately printed at G. Polidori's, 1847.

1862 Goblin Market and Other Poems. London: Macmillan, 1862.

1866 The Prince's Progress and Other Poems. London: Macmillan, 1866.

1875 Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems. London: Macmillan, 1875.

1881 A Pageant and Other Poems. London: Macmillan, 1881.

1885 Time Flies: A Reading Diary. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1885.

1892 Poems, New and Enlarged Edition. London and New York: Macmillan, 1892.

1896 New Poems, Hitherto Unpublished or Uncollected. Ed. William Michael Rossetti. London: Macmillan, 1896.

POEMS CITED:

The following is a list of the poems cited in this study. The sonnet sequences appear first and are followed by the individual poems. Many of Rossetti's poems cannot be assigned a precise date, so I have recorded the earliest edition in which a poem was published. All dates refer to the above editions.

SONNET SEQUENCES:

Later Life (date unknown, 1881 ed.)

Monna Innominata (date unknown, 1881 ed.)

Out of the Deep Have I Called unto Thee, O Lord (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

"Ah, Lord, Lord, if my heart were right with Thine"

"Alone Lord God, in Whom our trust and peace"

"As the sparks fly upwards"

"Cried out with Tears"

"I will come and heal him"

"Light of Light"

"Lord, grant us eyes to see and ears to hear"

"Lord, make us all love all: that when we meet"

"O Lord, I am ashamed to seek Thy Face"

The Thread of Life (date unknown, 1881 ed.)

"They Desire a Better Country" (date unknown, 1875 ed.)

INDIVIDUAL POEMS:

After Communion (2/23, 1866; 1875 ed.)

All Saints (1/20/1852; 1896 ed.)

"Behold a Shaking" (date unknown, 1881 ed.)

Darkness and light are both alike to Thee (date unknown, 1885 ed.)

"Death is swallowed up in Victory" (2/20/1848; 1896 ed.)

The Descent from the Cross (date unknown, 1881 ed.)

A Discovery (10/24/1852; 1896 ed.)

"Faint, Yet Pursuing" (date unknown, 1896 ed.)

"God is our Hope and Strength" (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

Life Out of Death (date unknown, 1847)

Lord, dost Thou look on me, and will not I (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

Lord, give me love that I may love Thee much (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

Lord, hast Thou so loved us, and will not we (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

"Lord, it is good for us to be here" (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

Martyrs' Song (3/20/1863; 1866 ed.)

New creatures; the Creator still the Same (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

"Not yours but you" (10/27/1856; 1896 ed.)

A Pause (6/10/1853; 1896 ed.)

Praise of Love (2/24/1847; previously unpublished)

Quinquagesima (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

"The ransomed of the Lord" (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

Remember (7/25/1849; 1862 ed.)

Sonnet (2/6/1849; previously unpublished)

Sonnets are full of love, and this my tome (date unknown, 1881)

"Surely He hath borne our griefs" (lines 1-8: after 3/7/1853 and before 5/9/1853; lines 9-14: date unknown; 1885 ed.)

"Thou art Fairer than the children of men"

A Triad (12/18/1856; 1862 ed.)

Trinity Sunday (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

Vigil of St. Bartholomew (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

Whitsun Tuesday (date unknown, 1892 ed.)

"Who have a form of godliness" (12/18/1853; 1896 ed.)

Why? (date unknown, 1881 ed.)

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